

**JAMES  
BORISHADE**

**CONNECTING**

**ACROSS**

**DIFFERENCES**

**SKILLS** *for*  
**HEALTHY  
COMMUNICATION**  
*at* **WORK  
AND HOME**



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# CONTENTS

Introduction	1
<b>1</b> What if There's Nothing Wrong with You?	17
<b>2</b> Designed to Be Different <i>A Look at Creation</i>	31
<b>3</b> Embracing the People Who Drive You Crazy	42
<b>4</b> When Behavior Is Really Biography	56
<b>5</b> From Cold Wars to Close Hearts	72
<b>6</b> The Anatomy of Disconnection	87
<b>7</b> Why We Love the Way We Do	102
<b>8</b> The Roots Beneath the Reaction <i>Parenting Styles and Emotional Triggers</i>	119
<b>9</b> Why We Reach, Why We Run <i>Attachment Styles and the Dance of Connection</i>	135
<b>10</b> Making It Work <i>Tools for Real-Life Connection</i>	149
Acknowledgments	159
Recommended Resources	161
Notes	165



## WHAT IF THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU?

WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN you look in the mirror?

Not physically. Beyond the clothes, the skin, the posture you've learned to perfect. I'm talking about the quiet moment when the world is still and you're face-to-face with the real you. Do you see someone created with intention? Someone carrying the fingerprints of the divine?

Or do you see your failures, your fears, your not-quites, your almosts?

For a long time I saw only the roles I had tried and sometimes failed to play. Husband. Provider. Fixer. Coach. Even now, I sometimes catch myself measuring my reflection against expectations I never agreed to in the first place.

But Scripture doesn't begin with roles. It begins with identity. Before you were anyone to anybody, you were already somebody to God. Before you were ever praised, blamed, hired, fired, married, divorced, celebrated, or overlooked, you were stamped with the image of God.

Let that sink in.

*Imago Dei* is not a concept reserved for theology class. It's the truth that has the power to change how you see yourself and

everyone else. It means the parts of you that feel “too different” or “too much” might actually be the parts that reflect him the most.

The way you love.

The way you question.

The way you create.

The way you speak up when others go silent.

The way you notice things no one else does.

All of these aren't detours from your divine design. They *are* your divine design.

### LIVING OUT THE *IMAGO DEI*

Once we understand that each of us bears the *imago Dei*, the question naturally follows: What does that mean for our everyday lives? How do the individual qualities that make us who we are reflect the divine? This is where the beauty of diversity in creation becomes clear. Each of our unique qualities—our personalities, strengths, passions, and even our struggles—reflect different facets of God's character. Together we create a mosaic that, in its fullness, reveals the vastness of who God is. These qualities are not just personal traits, they are windows into the divine nature.

Consider the quality of creativity. Those who are artists, musicians, writers, or anyone who loves to create something new are reflecting God's own creativity. In the very first pages of Scripture we see God as the ultimate Creator, crafting the heavens and the earth out of nothing. Genesis 1:1 opens with, “In the beginning God created . . .” and that act of creation continues throughout history. When we create—whether it is art, music, poetry, or even a business venture—we are participating in that divine attribute. We mirror the God who said, “Let there be light,” bringing new things into existence.



For those whose gift is compassion, you reflect the heart of God as a comforter and healer. Psalm 103:13 says, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him” (NIV). Your ability to care for others, to empathize with their pain, and to extend kindness even in the hardest situations directly reflects God’s deep compassion for his people. Whether you’re the person who listens patiently to a friend in need, volunteers in your community, or cares for family members, your compassion reflects God’s tender care for each of us.

Those with a deep sense of justice, who cannot stand to see wrongs go unchallenged, reflect God’s righteousness and justice. Isaiah 30:18 tells us, “For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (NIV). You may feel a calling to fight for fairness, advocate for the oppressed, or pursue what is right even when it’s difficult. This is God’s justice alive in you. Whether you are working in a courtroom, leading a non-profit, or simply standing up for what is right in your daily life, your passion for justice reflects God’s own commitment to righteousness.

Then there are those who reflect God’s wisdom. Some people have the ability to offer sound advice, see through complexity, and help others navigate life’s challenges. James 1:5 says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” When you use your discernment to help someone make an important decision, or when you bring clarity to a confusing situation, you are reflecting God’s wisdom. This gift is invaluable in relationships, workplaces, and leadership, as it brings the light of understanding into dark and uncertain situations.



Another divine quality we often see in people is strength—not just physical strength, but emotional and spiritual resilience. Those who endure hardship, remain steadfast in faith, and keep going when others might falter are reflecting God’s strength. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Your ability to persevere through trials, to remain hopeful when the path is hard, and to provide strength to others in moments of crisis reflects the enduring, unshakable nature of God’s own power.

Some people are gifted with leadership, the ability to inspire and guide others. True leadership reflects God’s own authority and care for his people. In Psalm 23:1, David writes, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” God leads us like a shepherd, guiding us toward still waters and safe pastures. If you are someone who naturally leads, whether in your family, your workplace, or your community, your leadership reflects God’s shepherd-like care for his people. Your ability to inspire, to cast vision, and to guide others through difficult terrain is a reflection of God’s guiding hand in our lives.

Finally, some of us reflect God’s attribute of peace. In a world full of anxiety and chaos, those who can remain calm and bring peace to others are a reflection of God’s peace. Philippians 4:7 describes “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” If you are someone who can de-escalate tense situations, offer reassurance in moments of fear, or simply exude a sense of calm in stressful environments, you are reflecting God’s peace. Your presence can be a sanctuary for those around you, a reminder that even in life’s storms, God’s peace is available.

Each of these qualities—creativity, compassion, justice, wisdom, strength, leadership, and peace—reflects a different aspect of



God's character. And these are just a few examples. The truth is, every good and unique trait within you is a reflection of the God who made you. You do not need to compare yourself to others or try to embody qualities that are not naturally yours. Instead, lean into the gifts God has given you. Whether you are someone who creates, leads, listens, or fights for justice, you are living out a piece of God's own heart.

Understanding this truth doesn't just change how you see yourself, it changes how you see others. The people in your life are also reflections of God's nature, carrying within them their own unique piece of the divine puzzle. The friend who makes you laugh, the colleague who always knows how to solve a problem, the family member who always shows up in a crisis—they each reflect something of God's goodness. When we recognize this, we stop trying to mold others into our own image and begin celebrating the unique way they reveal God's character.

In a world that often pressures us to conform, the *imago Dei* reminds us that God delights in our differences. Each of us was made to reflect a specific part of his nature, and when we embrace that truth we live fuller, more authentic lives. Together we form a beautiful tapestry of humanity, each of us contributing something irreplaceable. When you begin to see yourself and others through this lens, you will not only deepen your relationships, but you will also bring more of God's character into every space you inhabit.

### **BUT JAMES . . . HOW DO I FIND MYSELF?**

In the months following my divorce, I found myself feeling lost—disconnected not just from my marriage but from myself. I had spent so many years defining myself through my roles as a husband and father that I struggled to recognize who I was without those



roles. It was a difficult season, one where I questioned everything, even my purpose. I needed something to help me rediscover who I was and why I mattered. That's when I turned to StrengthsFinder 2.0, which introduced me to the CliftonStrengths assessment.<sup>1</sup>

Originally known as StrengthsFinder, the tool has since been rebranded by Gallup as CliftonStrengths, in honor of its founder, psychologist Donald Clifton. But the core ideas remain the same: Every person has innate talents—unique strengths embedded deep in who they are—and true growth and fulfillment come not from fixing your weaknesses, but from understanding and leaning into what you naturally do best.

The book includes a code to take the online assessment, which quickly guides you through a series of timed questions designed to capture your instinctive preferences. The result is a list of your top five signature themes—things like Relator, Strategic, Learner, or Responsibility—which are not just traits but patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that show up when you're operating at your best.

For me, taking the assessment wasn't just informational, it was transformational. It gave me language for parts of myself I had lost touch with. It reminded me that I wasn't broken, that I was uniquely wired. It didn't answer every question I had about my future, but it reintroduced me to who I had always been.

The assessment identified "Communication" as my top strength, and when I read the description, it hit home. It explained that I had a gift for engaging people, drawing them into conversation, and helping them feel heard. Whether in group discussions or one-on-one conversations, I had an ability to bring out the best in others through dialogue. I naturally energized discussions and acknowledged the value in what others said, which encouraged even



the quietest voices to speak up. This wasn't just something I liked doing, it was something God had designed me to do. My ability to foster open communication and create connections was a reflection of God's character at work in me.

But my assessment didn't stop with communication. My other top strengths—Strategic, Relator, Focus, and Futuristic—painted a fuller picture of who I was. I realized that my tendency to think ahead, plan, and see possibilities even in difficult situations were other ways I reflected God's foresight and wisdom.

One of the most surprising results was seeing "Relator" among my top strengths. At that time I was in the middle of a broken relationship, feeling like I had failed in one of the most important areas of my life—my marriage. I remember wondering how I could be good at relationships if I couldn't keep mine together. But CliftonStrengths reminded me that being a Relator wasn't about perfection, it was about my natural ability to build deep, meaningful connections with people.

The description of Relator emphasized my gift for forming authentic bonds, for valuing close relationships and being able to foster trust and open communication. This hit me in a profound way. It helped rebuild my confidence, reminding me that just because one relationship had ended didn't mean I was incapable of strong, healthy connections. In fact, the very strength I thought I had lost was actually a key part of who I was. Being a Relator wasn't just a skill; it was part of the unique way God had wired me. It reminded me that my uniqueness was not just a byproduct of my experiences; it was a part of God's intentional design.

For many people, discovering their strengths through tools like StrengthsFinder can be a pivotal moment. It's not about finding a label for yourself, it's about discovering how God has equipped



you to contribute uniquely to the world. Whether your strength is in creativity, leadership, empathy, or problem-solving, these traits are divine fingerprints and evidence of the *imago Dei* in you.

When I realized that, it changed my paradigm. I no longer saw my gifts as random quirks or isolated talents. I began to see my strengths as intentional reflections of God's character. And as I started leaning into those strengths, I saw how they could be used to help others. The more I reflected on them, the more I realized that the parts of myself I had once hidden or suppressed were meant to enrich the lives of those around me. My individuality was designed to be a blessing, not a burden, in my relationships.

### WHY WE HIDE OUR LIGHT

This realization was a game-changer. We often enter relationships—whether romantic, familial, or professional—believing that compromise means erasing parts of ourselves to make others feel more comfortable. Think about the last time you were in a room full of people—maybe it was at work, a social event, or a family gathering. Can you remember that subtle, almost imperceptible shift you made in yourself just to blend in? Can you remember slightly adjusting your tone or softening your opinions so they wouldn't stand out too much? Have you ever stayed quiet when you had something to say, worried that your thoughts might ruffle feathers or make people uncomfortable? Or maybe it was as simple as nodding along in agreement with something you didn't truly believe just to avoid conflict.

It happens so easily, doesn't it? Without realizing it, we slip into this mode of accommodation, where we begin to edit ourselves—leaving out the parts we fear others might not like or, worse, might reject. We downplay our intelligence so we don't come off as “too



much.” We hide our creativity because it seems impractical to others. We don’t share our ideas because we’re afraid of being judged for thinking differently. The truth is, many of us have mastered the art of shrinking ourselves to fit the boxes others have built for us. We tell ourselves that it’s easier this way, that blending in will keep the peace, that it’s better to avoid standing out. Have you convinced yourself that people will like you more if you’re less of yourself? Do you smooth over your perceived rough edges or dim your light?

At first it might feel like you’re making things easier on yourself—less conflict, fewer uncomfortable moments. But over time you start to feel the weight of that shrinking. You begin to notice that you’ve carved away pieces of who you truly are. You’re no longer fully yourself in your relationships, in your workplace, or even in your own home. It feels as though you’re presenting a version of yourself, a curated and polished image, while the real you sits in the background, unseen and unexpressed.

The saddest part is, the more you hide yourself, the more disconnected you feel—not just from the people around you, but from yourself. You wonder why it’s so hard to feel truly known by others, why there’s a constant sense of emptiness in your interactions. You long for deeper connection, but you’re terrified that being your full, authentic self might push people away.

Could it be, deep down, that you’ve come to believe that who you are isn’t enough, that your quirks, your opinions, your dreams aren’t worth sharing? Have you internalized the idea that you need to tone yourself down to be accepted? In doing so, have you hidden the very gifts God has placed within you, the very things God intentionally created? The irony is that while you’re working so

hard to fit in, you're robbing the world—and yourself—of the richness of your true identity.

This happens in relationships all the time. You enter a new relationship, and in the beginning, everything feels exciting. You want to make a good impression, so you downplay the parts of yourself you think might be too much for the other person to handle. Maybe you don't talk about your big dreams because they seem unrealistic or out of reach. Maybe you don't share your deepest thoughts, afraid that vulnerability might scare them away. Or perhaps you shift your personality just enough to match theirs so that everything feels smooth, like you're in sync. Many of us long for the feeling that we have lots in common with someone else.

But over time this takes its toll. You begin to feel trapped in the version of yourself that you've presented, knowing it doesn't reflect the fullness of who you are. You realize that the relationship is built on the foundation of a half-truth—not because you lied, but because you withheld the entirety of yourself. And now you're left wondering if the other person would love or accept you if they really knew you, or if they've only fallen in love with the version of you that fits neatly into their expectations.

In a professional setting this process might look different, but the feeling is the same. You sit in meetings, holding back your ideas because you worry they'll be too radical or different. You see others speaking up, offering their insights, and you wonder why you can't find the courage to do the same. But you've learned that in order to survive, whether it's climbing the corporate ladder or keeping your job, you need to fit in. You need to follow the unspoken rules, stay within the boundaries, and avoid making waves. So you stay in your lane even when you know deep down that you have something valuable to offer.



You tell yourself it's for the greater good, that it's easier this way, but inside you feel like you're withering. Your voice grows quieter. Your confidence fades. You wonder if you've lost the part of yourself that used to be bold, the part that wasn't afraid to stand out. It feels like the things that once made you come alive—your ideas, your creativity, your unique perspective—have been buried under layers of conformity.

This is the cost of downplaying ourselves. We sacrifice authenticity for acceptance, and in doing so, we cheat ourselves out of the fullness of life and relationships that God intended for us. The more we shrink, the more we distance ourselves from the *imago Dei*, the divine image within us. We were never meant to fit into someone else's mold. We were designed to stand out, to reflect God's character in the unique way he created us to do so.

## GOD WANTS US TO SHINE

God didn't make us different just for the sake of variety. He designed each of us with qualities that, when brought into relationship with others, create something greater than the sum of their parts. Our distinctiveness allows us to bring unique perspectives, solutions, and strengths to the table, enriching the lives of those around us.

Think about it: Just as God is diverse in character—loving, just, creative, and wise—so too are we made to reflect these qualities in different ways. Some of us are naturally empathetic, while others are more strategic or visionary. Some of us thrive in environments where we can offer comfort and care, while others are most alive when solving complex problems or leading others with clarity. When we embrace these qualities, we offer something indispensable to the people we love. Our



relationships are strengthened not in spite of our differences, but because of them.

I remember thinking about this in the context of my own relationships. For years I had believed that part of being in a relationship meant softening certain aspects of myself so I would be easier to love, to work with, or to be around. But what I came to understand was that the parts of myself I had tried to suppress were the very things that could bring depth and strength to my relationships, if only I had the courage to allow them to shine.

In marriage, for instance, we often face challenges because of differences in personality, perspective, or even pace. I had learned this firsthand in my own marriage. But instead of seeing these differences as obstacles, what if we viewed them as opportunities? What if, rather than trying to change our partner or ourselves, we leaned into the ways our uniqueness could complement one another?

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians about the body of Christ and how each member has a different role to play: “For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:14). While Paul was speaking about spiritual gifts in the church, this could also be a powerful metaphor for how our differences work together to create something beautiful in our relationships. Each of us brings something unique to the table, and together we form a complete picture of God’s creativity and design.

Embracing our individual distinctiveness means understanding that our strengths, passions, and even our struggles are part of the fabric of a relationship’s strength. When we are fully ourselves, bringing our whole being to the relationship, we allow space for the other person to do the same. Authenticity breeds authenticity, and in that space, true connection is born.



I learned that in order to truly enrich my relationships, I had to embrace the very things that made me feel different. I had to stop trying to fit into a mold others expected and instead offer the gifts God had woven into my being. This shift, while not easy, was transformative. It allowed me to love more fully, to lead more boldly, and to connect more deeply. It allowed me to see that my distinctiveness was not a flaw to be corrected but a gift to be celebrated.

But this journey isn't just about accepting our own uniqueness. It's about extending that same grace to others. When we begin to see our own distinctiveness as a divine gift, it changes how we view the people around us. Instead of wishing they were more like us or trying to change them to fit our expectations, we begin to value the ways they are different. We begin to see their uniqueness as something that enriches the relationship, not something that needs to be fixed.

As I began to reclaim the parts of myself I once suppressed, something powerful clicked into place: I wasn't just uniquely made, I was intentionally made. And I wasn't alone in that truth. The same God who handcrafted my strengths and wiring did the same for every person I'd ever met or would meet in the future. If my uniqueness isn't a mistake, then neither is theirs. Our differences aren't problems to solve; they are pieces of a divine pattern that stretches all the way back to the beginning.

## PONDER POINTS

1. What if the parts of yourself you've tried to hide are actually the most sacred reflections of how God designed you?
2. What if your quirks, your passions, your way of thinking—everything that makes you different—are not flaws to fix but gifts to offer?



**PRAYER**

*God, help me believe there's nothing wrong with who you created me to be. Quiet the lies that tell me I'm too much or not enough. Teach me to see myself as you see me—intentionally crafted, deeply loved, and divinely designed. Amen.*



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