

## ***Wonderfully Written***

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First of four reflections on our Human Nature

Psalm 139

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Please click [here](#) to read the Scripture.

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When you look into a mirror, do you know what you're seeing?

An extraordinary actor!

Shakespeare wrote:

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players. . . .<sup>1</sup>*

On stages have performed many players, acting many parts. Of course, they were pretending to be someone other than themselves.

But take Shakespeare seriously. Our world is a grand theatre. On its stage we are performing our lives. But we are playing our parts for real. I'm playing "Gregory." (I got the part without even auditioning!) You are playing "you," better than anyone else could. We are performing humans.

These are complicated characters. I have always played "Gregory." I still have not figured him out. How are you with the character you are playing?

Today and for the next few weeks, I want to use this metaphor of actors in a play to learn about these humans we're performing. Thankfully, the Playwright has given us a sort of "actors' guide," the Bible and Psalm 139 specifically, with the goal of bringing us to a standing ovation at the end.<sup>2</sup>

### II

Where did we come from? No character just pops into the script accidentally. We have been written in, by the Playwright.

From the Psalm:

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<sup>1</sup> *As You Like It* 2.7.138f.

<sup>2</sup> I've developed the idea of us being characters in the God-written play from many sources, starting with John Bowen of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Much of the content of this reflection comes from Serene Jones, "Performing Human Nature" in William C. Placher. *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Pp. 141-159

*Lord, You are the one who created my innermost parts.  
You knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.  
I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . .*

You are only because God chose you to be. You are not accidental nor random. You began as an idea in God's mind. You are a gift of God.

You are created. You don't make yourself up. You are a creature. Did you notice how physical the Psalm's description is? God made us organic. Here's how theologian Serene Jones puts it:

*"We have bodies that change and grow; get sick; reproduce; desire; experience hunger, sorrow, and joy; and need warmth and shelter to survive. There was a time when we were not, and there will be a time when we are no more. We are born, we grow old, and we die, and in between birth and death we are shaped in a vast network of relations."<sup>3</sup>*

God made us biological, and more.

This is from the first creation account in Genesis:

*God created humanity in God's own image.  
In the divine image God created them.  
Male and female God created them. . . .<sup>4</sup>*

Uniquely among all God's creatures, we are made to reflect God. But without being God (or gods). We are designed as other than divine. We are not who God is, but are entirely dependent on who God is.

All this about us — biological and spiritual, God-designed and God-dependent — is good. Also from Genesis:

*God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.<sup>5</sup>*

God the Playwright is writing everyone, and you! This role you are performing, the role of being you, is a very good one. God writes you wonderfully.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, 145.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:31.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Byassee writes, "each human person is God's best work of art." Psalms 101-150, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2018), 198.

### III

We are the Playwright's creatures, so the Playwright knows us.

From the Psalm:

*Lord, you have examined me.  
You know me. . . .*

*You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways. . . .*

*That kind of knowledge is too much for me.  
It's so high above me that I can't fathom it. . . .*

God knows everything about you. More and better, God knows you. Not just the details and facts about you. God knows you in a relationship, personally.

God loves you dearly. God holds you. God accompanies you. God pays close attention to you. God wants this relationship with you, and God has made you for it. Maybe that's part of the "image of God" idea. You've been given the capacity for connection with your Creator.

No matter what anyone else thinks of you . . . whether or not you love yourself . . . God loves you. God's feeling for you, first and foremost and always, is love. Even when God is disappointed in you, it is with unbending love. When God is angry with you, it is with unending love.

You have no choice in any of this!<sup>7</sup> You cannot choose whether your life is a gift or not; it is! You cannot decide if you are worthwhile or not; God declares that you are! You cannot change the God-given facts that you are biological and spiritual, that you live in a network of relationships, in a community and a society, in this world. God made it so. And you cannot change that you are God's beloved.

God wrote you this way, and you are wonderfully written.

### IV

Some things you can change. God gives you plenty of room to act "improv." Improv is theatre where the actors are maybe given a particular situation, and then they "go." They create the dialogue, action and story together as they go along.

It's like God has set the stage, created the scene, and sketched out the plot. God has created the character of "you." Within all that, God says "Go!." God gives freedom:

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<sup>7</sup> Serene Jones calls these aspects of our humanity our "whatness." (147)

- freedom to make your own lines;
- freedom to map your movements across the stage;
- freedom to develop your character;
- freedom to shape with the other actors how your scene will unfold within this expansive plot God is writing.

Again from the Psalm:

*Where can I go from your spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence? . . .*

*If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.*

We'll dig more deeply into this section next week. For now just notice this: we can choose to go, we can choose to flee, we can choose to fly.

God makes you with this freedom. God loves for you to do improv!<sup>8</sup>

This is not an “anything goes” production. Notice that wherever we choose to go, flee, fly and land, God does not leave us. We cannot escape the Playwright who loves us and continues to craft our story.

The Playwright guides us. It's called the Law, the Torah, the Way. God inscribes this into the fabric of creation and reveals it in the Bible. Its heart is love: love God, love each other, love all that God has made. This is no burden! God guides our improv, so we will flourish!<sup>9</sup>

## V

But then there is the ugly part of Psalm 139. Often we want to look away and skip it over, but I made sure we heard it. It's the part about killing enemies, driving off the bloodthirsty, despising those who hate God, and hating them perfectly. I think it's in there for a reason, a good reason.

The fact is, this play we are in is not a children's play. Most kids know that. It's turned ugly. We have to deal with that, and the Psalm invites us to.

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<sup>8</sup> Serene Jones writes, “Not only are we both different from and yet affected by ‘the other’ (understood very broadly); we are also both bound by the conditions of our material existence and yet, because we are agents, free to determine, creatively, how we are going to ‘do life’ in the context of these boundaries.” Also, “Who we are and what we are going to become is, to a considerable degree, an open question, and up to us.” (146) She calls this flexible aspect of our humanity our “whoness.” (147)

<sup>9</sup> “God says, ‘I will be your God, and you will be my people,’ and then gives us a set of directions for who we might be God's people, a people who flourish.” Jones, 146.

Next week, then, we'll look at how this play, though being written wonderful and well by the most extraordinary Playwright, has turned into a tragedy. We've made it a tragedy (and not a good one!)

## VI

For today, though, let's finish this. And next time and beyond, don't forget this most fantastic thing.

You are made by the Holy God, the Perfect Playwright. So at the root of your being you are good and you are holy. No matter what you do with that, it never stops being true. The Playwright keeps on writing the story, insisting on bringing you back to who you are.

Not just you. C. S. Lewis wrote this:

*There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself [the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper], your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.<sup>10</sup>*

God is writing them, and God is writing you.

Wonderfully.

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<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (New York: Harper Collins, 1949, 1980), 46.