

## ***“Trashing Our Scene”***

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Second of four reflections on our Human Nature

Psalm 139

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

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Psalm 139 has been called a “summit of Old Testament poetry.”<sup>1</sup>

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me. . . .  
Where can I go from your spirit? . . .  
You knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . .*

We are at this soaring height, and the Psalm hurls us crashing down to earth.

*Kill the wicked, God!  
Banish the blood-suckers away from me, God!  
Finish off those who lie about You and use You for lies!  
I hate them! As much as they hate You.  
Pure, uncontaminated hatred!  
Check me out and see!<sup>2</sup>*

That’s not tasteful!

Is it true? True to who we are?

### II

I am picturing us as actors on a stage.<sup>3</sup> We are playing our life, these roles that God the Playwright has written for us.

- We exist only because God imagines us.
- God creates us, flesh and blood.
- We don’t write ourselves. We are creatures, not divine.
- Yet we reflect something of the Writer. God makes us in God’s image.
- We are spiritual, crafted for a relationship God wants to have with us.
- God sets the stage, fills it with oodles of characters, and writes the plot.
- Yet God loves us to do improv. We have God-given freedom to grow our

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner, Psalms 73-150 Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 464.

<sup>2</sup> My paraphrase of vv. 19-24.

<sup>3</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

characters.

- God gives each of us the best part. We flourish when we are playing ourselves well, acting as we truly are.

All this is good. We are God's good work, wonderfully written.

This is the world we know.

But there is more to our story.

In each of us, and in all of us together, are these two intertwined plot lines.<sup>4</sup> We are acting both of them. For real! We are acting in the "wonderfully written" story. At the very same time we're acting this second one, in which we forget our parts, twist the story into a tangle, refuse the Writer, trash our scenes, and make a terrible tragedy.<sup>5</sup>

We turn from God, deny God. We are stuck in our own sin.

This is the world we know too.

### III

Whoever wrote Psalm 139 — tradition says it was King David — it seems they were a victim of vicious slander. So we get this passionate crying-out to God: *You know me. You made me. You are always with me. Judge between me and my enemies, and vindicate me. You know them. So destroy them. Banish them. I hate them!*

It's an outcry for justice. It sings out for everyone who is trampled by evils and evildoers let loose.

This *is* the world we know. Wonderful, and wicked. Very good, and violent. Beautiful, and bloody. Holy, and hating God, lying about God, lying to God. The *world* we know.

Me?

*Search me, O God . . . test me . . . see if there is any wicked way in me.* After the explosion of anger, this is how the psalm ends. *God, see any wrong in me?* What do

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<sup>4</sup> Jones observes that scripture doesn't give us "a single, coherent, monolithic account of humanity. Instead, we encounter several stories, each with its own plotline, stage props, and background scenery." (142) She finds it "more true to the biblical and doctrinal tradition to see these portraits as four dramas that are being enacted, simultaneously and ongoingly, in the life of every person and every community." (143)

<sup>5</sup> Jones describes these as "'The story of human beings as wondrously earthly creatures of a creator who calls them into covenant relationship,'" and "The story of a humanity that turns away from the covenant relation with God and falls into sin." (142)

they expect God sees?

You know the word “hypocrite” . . . it means actor! In ancient Greek theatre, a *hypocrites* was an actor. An actor pretends to be someone else. We expect that at a show. In real life, though . . . a hypocrite is a faker.

*Search me, O God* . . . what does God see?

It’s not “the world” or “them. It’s me. I’m a faker. God writes who I am. I fake, and act like I make myself, like I decide who I am, like I decide who others are. It’s me.

God makes everyone wonderfully in God’s image. I fake, and act like some are worth more than others. It’s me.

Only God is God. I fake, and act like all sorts of things are divine: things people have created, things I make up myself. I pursue them, I fear them, I sacrifice to them. It’s me.

God writes us to act with love for others and tend all of God’s creation. I fake, and act with lies and lusts. I seize, neglect, manipulate, abuse, ignore, exploit, mock, dominate. It’s me.

God calls me back to God. I fake, and I act like I can save myself from myself.

The Playwright is writing me wonderfully. But I toss the Writer’s script, ignore my part, mess up the story, and trash my scenes. Others do it too. You’re doing it too. I’d love to blame you, and anyone else. But it’s me too. We’re all making the Writer’s wonderful play a terrible tragedy.

*Search me, O God.* . . .

#### IV

February is *Black History Month*.

I need it.

I need it because people who looked like me decided . . . more truthfully, who looked like me in a minor way which they decided is most important: our skin colour . . . they also decided that people who have darker skin are less, and can be treated as less, than people who look like me.

This lie has allowed people who look like me to kidnap people, buy people, steal people’s work, beat people, hang people, incarcerate people, steal the land of people, conquer people, divide people, mock people, destroy the cultures of people, deny housing to people, shut out jobs from people, close off neighbourhoods to people, and

so on, and pretending this is the “natural order” of things.

Hypocrisy, of course. Acting like a lie is true.

People who look like me have done this to Indigenous people, and keep on doing it, and have this to African people and people of African ancestry, and keep on doing it. All to benefit people who look like me, and it has.

It’s the world we know. It’s the world we grew up in. Honestly, it’s the world that lives in me.

I am not responsible for this. It was happening long before me. I was born into it.

Once I start being freed from my hypocrisy — Thank God! — I have a responsibility as a follower of Jesus — who has darker skin than me — and a beloved child of the Creator, to do whatever I can to change it. Starting with myself.

I need *Black History Month*. I need to hear the good stories of Black people. I need to hear the resilience, the resistance, and the victories of Black people. I need to celebrate the cultures, the wisdom, and the achievements of Black people. I need to rejoice in the beauty and strength of Black people.

For them, sure.

For me. Because I need to be freed from an ugly, racist story.

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But this ugly story of racism is just part of that terrible plot line we are all acting out. Remember I talked about these different plot lines we are living. They are intertwined together and we are acting them at the same time.

There is the “wonderfully written” one, the one God writes. It is good, and beautiful, and as true as it has always been. God is a great Writer.

We are living this other one too: tossing the script, forgetting our parts, twisting the story, ignoring the Writer, trashing our scenes, a terrible tragedy. It’s true too. I can’t hide from it.

Here’s the good news.

I cannot hide.

*Where can I go from Your spirit?  
Where can I flee from Your presence?  
If I could fly far away, You'd be there.  
If I died in despair, You'd be there.  
In the deepest darkness, Your light shines.*

There is another story being told. Another plot has been woven in, surprisingly. By the Writer.

Next week!

Here's a preview: the Writer shows up! On stage! Among us!

God sees the wicked ways in us, and leads us to life everlasting. Amen.