

**“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”**  
***Sermon Series – Learning to Pray the Psalms***  
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**First Presbyterian Church, Winston-Salem, NC**  
**August 23, 2020**  
**(Psalm 139)**

**Introduction.**

Many years ago there was a wonderful film called “Mr. Holland’s Opus.” Did you ever see it? It’s the story of a man who taught high school music for 30 years. As the story unfolds, we discover that he took the teaching job because he couldn’t make a living writing and performing his own music, so his dream of composing a symphony was put on the back burner for more pressing matters like feeding his family and keeping a roof over their heads.

Then came the day when the music program at the high school was eliminated because of financial cutbacks. As he struggled with being cast aside by the school board after so many years, Mr. Holland was left questioning whether his life had really mattered. He put his dream on hold to take up the daily task of trying to impact the lives of teenagers through music. Now that, too, was gone.

There is a scene in the film when Mr. Holland goes to his old classroom for the last time. The weight of the world is on his shoulders when Bill, the football coach, drops by to see how he’s doing. And Mr. Holland isn’t doing well. He feels like a failure, that his life’s work has been for nothing, and he feels like he’s been kicked to the curb and isn’t needed anymore.

Have you ever felt like that? I mean, deep down, when it’s quiet and everyone else is asleep? Or when you’re driving and you don’t have to pay much attention, do you ever start thinking about where your life is headed, what you’ve done, or what you haven’t done? Maybe you feel like a hamster in a cage, turning the big wheel. Life is a treadmill, and it’s the same old thing day after day. You feel underappreciated, overlooked, under-paid, and unnecessary. There are many versions of what Mr. Holland experienced that day.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to me that most people who take time to reflect on their lives struggle with these incomplete feelings to one degree or another. If this is the case, then this is sermon is for you – and it’s for me, because God has a word for all of us here in Psalm 139. The Lord offers a different picture of your life, and He wants to give you a view from the top to help you see the value, beauty, and meaning of your life from His perspective.

There are four truths in this text that tell us of our true value in God’s eyes. Let’s take a closer look.

**I. God Knows You.**

In the opening six verses of this psalm there are nine different words that stack up together to tell you that God knows your story in an intimate way. It says, “*You have **searched** me, LORD, and you **know** me. You know when I **sit** and when I **rise**; you **perceive** my thoughts from afar. You **discern** my going out and my lying down; you are **familiar** with all my ways. Before a*

*word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You **hem** me in behind and before, and you **lay** your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (139:1-6).*

Each of these words conveys a different layer to God’s personal knowledge of you, and combined together, they picture God like a detective tracking even the most mundane activities and studying us even when we think we’re alone. He knows what makes us tick and why we do the things we do. God even knows what we’re going to say before we say it. He knows what we’re going to do before we do it.

Nothing surprises God about you, because He knows you completely. In our world today, it is easy to get lost in the shuffle, and there are times when we feel like we don’t matter much to anyone, just like Mr. Holland. But the truth of this psalm is that God is always watching over us, that we matter to Him, and He never loses track of what’s going on in our lives

God won’t let you get lost in a hospital ICU. You can’t get lost in the shadows of life when darkness stalks you and you’re not sure which way to go. You won’t be lost to God when you go to the far country and squander your inheritance there like the prodigal son. You won’t be lost in grief when all you can do is cry, and the hole in your heart simply won’t heal. And you won’t be lost to God when you go through a divorce, and you feel rejected and as though you have failed. There is nowhere we can run, nowhere we can hide, and nowhere we can fall that is outside of God’s amazing love which is always present and always available!

God sees you, and it is His chief desire to bless you. The text says, *“You have laid your hand on me” (139:5)*. This refers to a practice in the ancient world when a father would bestow a blessing on his children. The loving father would place his hands on his children and speak words over their lives about who they are, what their place in the family meant, and who the father hoped they would become some day in the future. This was one of the most important rites in a Hebrew family. This passage reminds us that God knows you, He wants to speak a blessing over your life, and He wants you to be part of His forever family.

## **II. God Pursues You.**

David’s first instinct when he discovers that God knows him completely is the same as ours – he wonders, *“Where can I hide?”* If God knows everything about me, then He realizes that I’m a hypocrite. He knows that you cheated on your taxes, that you yelled at your kids last night, and that your thought life isn’t as pure as it ought to be. David’s fear of total exposure motivated him to wonder if there was some kind of retreat, geographically or spiritually, to which he could run away and escape.

This was also the reaction of our first parents when they sinned in the Garden of Eden. You’ll recall that after they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Bible says they hid from God when He came walking in the cool of the evening. They sought to cover their shame, and they were afraid to meet with God. We tend to do the same thing when we’ve been exposed. We want to hide or run away. But God pursues us, just like He did Adam and Eve, and no one is beyond the reach of the grace of God. He is the Hound of Heaven who pursues us until we are found.

In the psalm David realizes that there isn’t any place in heaven or on the earth where he can hide, and then he writes, *“Your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me.”* This

means God wants to guide us and show us the way, and we are secure in His care. No matter what you've done and regardless of how far you have wandered, God wants to guide you and hold you close. He loves us with an everlasting love, and there is nothing we can do to make Him love us more or make Him love us less than He does right now.

### **III. God Made You.**

*In verse 13-16 we read, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

The text says that it was God who knit you together in your mother's womb, and the psalmist uses a metaphor of a seamstress creating a garment one thread at a time. The adverbs that are used in this passage make it clear that after God made you, He threw away the mold. You are totally unique. You're one of a kind.

Do you think of yourself as a masterpiece? Most people don't. Everyone I've ever met has something they don't like about themselves – how they look, how tall or short they are, the shape of their nose, or maybe it's the six-inch part some of us have on the top of our heads like me! But the Bible says that every one of us is a masterpiece of God.

In medieval times a craftsman would work for months on a special piece that displayed the craftsman's finest artistic skill. Finally, when the work was finished, he would present it to the craftsmen's guild of his village in hopes of achieving the rank of master craftsman. In this way the work he created was called his masterpiece. That's where the word comes from. In a similar way, the Bible says that you and I are God's masterpiece – we are the crowning act of His creation.

With the womb as God's studio, the Master Craftsman creates His work of art as He fashions each human being. This is one of the reasons why I'm such an advocate for the unborn and I'm pro-life. And it's also why our denomination – ECO – is too. God is intimately involved in the details of the creation of each human being, and from the moment of conception to the time we take our last breath, our lives belong to God. And I believe no one should end the life of an unborn child except God.

Of course, there are the instances of rape, incest, and the life of the mother, and I'm sympathetic to those concerns and understand exceptions need to be made. Still, the number of abortions in this country is staggering – around 800,000 every year. It's one of the most common surgical procedures in America today. And each of these little ones is a masterpiece of God.

I don't presume to suggest that solutions to problem pregnancies are easy or simple. Many people find themselves in a tangled web of mistakes, confusion, and heartache. And if the statistics are right, many of you listening to me today have had an abortion touch your life in the past, or perhaps you are struggling with a decision about it right now.

I want to share with you the story of a woman named Peggy (not her real name). I think it provides a powerful insight into the struggles women face in problem pregnancies. This is what she writes.

“I met a miracle two years ago, and [I] didn’t know what to do with it. Taking birth control pills caused rapid weight gain and severe depression, so I didn’t take contraceptive precautions. Eleven years earlier, I had been told by my gynecologist that I was unable to become pregnant. But the doctor was wrong. Still worse, my 6-month relationship ended on what became the day of conception. I refused to see him again after I found out he was married. Two home pregnancy tests instantly showed positive. I sat for hours in a horrified, numbed daze.

“Once the shock wore off a little, I cried incessantly and prayed desperately. I asked God to help me know what to do. Certain that God’s guidance helped me make the right decision for an educated woman in her 20s, I immediately made plans for an abortion. I chose a weekday to avoid protesters. I paid the extra fee for a general anesthetic so I wouldn’t hear or feel anything. The worst part of the ordeal was having no anesthetic to help with the emotional recovery.

“After the abortion my everyday life remained outwardly as it had been before. I needed the comfort of routine both for my own stability and to prevent others from learning the true reason for my ‘day surgery.’ The need for routine has changed with time, but I soon learned that the 15-minute procedure was going to remain with me for the rest of my life.

“Minutes before the abortion began, I saw my sonogram showing the fetus at 4.2 weeks gestation. All I could do was cry. I remember being in awe at the miracle of life that God had entrusted to me and realizing what I was about to do was a mistake. But I did not have the courage to change my plans.

“Over the years, I had gone with two different friends who were having abortions, silently vowing each time that I could not do the same if I were in their shoes. I not only could, but I did. That ethical reality combined with a new spiritual reality re-shaped my perspective on abortion.

“I am not sure when the full impact of my decision hit me. I never blamed God for the pregnancy, an obvious consequence of my own careless actions...

“I no longer believe in freedom of choice for several reasons. Abortion is a fast, easy solution, but it is one that affects a woman for her entire life. I prayed for God to help me understand the pain I felt. Why did I feel that my decisions had been the wrong one? The abortion was my preference rather than the preference of God. When I was absolutely certain that I knew what God wanted me to do, perhaps it was not God’s but my own voice speaking. Hardest of all, I had to reconcile the realization that I [had taken the life] of my own child, even if indirectly. I remember thinking, ‘My God! What else am I capable of doing?’ I believe, experientially, that abortion is wrong because it causes *two* deaths. The first death is of the fetus and the second is of a part of the mother.

“I am grateful for God’s loving presence throughout an experience that continues even now. I felt my decision must have saddened the heart of God. Yet, God’s love is so great as to carry me through even this. Who knows better than God how it feels to allow one’s own child to be put to death? Yet so great is God that I am forgiven of even this. Over two years later, I am just beginning to forgive myself.”<sup>2</sup>

If you find yourself in a difficult place and don’t know where to turn, or if you’ve had an abortion in the past and need to find healing from the pain of that decision, please seek out someone to talk to. Call me or one of the other pastors or contact the Salem Pregnancy Care Center. People are here to help you.

#### **IV. God Has a Plan Just for You.**

*“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them? Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand” (139:16-18).*

David says that the story of your life has already been written by God and that the Lord has carefully mapped out what will fill your days. David says that God has created each day of my

life, tailoring the circumstances, establishing the boundaries, and fashioning the opportunities for His glory and my good. Sure, I still have free will, and I can wander off the path of God. But He remains the sovereign Lord of the universe, and everything is ultimately under His control.

When I was in college, a friend shared with me a little evangelistic booklet which began by saying, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." I remember being fascinated by the thought that God had a plan just for me, and it caused me to want to learn about His plan for my life.

Rick Warren, who wrote the best seller *The Purpose-Driven Life*, says that God created each human being for five purposes. You were planned for God's pleasure, you were formed for God's family, you were created to become like Christ, you were shaped for God's service, and you were made for God's mission.

But even beyond that, the details of your life and the twists and turns your life has taken, and will take in the future, have all happened under the sovereign rule and loving care of God. It's a bit of a mystery and I can't explain how it all works, but even though I have free will and I'm accountable for all my choices, nevertheless God rules and overrules, and He is able to cause all things to work together for good and for His purposes in my life and in the world (Rm. 8:28).

Are you seeking to know God's plan for your life? Do you desire to live in the center of His will? Ask God to show you, and He will. Life always works better when we follow the plan of God and keep Him at the center of our lives.

### **Conclusion.**

My wife Cyndy's story of faith is a dramatic one of God's faithfulness and grace in the midst of a lot of tragedy and disappointment in her early adult life. At one point when she was in her late-20s, after a string of disappointments she ended up in the hospital for three weeks recovering from awful burns she suffered in a terrible grease fire. (Cyndy has given me permission to share this with you.)

As she lay in the hospital bed battling pain and angry with God over the tragic events of her life, she wondered why all these awful things had happened to her. Then she heard God say, "Cyndy, you've been doing things your way, and you want Me to bless it. Don't you think it's time you start following My teachings and do it My way?" In that moment she was overwhelmed by the presence of God's Holy Spirit, and she experienced His grace and love. It set her on a new course that continues to this day. It led to her conversion and a complete surrendering of her life to Jesus, and today she is one of the most positive and resilient people I've ever met. And I'm so blessed to be married to her.

God knows you, God pursues you, God made you, and He has a wonderful plan for your life. You are a masterpiece of His handiwork. Turn to God and seek to live in the center of His will. You will be blessed if you do. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a sermon by Lloyd Stillely, senior pastor at the First Baptist Church in Gulf Shores, AL. Some of the insights of this sermon were drawn from his excellent message.

<sup>2</sup>Penny Guinn (the author's pseudonym), "Abortion and Choice," *Windows*, pp. 12,13.