

THE GLORY OF GOD'S GALLERY
PSALM 139:13-16

Several years ago, when we lived in Placerville, California, something took place that was clearly the biggest social event of the year. It was the public unveiling of local artist Thomas Kinkade's latest painting entitled "*Placerville in the Snow*" (this was when Kinkade was just beginning to make a name for himself). The painting was displayed in a room bursting with people and buzzing with excitement. Outside, in the rain, hundreds more stood in a long line waiting to feast their eyes on this highly anticipated work of art.

Actually, there was a little more to it than that. In fact, I think for most people seeing the original was of secondary interest. What they really wanted was the opportunity to purchase a print of the new masterpiece, and indeed they were snatching them up two, three, or four at a time for \$35 apiece.

You are aware, I'm sure, that a print is not technically a work of art. It is a glorified poster, mass-produced in a high-tech print shop without the direct intervention of the artist. And although these particular prints were expertly manufactured, they were nothing compared to the original. They lacked the luster, the vividness, the texture, and the subtleties that could only be seen in the original.

So why all the excitement? Why the masses of people willing to stand in line for two hours?

Because inside the room, behind a table, sat Thomas Kinkade. In front of him were stacks of prints, and he was signing them, one after another, just as fast as he could. That is what most people were after on this particular night. That is why they were willing to wait...in the rain. That is why they were so excited.

You see, when that mass-produced print came into direct contact with the artist's pencil its worth was raised dramatically. Suddenly, that poster, which cost but a few dollars to manufacture, became worth quite a bit. At that time, prints of his first painting of Placerville were worth \$500; that is, *if* they had his signature on them. His signature is what gave them their worth, because that was the direct connection between the poster and the painter.

I'm not entirely sure about this, but I've heard it estimated that on a purely material basis the total mineral value of your body is approximately a dollar and a half, give or take a few cents depending on your size, and, of course, whether or not you have gold in your teeth.

It is an astounding thought to think that the dollar value of the ring on my finger is a hundred times that of my entire body, a million times that of the finger on which it rests. And yet I would not swap my finger for all the rings in the world. Look at the incredible detail in that thing—the folds, the lines, the patterns. There's not another finger like this one in the world. Look at how versatile it is. Look at how useful. Why, this finger is amazing!

Then I look at my hand to which this finger is attached and all the things it can do, and then I consider my arm and its flexibility and motion and strength; and then my shoulder...and on and on.

Have you ever stopped and seriously pondered the wonderful intricacies and astonishing nuances of your physical being? From the twenty-six tiny bones of your foot to the thousands of hairs on your head, you possess one fascinating feature after another. You are nothing short of a wonder.

And valuable? As theists we believe in a Creator. As Christians we believe that Creator is personal. That is, He wasn't merely standing by or even supervising the creation of us and our bodies. He is the Potter, we are the clay; He is the Artist, we are the canvas. He used His creative genius to carefully and lovingly fashion and design every detail of our beings. We are not mass produced reproductions. We are not facsimiles that merely have His stamp or His signature on them. We are original works of art from the Creator Himself—masterpieces. And that makes us the glory of God's gallery.

Do you believe that? If you don't, I pray God will convince you of that as we study this portion of Psalm 139, and that He will also show you the tremendous implications of the value He places on human life.

Verses 13-15. *¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

The Psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses the words “knitted” and “woven” to describe how we are put together by God. Did you know that shortly after the first microscopes were invented and the earliest researchers began examining body tissues they discovered that, under magnification, our bodies look as though they have been knit or woven together?

Our skin is made of collagen fibers that look like miniature pieces of rebar, and these fibers are actually stronger and less elastic than steel. And yet one of the most notable, remarkable features of our skin is its elasticity. How do you explain that? It's because those incredibly strong collagen fibers are *knit* or *woven* together so they can be stretched. That was *God's* design, and He did the knitting.

And talk about complex? Science can explain a lot of things. Science tells us that a human being is conceived when the single cell of a female is fertilized by a single cell of a male. We know that those cells divide multiple times so that by the time a baby enters the world she or he is made up of a hundred trillion cells, each of which coordinate and cooperate with each other so that the body can move and see and hear and perform countless functions. We know that within each cell there is a genetic code so complete that the entire body could be reassembled from information in any one of those cells.

We also know something about a chemically coiled strand inside each cell's nucleus called DNA, which gives instructions to each cell. It is estimated that if these instructions were written out they would fill a thousand 600-page volumes. We know that DNA is so narrow and compacted that all the genes in my body's cells would fit into an ice cube, yet if that DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back again 400 times.

That's what science knows, and that's impressive. What science can only conjecture is how that DNA got there—where it got its instructions, and how each cell knows what to do and where to go. Many scientists say, “Man just evolved from a chance collision of atoms to become a very complex blob of protoplasm.”

That makes about as much sense as me telling you that Thomas Kinkade's paintings are the result of an explosion in a paint store. It's absurd! How could something so intricate and precise and complex be accidental?

I'm not ashamed to say that I'm the work of a personal, purposeful, intelligent Creator. I think it takes *far* greater faith to believe in evolution than it does to believe in God. Evolution requires some serious denial.

The Psalmist says in an attitude of wonder, "*You formed my inward parts.*" Literally, "*You created my kidneys.*" *Kidneys* were believed to be the center of one's emotions and moral sensibilities. This is really a reference to what we call our *personality*. God was not only the genetic Engineer of our bodies, but He also gave each of us designer kidneys, that is, a personality that was tailored and designed for each of us alone. Our demeanor, our sense of humor, our preferences, our IQ—they've all been specially designed to make us what we are.

That is what the second line of verse 13 says. "...*You knitted me together in my mother's womb.*"

Now look ahead to **verse 15**. ¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*

God is such a good artist that He designed us and put us together in the dark. "Secret" and "depths of the earth" are metaphorical references to the mother's womb. It is there that God's creative power and genius are employed so beautifully.

We know that after just seven weeks in the womb a fetus has essentially all of its parts formed. God did that! And if God did that it makes that fetus *precious*, because it is the work of His hands. It is an affront to God to say, "That fetus has no worth and no rights—that it can be destroyed and disposed of if the mother doesn't want to go through with the pregnancy."

No! That fetus is a human being that has been uniquely and exquisitely woven together by the Creator Himself and is His masterpiece, a one-of-a-kind, the glory of His gallery.

I'd like you to think of some of the most valuable works of art that have ever been created. For example, think of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel that Michel-Angelo painted. For five years he laid on his back in a cramped position, sixty feet above the ground, covering 10,000 square feet. Painstaking, brilliant, invaluable.

What would the reaction be if someone who didn't like the art, who was somehow offended by his depictions of Bible scenes, broke into the Sistine Chapel one night and blew it up, destroying it completely?

There would be a great outcry from all over the world. It would be front-page headlines. There would be memorials and speeches and television specials decrying this malicious act of terror.

Yet, as tragic as that would be, it doesn't come close to the tragedy of attacking and destroying human life—any human life. That fetus, that person who has an incurable disease, that elderly person who is barely hanging on to life, is God's masterpiece, and we should view and treat him or her as such. Far more precious than anything man has devised or created.

What does the knowledge that God is the personal Creator of life do to you? It ought to make you blurt out with the Psalmist in **verse 14**. *¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

When we take time to reflect upon the various details of our bodies and the intricacies of our personalities it ought to point us to the One who designed and created us and compel us to praise Him. And I believe the more we know, the more we would be compelled to worship.

Did you know, for example, that in your eye there are 107 million cells that send millions of messages to your brain *simultaneously*? Did you know that your eye is capable of distinguishing a thousand shades of color?

Did you know that inside your ear is a drum that moves when sound frequencies pass through it, and that when you hear a note on the piano—middle C—your eardrum vibrates 256 times per second? And so sensitive is that drum that on the slightest of sounds it will flutter one billionth of a centimeter. That is almost impossible to calibrate! And yet that's how intricate God made you.

What does that knowledge do to you? It ought to compel you to cry out, **verse 14**. *¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

But knowledge of who we are not only compels me to worship God; it affects our values and relationships with others.

Why is there so much violence and abuse in our world? Why is there prejudice, strife, hatred, sexual perversion, abortion, euthanasia, and a host of other social ills which are endemic in society?

I don't want to be overly simplistic. But certainly one of the primary factors is that there is a blatant disregard for the value and sanctity of human life. People are viewed as objects to be used, foes to be conquered, animals with which to experiment, enemies to be subjugated or destroyed. Life is cheap. Life is dispensable. In some societies it is every man for himself, survival of the fittest, dog-eat-dog.

That view of life is one of the greatest problems in the world today, and it has tremendous implications.

What would we do if we really believed that mankind was the glory of God's gallery?

I believe there would be a lot more people who had Mother Theresa's perspective about human life. She would search the gutters and garbage piles of Calcutta's alleys, where she would find dying people. Then she would bring them to her hospital where she and the Sisters of Charity would surround them with love—"daubing at their sores, cleaning off layers of grime, and swaddling them in soft sheets." (*Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Brandt and Yancey, p.143).

She was asked numerous times why she did this. Why expend limited resources on people for whom there is little hope? Most of these patients died in a matter of days or weeks. Why not give attention to people who could be rehabilitated—people who could eventually make a contribution to society? Her response? "Because when I look into their eyes I see Jesus."

When we look at another human being we ought to be able to see in that person something of the image of God. We ought to be able to see the Creator's personal design, and that alone ought to compel us to treat that person, any person, with the dignity they

deserve. Dignity bestowed, not on the basis of their achievements or appearance or status or race or like-ability or any other worldly value, but totally on the basis of the worth they have as God's specially designed creation. His masterpiece.

If we really believed what the Psalmist is saying here in this passage, it would make a huge difference in how we treat people. If we viewed people as persons made by God in His image we would be much less inclined to put them down, make fun of them, gossip, criticize, judge, exploit, manipulate, be irritated, or be indifferent.

We would be much *more* inclined to listen, to sympathize and empathize, to be considerate, kind, compassionate, interested, treating others as we would want to be treated ourselves. We would devote more of our time to people and invest in them, and less of our time to projects and activities that benefit no one but ourselves. In short, people would become our greatest priority next to God Himself.

What's more, if we believed that *all* people are created by Him and for Him then we would treat *all* people with dignity. Not just the ones who have the same color of skin as us, or the same religion, or the same values. But all people.

Not just the ones who are attractive and winsome and important in the world's eyes, but those whom society deems as unimportant and unlovely—those that society calls “low-life” and “losers”.

For any one of us to be partial or prejudiced is an affront to Almighty God who created all people with equal dignity and honor. In God's sight there is no such thing as ugly, no such thing as insignificant, no such thing as a biological mistake. He created all for His glory and honor and all reflect that glory and honor, whether it is readily apparent or not.

Mindy used to teach her first grade students a song with a line in it that says, “God just doesn't make junk”. That's good theology. What we call physical or mental defects and deformities are not accidental, they are purposeful. God has designed that person in some way to reflect His glory.

But there is something else. If we really believed that each person is God's personal masterpiece it would have tremendous implications for how we viewed ourselves.

Have you ever thought to yourself, “If only I was prettier, smarter, a different size or shape? If only I had different features; if only I had a higher IQ, or a better memory, or a more dynamic personality?” Are you content with the way God made you, or do you wish you could be different?

If we really believe what this Psalm says, it ought to bring our complaints about ourselves to a halt. It ought to foster contentment and joy and satisfaction and wonder. It ought to deter us from comparing ourselves with others, measuring ourselves by some arbitrary standard of beauty, and trying to be someone we're not.

I remember watching a story on a news magazine that featured a lady whose supreme ambition in life was to look like a Barbie doll. She spent well over five hundred thousand dollars on procedures and plastic surgeries with a Barbie doll as the model. And you know what? She looked like a Barbie doll.

I'm not even going to attempt to analyze why people try to look and be different than what they were created to be, but whether they realize it or not they are tampering with God's masterpiece. They are saying in effect, “God, you didn't do a very good job. I'm a failure.”

I'm not saying we shouldn't try to look our best or we shouldn't keep in good physical condition, or there's no place for self-improvement. Knowing we are the glory of God's gallery

ought to compel us to take good care of our bodies and expand our minds, and live up to our potential. What I am saying is that we ought to be and we *can be* perfectly secure and content and satisfied with the way God made us. Because each of us is a specially designed masterpiece; a one-of-a-kind of tremendous worth.

God is sovereign. He is the one who determines what we are like. He is the one who designs our bodies, our personalities, our capabilities. But there's more. Look at **verse 16**. *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

This means that before we were even born, when we were just fetuses that were not fully formed, God knew exactly how long we would live. I think it's a stretch to interpret this verse as saying that God *determines* how long we live on this earth, as the NASB seems to suggest by translating it, "the days that were *ordained* for me." That Hebrew word has never meant "ordained" any other time it is used in Scripture. It means, "formed."

David is simply telling us that God *knows* how long we are going to live. So He knows all about the babies that have been miscarried in the womb. He knows about the choice that a mother might make to abort her baby. But even though He knows that these children will not live to see the light of day, He still lovingly and carefully fashions them in their mother's womb, and puts every bit as much effort into designing and forming their personalities. Because they are *eternal* souls, and they will live forever in His presence in heaven.

Likewise, God knows how many days you and I will live on this earth, and He's known it since before we were born. And that means that nothing takes Him by surprise. He knows about accidents and diseases that, from our perspective, shorten life. And He knows about medicines and technologies that, from our perspective, lengthen life.

But the point David wants to make in this verse is that God is personal. His knowledge of us is intimate. Jesus said that God knows the exact number of hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30). Remember, He is the Potter; we are the clay. He's the Creator and the Designer of every single person.

But He is also the God who is in the business of recreating and restoring our lives, providing opportunity for us to become everything He intended to be. God didn't just form us in the womb, so that we could live out our days on this earth, and then die at a ripe old age. He created us so that we could know Him, have intimate fellowship with Him, and live with Him forever. And we are able to do this when we allow Him to restore His image in us.

Most of you are aware that while we are created in God's image *sin* has severely distorted and marred that image. But God sent His Son Jesus into this world to restore His image in us. And that is precisely what happens when we receive Jesus Christ into our lives. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*If any man is in Christ he is a new creature—old things have passed away behold all things have become new*". When we receive Jesus that we become *new* creations, and are able to become all that He intended us to be.

And we receive this gift and this opportunity when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE GLORY OF GOD'S GALLERY
PSALM 139:13-16

Main Idea: God's personal and meticulous creation of us ought to produce wonder in us that results in exuberant praise

"Knit" and "woven" by God Himself (vv.13, 15)
A literal meaning

The complexity of human life

The absurdity of evolution

The response of contemplating Intelligent Design (v.14)
Praise and worship

Valuing *every* human being

Contentment with how God made *you*

An immensely personal God (v.16)
He knows every detail

His provision to live with Him forever