

Four Questions About God – Part 3

Psalm 139:13-18

In our wallets, in our photograph Albums, in our digital cameras, in our computers, in our cellphones, most of us carry pictures of family and friends. But there's ANOTHER picture we ALL carry around in our minds. It's a MENTAL picture we carry around w/us; & the MENTAL PICTURE we have of ourselves is something known as *our SELF-IMAGE*.

Fact is, in our own minds, we SEE ourselves in a certain way; every one of us has a self-image. AND . . . our self-image is NOT a static thing but rather a self-portrait we paint and revise often w/the colors of the conclusions we have reached about ourselves. And that IS @ least some of the PROBLEM we have when it comes to self-image: We're painting this self-portrait w/the wrong colors.

There was a young lady in Gadsden . . . bright, really pretty, popular, a Freshman at Auburn. Her parents brought her home because she was "cutting" herself in the dorm room. Turns out, there was a SELF-IMAGE issue that was driving her to that kind of bizarre and self-destructive behavior.

Friends, self-image IS a BIG deal. SUCH a big deal in fact that Dr. Ray Burwick, a Christian Psychologist from Birmingham AL for over 39 years, maintains that @ the core of untold numbers of psychological problems, behavioral disorders, and relational dysfunctions, there's a problem w/Self-image. As the years have gone by, Dr. Burwick has developed a helpful (& Biblical) distinction when it comes to how we see ourselves: The *distinction* between your "**PERCEIVED IMAGE,**" (YOUR perception of yourself) which tends to be EXTREME, and our "**ACTUAL IMAGE,**" = the way the LORD GOD sees you.

Fact is, people tend to live according to their "**PERCEIVED IMAGE.**" Some people carry in their minds a mental photograph of an OVERINFLATED self-image. If they wrote a book, some titles might include *My Great Humility & How I Achieved It; or . . . 12 Famous People Who Have Met Me; OR . . .* (and this is the title of an actual sports biography written 42 years ago), *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow . . . 'Cause I Get Better Looking Each Day* (you can find it on Amazon).] These hot air balloons are legends in their own minds – w/DISTORTED self-images. .

On the OTHER hand, other people have self-images so LOW they feel like if they were a pet in an animal shelter, NOBODY would EVER take 'em home. Or if they were an item displayed at a garage sale, you couldn't even GIVE them away. Their Theme song would be the old children's poem: "Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I think I'll go eat worms!" These people suffer from a severe INFERIORITY complex, so their "perceived image" is ALSO distorted.

The GOOD NEWS for us this AM is, these **Vv** we just read and heard together provide us w/our "ACTUAL IMAGE," which the way GOD sees us. This "Actual Image" is balanced, Biblical (of course), and custom designed to ENCOURAGE US in the PRESENT and gives us HOPE for the FUTURE.

The QUESTION Psalm 139:13-18 answer is: **How WELL has God DESIGNED me?** & the ANSWER to the question is: **God is ACTIVELY SOVEREIGN in my life.** And once you really come to embrace these **2 affirmations** of God's sovereignty here in these *verses*, your "ACTUAL IMAGE" (the way the LORD GOD sees you) will become crystal clear, and YOUR SELF-IMAGE will change – for the better!

1st Affirmation: BEFORE I was BORN, God designed & engineered my BODY.

In **Vs 13**, the word “You” is emphatic. The word “Create” is a special word in the original language. It means both “to originate” AND “to own” something. Paraphrase, **“God, with Your sovereign hands, YOU and YOU ALONE AND NO ONE ELSE both ORIGINATES ME . . . AND Lord you hold IN Your Sovereign Hands my OWNERSHIP PAPERS! You OWN me! I belong first and foremost to YOU! I am YOUR property!”**

Sooo, when we look @ the issue of abortion from a BIBLICAL perspective, a woman’s so-called “right” to have an abortion is a **NON-ISSUE**; because what’s inside of the woman is not even HERS to begin with! GOD *owns* that unborn child! In fact, Ultimately, NEITHER parent “owns” the child; from the moment of conception, EVERY child BELONGS to GOD! Indeed, parents are entrusted with the protection, provision, care, and nurture of their children; even as parents acknowledge that GOD is the one who *creates* and *owns* EVERY child! Biblical Reality Check (BRC): Our children are ON LOAN from God!

Look @ **Vs 13** again . . . **“You created my inmost being.”** The Hebrew word for **“inmost being”** literally is the word for **“kidneys,”** which at first probably sounds a little strange to us . . . **“O Lord, you created my kidneys?!?”** Well, In those days when you dismembered an animal, the kidneys were the very last organ you would reach. So, in Hebrew thought, the kidneys came to represent the innermost part of the person, your very inmost being. Nowadays we use the word “heart” in the same way. When we say things like “I love you with all my heart,” we don’t mean “I love you with the physical organ of my heart; or, I love you with all of my atriums and ventricles.” We mean, “I love you with all my inmost being.”

So guys, if you lived in Old Testament times I suppose you *could* tell your wife or girlfriend (if single), “My dearest sweetheart, I love you with all my kidneys.” But, it would be awkward. Anyway, The idea expressed is this: My EXTERNAL Body, AND my INTERNAL body is created and owned by God. Inside and out, from head to toe, I belong to GOD!

Look at **Vs 13** again . . . **“knit”** has a couple of meanings. It can mean **“to knit,”** as in **“to join or weave together,”** as in skillfully and artfully weaving together threads to make a tapestry; or **“knit”** can also mean **“to cover over”** something. If the Psalmist means **“knit”** as weaving together, then the Psalmist is speaking of God’s personal involvement in the womb of the Mother . . . His personal weaving together all the organs and blood vessels and tissues into a beautiful and artfully awesome tapestry and then placing that tapestry in a **“frame”** (cf Vs) – also known as our skeletal system.

Now, if **“knit”** means **“to cover over,”** the Psalmist is speaking of God placing the child in the womb as a place of covering or protection. Most likely, Both meanings are intended, because these two ideas of God personally fashioning the child in the womb and then putting the child in the womb as a place of protection are both picked up again in **Vs 15**.

The principle: From GOD’S perspective (which is the way it really is), I am a valuable and protected work of art! That is, unless some THIEF violently breaks into the womb and DESTROYS the work of art. Which is, by the way, what abortion is. It’s VANDALISM. It’s breaking in to God’s art gallery, stealing, and then destroying God’s property! Abortion is *vandalism* of God’s property.

Now, of course, if you’re HERE Today, it’s obvious you were NOT aborted. So what DO these **Vv** reveal to us regarding God’s sovereignty and our identity, our “ACTUAL image”? **Vs 14 . . .** Doesn’t mean we’ve been made scary! I guess humanly speaking, some of us *look* scarier than others. But

actually, “... *fearfully*...” means that WE are something that should cause people to be AMAZED @ the work of God!

What we see here is that I AM and YOU ARE a nothing less than **works of art** created and owned by the Lord God! We are each **a priceless piece of HUMAN TAPESTRY** woven in the womb (God’s Workshop . . . better yet, God’s ART STUDIO!) ~ woven into an astonishing, amazing, awe-inspiring pattern, and framed for the world to see!

[It’s been said that the VALUE of an object is directly related to the status of the ORIGINAL OWNER of the object. Steve Jussely’s autograph on an Elvis Presley LP record is worth not much! Elvis Presley’s autograph on an EP LP is worth \$8K. You & I could take a piece of canvas and paint stars shining in the night and sell it for . . . well, you know, *maybe* a few \$\$\$. But I read the other day that a painting titled “Starry Night” by an artist named Vincent Van Gogh is worth @ least 100 MILLION \$\$\$!]

Hear this well, beloved, if YOU are ORIGINATED and woven together in your Mother’s Womb by the Sovereign hand of GOD and OWNED by GOD, then Just how VALUABLE are you? **Vv** tell us, B/C you’re GOD’S CREATION and GOD’S POSSESSION, your “ACTUAL WORTH” = more than you can even begin to imagine! Please hear this: SINCE God was actively sovereign in your life BEFORE you were born, there IS no GOOD & BIBLICAL reason for you to have a poor self image!

2nd Affirmation: BEFORE I was CONCEIVED, God designed & engineered my DAYS.

Verses 16-18 are a suitcase PACKED w/significance for us. Let’s unpack what’s here.

Navin R. Johnson is a fictitious character in a movie. He’s a nobody who knows he’s a nobody . . . until he sees his name for the first time in print in of all things a phone book! Holding a phonebook in his hands, He jumps up and down & says, “I’m SOMEBODY now! My name in print! This is the kind of thing that MAKES people! I’m in PRINT! Things are going to start happening to me now . . .” Seems like there’s something VALIDATING, something AFFIRMING, something SIGNIFICANT about seeing your name in print. That’s why when we make scrapbooks for our children; and if their name is in the paper for whatever reason, we pull out the scissors, cut out the article, and save it. IF you name’s in a BOOK, well, you really ARE somebody! And, IF a book’s been written about you, well . . . you ARE the “Bees Knees.”

Psalm 139 says your name IS written in a real book . . . and so is mine! But more than that, on a personal level, you need to affirm that GOD HIMSELF is the Author of my LIFE STORY and GOD has written down EVERY DAY I will EVER experience BEFORE I am even BORN! In fact, the major message of **Vs 16** IS that for those trusting in the Lord (personal) BESIDES Me being a work of art from the hand of God, **My LIFE is a STORY ~ located within a much BIGGER story ~ & BOTH stories are written by the Same Author: The Lord God.**

Let’s think this through on a personal level. EVERY DAY/PAGE of my life’s story was written, scripted out, in God’s book BEFORE chapter 1, page 1, word 1 of the story of my life was actually lived out! Stated another way, BEFORE TIME BEGAN, the Lord God wrote with the permanent ink pen of His Sovereignty the story that IS my life ~ a story complete w/characters and conflicts, choices and consequences, ecstatic highs and heartbreaking lows.

It’s amazing for me to consider: BEFORE I ever lived 1 day, God sovereignly wrote down the very day that my life would begin in Winnie Jussely’s tummy, the very day I would be born, the family I would

be born into, the PLACE where I would be born (Decatur, GA), the PLACES I would lived (Decatur GA, Dallas TX, Crystal Springs MS, Waynesboro MS, Hattiesburg MS, Gadsden AL , South Jackson, Brandon). God also wrote down how long I would live in each place. God wrote down WHERE I'd go to school, WHO my friends would be, what kind of JOBS I would have @ different times in my life, who I'd MARRY, the number (and gender!) of CHILDREN Carol and I would have, and ALL the things future I have yet to experience. In God's "pre-Biography" of Steve Jussely, both my birth date, April 29, 19whatever AND the date of my death were written down BEFORE I ever lived 1 day on this earth!

To change the image a bit, if we agree with what Shakespeare said in the play "As You Like It," that all the world's a stage and we are players on that stage, THEN we ALSO believe GOD is the PLAYWRITE and the DIRECTOR of our life's drama. He's the One who DETERMINES when the curtain will rise, what the state settings, characters, and plot will be, and when the curtain will fall on the final act of the drama that is my life. So WHO am I? I'm somebody living out a story written by God Himself! That fact alone makes my life special.

But yet . . . there's something DEEPER and RICHER and more SIGNIFICANT, more PROFOUND going on with this story. You see, for me, for You, for EVERY Believer in the Lord, OUR story is part of a MUCH, MUCH bigger story. We find a clue to that Bigger Story is in **Vs 18 "... grains of sand ..."** For the first audience reading those words, their minds would race back to Genesis 32, where the Lord God promises 1 of the Patriarchs that his descendents would be as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea, which cannot be counted. Of course, the roots of that promise sink deeply into the soil of a promise God made to ABRAHAM back in **Genesis 12 & 15** ~ a promise of Abraham's descendents being more numerous than the stars in the sky. And guess what? This promise is AFFIRMED and applied to EVERY believer in **Gal 3:7, "Understand, then, that those who have Faith (believe in Christ) ARE children of Abraham."**

Please understand, IF you're a Christian, GOD has written you into the GRAND NARRATIVE, the BIG STORY of REDEMPTION. Which means, the STORY the Bible tells about God choosing and redeeming a special people to be His own . . . THIS story is also YOUR story!

And since by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, YOU are written into this story ~ you are actually IN this Story ~ YOUR life WILL have a TRUE "Fairy Tale" ending. It WILL be said of you " . . . and he lived / she lived happily ever after!" Check it out in Revelation 21 and 22. We can indeed affirm, with Biblical certainty, what C. S. Lewis suggests at the conclusion of his *Narnia Chronicles*, that " . . . for EVERY Believer, the END of the story is really the beginning of a much GREATER story that goes on and on for all eternity, a story in which each chapter is better than the previous chapter!"

Friends, it's time put aside OUR perceptions about ourselves. Our "PERCEIVED self-image" is NOT our "ACTUAL self-image." We are **God's masterpieces, originated and owned by God.** We are **people with a personal story, EVERY PAGE of which was handwritten by our Sovereign God; and OUR story is located within an INCREDIBLY BIG AND WONDERFUL STORY that has a SPECTACULAR ending that NEVER ends!** May God give you grace to see yourself NOT as you THINK you are; but to see yourself . . . as you REALLY are!