

# Created in God's Image

"Mirrors" Series, September 6 & 7, 2025 | Psalm 139 (esp. verses 7-16)

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## What does it mean to be human?

**I love J.R.R. Tolkien's writing because he creates worlds that make it safe to think about ourselves.**

We meet elves and dwarves and other fantastic creatures.

Ironically, in all of them, we see something about the human condition and get to think about it in ways that feel safe.

**One of Tolkien's creatures in particular challenges us to think about what it means to be human.**

Gollum is a creature who followed evil into a cave far underground.

We meet him in *The Hobbit* (ch. 5) where Tolkien describes him this way:

"Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum, a small slimy creature ... as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face. He had a little boat, and he rowed about quite quietly on the lake ... with large feet dangling over the side, but never a ripple did he make. Not he."

Living underground, Gollum was corrupted by darkness and evil, which made him something less than he had been when he was born. Which makes us think about who we were when we were born, what has happened to us, and who we have become. That's all part of what it means to be human. Gollum, who is not very human, provides us a mirror to look into so that we see ourselves more clearly.

**Today, many people are holding up a MIRROR and anxiously asking what it means to be human.**

We're calling this series "MIRRORS" because a mirror is something in which we see ourselves.

We wonder who we are as individuals, what it means to be human, and what is unique and important about us.

People have been asking this question for as long as there have been people.

But there is a new level of anxiety about this question today.

Are we just hairless apes? Will computers, robots, and artificial intelligence replace us?

What does it mean to be human?

**A better question may be, "What does the Bible say about being human?"**

The Bible tells us how we are designed and created, how we function, and where we are destined. In theology, we call it the doctrine of humanity.

The doctrine of humanity touches big, practical issues like life, marriage, death, and eternity.

Which means we desperately want to hear what the Bible says about them!

**We start with the way we reflect God's image. It's another reason this series is called "MIRRORS".**

Genesis 1 tells us that we are created in God's image.

We reflect God's image the way the moon reflects the sun. There is something of God's nature in us, and we display God's nature to the rest of creation.

What does it mean that we reflect God's image? Answering that question tells us something important about what it means to be HUMAN, what it means to be US!

Psalms 139 has a lot to say on that topic, so let's dive in.

## **"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."**

**David wrote that God had knitted us together in our mother's womb. Imagine that!**

We know that God created us in the first place.

We read in Genesis 1 that on the sixth day, God created humans in His own image.

Then in **Genesis 1:31** we read:

***And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. ...***

God made us and thought He had done a really good job!

I think we sometimes assume that God just set the system in motion from that point forward and left it on its own. Since then, He is somewhere in the background making it all work...

But in Psalm 139 David says that God knitted us together in our mother's wombs. Like He shapes our skeletons and covers them with flesh. It's a word picture, but what a word picture!

It means that we are each created by God. Fearfully and wonderfully made.

God has made us to be the people that He planned for us to be. What an amazing thought!

**It makes me think of the first time I saw my first son's face on an ultrasound.**

This was more than two decades ago, so the ultrasounds weren't very good. It was more of a grainy image of a little goblin. But there were eyes. Fingers. Toes. There was our baby!

Up to that point, our son was nothing more than an idea in my mind, something that made my wife, Tammi, sick every morning.

But there he was, being knitted together by God inside his mother's womb.

He was being fearfully and wonderfully made. He had my heart!

**It boggles my mind that many people believe we exist because of chance and combat across the ages.**

That's not what the Bible says.

That's not what I see when I look at you. That's not what I see when I look into the faces of my two sons. And that's not what I see when I look in the mirror.

If chance and the survival of the fittest can account for human life, then we really are nothing more than hairless apes, one animal among many, one living thing in a sea of living things!

**That kind of thinking contributed to the horrors of World War 1, which scarred men like Tolkien.**

In the decades leading up to World War 1, the world was changing dramatically.

All kinds of forces were at work—nationalism was on the rise. Empires were changing.

But after the rise of Darwinism, many intellectuals concluded that society was best served by a war that would leave the strongest on top. It would purge the weak and leave the strong.

Mind you, not everyone thought this. Not even everyone who embraced Darwin. But some did. And when you think about the grinding months of warfare along the trenches in France, it helps to explain why leaders sent endless waves of young men into machine-gun fire. Tolkien was there in those trenches, and what he saw scarred him. It led him to write about the horrors of war in his fantasy literature. It helped him imagine creatures like Gollum who were twisted into something ghastly. But the trenches did not have the last word on what it means to be human. And the people who sent waves of young men into machine-gun fire were wrong about how we were created.

### **Do you resist the thought that you are fearfully and wonderfully made by a loving Father?**

Some of us deny that God made us and that He did a good job. We look at ourselves, see our flaws and weaknesses, and think, "If God made ME, then He could have done better!"

And sometimes we deny—either explicitly or by our actions—that God could have made other human beings and called them "very good" too!

But the truth that we are created in the image of God by our loving Creator is the cornerstone of the doctrine of humanity. It shapes how we see each other and how we see ourselves.

## **We are ALL fearfully and wonderfully made.**

### **We counted some people as 3/5<sup>th</sup> of a person at the founding of this country.**

At the time of the American Revolution, slavery was an established practice in many places.

There was a growing sense that the practice was wrong. It violated the ideas of liberty and freedom that were so important to our founding.

But when hammering out a constitution for all of the states, the framers compromised.

In determining population, enslaved people were counted as 3/5ths of a person.

They tacitly agreed that slaves were not fully human.<sup>1</sup>

If we understand what the Bible is saying, that should be a horrific thought to us. It's horrific to say that anyone is less than fully human. But that's what we did at one time.

### **But what David wrote about himself in Psalm 139 applies to ALL human beings.**

In **Psalm 139:13**, David wrote:

***... you knitted me together in my mother's womb.***

Then in **Psalm 139:14**, he added:

***I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. ...***

What he wrote doesn't just apply to him. This isn't a psalm about David or about the kings of Israel and Judah. David isn't saying, "Kings like me are fearfully and wonderfully made."

Nor does what David is saying apply only to Israelites or Christians. He isn't saying, "Israelites and Christians are fearfully and wonderfully made."

He's not even saying, "People like me and people I like are fearfully and wonderfully made."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/three-fifths-compromise>

David is describing God's goodness—His power, presence, knowledge, and care.  
And David is speaking for all humanity. What he wrote applies to us all!

**ALL human beings bear God's image, regardless of what we see when we look in the mirror.**

If we are created in God's image—and we are—then so is every other human on the planet!

That means that every human from every nation, ethnicity, and race is an image-bearer, too.

Every human being who speaks a different language, who dresses differently, who has different abilities, and who has a different opinion from you is made by God in His image.

We have not always gotten this fact right, but this is important!

**Racism and ethnic prejudices deny what the Bible plainly says.**

When we look at people of other races and think that they are in some way less than we are, then we are missing what God says plainly in His Word. We are all created in His image.

If we think people of other cultures are less important, then we are missing the truth.

When we think of political or national enemies as less human than we are, then we are sinning.

We can do better than that! We have the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

**Jesus called us to set the example in loving one another, the way Charles Galda is building bridges between New England leaders from different backgrounds.**

Charles is the head of Vision New England, which brings evangelicals together regionally.

He has a ministry called "Bridge Builders." He brings together church leaders from different racial and ethnic backgrounds with a simple agenda—getting to know one another.

I have been blessed to take part in one of his Bridge-Builder events. I met for three days with four other brothers from three different backgrounds. We spent time together, got to know each other's life stories and faith stories, and built trust and brotherly love.

It sounds simple, but it is the kind of revolutionary thing that changes the world.

It says that we are all valuable, all fearfully and wonderfully made.

When we realize that about each other, we are living from a Gospel worldview.

**"Where shall I go from your Spirit?" Nowhere!**

**In stanza two of Psalm 139 (verses 7-12), David asks God, "Where shall I go from your Spirit?"**

In verse eight he says that God is in heaven and in the land of the dead.

In verse nine he adds that God is in the east and in the west.

God is even in the darkness.

No matter where David might go, God is already there.

There is nowhere to escape from God's presence! That may sound ominous, but it's a promise.

**Then in Psalm 139:16, David says that God sees our days before they ever begin.**

He writes: *... in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,*

**when as yet there was none of them.**

God knows everything about us before we are born.

He knows our strengths and weaknesses, our failures and successes.

But God creates us anyway. That is an act of love on God's part.

God knows you and created you anyway!

**Because God also knows His plan in Jesus!**

God also sees Jesus Christ Who died to pay the price for our sin. God knows that we are offered Christ and a chance at forgiveness and redemption.

God knows that every aspect of our lives fits into His plan to redeem a people for Himself and to resurrect creation. Somehow, we fit into that plan. We have a part to play in God's plan.

And God knows that there is the future when, if we choose Jesus Christ, we will get resurrection and eternal life. There we will be perfected forever.

**Again, it reminds me of Gollum.**

Gollum appeared again in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. He appeared as a pair of eyes following the hero and his companions in another dark, underground mine.

At first, the new hero despised Gollum. He looked back at the past and said, "It's a pity Bilbo didn't kill Gollum when he had the chance."

The wise wizard in their party replied, "Pity? It's a pity that stayed Bilbo's hand."

Then he added, "My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before this is over."  
(Book 2, Chapter 4, *The Fellowship of the Ring*)

That insight proves to be right and critical to the outcome of the entire story.

**Are we Gollum?**

We were created fearfully and wonderfully in the first place.

Sin and evil have touched and twisted us so that the image of God has faded in us.

Still, there is the hope of redemption for us. One of the questions I get asked most often, "Have I gone so far that I am beyond God's reach?" I can't tell you how many people over the years have quietly asked if they were so sinful that God could not save them. You would be shocked how many of us privately worry about this regularly. And the answer is—no! David reminds us that there is nowhere we can go in this life that puts us beyond God's reach. As long as there is breath in our lungs, we can be redeemed.

And we have some role to play in God's plan for creation. None of us is so broken or flawed that there is not some part God has for us to play in His plan! You have a part!

And we have a future. If we choose Christ, we will be resurrected and live with Him forever!

And that is how David ends this psalm, with his prayers directed toward eternity.

**"Lead me in the way everlasting!"**

**In the end, Gollum was beyond saving but only because he gave into evil by HIS choice.**

There is a powerful ring at the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Gollum wanted that ring more than anything, but it was evil.

In the end, Gollum chose the ring. It cost him his life.  
He played an important part in the drama, but he never found redemption.  
Tragically, you could call him an enemy of good.

**In Psalm 139, David begs God to KNOW him (and us) so that we never fall into that trap.**

In verses 19-22, David calls on God to slay the wicked.  
The wicked are those who are against God and who disregard God.  
David never wants that to happen to himself or to us.  
So, he calls on God in **verses 23-24** to search us and know us:

***Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me ...***

David is praying, "God, don't let me be an enemy! Search me! If there is stuff in me that doesn't work, take it out!"

Why? So that God will, in the words of **verse 24**:

***...lead me in the way everlasting!***

So that we will be fit for eternity.

**May the reality that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God sink in.**

This isn't just a Bible study. And it isn't just doctrine we believe.  
That's good doctrine, and it's truth, but this stuff is much more personal.

**I grasp what the Bible says about being human when I see that YOU are made in the image of God.**

When you look different from me ...

When you have a different culture, different thoughts, different loyalties ...

When you bring a cart full of groceries and cut me off at the checkout counter at the grocery store, even though I have just three or four items in my hands ...

When you undermine me at work ...

... but and I still see that YOU are fearfully and wonderfully made, then I am truly beginning to grasp what David is saying in Psalm 139.

**I grasp what the Bible says about being human when I see that I too am made in the image of God.**

I look in the mirror and see myself accurately—my strengths and weaknesses; my sin and salvation; my failures and successes—and still say, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

That's when I really understand what it means to be human.