

I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM *fearfully & wonderfully made*

CHANGING  HEARTS

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank You for this time together. Help us see ourselves and others as You see us, as Your fearfully and wonderfully made creations. Help us draw close to Your Word and share Your love and grace with others. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Opening Thoughts:

- When was the last time you got a performance review? Or perhaps a final grade after a long semester?
- Did it reflect your inner strengths and most proud accomplishments?

With most reviews or finals, there are areas we are proud of and areas where we feel we could improve. Our society generally focuses on areas in need of improvement. We live in a performance driven culture. We allow people, circumstances, accomplishments, and ideas to determine how we value ourselves and others. We are so often consumed by meeting our goals and objectives at work and in our social lives that we neglect the most important objective of all: a relationship with God, bearing His likeness.

From the beginning, God has had a plan for us. God sees people who are marvelously created, chosen, accepted, loved, and who reflect His Spirit, created in His very image. The Bible tells us we are God's wonderfully made creation, created with purpose. Even though we are flawed by sin, we are mercifully redeemed by Jesus Christ.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Read Psalm 139:13-14

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.

—Psalm 139:13-14 NIV

- What do you think it means to be "fearfully and wonderfully made?"

Read Genesis 1:26-31

- (v.26) Think about this first verse **let us make**. How would you define the word **make**?
 - **To make** is derived from the word **Asah** which means **to do, make, work, create, accomplish, prepare; to obey, to offer, to sacrifice**.
- Think about **in His likeness**. What does it really mean to be made **in God's likeness**?
 - **In His likeness** is derived from **Denut** which means **to resemble, to model, or to pattern**.

(v.28-29) God created us with everything we need to be like Him. Among all the creatures of the world, only humans are made in the likeness of God and are able to form a relationship with Him. We are set apart from the rest of creation.

- Think about God's plan and God's timing. God had a plan for you from the very beginning, even before you were created. Does knowing this give you confidence in who you are?
- How has God revealed His plans for you so far?
- How does it feel to know God's plans for you will continue to unfold?
- Think about people with disabilities. Have you ever made an assumption or judgement about someone's path based on their disability?

Read Ephesians 2:10

Consider what it means to be God's handiwork. Compare this to Genesis 1:31. God looked at all He created and saw it was good. God longed for humanity, created us in His likeness, and saw **it was very good**.

- How do these passages show the importance of God's perfect plan and purpose for all people, including people with disabilities?

The Fallen Man

Adam was a real and living person made in the likeness of God. Adam and Eve knew they were created and formed specifically by God. They listened to Satan in the form of a serpent and disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit of the *Tree of the Knowledge* of good and evil. By eating that fruit, Adam and Eve sinned against God and suffered an identity crisis. Although created in God's likeness, they sinned against God, deliberately violating God's command and design. Once they sinned, they forgot Who they were. All human beings are sinners as a result of their disobedience. The mercy and grace of God are evident in the fact that Jesus came to save guilty, undeserving sinners.

Read the following scriptures. As you read them, consider the following:

- What do we all suffer from?
- Where do you tend to place your value?
- How does God define you?
Read Psalm 14:1-3 – Universality of sin
Read Romans 5:12-14 – Adam's disobedience
Read Romans 3:23 – Universality of sin
Read 2 Samuel 12:9-10 – David's sin

God's Kingdom vs. Our Kingdom

The life-saving resurrection of Jesus Christ fundamentally changes how we should see ourselves. It re-defines reality completely. In our kingdom, we define ourselves by our accomplishments. We tend to place a greater value on performing and doing. In this kind of world, people with disabilities often get overlooked, forgotten, and shut out. We value those who know the most and we hold everyone under this microscope. We compare our strengths, test scores, financial status, relationship status, resumes, and accomplishments constantly; it is a never-ending battle of striving, seeking, and scrambling for value. But God's kingdom isn't like our kingdom. We are mercifully forgiven members of God's eternal kingdom.

Read Romans 5:12-20

- What is the "gift" referring to in this passage?
- How does this passage challenge the value system of this kingdom?
- How does this passage support how God's promises apply to all people?

Through Jesus, we have the gift of eternal life and the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Reflect on how God has already equipped you to pattern your life to reflect His.

- In which area of your life do you need God's help to reflect His likeness?
- How can you share God's message and reflect His love to people with disabilities? Read Galatians 3:26-28.

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- (v.28) Every distinction melts away in God's eyes. There is neither Jew or Gentile, male or female, disability or no disability. Think about people with disabilities. Like all people, they are one in Christ Jesus. They have gifts and abilities. What are some ways people with disabilities can serve and be included in your church?

God tells us who we are in His Word

You are a new birth (1 Peter 1:3)
You are a child of God (Romans 8:4)
Righteous (Romans 3:22)
Not condemned (Romans 8:1)
Precious, honored, and loved (Isaiah 43:4)
Fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)

Closing Thoughts

- What if God gave you a performance review? Would you score perfectly?

Christ died and rose so we wouldn't have to keep score. God has given us everything we need to reflect Him through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. We have the life-saving power of the resurrection inside us and were created to bear His likeness. In our kingdom, we place value on performance, knowledge and outward appearance. In God's kingdom, everyone is equally loved, equally saved, and equally valued. When God looks at the world, He sees one kind of person. He sees people who are equally in need of grace and equally unable to earn it. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made children of God created in His likeness. We are all broken and flawed by sin, but in Christ we are forgiven and have eternal life in heaven. The empty tomb of Jesus, the cross and the resurrection of Christ is everything! Praise God, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made and redeemed!

If time permits, read all of Psalm 139.

Closing Prayer

Dear Gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for creating us in Your perfect image. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to redeem us from our sins. Help us know You have a purpose and a plan for our lives. Strengthen our faith so we cling to our identity in You and not through things of this world. Forgive us when we fail to see others as valuable to You and Your kingdom. We love You, Lord. Help us share Your love and grace with people of all abilities. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.