

**“Grace Embodied”****I Corinthians 6:12-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; John 1:43-51****Psalm 139**

<sup>1</sup>O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup>You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD,  
you know it completely.

<sup>5</sup>You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

<sup>13</sup>For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

<sup>14</sup>I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

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

<sup>16</sup>Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

<sup>17</sup>How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup>I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

**John 1:43-51**

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

<sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

<sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

<sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

<sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

<sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

### **I Corinthians 6:12-20 (selected)**

<sup>12</sup>“All things are lawful for me”—but not all things are beneficial.

“All things are lawful for me”—but I will not be dominated by anything.

<sup>13</sup>...The body is meant [for] the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup>And God raised the Lord, and will also raise us by his power.

<sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?...

<sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

<sup>20</sup>For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.

A prayer by Ted Loder:

O God, I am so fragile:  
my dreams get broken,  
my relationships get broken,  
my heart gets broken,  
my body gets broken.

What can I believe,  
except that you will not despise a broken heart,  
that old and broken people shall yet dream dreams,  
and that the lame shall leap for joy,  
the blind see,  
the deaf hear.

What can I believe,  
except what Jesus taught:  
that only what is first broken, like bread,  
can be shared;  
that only what is broken,  
is open to your entry;  
that old wineskins must be ripped open and replaced  
if the wine of new life is to expand.

So, I believe, Lord;  
help my unbelief  
that I may have courage to keep trying  
when I am tired,  
and to keep wanting passionately  
when I am found wanting.

O God, I am so frail:  
my life spins like a top,  
bounced about by the clumsy hands

of demands beyond my doing,  
 fanned by furies  
 at a pace but half a step from hysteria,  
 so much to do,  
 my days so few and fast-spent,  
 and I, mostly unable to recall  
 what I am rushing after.

What can I believe,  
 except that beyond the limits  
 of my little prayers and careful creeds,  
 I am not meant for dust and darkness,  
 but for dancing life and silver starlight.

Help my unbelief  
 that I may have courage  
 to dare to love the enemies  
 I have the integrity to make;  
 to care for little else  
 save my brothers and sisters of the human family;  
 to take time to be truly with them,  
 take time to see,  
 take time to speak,  
 take time to learn with them  
 before time takes us;  
 and to fear failure and death less  
 than the faithlessness  
 of not embracing love's risks.

God, I am so frantic:  
 somehow I've lost my gentleness  
 in a flood of ambition,  
  
 lost my sense of wonder  
 in a maze of videos and computers,

lost my integrity  
 in a shuffle of commercial disguises,  
 lost my gratitude  
 in a swarm of criticisms and complaints,  
 lost my innocence  
 in a sea of betrayals and compromises.

What can I believe,  
 except that the touch of your mercy  
 will ease the anguish of my memory;  
 that the tug of your Spirit  
 will empower me to help carry now the burdens  
 I have loaded on the lives of others;  
 that the example of Jesus  
 will inspire me to find again my humanity.

So, I believe, Lord;  
 help my unbelief  
 that I may have courage  
 to cut free from what I have been  
 and gamble on what can be,  
 and on what you  
 might laughingly do  
 with trembling me  
 for your incredible world.<sup>i</sup>

The Apostle Paul didn't write to churches as institutions or single entities because fundamentally a church isn't an institution or a single entity. He wrote to people, and encouraged them to be the Church *as people*—as individuals *united*, as members of a *whole*, but still distinguishable from one another, as God had *made* them distinguishable from one another.

Paul doesn't show any sign (that I can see) of encouraging the local church to be designed to make consumers happy—a service provider offering people what they want, in the most professional way possible.

He seems a lot more interested in the church being a community where all participants in society (and those who are excluded from society), can become disciples: ever more faithful, ever more equipped to reach out and invite everybody else to be disciples, too.

So, Paul didn't seem to mind being straightforward with them when consumers in the church asserted their right to do whatever they wanted with themselves because, you know, all of this physical being is temporal anyway, so obviously (they thought), why would God care what you do with it?

The immediate context of that conversation was physical indulgence:  
 whatever makes me feel good in the moment,  
 regardless of the impact it has on other human lives;  
 whatever appetites my physical being may have,  
 surely God couldn't care one way or the other,  
 since all of this physical being  
 is just going to turn back to dust anyway.

But the wider context is to recognize that in the life we live,  
 with its thousand daily decisions we make—  
 everything we do, in our physical being,  
 is done as creatures—that is, living creations—of God.

We make our decisions as stewards of these physical bodies.

Your body, said Paul, your physical being, is a temple  
 of the Holy Spirit that God has put within you.

Not all of us have the breathtaking gifts of the five senses of taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight, certainly not at 100% of their ideal capability.

Our bodies—like our minds and our spirits—can sometimes flag  
and fail and let us down;  
and the parts don't always work like the manual  
says they're supposed to,  
and they don't come with a warranty.

Have you ever visited a temple that's been around for a while,  
that isn't maintained with an astronomical budget  
and thousands of professional person-hours spent working on it  
every year?

Most temples eventually develop creaks, and leaks, and make weird settling noises, and the arches need more and more support, and the tourists don't come around quite so often to pose for pictures with them anymore.

No matter what condition the temple is in, we are always, only here because God put us here, and has reasons for us to be here.

We are not our own.

What you and I do with every second of our lives is entirely up to us—but it is never only *about* us.

And each one of us living, functioning, free-willed human beings was bought with a price.

Therefore, says Paul: glorify God in your body: in your time, where you are.

As Nathanael was walking toward Jesus, Jesus effectively told everyone who was there, "I know this guy." How did you know me?

“I saw you.” Before Jesus was ever around Nathanael, he knew him by his appearance, and he knew something about him: apparently Nathanael was a pretty straightforward, down-to-earth guy, “in whom there was no deceit.”

God sees us in our physical being, and knows better than we know ourselves all the nobility and all the fragility that we carry inside these temples, and invites us to embody the spiritual realm of God and God’s cosmos, in our earthly bodies, in our time, inviting us to follow Jesus and become disciples.

O God, my dreams get broken, my relationships get broken, my heart gets broken, my body gets broken.

May I have the courage to love the enemies I have the integrity to make;  
to care above all for my siblings of the human family;  
to be truly with them,  
to take time to see,  
to take time to speak,  
to take time to learn with them before time takes us;  
and to be courageous and faithful enough  
to risk loving the world and its people the way Jesus did,  
the way you do. Amen.

Keith Grogg  
Montreat Presbyterian Church  
Montreat, NC  
January 17, 2021

---

<sup>i</sup> Ted Loder “What Can I Believe,” in Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace* (LuraMedia, 1984)