



GOD'S WORDS FOR OUR INSECURITY PSALM 139

Case Study:

Jeff would tell people he was a private, introverted person; that he just didn't want people to know "his business." But it was more than personality or temperament. It was an insecurity that made relationships feel dangerous. Jeff had a hard time putting his finger on what it was that made him want to withdraw when conversation moved (or might move) beyond casual.

As Jeff got older, the reason that he settled on was that "nobody really understands me; nobody gets me." He included his wife, kids, and fellow church members in "nobody." The more he thought this way, the more he felt like an outsider and the more irrelevant every piece of advice for his loneliness and fearfulness became. If nobody understood him, then nobody could speak into his experience.

This belief began to crush Jeff's marriage and overall sense of hope. Depression became his only comfort, his only friend, and painful reality. Repeated messages of "being misunderstood and alone" were the only thing that made sense of his life. But the explanation he sought as a means of comfort quickly soured into despair. The answer he created eliminated the opportunity to share his insight with anyone else. Jeff's answer fed Jeff's struggle.

Even when people (especially his wife and kids) shared that they loved or cared for Jeff, he would smile, but shrug it off thinking, "They cannot love somebody they don't know and nobody gets me." His unwillingness to receive their affirmation resulted in receiving less of it. That only confirmed his suspicion that they were only words of obligation.

When Jeff would get down he would often replay in his mind past experiences of being mocked or on the stinging end of jokes. These experiences gave more cold comfort to his pattern of insecurity-isolation-withdrawal as "the only right/wise course of action."

It was in one of these dark times of reminiscence that Jeff mustered up the strength and courage to read his Bible. That day he turned to Psalm 139 he had his life story re-written. Jeff saw that he was both understood and loved by God. This was uncomfortably comforting in a new way. It gave him the needed courage to begin to risk being known by his wife, then his children, and even a few close friends.

As Jeff risked being known by others he found that he could receive their love in a new way. With each good interaction his old story made less and less sense of his life, although bad (or even neutral) interactions still caused him to shrink back into the old insecurity. So Jeff decided to rewrite Psalm 139 in his own words to help him personalize the message that was transforming his life.



Pre-Questions:

This case study is meant to challenge you to think biblically about the real struggles of life. These questions will not be answered completely in the sections below. But they do represent the kind of struggles that are being wrestled with in Psalm 139. Use the question to both stir application and to give you new insight into the psalm.

- What is the difference between being introverted and being insecure or fearing relationships?
- How did Jeff's fears become self-fulfilling?
- How could Jeff's family and friends have helped earlier as Jeff's fear of relationship caused him to retreat from their overtures of interest/concern?

Read Psalm 139 in your preferred Bible translation. The “rewrite” of Psalm 139 below is an attempt to capture the words that God would give Jeff to pray (Romans 8:26-27). This would be something Jeff would need to pray many times as he struggled with insecurity.

A re-write of Psalm 139

1. Wow! You know me, Lord. You get me, all of me!
2. You not only care to know the trivial happenings of my day, You are concerned about what I think.
3. You understand my fears and all I do to “protect” myself. The awkward things that I do which make other people pull away in confusion, You get them!
4. I may speak to others and they look at me funny, but you understand what I am saying, why I am saying it, and the response I am longing for to comfort me.
5. I am safe with you. Like a good parent with a fearful child, You hold me close with Your hands and do not let me exasperate my fears by running from my source of comfort.
6. This is overwhelming! It kind of makes me uncomfortable, but I like it. I am not sure I have the categories (yet) to make sense of what I'm saying. I know the words but not the experience.
7. But my fearful running really doesn't make sense any more. Where could I go to escape being known by You? My fearful running was as foolish as it was impossible.
8. If I go to church and try to do lots of things and keep busy to keep people away, You know and love me there. If I do lots of bad things and withdraw to make You feel far away, You are still with me and love me even then.
9. If I wake up early to make earnest plans of how I can avoid as many people as possible, You understand what I am doing and never leave my side.
10. More than not leaving my side, You are prompting me through my pain and loneliness to turn around and return to Your community. Even in my fearful resistance, You are content to hold me in Your hands until I finally “get myself” and see my insecurity for what it is.
11. My old lies seem silly now. I would say, “Nobody understands me; nobody gets me; nobody can see into my darkness.” I would say these things even when You sent family and friends to penetrate that darkness.



12. My old lies were not too thick for you. You saw through them as if they were crisp morning. I thought I had convinced everyone, including You, when I had only deceived myself.
13. How funny! I thought I was unknown to the one who knit together my DNA and set me apart by name before the foundations of the world.
14. Praise God! I am known from the inside out, because I am made by the hands and in the image of the God of deep, personal, compassionate love! I am finally letting that truth penetrate my soul and spill into my relationships.
15. There was no hiding from You even when no other eyes had yet seen me. When I was a fetus you knew me like a quilter knows her quilt.
16. Before I was literally anything, You knew me and loved me. Even then You could write my life story and would enjoy reading of Your redemption for my struggles. But somehow I had convinced myself I was unknown and unloved.
17. Lord, these thoughts liberate my fearful heart! I feel a freedom to love and be loved emerging that is larger than I can put into words.
18. The thoughts of Your presence and love are more numerous than my previous thoughts of being mocked and alone. I used to wake up and fear the day because it had people in it. Now I awake and embrace the day because You are with me!
19. Lord, I see now that you hate mockery. You are against those who speak hate and use words to harm. Before when I heard words of destruction, I assumed they were true. And if they were true (false assumption), then You must agree with them (terrifying reality).
20. You are against such words and actions. They spoke falsely as if their words were true. I wrongly accounted the power of their words as Your confirmation of their words.
21. I can now reject what You reject, my God. I do not have to receive as true what You declare to be false and worthless.
22. I can now completely reject and despise what I once feared to be true. Those thoughts and memories were my enemies which held me as their captive in a prison of fear and isolation.
23. I invite You to search me, O God, know me completely. That is the key which has unlocked the prison of my fear and isolation. I AM KNOWN AND LOVED! Read my thoughts and see that I now draw comfort from that reality.
24. Whenever I begin to act as if that is not true, as if I am not known and loved by You, lead me back to the truth that unlocks Your freedom, peace, and joy. Remind me that You are with me and for me all the way to eternal life.

Passages for Further Study:

Psalm 136; John 1:48; Ephesians 1:3-14; Hebrews 4:14-16



Post Questions:

Now that you have read Psalm 139, examined how Jeff might rewrite it for his situation, and studied several other passages, consider the following questions:

- How does the reality of being known and loved by God create the courage to allow ourselves to be known by others?
- When we fear the harmful words of others and in our mind declaring them true, how are we also ascribing those harmful words to God?
- How would your answers to the “pre-questions” have changed as a result of reflecting on Psalm 139?
- For what instances of work or performance-based identity do you need to re-write your own version of Psalm 139?