

**NO MERE MORTALS**  
**Isaiah 139:1-6, 13-18**

Do you know any good light bulb jokes?

If they're tasteful and not horribly insensitive, light bulb jokes are some of my favorites. For example:

How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?  
*One, but the light bulb has to want to change.*

How many computer programmers does it take to change a light bulb?  
*None, that's a hardware problem. (But did you try turning the light off and turning it back on again?)*

My favorite light bulb joke is rather dated, but it still cracks me up. It goes back to the days before college basketball had a shot clock. Back to the days of Coach Dean Smith and the famous Four Corners offense. If you remember those days, you'll get this:

How many Carolina basketball players does it take to screw in a light bulb?  
*One, after the other four have passed it around for 17 minutes.*

And then there's a set of **denominational** light bulb jokes going around: How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? How many Catholics... How many Baptists...

Would you like to hear the one for United Methodists?

How many United Methodists does it take to change a light bulb?

*We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb; however if in your own journey you have found that a light bulb works for you, then you are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance and present it next month at our annual "Light Bulb" Sunday service.*

You know, it seems like we United Methodists have a special Sunday for just about everything. If we at Main Street did all the special Sundays there are, that's probably all we'd do. But today is **Human Relations Day**, and this is one we need to observe. Because right now, our country is tearing itself apart:

Last month a grand jury announced they would not indict the white police officer who shot the young black man in Ferguson, MO. Protests broke out all over the nation. Many of the reactions were divided along racial lines.

A week later, a similar situation—a grand jury in New York City decided not to indict a white police officer who used a chokehold to subdue a black man who died shortly

thereafter. Again, protests broke out. Again, many of the reactions were divided along racial lines.

And then a few days later a mentally unstable man in New York City, who said he was acting in retaliation for the deaths of the two black men, shot two NYPD officers while they were sitting in their patrol car. Again, there were angry protests, including this time from New York City police officers who blamed the mayor for what happened.

Now, more than ever, we need to think about Human Relations. Our country is tearing itself apart. And as followers of Jesus, we can't just stand by and let it happen. Jesus has called us to be makers of peace!

Now, you say, "But Claude, what are we supposed to do? We're not in Ferguson. We're not in New York City. We're here in Kernersville! We can't change the world!"

Well, listen: Maybe you can't change the *whole* world – but you can change *your* world. And today I'm gonna show you some specific things you can do to change your world in the area of Human Relations.

Now, more than ever, we need to think about Human Relations.

Psalms 139, our Scripture for today, makes outrageous claims about God.

- God has searched you and known you
- God knows when you sit down and when you rise up
- God knows your thoughts
- God knows what you're going to say before you say it

A month ago we were singing, "*He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake...*" I don't know if Santa Claus can really do that, but according to Psalm 139, God can!

- God is acquainted with all your ways
- God hems you in, behind and before

Try to wrap your mind around this staggering thought: There are 7 Billion people on planet earth, and God has his eye on YOU!

- Before you were born, God had a plan for you
- Before you were formed in the womb, God knew you

These are amazing statements about God – but they're also amazing statements about YOU. Look at Psalm 139:13—

<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. —Psalm 139:13-14 NRSV

--My brother, my sister, my friend—You are fearfully and wonderfully made--knit together in your mother's womb—lovingly...carefully...intimately.

You are the pinnacle of God's creation:

- Genesis 1 says you are created in the image of God
- Psalm 8 says you are crowned with glory and honor, just a little lower than the angels
- Ephesians 2 says you are God's workmanship, which could also be translated masterpiece

Please excuse this cliché, but "God don't make no junk."

You are a cherished person of divine worth,  
 infinitely loved,  
 and infinitely valuable.

**So here's the question: If that's true of you, what about that person over there?**

- Is he fearfully and wonderfully made?
- Is she infinitely valuable?

- What if he's poor?
- What if she's homeless?
- What if he's disabled?
- What if she's mentally handicapped?
  
- What if he's an alcoholic?
- What if she's a meth addict?
  
- What if he's Hispanic?
  - What if she's Asian?
    - What if he's black?
      - What if she's white?

--Are those people valuable in the eyes of God?

If your answer to that question is no, then go ahead and turn your back on those people:

- Go ahead and call 'em names

- Go ahead and insult them
- Go ahead and stereotype them and give ‘em a label:
  - o Lazy
  - o Ignorant
  - o Violent
  - o Unintelligent
  - o Unequal

If you honestly believe that Psalm 139 only applies to you, then go ahead and *dehumanize* whoever you want.

A professor named David Livingstone Smith wrote a book called *Less Than Human*. He found that throughout history, in all the war crimes and atrocities and genocides there was one common ingredient: The perpetrators *dehumanized* the victims:

- The Nazis referred to the Jews as rats
- The Hutus in Rwanda referred to the Tutsis as cockroaches
- The Japanese who invaded China referred to the Chinese as insects
- Europeans in Australia referred to the Aborigines as “feral jungle creatures”
- White people who massacred Native Americans referred to them as “savage beasts.”

And what you need to understand is that if you choose to label people and call people names based on their background, *you are heading down the same road!*

You say, “Claude, you’re going overboard here.” Well, so did Jesus:

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. –Matthew 5:21-22

Jesus is saying that anger and name-calling are just as bad as murder. Why? Because human beings are created in the image of God – and murder is an attack on the image of God. But guess what? Looking down on someone is an attack on the image of God. Insulting someone is an attack on the image of God. Racial prejudice is an attack on the image of God. Anger, and bitterness, and holding a grudge is an attack on the image of God.

EVERY TIME WE DENY THE DIGNITY AND VALUE AND WORTH OF ANOTHER HUMAN BEING, we’ve taken the first step on the road to MURDER.

But if you honestly believe that Psalm 139 only applies to you – then go ahead and do that.

But if you believe that Psalm 139 talks about every human being on the planet, then you have to take a different approach.

If you believe the Bible, then every person you see is made in the image of God, crowned with glory and honor, fearfully and wonderfully made, just a little lower than the angels.

If you believe the Bible, then you have to see other people, no matter who they are, as persons of infinite value who are worthy of your care, your compassion, your attention, and your respect.

- No matter how different
- No matter how dirty
- No matter how undeserving
- No matter how bad their choices

CS Lewis, one of my heroes, said this:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship...

There are no *ordinary* people.

You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Every person you see is made in the image of God, crowned with glory and honor, fearfully and wonderfully made, just a little lower than the angels.

*There are no mere mortals.*

Believing that—and acting like we believe that—is the key to Human Relations.

**So what would happen if we started treating other people as made in the image of God?**

For one thing, we would listen a whole lot more. Instead of screaming and shouting, we'd get quiet. We'd listen to what other groups are trying to say.

And then, we'd stop judging and put ourselves in the other people's shoes. Now, listen: Just because you see where a person's coming from doesn't mean you agree with them, and it doesn't mean you condone their behavior. It just means you understand.

And if we would try to understand, we might find some common ground. And if we find some common ground, then we might find solutions to our human relations problems.

Earlier I mentioned the protesters in Ferguson, MO and New York City, protesting against the police. Well, there was a group in New York City that was gathering for one of these protests, but then they heard about the two policemen who were shot in their patrol car. And they changed their gathering from a protest to a prayer vigil. They got quiet, and they lit candles, and they prayed for the families of the police officers who were killed.

*That's the kind of thing that's got to happen!*

We've got to start understanding each other's problems,  
 feeling each other's pain,  
 putting ourselves in each other's shoes,  
 finding the common ground,  
 and seeing each other as human beings.

And if you and I will start doing that, we can change the world! Maybe not the whole world – but we can certainly change OUR world.

So let me tell you **Five Things You Can Do** to improve human relations:

1. Right now, you could give to today's Human Relations Day offering.
2. After the service, you could pick up one of our homeless food bags. Keep this in your car and hand it to the person by the side of the road with the cardboard sign asking for help.
3. This afternoon, you could attend our community Martin Luther King Day service.
4. On February 15, you could attend our Poverty Simulation, led by Crisis Control, and put yourself in the shoes of people who are living in poverty.
5. And from now on—you could start treating everybody you meet as a human being, worthy of your compassion, care, and respect.

- Every person you see is made in the image of God,  
 crowned with glory and honor,  
 fearfully and wonderfully made,  
 just a little lower than the angels

--So treat that person with dignity and respect

LISTEN to their concerns  
 UNDERSTAND where they're coming from, even if you don't agree  
 FIND COMMON GROUND

--Do that, and you can change the world – maybe not the whole world – but you can certainly change *your* world.