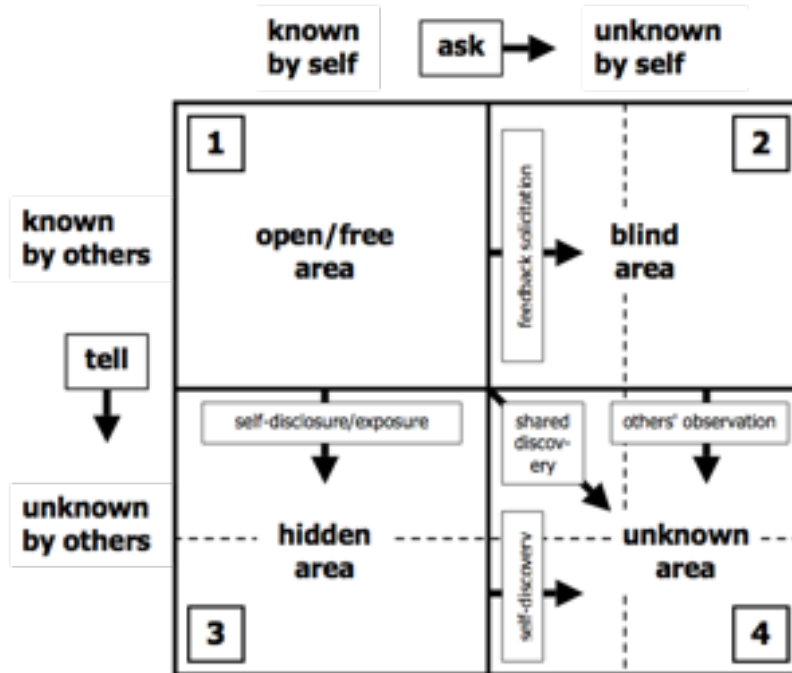


Introduction:

How well do you think you know yourself?

Johari Window model



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See the Johari Window model to briefly see there are parts of ourselves we know, parts we don't know, parts we share, and parts we hide.

No matter how you slice it, we only know ourselves in part, and others only know us in part. Yet David tells us in our Psalm for today, Psalm 139 that God sees and knows you completely, through and through. God sees your whole window –no blind spots, no hidden areas.

[Transition] - I want to show you how David rolls this out in our Psalm today. He begins today by declaring that God is actively aware of your every action and anticipates your innermost thoughts. God knows you inside and out. Look at verse 1 with me.

God knows you inside and out.

Verse 1 begins: *"O Lord, you have searched me, and you know me."* I think it's important to note that David isn't addressing us. He is addressing God. This is David's way of saying that he knows that God knows him.

As David continues, he describes the extent of God's knowledge. He points out that God's knowledge of him is expansive. David pictures God watching from a distance: *"You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways."*

Is it possible that in this age of security cameras and satellite images, the wonder of this truth is lost on us? To be honest, I think we are so used to being under surveillance that we hardly notice anymore.

But the knowledge God has of us is not only expansive, it's also deeply personal. David describes God as seeing us from afar, but that doesn't mean that he thinks that God is far off. This God who knows us knows us from the inside. David uses the language of "perception" and "discernment" to characterize God's knowledge of him. *"You perceive my thoughts,"* he says. *"You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with my ways."* In other words, God is intimately familiar with all your ways, actions, and words.

[Illustration] - How well can people read you? Are you one who sort of displays your inner self on your outer sleeve? You've heard people say he/she wears their emotions on their sleeve? Can your co-workers tell when you're bored? Excited. Irritated?

How about your spouse? Can you read him? Can you read her? The better you know someone, the better you're able to read them. It's funny though, sometimes people are completely unreadable. (Like Dillon) But others you can read like a book just by seeing their expression, or body language, or their eyes (like Sam). Is this ringing true for you?

But the knowledge of God has of us goes one step further. It's not just that he knows us well enough to read us from a distance. His knowledge of us is so deep that he can see us coming and going. According to verse 4, this knowledge is so complete that it is predictive: "*Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord.*"

Is David saying that God can read his mind? Well, yes, pretty much. But he is saying more than that. He is saying that God sees our thoughts before they are fully formed. This is what he really means when he says that God perceives his thoughts from "afar." The distance the Psalmist has in view is temporal. He knows it before it happens.

[Application] -Now, I suppose this could raise questions. For example, it could raise questions about prayer. If God knows what I'm going to say before I say it, why do I need to pray? Why doesn't he just look into the future, anticipate my request, and grant the answer before I put it into words?

In fact, there are times when he does just that. If you stop and think about God's answers to our prayers, sometimes you will realize that in order for the timing to work, the answer had to be set in motion before we ever uttered the words!

Still, you might think: "Why go through the charade of asking God if he already knows what I'm going to say?" Is prayer some kind of game? Is God teasing me—like someone who holds my desire behind his back, waiting for me to use just the right words, all the while knowing what it is that I want and knowing that he can grant my desire?"

The trouble with this view is not just that it reflects a convoluted view of God. Its root problem is that it misunderstands the nature of prayer. It assumes that prayer is primarily functional. It assumes that the main reason we pray is to get what we want. I mean if we analyzed many of our prayers, you would find that they look more like a grocery list than a conversation or communion with our Lord. But there is more to prayer than the answer. There is more to prayer than the asking. *Prayer is a relational encounter.*

[Illustration] - In his book entitled *Beginning to Pray*, Anthony Bloom writes: " ... it is very important to remember that prayer is an encounter and a relationship, a relationship which is deep, and this relationship cannot be forced either on us or on God."

Bloom warns that one of the great dangers we face in this area is the temptation to take an impersonal approach to prayer. There are many times when we are ready to pray, but we are not ready to receive God. "We want something from him but him not at all."

How can we overcome this tendency? Well, it is not a matter of methodology. The problem isn't that we have been using the wrong posture or language. The real problem is our angle of vision. The problem is that we haven't learned to see God as David sees him—to see him as a God who knows me deeply and personally, a God who is acquainted with my thoughts, a God who speaks my language and anticipates my words. This is a God who knows me better than I know myself. I don't know what I am going to say before I say it. But God does. I don't know what my thoughts are going to be tomorrow. But God does.

[Application]- Friends, stop and reflect on this for a few moments. (pause) How does this truth change your perspective and practice of prayer? I hope it allows you to soften your heart.

God knows you before you even have a chance to be you! AND HE LOVES YOU DEEPLY! Isn't that a profound truth? He loves you and only wants what is best for you. He loves you and only wants to show you that

lovingkindness. Rest in that, friends. Take joy in that, friends. Allow it to shape your conversation and musings with God.

[Transition] - Now, beginning in verse 5 the Psalmist shifts his focus from God's knowledge to God's presence. As we begin to consider verses 5-12, the picture is not one of a God who discerns our all our thoughts but of a God who is never far from us. It's a picture of a God who sees us coming and going. Let's pick up at verse 5.

God sees you coming and going.

"You hem me in, behind and before," David writes, *"You have laid your hand upon me."* David imagines himself bumping into God again and again. Is God behind him? Well, yes, yes he is. At the same time is God in front of him? Absolutely! David is surrounded by God and God's hand is continually on him.

David conducts a kind of mental experiment, imagining what it would be like to try and escape God. He poses the test question in verse. 7: *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"* Then he establishes the boundaries of his experiment in verses 8-9: *"If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea"*

First, he explores height and the depth. If he ascends into the heavens above, God is already there. If he descends into the deepest part of the earth, God is there too. Next, he explores the expanse of the globe. If David were to "rise on the wings of the dawn"—if he were to rise with the sun and follow its course from horizon to horizon until he set with it on the far side of the sea, the result would be no different. He would find God there too.

David concludes that flight from God is impossible...because anywhere he might go God is already there. Everywhere that David goes, he finds God there.

But David makes a further point: not only is God with him wherever he goes, but God is also guiding him. Verse 10 says: *"even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."*

[Application] -Now, how we feel about this overall picture depends upon whether we understand God to be our friend or our foe. If a policeman lays his hand on you to apprehend you, there is no comfort in that touch. You would feel very different if the hand that rested on your shoulder was that of a friend or a loving spouse.

If you are about to slip on the ice, the strong grip of someone who grabs you is reassuring. But if you're trying to evade authorities, you would feel about that grip the way a prisoner does his shackles. You would hate it; you would strain against it.

So, which is it for you? When it comes to God's strong hand of love? Is it a source of comfort to you or something that you want to stiff arm and resist? Does the inescapable presence of God make you feel protected? Is your sense of God's presence the feeling of a faithful companion? A guide? A rear guard who's got your back? Or does it bug you? Do you feel like God has invaded your privacy, trapped your soul? Do you see his relentless pursuit as the pursuit of an adversary?

If we are honest, we would probably have to say a little of both. Even David, as he describes his experience in this Psalm seems a little ambivalent. He seems comforted and uncomfortable at the same time. In verses 11-12, he seems to imagine what it would be like to try and hide from God under the cover of darkness: *"If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."*

If you are trying to navigate an unfamiliar landscape in the dark, the thought that God sees as clearly in the darkness as in the light is good

news. But it feels entirely the opposite if you are trying to use the darkness for cover!

In these verses David makes it clear: You and I are transparent before God. There is no way to cover ourselves. We can't run. We can't hide. We can't put up a smokescreen that obscures the true state of our heart or our actions. God sees everything with complete clarity.

Friends, allow this truth to free you. Allow it to be the catalyst for you to stop running from God. Does a sense of shame have you somehow avoiding God, not wanting to make eye contact with him? Friends, David is coaching us...you can stop running, you can stop dodging, you don't have to be driven by shame. You can drop your defenses and sink deep into God's loving presence.

[Transition] - You may be able avoid your neighbor. You can even fool yourself. But God? No way. He sees and knows and discerns all. He sees you coming and going. He isn't just some heavenly spectator to the drama of your life. He is the author and architect of your soul. God is your loving creator. And he has been involved in your life from the very beginning. Let's pick up in verse 13.

God is the architect of your soul.

Verse 13 reads: *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."* The Hebrew word that the NIV translates as "created" in this verse is a word that means to "purchase" or "get." God is pictured as the artisan who purchased the material that makes up our innermost parts and he has woven them together. This is intricate work that causes David to marvel at God's skill.

More importantly, he describes it as something for which to be thankful: *"I will give thanks unto thee;"* he declares in verse 14, *"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."* When he speaks of being made in "the secret place"

and "woven together in the depths of the earth" in verse 15, he is using poetic language to describe human conception and development. The Psalmist sees his "frame" and his "unformed body" not only as a work of God, but as the work of an artisan.

This is a radically different worldview than the one that tries to argue the unformed fetus as a blob of tissue. According to God's word, human conception is not an accidental process but an intentional one. The modernist looks at the human form as a machine, a mere collection of cells, or a consequence of random forces.

But the Psalmist sees it as a work of God. In fact, David sees God at work in the entire scope of his life. Not just at his conception, but also during "all the days ordained" for him. *The same God who is at work in the womb continues to work in your life once I leave the womb.* He saw you when you were unformed. He keeps a record of your days.

This thought moves David to praise in verses 17-18: *"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you."*

The contrast between the Psalmist's view and that of our culture is not only striking, it's also tragic. The Psalmist sees the human embryo as something sacred. *"Fearfully and wonderfully made"* are the words he uses. He sees it as the intricate weaving of God's hand—a mysterious work, a marvelous work. It is a work of art—a work of God. The Psalmist sees human life as something to be celebrated and for which God deserves praise.

Contrast that with much of our culture. Much of our culture treats the human embryo the same way it treats a tumor—something to be cut out, scraped away, and discarded. Or they treat it like a commodity—something to be harvested for the benefit of others or something to be bought and sold in the market place.

Friends... this is a base, and degraded view of humanity. It is a view that can only lead to further degradation, because if you do not value life while it is in the womb, how can you value it outside the womb?

Friends...Do not be deceived by the rhetoric you hear. ***This is not a political issue. It is a moral issue.*** Having said that, our morals and our values must inform our politics. We have an election coming up. If you've been around Foothills Church long enough, you know what I say to you around election time. Please vote. And please vote your conscience and vote in alignment with your Biblical values.

If you're a Christian, and it is your desire to champion Biblical values in all you do, then I'd strongly encourage you to rethink your support for any candidate that refuses to take a strong stand for the life of the unborn.

If a candidate for any office is soft on abortion or refuses to be clear about the rights of the unborn, I personally can never justify or rationalize supporting that candidate with my vote. Here's my logic.

Premise 1: It's wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human life.

Premise 2: Abortion is killing an innocent human life.

Therefore: abortion is wrong

Premise 1: It is wrong to support the killing of innocent life.

Premise 2: Politicians are in positions of power to support abortions.

Therefore: It is wrong to vote for a politician who supports abortion.

I understand the culture's primary argument regarding a woman's right to choose. But I'd argue each of us has a right to live our lives in any way we want, as long as your exercise of that freedom does not harm any other human. A woman has the right to choose to do whatever she wants with her body as long as it does not injure or kill anyone else.

In a civilized society, our freedoms to live however we want are limited by how it impacts others. The pro-choice argument elevates the woman's choice over the value of a human life.

How did we come to this place? How have we fallen so far? How have we come to have such a low view of ourselves? The answer is a simple one and it reverberates throughout this Psalm: We lost sight of ourselves when we lost sight of God. It is God who gives us life. It is God who gives us purpose. It is God who gives us dignity. Rule God out of the equation and what do you have? A mass of cells and little more. A piece of tissue. A commodity.

John Calvin begins the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with the assertion that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of our selves are related. Calvin writes: "*Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.*"

Calvin goes on to say that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating God to scrutinize himself.

But, Calvin points out, what we learn about ourselves is not entirely comfortable. Because when we consider ourselves in the light of God, we see both "what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam."

[Transition] - This is precisely the trajectory the Psalmist takes in his thinking. He moves from contemplating the wonder of God's work in conception to considering himself. First, he aligns himself with God's purposes by differentiating himself from the wicked, and then he asks God to search him. Let's pick it up at verse 19.

Verse 19-22 reads: "*If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! They speak of you with evil intent; your*

adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies." We are embarrassed by his sentiment—David's words sound harsh to us—but that is only because we have lost our moral compass.

The Psalmist's uncomfortable words are a reminder that there really is such a thing as evil. And it is right to denounce evil. But those who denounce evil in others must be prepared to confront a more subtle enemy: they must be prepared to face the evil in themselves.

That's why the Psalmist concludes with a prayer for himself in verses 23-24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Conclusion

The good news for you today is that the God who is your creator is also your redeemer. This God who knows you inside and out, the God who sees you coming and going, the God who is the architect of your soul, is also the author of your salvation.

He's the God who knows you thoroughly and completely...AND...he has committed his love to you. He has shown you his mercy and grace. His love and attachment to you moves him to never stop pursuing you.

He is the God who went so far as to become flesh and to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one who went so far as to shed his own blood on the cross to pay for your sin. He makes forgiveness a reality for you. And he makes heaven a reality for you. But, you have to stop running from him, and instead open your heart to him.

Invitation...Do any of you need to do that today...for the first time? For the first time in a long time?