

PREFACE

(Read this it is important)

If you have ever struggled with deep disappointments, unanswered prayers, or found your life crumbling around you, and feeling as if God is conspiring against you, *Conspiracy Theory* was written just for you.

For many of us life is dominated by a mild addiction to an image-rich, digital playground where meaning and purpose are determined by how connected we are to the ubiquitous convenience of a digital lifestyle. The immense popularity of current social network sites like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook reveal that connectedness and intimacy are priorities for all of us. Yet, for all of the technological sophistication available, there is also a deep-seated awareness that there is so much more to life than a digital existence.

Conspiracy Theory seeks to draw you into a fresh understanding of the outrageous love and extravagant grace encountered in the life-transforming nature of God. It quickly takes you to a level which enlarges the mind and warms the heart as you begin to immerse yourself in one of the best loved psalms of all time, Psalm 139. In doing so you will discover that you find yourself engaging with God as He truly is; such an experience is not for the faint-hearted.

To instinctively focus on God before focusing on yourself will challenge you and cause you to radically reconsider how you live and what it is that defines you. More importantly, you will learn that moving to a new level of intimacy in your relationship with God is personally engaging and deeply transformative, leaving you with a passionate, constructive preoccupation with God Himself. This level of intimacy will help shape and fashion your appreciation of who God really is, and cause you to wrestle with the greatest single need in the life of any individual: to grasp and then grapple with a mature, understanding of the majesty, grace, grandeur, and radiance of the overwhelming love of God.

But please be careful, you may find that as God conspires to draw you into a deeper engagement you radically reframe or reinterpret the quality of your relationship with Him. You may also discover that you are prayerfully asking some fearless, searching, spiritual questions at an entirely new level. Answering the questions at the end of each chapter will allow you to explore the life-changing principles contained in Psalm 139. They will, however, challenge you deeply and personally.

Psalm 139

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.

⁵ You hem me in — behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,'

¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

- ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake, I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ If only you would slay the wicked, O God!
Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,
and abhor those who rise up against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

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SURPRISED AND ASTONISHED

For the director of music. Of David.

*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
(Ps. 139:1–2)*

Surprise

Some years ago I met a friend and asked about his family. He replied that earlier that day his wife Catherine had gone into a busy coffee shop, ordered a latte and a Kit Kat, and sat down at one of the last remaining tables. A few minutes later, another customer, unable to find a seat elsewhere, sat down beside her. He looked over, exchanged a smile, but said nothing. After a moment or two he paused from reading his newspaper and, much to Catherine's surprise, picked up the Kit Kat, broke off a piece, and began to eat it. Catherine was seriously uncertain as to what was going on but was determined not to be taken advantage of. With considerable determination, she picked up the Kit Kat, broke off another piece, and began to eat. Looking

somewhat surprised, the man took the third piece; undeterred, Catherine ate the final piece and still nothing was said.

After a few moments the man got up, walked over to the counter, purchased a pastry, and sat at an empty table as far from Catherine as he could. Two or three minutes later, Catherine, now feeling a little uncomfortable, finished her coffee and decided she should leave. As she rose to leave, however, something in her changed. She looked over at the man's table, realized he had quartered his pastry, and knowing she would have to pass that table on the way out, Catherine came to a decision. As she made her way to the door, she reached out, lifted a piece of the pastry and popped it into her mouth. She then smiled, nodded to the man, and left the coffee shop.

As she walked away, feeling strangely satisfied by her action and realizing her fingers were a little sticky from the pastry, she put her hand in her pocket for a tissue. To her complete surprise and deep embarrassment, she discovered her own Kit Kat.

Now pause for a moment and consider what was going on in Catherine's mind when she put her hand in her pocket. In that fleeting second when her hand touched her own Kit Kat, I imagine she found it difficult to process exactly what was going on. Her mind would find it difficult to deal with what had just occurred. Yet, paradoxically, her dilemma was clear. Suddenly, what she thought had happened turned out to be very different from what in fact had happened.

Now consider what was going through the man's mind. How was he processing what had just occurred? He had gone into a coffee shop to relax for a few minutes, and a strange woman, without asking permission, took a piece of his Kit Kat—not once, but twice. When he had made it very plain that he wished to have nothing more to do with her, she accosted him a second time by stealing a piece of his pastry.

My reason for beginning with this story is to ask you a question: When was the last time you were truly surprised? Not a gentle, ‘I did not see that coming’ type of surprise, but a jaw-dropping, overwhelming, *Wow!* type of surprise. From time to time you may have been surprised at Christmas or on your birthday or perhaps a situation you were concerned about turned out to be much better than you initially imagined. But how would you respond if God was the One behind the wow! type of surprise?

There are other occasions when we face complex and difficult circumstances that are out of our control. Circumstances no one could have seen coming. In early 2020, countries around the world experienced a global pandemic that resulted in a significant loss of life, extraordinary challenges to health care systems, the closing of businesses, schools and colleges, postponed weddings, cancelled graduations, substantial unemployment, and ailing economies. How then should you respond when things do not go the way you had planned, and it seems as if God is conspiring against you?

My hope for you as you read through this book and explore the hidden depths of Psalm 139 is that God will surprise you in such a way that He will draw you into a deeper relationship with Himself and that you will come to a fresh understanding and deeper appreciation of Him. But don't be surprised if He takes you to places you had not previously imagined and challenges you in the circumstances you are facing while equipping and enabling you to respond to what you once thought was impossible.

Understanding the Challenge

As you begin to read this book, your first surprise may be that you are actually reading it. Perhaps a friend has given it to you

as a gift; possibly you are reading it as part of a Bible study group; or it may be that you simply have a desire to grow in your faith. Regardless of your motive, you may be surprised to be reading a book that focuses on a psalm from the Old Testament.

Some years ago Philip Yancey wrote an excellent book, *The Bible Jesus Read*. In it he recalls how surprised he was when reading some of Shakespeare's plays. As he described his experience of having to adjust to the archaic language of Elizabethan English and the awkwardness of reading a play, Yancey's readers would have immediately returned to their own teenage years of being in school when they were given *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* for a class assignment. Like Yancey, readers of Shakespeare would have found it difficult to adjust to the new experience of immersing themselves in eleventh-century Scotland or ancient Rome as initially it seemed to have little to teach them about life today. What readers of Shakespeare's plays discover, however, is his writing is not simply about a historical context filled with unpronounceable names and unfamiliar places, but a world infected with the tranquilizing addiction of greed, ambition, paranoia, and an uncontrollable lust for power. The surprising thing for many readers of Shakespeare is that, in reading his plays, you learn a great deal about yourself.

As you begin to explore Psalm 139, you will also discover that although you live in a world dominated by the ubiquitous digital convenience of smartphones, iPads, Facebook, and YouTube, the intimacy contained within this psalm has a great deal to teach us about living the Christian life in a twenty-first century environment, where the temporary and the transient nature of a virtual existence promises so much, yet often leaves us with so little.

If you are serious about growing in your faith and are ready to prayerfully ask some fearless, searching questions about your