May the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

My Dear Friends,

A careful eye had arranged each square. A steady hand meticulously stitched each thread. A machine could have done it faster, maybe even tighter, but it wouldn’t have been as good. From a distance the quilt was beautiful. But when a knowledgeable shopper looked closely, they saw the real work of art.

You can buy a shelf, a table, a cabinet at Ikea or off Amazon, the parts are almost always all there, with a little study, you can follow the directions, and in the end it will likely be a functional piece of furniture, some of it may even be made of real wood, but compared to the work of a craftsman? The quality materials, matched grains, the tight-fitting joints, the hand rubbed finish, it is solid; it is beautiful. Not only will it not come apart, but you would never want it to. In the work of a craftsman, skill and detail meet.

On the other hand, that iphone, android, or computer is a different kind of amazing. What’s inside is detailed electronics that few of us can understand, engineering which is the culmination of so much scientific discovery. Each little piece has a specific purpose, but as marvelous as all those devices are, each is the same. One new Iphone is the same as all the other Iphones people stand in line to buy. They are interchangeable, replaceable upgradeable. In some ways they are so much more amazing than that handmade quilt or fine crafted table, in another, they can’t even compare to one of those one of a kind pieces of detailed skill.

When we look out at creation, we can think of God’s greatness in the big things, the mountains, the oceans, the storms and the fields. We can gaze with wonder from afar at the beauty of a sunset. But that wonder cannot stop with a distance. The closer you look, the more you examine, the more wonder you find. Each ecosystem on earth is a careful balance of creatures large and microscopic. Each species its own niche. Every cell from the bacteria to the blue whale holds long strings of information encoded in its DNA, genes that fulfill their purpose for each creature. And then there’s you and I, each of our own biological systems is full of wonders. Our mental abilities are complex. Our emotions and personalities are impossible for science to even begin to pin down. There are millions of little details that go into making you, you. Yet as our Psalm confesses today, God is the craftsman proudly standing behind every one. God’s Wonderful Works Include You. He works in the details of your whole life. He works his justice for your soul.

Psalm 139 is a meditation on God’s greatness from David’s, from our, view. Everything about God is worthy of our awe and praise. He knows all, even our hearts and our plans. He sees all. He is present everywhere, both for our comfort and our warning. For David it isn’t just that God is all knowing, or present in all places, or now that he displays power and wisdom, but that he is all these things for us. The truly amazing thing is that God is involved with his creation; he is involved in the lives of people; your life has his fingerprints all over it. **You created my inner organs.** The Lord designed the way our bodies work, and the Lord united our body, mind, and soul into one whole person. **You wove me together in my mother’s womb.** What can we say when we see all that each one of us has been created to be, **I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful.** We know from experience, **and my soul knows that full well.**

From a scientific perspective when sperm and egg join together, new DNA is created, a new human life begins, a person has begun to develop within the womb. It is a human life from the moment that single cell lives to the moment that body dies. So, from a rational perspective we can ask, does a person, a human being, have value? Do you or I? Does every individual human being have intrinsic value, intrinsic potential, intrinsic unalienable rights? We who desire them for ourselves, dare not strip them from others! But from the biblical perspective, David takes us one step deeper. God is at work in the womb, through these natural means, God creates each person. **My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.** Before ultrasound, people weren’t ignorant of where babies came from, but no place was more private and hidden and protected than a mother’s womb. But whether we get to peak or not, God is there, **Your eyes saw my unfinished body.** God holds each embryo in his hands. And those hands continue to shape, fashion, and care for life. Throughout a person’s life, to their very last breath, God is involved. God cares. **In your book, all of them were written. Days were determined, before any of them existed.** Those who desire to play God over when life should begin, whose life has value, or when it should end, they mock God’s wisdom, glory, and power and miss the joy and comfort God wishes to share. When we take pride in ourselves, what we have made ourselves to be, we steal his glory. When we wonder if maybe God made a mistake, whether we truly have value, whether our life really matters, God’s wonderful works include you.

It shouldn’t be as enjoyable as it is. A carousel is just an old machine that spins in a circle, while fake animals go up and down. Some of us don’t like spinning in circles and may not even like going up and down. Yet, if you haven’t been, I really do have to recommend the Albany Carousel. It isn’t that it spins and plays carnival music; it’s the animals. Each one is a one of a kind work of art, hand carved, hand painted, and completely unique. Though they are inanimate, they can’t talk, they move on predetermined gears, somehow they each have their own personality, whimsy, and joy. The personal work, decisions and skill that went into them changes the whole experience.

We can appreciate a great work of art when we see it. But the art doesn’t usually appreciate itself. In your case, you are God’s work, and he does invite you to appreciate it. He is the writer of your genetic code. Mathematicians better than I would need to explain all the possible combinations of genes that could have been yours, but God chose to make you the way you are, even the parts of you maybe you don’t like. He chose your eyes and your hair, your strengths and intelligence. He helped put into place those traits that make up your personality, so that even identical twins are not identical. He placed you in a time, in a place, with people, with resources according to his wisdom. He set your life on course and walks with you all the way. Yet, in a way that is beyond our fathoming, he hasn’t made you a robot, or set your life on gears so that you can spin in a circle and go up and down at set times, but has worked you, your choices, your actions, your faith your prayers into his aimes and his purposes, because it pleases him when his work lives and acts and speaks to his glory. We just scratch the surface of this wonder, the more we explore it the less we can understand. **Your thoughts to me are so precious, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.** This comfort is yours every day. **I awake, and I am still with you.** Your whole life is God’s wonderful work.

These last verses seem take a violent right turn. **If only you would slay the wicked, O God**. David asks. He pleads his case. **Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD and detest those who rise up against you?** This seems terribly negative and morose for such a comforting psalm, but the thought fits perfectly.

Consider going to one of Oregon’s beautiful places, hiking through old forests to find some secluded stream, only to find the destination trashed, trees cut up and dying, cans and plastic bags and other trash too disgusting to describe clogging those flowing waters. When a story is reported of a whale washing up on shore with 80 pound of plastic choking it to death. When we hear about poaching, animals hunted to the brink of extinction, are we not rightly enraged?

God’s creation is so wonderful we can see its value and our responsibility to care for it. How much more the crown of God’s creation! How much more human life! The more we see God’s wonderful works, the more we understand his greatness, the more we understand how much the Lord is involved in your life, in your neighbors life, in every human life, the more we see the glory God deserves. So what is the proper response to those who reject God’s work? Those who see his works as their commodities to be used and abused? Those who speak against the Lord and blame him for the result of our sinful choices. What is our hearts plea when we see those living out the evil desires of their hearts? Do we not cry out with David for justice? We rightly join our hearts with David. **To me they are enemies.** We rightly ask God, to save us, not only from their violence, but from our own, **Investigate me, God, and know my heart. Test me and know my troubled thoughts. See if there is any way in me that causes pain, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

**Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will certainly not believe,** Jesus declared. Does God really know what life is like? Does God really care? Does God really exist? Why doesn’t he answer in the pain? Our Psalm provides some answers, look at God’s creation, its beauty down to the intricate details. Look at yourself, your life, your body, your soul, his individual care that made you exactly the way you are. But Jesus came to fill in even more of the picture. God in the flesh dwelt among his people. He took personal interest in the troubles of real lives. He fulfilled every word the Scriptures spoke about him. And if that were not enough to believe, to give thanks, to give glory to God, every step Jesus took he confronted the results of sin with his miraculous power. He rebuked the hard hearts. He went the way of suffering so that God’s justice could look with favor on you. He has not only created you as his wonderful work. He has redeemed you as his wonderful work. He has called you as his Spirit has recreated you in his love. He knows your troubled thoughts. He knows your painful paths, and he in his loving work chooses to lead you in the way everlasting. This is God’s Wonderful work for you. Amen.