

God Is Personal

If you pay close attention, you may be aware advertisers monitor our online habits and create personalized ads that correspond to our interests. On some level this makes practical sense. If you and I are going to be exposed to ads, we might as well get advertising about products which interest us. For example, houses in a neighborhood of family homes might receive ads targeted to parents. Probably few see a problem with this, but what if advertisers target specific families owning cats and dogs because their digital research enabled them to determine the homes which have pets?

A few years ago, Sky network in the United Kingdom, seriously considered developing ads using viewer's personal names since research revealed hearing one's own name catches their attention. However, the networks and advertisers hesitated to implement the new technology because many viewers found it, "a little creepy."

Even if commercial ads focus on our personal interests, this does not mean advertisers really know us. Advertisements containing our name do not mean advertisers have established a personal connection. No matter how personalized commercials become, they can never truly be personal.

We might enjoy hearing our name mentioned on TV, but it simply does not have the same significance as when spoken by a family member or dear friend. It is much more meaningful when someone we love calls us by our name.

Consider the story recorded in scripture by the Apostle John of Mary Magdalene soon after the resurrection of Jesus. "She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. 'Dear woman, why are you crying?' Jesus asked her. 'Who are you looking for?' She thought he was the gardener. 'Sir,' she said, 'if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.' 'Mary!' Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, 'Rabboni!' (which is Hebrew for 'Teacher')." (John 20:14–16, NLT) The familiarity with which Jesus spoke Mary's name confirmed for her the one who had known her so well before his crucifixion was alive again. Her name, spoken by one whom she loved, was deeply personal and extremely meaningful.

As technology continues to improve, future ads will likely become increasingly personalized, but they are unlikely to eliminate loneliness no matter how personal they become. However, as Mary discovered, the God who knows us perfectly has the ability to personally relate to us. Our Creator wants a connection with us not based on research, but upon both love and his desire to have a personal relationship everyone.