



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

June 6, 2021

You Are There

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: June 10, 2021

Paul McCartney was asked often to name his favorite Beatles Song. In one interview he compared this request to naming your favorite child. "You love them all, how can you pick just one? They all have so much to offer!" Selecting a favorite passage of scripture presents a similar challenge. The Bible is filled with the message of God to us, inspired by the Holy Spirit. No single passage is the definitive Word as our faith continues to deepen over a lifetime. Hebrews states, "the Word of God is living and active." As I was selecting the passage for today, I found words of beauty which show the nature of our God and tell us what God thinks about us. We come to Psalm 139.

Psalm 139 The Inescapable God

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.
O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?
 Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them—they are more than the
sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Arlington Virginia, just outside of Washington DC, is home to sacred ground, Arlington Cemetery. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is found there perpetually guarded 24 hours, seven days a week by the Old Guard. When you go to the tomb, you will always find a soldier keeping watch. The soldier will advance with 21 steps, pause for 21 seconds, and then return with 21 precise steps. They purposely use 21 as a reference to the 21-gun salute which is the highest honor one can receive for military service. On the tomb are engraved these words, "Here rests in honored glory, an American soldier, known but to God." God is omniscient, knows all. While we bring dignity to the unknown soldier, God knows the identity and claims the person as a Child of God. How comforting to be known by God.

Psalm 139 is all about God knowing us and in that knowing we encounter God. The Psalm virtually shouts at us that you are not only known, you are "fearfully and wonderfully made." God can't stop thinking about you. If God could count all the thoughts of you, "they would be more in number than the sand." Why are you loved so much" asks Max Lucado? The same reason the artist loves his paintings or the boat builder loves his vessels. You are God's idea. And he has only good ideas. Paul said in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." **You matter to God!** Remember that when you place your head on the pillow tonight night.

The Psalm continues, not only are we wonderful and fearfully made. The psalmist says, “O LORD, you have searched me and known me.” As poetic as that sounds, to be searched is no picnic. Anyone who has flown has been searched. When we travel by air the T.S.A.’s we encounter, prior to arriving at our gate, have complete control on our destiny. We take off our shoes, hoist up our bag on the conveyor, hoping we do not get stopped. More than once a person in uniform has asked me, “Is this your bag?” We step over to the special area. She unzips my suitcase, rummages/ ransacking through my most personal things with a wound. I’m not hiding anything, but still, I’m almost afraid she’ll find something. The beep goes off. The searching has left me disheveled and rattled. To be searched, although necessary is not always pleasant.

How different to be searched and known by God. God knows you best. This is the God who counts the number of every hair on your head -- This is the God for whom there are no anonymous faces, to whom nobody is a write-off, for whom no one is lost in the crowd. The personal God who searches for everyone: one lost sheep, one missing coin, one sinner lost and found, and he calls us by name. We can trust in the Lord to search us and still love us for who we truly are.

While he was imprisoned for his resistance against the Nazis, the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a poem called “**Who Am I?**” Here he meditates upon the difference between what others say about him during his time in prison and what he feels about himself

inside. Others see him as a cheerful tower of strength and faith amid hardship -- but on the inside he feels restless and yearning and sick, like a tiny bird in its cage, barely alive. "Who am I?" he asks. "This man or that other? / Am I then this man today and tomorrow another? / Am I both all at once?" But Bonhoeffer concludes the poem with a type of Psalm 139: "Whoever I am, you know me, O God. You know I am yours." How wonderful it is, when we do not even know ourselves, to be searched and known by God.

God will not let us go. At times we may not want to be known, but this searching, all-knowing God won't leave us alone, like a hound dog on a scent. "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? "The psalmist asks again: "If I top the clouds and mount up into the stratosphere -- You are there. If I roll out a sleeping bag down in the lowest basement of hell -- You are there. If I catch a pre-dawn flight over the farthest ocean -- You." This is the height, breadth, depth of the love of Christ. "Even the darkness, even my darkness is not dark to you, O God" I pull down the shade, I turn out the lights, I hide under the bed or beneath the shade of my self-deception -- and I might as well pull out a flashlight. You, again.

One of the cherished times in my position is to be with families as we say goodbye to loved ones here on earth and entrust them to Almighty God. Last year I had a unique experience as I said goodbye to one of my good friends, Sue. She was one of my closest friends, we vacationed together, took long walks on the

beach, raised our children together, cheered the Steelers, shared secrets. No one expected her cancer to return with a vengeance. I attended the service both as a pastor and as her friend. Psalm 139 was read at her service. Poignant words, the message of God to us, as we ponder things eternal, when we surrender this life on earth to the life everlasting. The psalmist reassures us, God's hand is upon us, there is no need to hide, for we are known by God who has searched us; nothing will be found that has not been found and embraced. As we stood at my friend's grave these held us fast, gave hope, secured us in love. "When I come to the end, O Lord, You are there." Amen.



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