

“Heart Surgery”

Psalm 139

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Heart surgery has come a long way in recent decades. It began soon after WW II in select hospitals around the world by just a few cardiac surgeons. Now it is performed in almost every country and certainly every state in America, including many rural areas. There was a time when heart surgery was the leading story on the evening news, but some procedures have become so common they are performed as out-patient surgery.

How I wish it was common for us to let God examine our hearts to see if it has become diseased and needs repairing. A prayer similar to the one the Psalmist prayed in our text could serve to inspire and guide us.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart,” the Psalmist wrote. “Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

It appears this personal prayer was uttered by someone who had been accused of doing wrong. Evidently, he felt he was not guilty, but he was struggling to convince anyone of his innocence.

Frustrated and at the end of his rope, he cried out to God to be his advocate. It is the way he voiced this urgent request that has captured the attention of people for generations. Instead of informing God of his innocence, he pleads with God to examine his heart, much like a skilled surgeon, and inform him of what he discovers.

“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.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

What impresses you most about this prayer? I am struck by the Psalmist’s passion and boldness. Every sentence or phrase begins with an imperative: search, test, see and lead.

This is not a casual conversation the Psalmist is having with God, one filled with pleasantries and compliments. The Psalmist is calling on God to act and to do it quickly.

I am also impressed with the scope of the prayer. The focus is not merely on this one charge or incident but his entire life.

“See if there is **any** offensive way in me,” the Psalmist cried out. He may not have been guilty this time, but he knows he has been before and will be again.

Knowing this, the Psalmist asked God to search him thoroughly to see if he was doing anything to harm another person or even himself. He was wise enough to know he had blind spots and needed God to reveal what he was denying or overlooking.

I am equally impressed by how often the Psalmist appeals to God to search his heart. The request is continual.

It is as if he is asking God to be on search at all times, informing him of anything God finds that is unhealthy. The Psalmist doesn’t want a problem to go undetected and to spiral out of control.

I am most impressed, though, that the Psalmist is asking God to search his heart. Don’t most of us try to hide our ugly nature and crude behavior from God? Don’t we fear God will quit loving us if we are this open and transparent?

After all, this is the reaction of some of our friends and even family members when they are disappointed in us. The relationship changes, and often it is not for the better.

Won’t this be true for God, too?

Apparently, the Psalmist did not think so. I wonder why. What did he know that we struggle to understand?

The Psalmist was aware that he was fully and completely known by God, including every thought, word and deed, and yet God still loved him. Trying to hide from God or to conceal anything he was doing from God was futile and self-defeating.

“You have searched me, O Lord, and you know me. 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.

Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.” (139:1-6)

The key word in this text is ‘know’. It occurs seven times throughout this Psalm, a number indicating fullness or completion.

God’s faithful and unconditional love was not dependent upon the Psalmist being perfect or good at concealing his mistakes, but his willingness to be humble and candid. God’s primary interest was in helping the Psalmist to grow and to mature into a responsible and loving person, and this required both God and the Psalmist being open, honest and transparent.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart,” the Psalmist wrote. “Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

How would your life change if you prayed this prayer? Would you be drawn closer to God and spend more time in prayer seeking God’s counsel and advice?

Would you become a better person by saying no to things that are harmful and yes to things that are good? Would your life more accurately reflect the heart and nature of God, as Jesus’ did?

Would your values and priorities change and your relationships improve? Would you respond differently to life's challenges, problems, temptations, frustrations and opportunities? Would you walk farther down the path that leads 'to the way everlasting'?

Let me encourage you to pray this prayer more often. Follow the Psalmist's lead by entrusting your life to God and trusting God to be the kind of heart surgeon that heals, replenishes, restores and revitalizes.

The primary goal of our spiritual journey is self-awareness, which can lead to substantial and permanent changes that make us better. We cannot achieve this goal without God's help. The Psalmist couldn't and neither can we.

I assure you that God, like a loving and responsible parent and heart surgeon, is ready to help you. Will you receive his help by voicing this prayer today and every day?