

Week 8- Psalm 139: Praying our Surrender

1: CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of Psalms from Week One. What kind of literature is the book of Psalms? Who is one of the primary authors? What is the book's main purpose? Where are we in the large story of Scripture? Share some of the main themes or learnings from the past weeks (lament, trust, sin, frustration, journey, anger).

Today's Passage: Today we come to another well-loved psalm written by David that speaks to the intimacy of our relationship with God. Psalm 139 is one that can be read daily, memorized, and brought to mind often. When social media pushes us to present our outsides as perfect and hide our internal stress and struggles, this psalm reminds us that God knows us deeply, inside and out, AND loves us.

2: CONTENT

Read Psalm 139 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, C, or D) to help your group engage with this passage. (note to leaders: this Psalm has so many beautiful images, making it a great week to try illustrating parts of the passage, if you think your group would be willing)

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

Option C. Lectio Divina: Scripture is read four times, pausing after each reading:

1: HEAR the passage.

2: MEDITATE on the passage in the silence that follows.

3: IDENTIFY a word or phrase that stands out to you from the reading (leader may ask group to speak this out loud after the 3rd reading, or to share it as a group after the 4th reading)

4: REST in the presence of God.

Take time to share your reflections with each other as a group.

Option D. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. This psalm opens with "You have searched me..." and closes with the request "Search me, O God..." What does this teach us about the one writing the psalm? What does it take for us to want someone to search us, to really know us?
2. Verses 1-5 include a big list of things that David knows about God, each one starting with the word "You..." Make a list (either verbally or written) of all the actions of God in these verses. What do you learn about God from this list? Is there an action that stands out to you, or is especially meaningful to you?

3. Identify all the “places” that the psalm writer presents in vs 7-11 (are all introduced with an “if”). If you had to summarize what he is saying here, how would you put it into one sentence? What do you learn here about God?
4. Verses 13-16 mark a switch from God’s vast, sovereign presence to a very intimate, personal presence. How does David choose to describe this intimacy? How does the description here fit with the opening verses of the psalm? Is there a phrase that is particularly meaningful to you in this section? Why?
5. At first glance, vs 19-22 seem to be “out of place” in this psalm. But how might they be connected to the emotions expressed in the rest of the psalm?

3: APPLICATION

No matter what method you used for content, spend some time talking about what this passage might mean to us now. Here are some questions to help guide this discussion. Feel free to use several or to just focus on one or two.

- This week is called “Praying our Surrender.” How would you define surrender? What does surrender look like, feel like in this psalm?
- This psalm tells us that we have a God who really knows us, and who really loves us. Who won’t leave. Who isn’t scared by what He discovers. Who isn’t surprised by our anxieties, our dark places, our beautiful places. Who actually **comes to find us**- wherever we are.
 - Does this truth fit with how you typically think or have learned about God?
 - Are there other biblical stories you know that illustrate this character of God?
- Remember that the writer of Psalm 139 did not yet “know” Christ. Had not witnessed the miracle of Easter morning. Yet he somehow understands a God who will not let him go. Read Ephesians 3: 17b-19 and/or Romans 8: 38-39. How do these passages support/compare/add to what Psalm 139 teaches us?
- Verse 14 says, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Most of us don’t look in the mirror in the morning and say, “Wow God! You were up to your best work when you made me. You are amazing!” We are so quick to forget that our mere “being” is a marvel- a testimony of praise to the Artist.
 - What *are* the normal narratives in your head when you “examine” yourself? How does a recognition of your own worth, your own belovedness, your own deep mattering sit with you? Is it harder to accept your own “wonderfulness” or to see the deep “wonderfulness” in others- why?
- David’s last words demonstrate a complete openness to God’s gaze. Here’s how *The Message* translates verses 23-24:

Investigate my life, O God,
 find out everything about me;
 Cross-examine and test me,
 get a clear picture of what I’m about;
 See for yourself whether I’ve done anything wrong—
 then guide me on the road to eternal life.

Why does David want this kind of examination? Have you ever experienced this openness with God or with anyone else in your life? Does this seem like a risky request? An invitation to freedom? How might your life with God change or grow if these words were part of your prayer life?

4: PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Reveal to us the ways in which you are always working to move us from sin to forgiveness, from offensive ways to the way everlasting, from death to life. You alone know us completely and you love us fully. What a mystery that is. Help us to rest in your love and rise to your service. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.