

PSALM 139: 1-18

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

This is a favourite psalm of mine. It is also among the top 10 of well known and beloved psalms for many. Its composition is attributed to King David. And as mentioned in previous meditations, this attribution is not because it was believed David was the actual author. Rather, the psalm reflects something that David, as he was known, would have resonated with deeply. How so?

Well, David was well known as a king faithful and devout to God. He sought to honour God, praise and glorify God any which way he could. However, David was also someone who made many mistakes and hurt a lot of people. As much as he was a great human and a great ruler, he was also deeply flawed, and he expressed his guilt and shame openly at times. He confessed his sins before God especially when he was called out by prophets like Nathan. Rather than get defensive or punish the prophet and anyone who called him out, he absorbed the condemnation and sought to make amends.

So how is it that this psalm reflects something of David and resonates with his experience as it has been described in the biblical books of Samuel among others?

“Oh Lord, you have searched me and you have known me.” To become aware that you are searched and known, that you can hide nothing, that all your ways, your thoughts, your feelings, all of it is known by God who sees all... does that matter? It matters if you believe in God. It matters also if you believe there are consequences to being found out and known. The most dangerous people are those who have no sense of accountability for what they do and take no responsibility either. To believe in God is to believe that no matter what deception, manipulation, rationalization or justification you can pull off with other people, it will not work with God, for God sees and knows all. At the end of the day and at the end of life we are accountable and responsible. Will such faith in a God who sees and knows all shape how we live and how we face our mistakes and shortcomings?

“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.” Despite the fact that the psalmist can never escape God’s searching presence, this is not a cause for fear or shame. Rather, there is faith that being known is also an experience of being cherished and loved. By seeing themselves as a wondrous creation of God, the psalmist also cherishes themselves and the gift of God they are in their being. Imagine seeing ourselves through the eyes of God and believing such seeing is love rather than contempt, disdain or punishment for moral failure. Imagine!

And yet, this is exactly what the psalmist is inviting us to embrace as the possibility of a relationship with God. Yes, God knows and sees all. We are accountable and responsible. May we grow in our accountability and responsibility to become ever more trustworthy humans with ever greater integrity of heart and behaviour. But we are also loved fully and completely, even when we must journey through repentance and seek out forgiveness. Only as we know ourselves loved fully and completely will our journey through accountability and responsibility be one that makes us more grateful for the gift of new beginnings. If we are judged without being loved, we become bitter and resentful. If we are loved even as we are judged, we are empowered to believe we can be better because we are better. We see what we can truly become through the eyes of those who love us.

Do you know and believe in a God who loves you that way?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for your love. Help me open my heart to receive it and internalize it more than I sometimes do. Help me believe in second chances and new beginnings even when I must face the consequences of mistakes and failures in my life. Help me open myself to you, a presence and energy who sees and knows all, who moves and flows through all, and yet loves me fully and without remainder because you see the wondrous beauty in me and the possibility in what I can yet become with you moving in me. Be with me and do not forsake me. Even when I come to the end and take my last breath, be with me. Amen.