

Being Known

Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne



Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

*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.
Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me, and
lead me in the way everlasting.
This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

One of the most wonderful men I have ever known was Carl Louderback. He was an elder and deacon in the church in Louisville, Kentucky. He was a loving husband, devoted father, a good friend and an amazing award-winning water color artist of local renown.

I wanted Carl to help me in small group ministries by teaching a water color painting class. But, when I asked him to teach, he said, "No, I am not a teacher." I asked again. He declined again. I kept asking and pestering him – maybe even harassing him!

Finally, Carl said to me, "Ask me differently." So, I asked him, "Carl, would you come and paint water color with me and a bunch of other people?" He said, "Alright, I'll be glad to." I asked, "Can I please call the class 'Water Color Painting with Carl?'" He said "Yes." Hah! I got him. It was on his terms, but I got him fair and square!

As we painted together, Carl 'helped' each of us. He would set a scene for us to paint or let us bring a picture of what we wanted to paint. He would begin his own painting and then he would wander around the table quietly 'helping' each of us.

Sometimes he would paint on our paintings to show us how to improve. I came to realize that some of my paintings were all my own and some were 20% or 40% Carl and some were 90% Carl and only 10% me.

Other times Carl would take a new piece of

paper and very quickly paint to show us how it was done. He tossed those paintings in the waste basket. As soon as his back was turned I dove for the basket and retrieved the paintings. I would try to get him to sign them because I thought they were beautiful. He rarely agreed, but I treasured them, signed or not. I came to realize that even on my paintings that Carl never touched, his spirit was there.

Carl had a particular piece of advice for me. "It's all in the wrist, Hmingi. Relax, loosen up your wrist. Don't be so stiff." Me? Stiff? Oh, that was hard advice for me to follow. The harder I tried to loosen up and relax, the stiffer my wrist became. But, gradually, very gradually, (after a few years) I got it. I learned to relax my wrist and my painting got better.

Those paintings became analogies for me about life and friendship. In the beginning, I thought I had gotten Carl to help me. But I now realize, Carl got me to know myself better and to become a little bit better painter - myself. Not that I ever became good, but I can lose myself for hours in painting water and color.

Psalm 139 is like one of those paintings. It is about God and the psalmist. It is a celebration of their profound and deep relationship. I wanted what I had learned from Carl to transform every part of my painting.

And, the psalmist wants being known by God to transform every part of himself. He wants everything about who and what he is to reflect the image and nature of God. He wants this because he has learned that the more God knows him the more he feels God loves him.

Genesis 1:26 & 27 tells us, "God said, 'Let us make human kind in our own image according to our own likeness ... so God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.'"

In being known by God we discover how much we bear and share the likeness of God. Surely that is our highest honor! Definitely, it is the most wonderful way to live!

It is not easy to live being known by God. We want to define ourselves for ourselves. We want to choose what God gets to know about us. But Psalm 100 (v. 3) tells us,

"It is God that made us, and we are God's own; we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture."

We don't get to determine what we are. God made us. God decides. We are the work of God's hands. We are the picture God has painted. God's nature and artistry are seen in every part of us. God knows us completely.

The psalmist of Psalm 139 wants us to rejoice

“In being known by God we discover how much we bear and share the likeness of God.”

in being God's and being known by God. That knowledge, he says, is a knowledge of love and it is the path of our salvation.

Sometimes, as human beings, we are afraid that we will not live up to God's expectations. And, because God made us with freedom and choice, sometimes we try to run away from God.

The psalmist had those same feelings of wanting to run away from God. But, he teaches us that running away from God only postpones our experience of the wonder of God's love for us. No matter where we run, we are still God's and we still bear God's own image and likeness. Every place we might go, God is there waiting to love us and help us.

There is a wonderful children's story I'd like to share with you. It is one of my favorite stories. It is called *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown, written 75 years ago. In the story a little Bunny talks with his mother about running away. It goes like this:

"I am running away."

"If you run away, I will run after you for you are my little bunny."

"If you run after me, I will become a fish in a trout stream and I will swim away from you."

"If you become a fish in a trout stream, I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you."

"If you become a fisherman, I will become a rock on the mountain, high above you."

"If you become a rock on the mountain high above me, I will become a mountain climber, and I will climb to where you are."

"If you become a mountain climber, I will be a crocus in a hidden garden."

"If you become a crocus in a hidden garden, I will be a gardener. And I will find you."

"If you are a gardener and find me, I will be a bird and fly away from you."

"If you become a bird and fly away from me, I will be a tree that you come home to."

"If you become a tree, I will become a little sailboat, and I will sail away from you."

"If you become a sailboat and sail away from me, I will become the wind and blow you where I want you to go."

"If you become the wind and blow me, I will join a circus and fly away on a flying trapeze."

"If you go flying on a flying trapeze, I will be a tightrope walker, and I will walk across the air to you."

"If you become a tightrope walker and walk across the air, I will become a little boy and run into a house."

"If you become a little boy and run into a house, I will become your mother and catch you in my arms and hug you."

"Shucks, I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny."

And so he did.

"Have a carrot," said the mother bunny.

The point is that the little bunny's mother knows him completely and loves him completely.

God, as portrayed in Psalm 139, is like that mother bunny. God knows us completely and loves us completely. Such a God is not to be feared. The psalmist is teaching us that when we choose to live in the heart of God's love, we will know joy.

The psalmist is not naïve. He knows we sin. But he urges us not to try and hide our sin from God. That never works. Rather, we must let God see our sin so that God can free us and lead us back to the path of life.

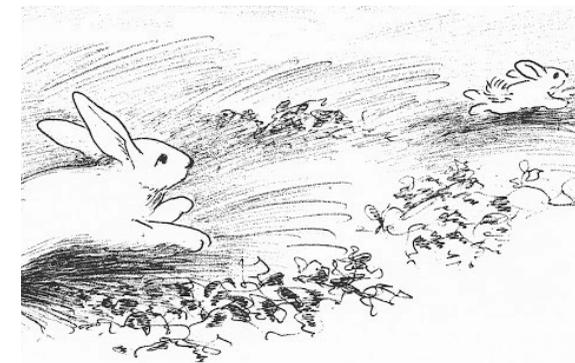
Like the psalmist, we too may say,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"

Today, as we walk the way everlasting, we are invited to come to the Lord's Table. In coming to our Lord's Table, we come to the heart of God's love. In coming to this Table, we remember who made us and whose we are. It is in coming to our Lord's Table that we celebrate the wonder and joy of being known by God completely. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Charge & Benediction

Go in peace, celebrating God's love and grace for you. Love your neighbor as God loves you. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each and every one of you now and always. Amen.



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