

A SIMPLE PRAYER THAT LEADS TO POWER

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Psalms 139

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

²⁴ And see if [there be any] wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Someone said that we should pray as if everything is up to God and work as if everything is up to us; but that statement compartmentalizes man and God; for since we have trusted Jesus as our Savior, God the Spirit lives in us, and there should be a definite partnership between us and our Heavenly Father. That is His will; that is what He desires; and that is what the Psalmist is thinking about as he muses upon being created in the image of God, and how 'fearfully and wonderfully' he is made. He is rather like the Apostle Paul who said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency and the power may be of God and not of us."

God wants to use each one of us in such a way that we will bring honor and glory to His Holy Name; but He can only use us and empower us if we are truly willing to be used, and desire to be a more powerful instrument in that use.

God has a purpose for us all, and never saved us to make us more comfortable. In a tongue-in-cheek way, C.S. Lewis said, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity." What Lewis was saying was that God didn't save us to give us an easy life; He saved us to give us a purposeful life. The life of purpose that God calls us to can only be done by us with the Divine Power to fulfill that purpose. In a very simple prayer, the Psalmist shows us the way to a channel of blessing for our Lord so that the purpose He has for us will be fulfilled.

I. SEARCH ME! ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: In the first place, we need to ask God to search our hearts. There is a good reason to pray such a prayer. For all sin comes from the heart and is centered in wrong motives. In Genesis 6:5, the Bible says that God saw the wickedness in man and that the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And, in verse 6, because of their sinful hearts, God Himself was grieved in His heart that He had created man.

In Jeremiah 16:9, the Bible says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

In Matthew 15:18: But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. ¹⁹For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: ²⁰These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

The heart of man is deceitful, says the Bible. Our heart not only tries to deceive God and deceive others: our heart also deceives us. No matter what we do that is wrong, we can find some excuse and some justification for doing it. Rarely do we do wrong things against others

without justifying our actions. We are in the right even when we are in the wrong, Such a thing is deception and comes from the heart. Such deceptive attitudes start in childhood. Children have the ability to shift blame and to deceive the parent in the most creative ways. But adults become hardened in the art of deception because of our deceitful hearts.

Not only are our hearts deceitful, they are desperately wicked. Jeremiah says so; but listen again to the words of Jesus: ¹⁹For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: ²⁰These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Jeremiah asks the question about the heart--"who can know it?" Well, since you cannot know your own heart, and since others cannot know your heart, who then can know it? God the Father knows the heart; God the Son knows the human heart (He knew what was in man.); and God the Holy Spirit knows the human heart. Therefore, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to Search Our Hearts. With His search we can see where we are wrong in our relationship to God the Father and to others. In His search He will show us what we must do, And in His search of our hearts He will use the testimony of the Word to confirm the truth of our spiritual needs to us. When we accept His search, we will have clean hands and a pure heart. The prophet Jeremiah cried out, Jeremiah 4:14 "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"

When Augustine looked into his heart he says that what he saw was "a cauldron of unholy vices." When God searches our hearts he shows us our hearts.

O Spirit of God, search every heart here today. Help us to see ourselves as we really are, and then cleanse our hearts that your purpose can be done perfectly in us.

II. TRY ME! "try me, O Lord, and know my thoughts." The psalmist not only prays that his Lord search him, but that his Lord try him and know his thoughts. Certainly this is a parallelism, a poetic device that the psalm writers used, much as we use rhyme. It might even be that the way the psalmist realizes that God will search his heart is through trying him to know his thoughts.

But there is a difference in this part of the prayer, for the heart was considered in Scripture the very center of our being; and the mind, though important, played a less significant part in the life of man, even if wisdom was always highly exalted.

In Deuteronomy 6:4 & 5 we find these words, ⁴ "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord;" ⁵ "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, He said: Mark 12:30 "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." Then Jesus added the second commandment to love our neighbor as ourself. In our Love for God, Jesus added that we must Love God with all our minds as well. And then He added that to love God, we must love our neighbor as ourself.

In order for our motives to be pure so that we might receive more power to accomplish the purpose that God has called us to do, we have to be tried. Through our trials, the real person emerges. We may boast about our faith, we may sing about our salvation, we may shout about our religion, but the trial of our faith shows us exactly who we are. I am reading the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote just after the Apostles. He wrote these letters on his way to Rome, like Paul. But Ignatius had been condemned to death and ordered to die by fighting the wild beasts in the coliseum. He never loses his faith in his Lord, and willingly embraces his fate.

Listen to his words to the church: "Only let our lot be genuine life in Jesus Christ. ²Do not let anything catch your eye besides him, for whom I carry around these chains—my spiritual pearls! Through them I want to rise from the dead by your prayers. May I ever share in these, so that I may be numbered among the Ephesian Christians who, by the might of Jesus Christ, have always been of one mind with the very apostles." We have no record of Ignatius' death, but this great Bishop of the great mission church at Antioch was martyred in Rome. He and Polycarp were dear friends, and when Polycarp was tried for being a Christian, and asked to deny his faith, he said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has never done me wrong. How can I deny my King and my God." These men were tried, and proved.

Throughout the New Testament the word temptation in the KJV is translated "trial." Listen to James 1:2-4: ²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

When we pray the prayer, 'try me and know my thoughts,' we are praying that God might show us 'any wicked way in us' show us who we are that we might become who we ought to be. And we can only become who we ought to be by the power of the Holy Spirit who, through the blood of Christ, sanctifies us to be acceptable workers for the Lord.

III. LEAD ME! ²⁴And see if [there be any] wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

As Ignatius said, "Where the shepherd is, there are the sheep." We all need leadership. We all need a Shepherd. We all need the Lord. We can only be led 'in the way everlasting' if we have an Everlasting Shepherd. Many of our hymns speak to the leadership of God--He Leadeth me! Lead On O King Eternal! God is our leader, but He also leads through other human beings. He said to Moses in Exodus 32:34 Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee:"

But God had another way of leading His people, and that was by a pillar of a cloud that moved before them before they would dare themselves to move, being smart enough to know that without God's leadership they would never reach the land of promise, since they had no idea where this land was located. When Abraham's servant was sent to find a wife for Isaac, he followed the leadership of God. When he had found Rebecca, he said: Genesis 24:48 "And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his

son."

God always leads us in the right way because God is Himself the Way. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." What a poignant and powerful cry--"Lead me in the way everlasting."

David said the same thing as this psalmist in a very simple psalm: Psalm 23: ¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. ³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. ⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 139:23: ²³Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
²⁴And see if [there be any] wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.

Make my heart ready for your power that I may achieve the eternal purpose for which I was born. In Jesus' Name. Amen.