

Bill was in big trouble- the biggest trouble of his life. He had been stopped for a simple traffic violation, but the police had suspected possible drug use. They had then searched his car and discovered more drugs. So Bill was arrested, tried and sentenced- 45 days in jail were in store for him.

And Bill wasn't the only one in the family who was having trouble. The family just seemed to be falling apart at the seams. Sister Laurie was in trouble as well. Some time ago she had been arrested and convicted of being a petty thief. After this problem, she had run away from home, right into the arms of her own drug problem. Now she was addicted to heroin. And big sister, Ellie, had run away from home earlier in rebellion to get married. To nobody's surprise, that marriage soon ended up in divorce. Every member of the family was in trouble, serious trouble.

Where was dad when all this was happening? Where was the one who seemed to have all the answers? Well, he was having problems of his own. It was not just his serious drinking problem, but it was also chronic depression, depression that was rendering him almost useless to the family.

So here was a family in tragedy- an alcoholic father with chronic depression, 3 children either on the run or in jail.

Yet it was this very family that was presented for years to our nation as America's model family. Most of us who are over 50 are quite familiar with this family. Bill Gray was the one who was arrested for possession of drugs, Laurie Chapin was the one arrested for stealing money, Ellie Donahue was the one whose marriage had disintegrated, and Robert Young was the alcoholic father with chronic depression. Yet, all the time they were living another life, as the Andersons, as America's model family, on a T.V. series called "Father Knows Best."

The Anderson's represent countless other people in our nation who are apparently living successful and productive lives, but who in reality are hurting deeply on the inside. It seems to be a natural pattern to share the good times, but to silently bear the bad times. And we must admit that this is the pattern that is promoted by the culture surrounding us. Like the prodigal son, we can find many in the world to party with us, but when the resources are all gone, whether they be financial or physical or emotional, few will sit in the pig sty and feed the husks of corn to the pigs with us. And this societal expectation that we all sense leads us to develop a pattern of life that often presents that which is good, but hides that which could cause us shame.

Happily, within God's body, the church, we find friends who love and care for us, and who will share our deepest hurts with us supporting us with prayer. We thank God for these wise and godly friends who can be supports and counselors to us during times of need. But it is hard for us. For we have grown up in a world

that rewards success but turns its back upon failure.

In order to have an intimate relationship with God, we must reverse this tendency of living that is so natural to us in our cultural setting. For our workmates and neighbors, God knows everything about us. He even knows more about us than we know about ourselves- He knows the words that we are going to speak before we speak them, the Psalmist says. And God loves us with the deepest of all possible loves- he truly has our best interests in life with absolutely no selfish motives at all. Now it is really hard for us to imagine this, for we live in a very selfish and cynical world- but it is true. God's love is absolutely unconditional- it gives not asking for a thing in return. So it is fruitless to try to hide hidden secrets in our life from God because he knows everything anyway. And it is foolish to want to hide our hurts from him because he alone is the perfect source of help for us. It, therefore, does not surprise us that David the Psalmist ends Psalm 139 with the invitation to God to search his life like an open book.

During these past Sunday Mornings, we have been looking at 6 pictures of God presented by King David in Psalm 139. We have already seen:

- *the God who knows all things - verses 1-6
- *the God who is everywhere - verses 7-12
- *the God who is our creator - verses 13-16
- *the God who is always present with us - verses 17-18
- *the God who just and righteous - verses 19-22

Now we come to the final picture of God in our study- and this picture of God presents the only logical response that we can have towards him in light of who he is. Because he is everywhere, always present with us, and because he knows all things and as our creator knows us better than we even know ourselves, and because he is just by his character during all things right, David comes to this conclusion that we all should have in our relationship with God. The conclusion that David comes to is summarized in 3 invitations that he gives to God. Let look at these 3 invitations together that are found in Psalm 139:23, 24.

PS 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

PS 139:24 See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

1. The first invitation is for God to search and know him. READ 139:23a.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart;”

Whenever the term "search" is found in the O.T., it is always used to refer to a diligent, careful process of probing. It is used of the investigating of legal proceedings as the lawyer carefully sifts thru every single piece of evidence trying to find that which would be helpful to support his case. It is used in reference to the

studying of the Proverbs as the student ponders and dissects these wise sayings so that he might find the nuggets of truth in them. It is even used in the O.T. of the mining process, sifting thru the bushels of soil and rock in order to find those rare gems or nuggets of precious metals. The term that David uses here when he invites God to search and know his heart is a term that indicates a very careful dissection, a very diligent and careful probing.

Now David is not inviting God to do something that He hadn't already done, and David was aware of this. He had already spoken of the God who knows all things, so David was quite aware of the fact that God knew what was in his heart. But the fact that David was willing to invite God to search him is significant, for it showed both David's approval of God's omniscience concerning himself, and it showed that David was concerned to know himself what was really going on inside of him.

In one of the early car assembly plants a man worked there who was simply called "Magnet Bill". The accountants called Magnet Bill one of the most valuable men in the entire plant. He did not design cars, or stamp out the parts. Bill didn't even help to put the cars together. No, all that Magnet Bill did all day was walk around the plant with a long pole attached to a magnet. You see, the plant foremen had noticed that ragged pieces of metal that had been discarded and screws that had been dropped by mistake were mingled undetected among the debris on the ground and were cutting many tires of the cars that were being driven off of the assembly line costing the company thousands of dollars over the course of the year. After Magnet Bill was assigned to walk throughout the plant separating the scrap metal and dropped screws from the harmless debris, the incidents of slashed tires went to practically nothing, and Bill saved the company many, many times his salary by detecting and ridding the factory of that which was harmful to the product they were making.

That is what the spirit of God is able to do in our lives as we invite him to search our hearts. He is able to detect what is spiritually harmful to us. He is able to see what is slashing and wounding our souls. He is able to separate that which is detrimental in our lives so that we can be cleansed from the harmful effects.

Search me, O God. Do a diligent, careful inventory in my life. Use your great omniscience to my personal advantage so that I can know if something has taken hold in my life that is doing me spiritual harm. That was David's first invitation for God.

2. But now notice with me the second invitation. Test me. READ 139:23,24a.
"test me and know my anxious thoughts."

This Hebrew term which occurs 32 times in the O.T. is another interesting one. It has the indication of putting something to the test or refining it in order to test its integrity. It is a step beyond mere searching. Searching would indicate the finding of that which is hidden in the recesses of one's heart. Now testing would

indicate the applying of the refiner's fire to that which is found to see the quality of it. Just as impure gold is subjected to the refiner's fire so that the impurities might be found out and separated from the pure metal, so David invited God to use the refining fire of his omniscience and pure justice to separate the pure from the impure in his life.

The implication of David's words here are most interesting, especially in the culture in which he lived. For this very term and concept was used in extra Biblical sources of an interesting Egyptian doctrine in their theology.

Many times Israel is compared and contrasted to Egypt in the O.T. Egypt is a picture of the world, Satan's domain. As Israel was imprisoned in bondage in Egypt, so everyone is born into the world imprisoned in the bondage of sin. But as God delivered his people from Egypt by his miraculous power, so God is able to break those bonds of sin and give a person new birth and life thru his miraculous power- and God executed his judgment upon the gods of Egypt showing himself to be more powerful than they. So God is infinitely more powerful than any of the world's forces. Just as God lead his people out of Egypt to the promised land, so he desires to lead each one of his people out of the enemy's bondage into perfect freedom found only in fellowship with him. Now this term "test" that is used here by David was a very important theological term in Egyptian religious doctrine.

According to Egyptian doctrine, after a person's death, his heart was tested. This was very critical for it would determine the quality of the person's afterlife. Because the Egyptian religious system was basically built upon the concept of doing good things throughout one's life to please the gods, after one's death, the heart was tested to see if it had passed the criteria of the gods. Then the quality of afterlife was determined for the person.

How representative this is of the general thinking of many in our world today. If a person believes in a god and an afterlife at all, he generally has the idea that god after one dies weighs the good against the bad in order to determine whether a person goes to heaven or hell. Not only does this type of thinking demonstrate an imperfect view of god for this type of god is certainly not a perfect one- he is one that would be appeased by 51% having a shallow view of sin and the magnitude of it, but it also allows a person no basis for any confidence concerning his eternal state throughout his entire lifetime. One never knows for sure if he is being good enough. He has to try his best living under the pressure that after his death, when it is too late to do anything to rectify the situation, he still might end up with 49%, just short of tipping the balance scale.

How different David's God was as he revealed it to us in the Bible. David's God did not have to wait until after death to test his people. He knows their actions and even the thoughts of their hearts every moment of every day. He is able to continually test his people so that they know if their attitudes and actions are pleasing

in his sight. He is able to convict of sin while there is yet time for repentance and a change in life. How much better this is than the Egyptian way - waiting until it was too late after death.

To David, the fact that God could and would test his heart was a comfort to him- so he invited God to test him and know his anxious thoughts. To see if there was any offensive way in him. In fact, as you follow the progression of David's thinking here, the purpose of God's diligent searching of his heart was to test or prove that which he found- to put his thoughts and actions in the refining fire to see if they were pure.

3. And this leads us to the third invitation that David gives to God. The invitation to lead. READ 139:24b. "and lead me in the way everlasting."

The word that David uses here is quite a common term in the O.T. It is found some 39 times. It was a shepherd's term, literally meaning to herd or to guide a flock to the intended destination. As David often did in his psalms, he reverted back to his younger days when he was a shepherd to his father's flocks, and he picked up that imagery inviting God as his shepherd to now lead him thru life. But this specific request was for more than just guidance thru a day's or week's schedule. No, this was a request for spiritual guidance, an invitation for God to lead him in the paths of righteousness. "Lead me in the way everlasting" is David's request of God.

Now let's put these thoughts all together, for David really sums up the whole Psalm in these 3 invitations at the very end. So many times, people have looked at this Psalm as a theology of the attributes of God. It is this, of course, but it is so much more. Psalm 139 is a most practical guide for daily living in righteousness.

*God is the omniscient, omnipresent creator of all things. Therefore he has made each and every one of us-

"For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

*And He knows everything about us-

"you know when I sit and when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar"

*there is no place where we can go to escape his presence for he is everywhere at the same time.

"Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there, if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."

*Now whether we choose to believe these truths or not does not alter them in any way. Whether a person believes in God or not, God is still their omniscient, omnipresent creator. These are facts of his being, these are attributes of his existence, these are part of God's very character. We couldn't change these even if we wanted to. They are truths that the Bible presents as facts about God.

*What we do have control of is how we respond to these truths. For we can either live our lives

consistently with the attributes and character of God, or we can choose to live our lives in an inconsistent manner with who he is. Like many people in the world, we can choose to live our lives as if God isn't everywhere and doesn't know everything that we are doing. We can try to convince ourselves that we can hide things from him and fool him. We can even come to the place where we convince ourselves that we are fooling him, that he doesn't really know. This doesn't change God's character; of course, it doesn't change the reality of who God is. God still is everywhere and he still does know. But we deceive ourselves and choose to live our lives as if God really doesn't exist. It shouldn't surprise us that if we choose to live life in that manner, we don't find true peace within ourselves- for we are not living consistently with the realities of life. So there are many today who are searching and searching for peace and contentment in life but are not finding it, for they are not living their lives consistently with the character of God.

There is another, better way. This is the life that David chose for himself and wrote about. That is to choose to live a life that is consistent with the character of God. This way of life accepts the Biblical teaching about God, that he is always with us as a gracious and compassionate heavenly father- "when I awake, I am still with you". This way of life realizes that the true God of heaven is a just and righteous God- he does everything right. So in confidence, this way of life chooses to live consistently with who God is. After all, he is everywhere- why try to hide from him. This way of life accepts the fact that he is everywhere and chooses to acknowledge that presence and fellowship with him. He knows everything- why try to fool him? This way of life accepts that fact and freely confesses all hidden secrets to him, even inviting him to search and test our hearts in order to guide us into righteous paths. This way of life accepts God and chooses to live consistently with his character. This way of life finds inner peace and contentment.

There are certain things in life that we cannot change. We must learn to live in harmony with them. The weather is an example. It doesn't matter how badly we might want it to be 80 degrees outside today - we can convince ourselves in our minds that it is 80 degrees, we can put on shorts and sandals, we can even plan a picnic in the park- it doesn't matter. No amount of convincing is going to change the fact that it is mid-November and we are headed for a Michigan winter. If we want to be comfortable in life, we will change and live in consistency with the weather. We will get out our sweaters and warmer coats. The only other alternative is for us to make a change- for us to physically go to a place where it is 80 degrees outside. Of all of the unchangeables in life, God is the most unchangeable. He is immutable. "I am the Lord, I change not", he said. What would you think of a person who was out raking his leaves today in sandals and shorts? You would think that he was a couple of bags of leaves light upstairs, wouldn't you? He wouldn't be living consistently with the reality of life. If a person is going to live in Michigan, that person has to adjust to the changing seasons. As foolish as that person would be, it is even more foolish to try to live our lives

inconsistently with the character of God.

David realized that. He sought to live his life consistently with God's character, and God called him a man after his own heart. We too, can be people after God's own heart, living with inner peace and contentment-as we know God, and as we live consistently with who he is.