

Rhythms of a Disciple

Rhythm 9: Examination

“Many avoid the path of self-knowledge because they are afraid of being swallowed up in their own abysses.” - Andreas Ebert

God modeled examination for us right at the beginning of Genesis:

“And God saw that it was good.” (Gen 1)

He could say that because He had a perfect perspective. I don't have a perfect perspective. My brain fits right inside my head. I need God's perspective.

Therefore, our examination process is not merely SELF-examination. We invite God to lead the process of examining us. David showed us how:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps 139:23-24)

WHY EXAMINATION?

- It can bring us closer to God (No, really.)
- It reminds us to celebrate our victories
- It leads us to the kind of confession that heals

Let's follow David on his journey of examination in Psalm 139.

Psalm 139:1-6

“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 afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

David begins by extolling this incredible thing about God: He knows all. He even knows all... of me. David begins with Praise.

Psalm 139:7-12

“Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall 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 dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

In other words, "God, I cannot hide from you, even if I wanted to. And sometimes I want to."

It is a foolish, childish thing to try to hide from God. He can see all.

Why do we wish we could hide from God? Is it because we are afraid He's going to reject us? Is that we are afraid of disclosing our hearts? He already knows our hearts.

Psalm 139:13-18

"For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you

David says, "there are actually good things about me."

Do you know God actually delights in you? Not in your neighbor, in YOU.
Do you know you've probably done some things really well? Do you stop to celebrate? Do you stop to feel His pleasure? Do you stop to say, "It was good."?

So far, it's a beautiful song, right? Could be an Adelle ballad. It's intimate, delicate, and full of beauty. I imagine violins and cellos, with lots of little interludes that propel us right into worship.

Then comes the bridge...

Psalm 139:19-22

Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!
O men of blood, depart from me!
They speak against you with malicious intent;
your enemies take your name in vain.

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.

If the first part was an Adelle ballad, this part included heavy distortion guitars and the double bass drum. And the singer is screaming.

Then, the chorus comes back in, and the song ends with the verse we began with:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps 139:23-24)

Does the bridge fit? At first glance, no. Absolutely not.

We call those kinds of angry psalms “imprecatory psalms,” and we have certain ways of viewing those. But as Ruth Haley Barton points out, the bridge makes perfect sense if you view the Psalm as an examination song.

With David’s flash of anger, he is confessing. He is showing God even the dark places inside him, and offering Himself up to God’s evaluation.

So what happens when you find something ugly inside yourself? Then you will probably face CONVICTION or CONDEMNATION.

Conviction is from God. It is a specific conscience notification alert.
Condemnation is not. It is a general insult. A blue screen that says, “you stink.”

- Condemnation will attack identity.
- Conviction will attack sin
- Conviction leads to Confession

Why shouldn’t I fear this process? It sounds scary...

God is both perfectly competent and perfectly caring. He is loving enough to forgive you, and wise enough to restore you.

PRACTICE: Journaling

Where was God this week?”

Where did I feel His presence? His nudging? Where did I succeed? Where did I blow it?

Journaling becomes a stone of remembrance for us. It becomes not only a short term evaluation tool but a long-term one, too.

Practice: Prayer of Examination

(From Ruth Haley Barton’s, “Sacred Rhythms”)

1. Preparation: Be still

2. Invite the Holy Spirit
3. Review the previous day / week
4. Give thanks
5. Confess
6. Ask forgiveness
7. Update someone you trust