

Try Me and Know My Thoughts

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[0 : 00] In Psalm 139 we read in these verses 2 and then 23 and 24. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought of far off.

And then in the last two verses. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting. Now we've read these verses no doubt many times in the past. Ourselves. And we think in terms of David saying, well Lord, just search my heart. And see if there's anything there that's bad. And if there is, well Lord, you just deal with it. And it's got to be in a sense a prayer that we might think, yes, okay. I want that to be my prayer too. But, you know, we stop and think of it. And then you really want that prayer to be true. You know, the Lord knows your thoughts. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Search me, O God.

[1 : 00] Know my heart. Well, he already does. Try me and know my thoughts. Well, he knows that too. See if there be any wicked way in me. Well, we know that there is.

And lead me in the way everlasting. In order to be genuine and sincere in such a prayer as this, we really got to want to have the problem dealt with.

It's not enough anymore just to keep it inside. And to think, well, nobody can see what I think. Nobody can see what's in my heart. And as long as the world doesn't see it, or the church doesn't see it, well, that's okay.

But the Lord knows it. Jesus knew exactly what he was talking about when in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, if you're angry with someone in such a way as you really wish them dead, then you've effectively killed them in your heart.

If you look on somebody lustfully wanting to have inappropriate relations with them, you've effectively committed that adultery in your heart. What you think and desire in your heart is what you have effectively done, even if you're physically restrained from doing it.

[2 : 12] And even if you don't physically put it into practice, it's what you want to do. And it's what you've already done in your heart. And some of the things that perhaps people think in their hearts, we might see not as really a problem.

I mean, it's maybe a perplexing thing to us that Jesus doesn't seem to give credit here to the scribes and Pharisees and so on when they say in their hearts, no, why did this man speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And he wants their right. Only God can forgive sins. What they don't get and what they don't yet grasp is that this man is not speaking blasphemies because he has the power to forgive sin, being not only the Son of Man, but God the Son.

In a sense, they are right. But Jesus takes issue with what is in their hearts because there were certain of the scribes sitting there reasoning in their hearts.

Why did this man not speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And Jesus doesn't make it blatant and say, you know, you're right. Only God can forgive sins.

[3 : 25] But here's the great news. I am God personified. I am God the Son. That would probably be too much for them to take. Too much for them to understand. They couldn't get their heads around it.

So he simply does it with a bite-sized baby steps, proportions. Looks at what's easier to say. Either your sins are forgiven you or take up your bed and walk.

But so that you can know that the Son of Man has the right and the power to forgive sins, he says to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, arise, take up thy bed and go thy way into thy house.

And immediately he arose, took up the bed and went forth before them all, in so much as they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we never saw on this function.

And then, of course, when he calls Levi and Matthew to follow him later on, when they're all sitting in a house and all eating together, and there's lives and families, he said to his disciples, how is he eating with publicans and sinners?

[4 : 24] You know, by associating with these people, he becomes associated with them. He becomes tainted by them. And the sins that they are guilty of, they sort of stick to him in that sense.

Why is he doing this? We can see that he's a man of God. We know he's obviously got great wisdom and spiritual insight. Why is he doing this? Why is he sitting with them?

And Jesus said, Now, the Pharisees and the scribes could see that the likes of Matthew and Levi are publicans and sinners.

And they, yes, okay, they need healing. They need to be cleansed. They need to be saved. But they didn't see it in themselves. And sometimes, perhaps, maybe we don't see it in ourselves. Or we know it's in ourselves, but we just don't want anyone else to know. Well, the bad news is that God already knows. Or maybe it's not bad news.

[5 : 25] Maybe it's good news that he already knows. But the good news is that he already knew anyway. And still, it's because he loves sinners like us that he has come himself to pay that highest and most difficult and agonizing price of all that costliest sacrifice that has ever been made.

He has paid that so that sinners can be saved. Shall be saved if they put their trust in. Thou knowest my down-sitting, my up-rising, when I get down, when I sit up, when I walk by the way. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Search me, O God. Know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. Oh, yes, and God, see if there'll be any wicked way in me.

You've really got to want that prayer to be true before you pray it. You've really got to want him to open you up and say, Well, look, this, this, and this, that you always pretended wasn't really there. It is there. You know it. I know it. And this is what needs dealt with. Maybe this is the thing that is holding you back from blessing. Maybe this is the thing that is preventing you from enjoying the presence of your Lord, from knowing his blessing and entering into all the fullness of joy.

[6 : 42] Because at least the guy who was sick of the palsy, he knew that he needed healing. Maybe he didn't know that he needed his sins forgiven. But he knew that he needed healing. And when we get to the stage where we are in so much turmoil, so much agony, that we just don't care what it takes.

Just do whatever you have to do, Lord. If it means my being shamed in your presence because you show me my sin, I do it. Just deal with it. Just take away my sin, Lord. Many years ago, when I was away at a conference in Glasgow, I became, during the night, gripped with the most agonizing and intense internal pains I've ever experienced in my life.

And I was convinced that I must have a burst appendix or something like that. I was in such total agony. And up in the middle of the night, got a tattoo, taking an accident in emergency in the middle of Glasgow, sitting there, absolutely riding in agony, taking on a trolley up through the long corridors.

And, you know, you see all the pipework going over your head while you're standing up at the ceiling. And they take you in. And then you're lying beside a trolley while they try and diagnose in a corridor. And they give you one of these hospital gowns that barely covers modesty and everything. But you just don't care. Because you're just in such absolute agony. And if they had said to me there and then, well, Mr. Topham, in order to find out what's wrong with you, I'm afraid we have to cut you open and dig about inside.

[8 : 10] And then we'll dig out. And they say, do it, do it. I don't care what you do. Just do it. Just stop this pain from happening. And in due course, of course, they find out what was wrong. Nothing as dramatic as a burst appendix.

Very one day, in the end of the day, probably quite embarrassing. But it stopped. It was dealt with. But in the midst of such agony, I wouldn't have cared what they had to do.

If they said, here's a bit of wood, biting it, we're going to have to cut you open without any anesthetic. Is that okay? I just said, yep, give me the piece of wood. Just do it. Because anything was better than the amount of pain that I perceived myself to be in.

Now, we may or may not get to that level of spiritual anguish where we recognize the darkness and the sin that is within us.

Maybe some things we hide even from ourselves that we just don't admit that they are there, but deep down we know it. And the Lord already sees it.

[9 : 15] So when we are prepared to pray, search me, O God, you can be sure. He's going to find it. You know, the surest way that somebody is going to find something in a search is if they already know what they're looking for and they already know where it's hidden, they will go straight to it.

They will uncover it and they will take it out because they already know it's there and they already know where it's hidden. That's what it's like with God. He's going to go exactly to the root of the problem.

He's going to go exactly to the most hidden secret sin of your mind or your thought because he knows it's there. Maybe you only half admit it to yourself.

Maybe I only half admit it to ourselves. But we know it's there and certainly God knows it's there. Not only does he know it's there, but he knows the root cause of the problem.

We may recognize we have particular sins or bad thoughts or ideas or hatreds against people or whatever the thing may be. And the Lord is able to go right to the root and say, yes, you're going to look at this, this and this, but this is why.

[10 : 16] And it's this infinite way back here or this particular problem that you've got. You can go right to the root cause of the problem. Just like with the man sick of the polio. He's got this physical disease, this physical ailment.

But the root cause of that physical ailment and all disability and sickness and illness and death in the world is because this world is fallen and man is separated from God.

In our pristine condition, before man fell in the garden, there was no disease. There was no illness. There was no paralysis. There was no sickness.

There was no death. But it's because of our relationship with God having been broken apart by sin that all these things come in.

Now, of course, we don't say, Adam and Eve didn't say, this is a great idea. Let's have disease.

Let's have death. Let's have sickness. And all this manner of suffering. No, they just thought, well, let's just eat the fruit.

[11 : 16] Let's just eat the fruit of God for bad and see what happens and see if our eyes are open. It's like if somebody punches a hole in the side of a ship they don't imagine or intend everything that's going to come through that hole.

Not just water, but all the jetsam and flotsam that might be there on the surface of the water. It's all going to come pouring in through that hole and it's eventually going to sink the ship. They don't intend that.

They just intend to make a wee hole in the side of the ship. Just eat the fruit. They don't intend all the side effects. And undoubtedly, with the sins that we commit, particularly with the sins that we imagine and that we think in our minds, we do not intend all the side effects that come with that. But every sin, just like every man-made medicine or tablet or pill, has side effects. There is going to be a ripple effect from the stone that is dropped in.

To expect otherwise is to expect that when an atom bomb is dropped in any place, it will only be the precise point of impact that is affected. No, it's not.

[12 : 25] There's going to be a blast radius and huge damage with all that follows from it. And with every sin that we commit, there will be side effects.

There will be a knock on. There will be a blast radius. And so many people around us will be touched and affected by it. Because everybody that our lives touch will likewise be tainted by what happens to us.

Now, the good news is that the converse is also true. That when the Lord enters our life, when he heals us from our iniquity, and I'm using that phrase advisory because it's not just, you know, cringing us, but also it is a healing.

A healing of a breach that had been made between man and God. A healing of a wound, a festering sore that has been there that we are effectively conceived and born with in our original sin that opens up and succulates with all our own sins that we add to it.

When the Lord heals that, then likewise, the benign effects are felt by all those around us. They see the difference in our lives.

[13 : 38] They see the difference in behavior. They see the difference in attitude. They are conscious that something has changed. And it has changed for the better in our lives. And they may, like those who are in a warm room heated by a fire, they may feel the benefit of it, even if they're not fully aware of how it has happened or don't necessarily share the same opinions.

But they gain benefit from it. When the Lord looks into our hearts, if we pray for him to look into our hearts, search me, oh God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts, then you'd better be sure you actually want him to do that.

But sooner or later, he's going to anyway. You know, it's rather like if you're going to sort of swap for an exam and you know that the highers or the, oh, I was going to say, oh great, that really, really dates me up, national fives or whatever it is they do nowadays, if you know that this is coming and you start swatting for your exam, your chemistry and your physics and your maths and English and history and all whatnot, and it may seem that by taking out the books and slogging away over your notebooks and your class notes and going over past papers and things, how you're sort of bringing it closer and making it real and it's a burden and it's a hassle and you really don't want it's much easier just to put the books away and go watch TV and you think that by doing that, somehow you make it not happen but the reality is it gets closer and closer and it's going to happen whether you're prepared for it or not.

Now whether or not we face up to the reality that the Lord who already sees in our hearts is ready to search those hearts if we invite them to do so and ready to show us the things that need to be addressed and need to be healed and need to be cleansed and forgiven or whether we're determined just to close the books and put them away and say, oh I don't like reading that but just put it away and we'll put off the evil day.

Well, you may put it off but like the exam it will come. It will come and it will find us as the old game used to be you know, counting to a hundred covering your eyes hiding and seeing coming ready or not and it is.

[15 : 54] So when we say to the Lord search me oh God know my heart try me know my thoughts it is not for the faint hearted but it is for the true hearted we have to be healed inside we have to be cleansed in our thoughts and minds we have to be turned ultimately to the only one who is able to heal us when he sees the faith that we have as Jesus did those who carried the man who had the paralysis the policy he saw their faith and he said son your sins have forgiven you and when the root cause is dealt with all the symptoms are dealt with as well and when the root cause of our separation from God and we may think ah but I'm already a Christian you know I'm already believing it's okay that's sordid yes but even in the best of relationships there can be festering sores there can be hidden and dark secrets that come between us and the one we love the one we love most is or ought to be the Lord and there can be things that come between us and sins that come between us and which perhaps we are not prepared to acknowledge now if we think of David's one classic sin of course with Bathsheba he did it and he tried to cover it up so he obviously knew there was something wrong and then he tried to start to tidy away all the loose ends and then no doubt he became simply comfortable with the fact of what had happened and Bathsheba had the baby and so on and then Nathan the prophet comes and confronts him with the awful reality thou art the man and David knew all these things and when it was finally brought out into the open that the Lord hadn't just turned a blind eye and all the sin just hadn't gone away it was still there festering away and God required a reckoning for it he just crumpled he just crumpled and knew that he was guilty before God and the Lord said through Nathan you know you won't die what he meant is you're not going to die just now but the child would die and not only would the child die but the aftershock the blast radius as we know would come back to haunt

David with his son Absalom and then with all the rebellion that would follow on in Israel and all the after effects and all the brother killing brother and so on that came and David was helpless to prevent it because he was fatally weakened by that sin which had been conceived in secret and thought about simply in his heart but then of course put into practice in action some of our sins may never in that sense see the light of day some of our sins may remain as far as we think secret they may be in our hearts they may be in our heads Jesus really knew what he was talking about when he made those references in the sound because those are the things that the Lord already knows about search me of God and know my heart try me and know my thoughts see if there be any wicked way in me well there is in you and me and every sinner before God there is that wicked way within us those wicked ways are already there and they will be different for different people but they need to be dealt with and the Lord who sees and knows all things this as the prayer of the believer we think is wonderful and it is but if you think of it as the prayer of the impenitent sinner it becomes almost a panic stricken flight where shall I go from thy spirit or where shall I flee from thy presence if I ascend up into heaven thou art there if I make my bed in hell behold thou art there if I take the

wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea even there shall thy hand lead me thy right hand shall hold me if I say surely the darkness shall cover me even the night shall be like about me yea the darkness hideth not from thee but the night shineth as the day the darkness and the light are both alike to thee now you see we read these verses and usually we read them in terms of comfort and the

Lord always tells us wherever we go the darkness is turned to light and this is good news if we are reconciled to the Lord it is bad news if we are trying to hide from him it is bad news if we are trying to put off the day of reckoning but whether we regard it as good news or whether we regard it as bad news it depends on our state of being before God God is not changing he is the unchanging one his word is not changing it is an unchanging word of an unchanging God it is we who are the way about what is our condition before God and that condition depending on how we are before the Lord will determine how we interpret that same word that unchanging word because if we are right with the Lord it is wonderful it is good news for us and if we are running from God and at enmity with him it is darkness it is bad news but we get to the stage where we are in so much pain so much agony of separation from God that we just don't care just do the surgery

Lord just get it out cut out whatever is in there just take it away search me oh God know my heart find out what the problem is try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me or rather see the wicked way in me find it take it out and leave me in the way everlasting because once we've had that surgery we will bear the scars and we will never be the same again we will be changed Jesus when he does the work of redemption of course he still bears the scars even in glory he bears the scars even in his resurrection body he bears the scars because it is costly putting right what is wrong in our lives and we are all guilty sinners before him I remember once many years ago I was assisting as a student at a funeral where the minister concerned he was looking for an appropriate passage to read and thought well maybe

Sam 90 but then it was an old baby who had died he was like in her 90s and he said oh well I'm not going to read this about our iniquities before our secret sins in the light of I counted my goodness the woman was 90 something what secret sins could she possibly have now of course whilst he may have particular active sins in mind that she might not have been guilty of a 90 something year old is just as capable of secret sins and wrong thoughts and darkness in the heart as somebody in their twenties or their teens our secret sins and the darkness of our heart is the same heart problem whatever age we may be whatever stage of life we are at we have need of God's surgical precision to cut out what is wrong and to cleanse us from all our iniquity surely verse 19 thou wilt slay the wicked

[23 : 55] O God depart from me therefore ye bloody men that's not so much a command really as so much a desperation plea in the sense that if you think back to number 16 where you put Dathan and Abiram and their rebellion there and where the Lord says to Moses get up and depart from these men's tents because something terrible is about to happen and so we read verse 26 and he spake unto the congregation depart I pray you from the tents of these wicked men touch nothing of theirs lest you be consumed in all their sins and of course in due course the ground opened and swallowed them up and all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them for they said lest the earth swallow us up also right so in that sense partly we should understand this David saying you know depart from me ye bloody men because God is going to slay the wicked I don't want to be near you when it happens I don't want to be around when he slays the wicked well we're going to be slain by him if that wickedness is still there that wickedness in our heart that wickedness in our minds and thoughts that is the hardest to get rid of that the

Lord sees exactly where the problem is exactly what the problems are and he is ready to deal with it he is willing to deal with it you will not be able to confess to God anything he does not already know about he will know exactly where to go with a scalpel of his surgical cleansing and healing he will know exactly what to do to stitch up the wound afterwards he will know exactly how long the recovery period is he will know that you need help thereafter to hobble on in the way everlasting search me and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting a picture we might think of that is almost like one sort of leaning on the arm of a nurse hobbling on with a wound still perhaps painful after surgery well the Lord is able to take all the sin from our hearts and from our heads to read our thoughts to know what needs cleansing and to cleanse it sometimes we may think that if the

Lord knew exactly what was there well he would turn away from us in his gust he would be shocked he would be appalled there's nothing that can shock Jesus he said I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance those who are fine and healthy they don't need a doctor the whole have no need of a physician but they are sick and we are often sick in our heads or sick in our hearts or sin sick in our soul and the world may not see it and the church may not see it but ordinary people ordinary worshippers office bearers heacons elders ministers we are all guilty before the Lord and he who sees the heart he who sees the mind knows what it is that needs to be addressed knows what it is that needs to be cleansed and it may look like an outward problem or it may be well covered up or it may be that we are not doing anything much other people are carrying us but Jesus perceived in his spirit he saw the faith that they had he said to the sick of the apostles son thy sins be forgiven me isn't that what we so need to hear son daughter thy sins be forgiven me I see it through your heart thy sins be forgiven me I see it through your mind thy sins be forgiven me I know what thou hast denied even thyself and kept buried in the darkest recesses of your mind thy sins be forgiven me it's okay to let go it's okay to let the Lord in in fact it is a necessity search me oh God and know my heart it's a big ask and you better be serious because he's ready to do try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me and there will be and we're asking him to deal with it and leave me there in the way everlasting thou knowest my down stepping and my uprising thou understandest my thought afar off God already knows God is simply waiting for the invitation for you to say yeah go ahead do the surgery do whatever is needed just deal with this pain deal with this problem and set me free let me pick up my bed let me walk let me go home let me know where my real home is and lead me in a way everlasting going to hold on
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