

A Spiritual Inventory -- Psalm 139:23-24

At the beginning of each New Year many types of companies, such as those that deal in retail, take inventory which allows a company to know exactly what stocks & assets it has, & to locate those stock & assets quickly. That, my friends, is a good practice even for the Christian! It is always a good thing, for a Christian to take the time to reflect, to examine their heart, & to do a **spiritual inventory**. With the beginning of a New Year, I'd like to ask you this morning: **How are you doing spiritually?** Are you willing to allow the Lord to search you, to examine you, to turn His light of grace into every corner of your heart & life?

I cannot think of a better passage in the Bible to help us, to assist us, in this process of taking a **spiritual inventory**, than that which is found in **Psalms 139:23-24**. It is good for us as Christians to have a time of honest introspection, & to evaluate our walk with the Lord. This passage should lead to introspection; self-analysis, & soul searching.

“Search me, O God, & know my heart; try me, & know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, & lead me in the way everlasting.” -- Psalms 139:23-24

Would you make this prayer of David, your very own prayer today? Here is a prayer that comes from the true servant of God. It comes from a heart that is sincere! You cannot truly pray this prayer without being sincere. There are **five great verbs** that stand out: **search** (examine) me; **know** me; **test** me; **see** me; **lead** me.

There is a need for such a prayer, across this great land of ours, & even within the walls of our church. **I** need to pray this prayer; **you** need to pray this prayer. **We all** need to pray this prayer! We cannot sincerely pray this prayer without taking a **good look** within; & as we look within, we must consider the **motives**, the **thoughts**, the **desires**, the **purposes**, which continually work away at our hearts. Search me, O God; Investigate my conduct; examine my heart; put me to the test; examine my thoughts, **get a clear picture of what I'm about**. I desire to be free from all sins, & sinfulness. I desire to walk, to live in the way of true righteousness, godliness, holiness!

My friends, will you join me in making this your prayer today? In allowing God to search your heart? In allowing the spot light of God to shine within us today? Let this be a time of personal spiritual inventory.

My intent is **not to unchristianize anyone**, but to give opportunity for the Holy Spirit to help evaluate your relationship with God. This kind of prayer, when prayed in true sincerity, cannot fail to move the heart of God to forgive & to cleanse! There are **three elements** about this prayer which ought to be noticed:

1. It Is an Honest Prayer!

Abraham Lincoln once said: “You can fool **all** the people **some** of the time, & **some** of the people **all** the time, but you cannot fool **all** the people **all** the time.” I would add to that thought, **you cannot fool God any of the time!** There is no need for pretense with God! He already knows us, & He knows **who** we are, & **what** we are. God knows you from beginning to end; more importantly, **He loves you**, & He wants what is best for you.

So here is a prayer that strives to be **totally honest** with God! Open honesty with the Lord is the best way to make spiritual progress. Some people find it easier to **play games** with God, then to really be honest & open with

God. The Bible is filled with the stories of people who played those games, & found they didn't work. **Adam** unsuccessfully played a game of **hide & seek** with God, trying to hide his guilt behind the leaf-age of the Garden of Eden. **Jacob**, whose name means "the Schemer" played games with God, when he tricked his brother Esau into giving away his birthright. Finally Jacob got honest with God in an all night wrestling match & had his **nature** changed, as well as his **name**, to Israel, which means "Prince of God." **Jonah** played games with God's message, then tried to run away, only to find that it wasn't possible to run far enough to get away from God

Being honest with God means to **quit playing games**, & frankly admit our needs, even our sinfulness, before God. Don't play games with God! Don't try to put on a good face while hiding sin away in your heart & life. You can deceive **me**, & get away with it. You can deceive even the church, & get by. But you cannot deceive God! He knows what is really going on in your heart & mind. When we try to deceive God, **we are only fooling ourselves**. Let's be open & honest before God! Openness with God is the key to finding God's will, & keeping in alignment with His will. God is always clear & specific in His instructions, if we request Him to search us.

The prophet Isaiah is a good example. Isaiah stood tall in his own eyes, & in the eyes of the people, **until** he saw the Lord "high & lifted up." Following this vision of the Most Holy God, Isaiah's eyes turned inward. In this searching gaze, Isaiah saw himself as he really was. He confessed: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." Upon his honest confession before God Almighty, God was able to call Isaiah to even greater service! When we pray this prayer in openness & honesty, God can cleanse us, & use us as a channel of grace & blessing to others.

2. Not only is it an Honest Prayer, **It Is also a Practical Prayer!**

So many times we want people to see us as we **wish we were**, or as **we hope to be someday**. But more important than what I think of you, or what others think of you, or what you think of me, **is what God thinks of you & me!**

This prayer attempts at seeing ourselves **as God sees us!** It is not asking what the **world** thinks; newspapers, books, & gossip may give the very **opposite** report of us to what God would give. They may praise, where God condemns; or they may condemn, where God praises. This prayer does not even ask for the opinion of our nearest & dearest friends; even they may be deceived by us. You may be successful in the eyes of this world, & be poverty stricken in the eyes of God. Or you may be poverty stricken as the world sees you, & be rich in the heart of God through His marvelous grace! Men look on the outward appearance -- but God looks on the heart.

The practical aspect of this prayer is to discover what God thinks of us! Someday we shall each one stand face to face with God! Then we shall be unveiled, & the innermost secrets of our hearts will be laid bare. It is far better, & far more practical for us to find out **now** what God thinks of us; **for now we can make up at once what we lack in order to be right with God!** In that day of judgment it will be too late!

So we need to know **now** if there is "some wicked way" in us: some unbelief; some pride; some selfishness; some worldliness; some covetousness; some envy, some thing that God finds offensive. Lord, "point out anything in me that offends You" (NLT). "See for Yourself, Lord, whether I'm doing anything wrong." My friends, **it is the practical thing to do!!**

The story is told of a home which had a secret chamber that was always kept locked. An elderly member of the family had ordered the servants never to unlock it. After his death, curiosity prompted someone to find the key, &

inspect that forbidden closet. They were **shocked** to find that it contained **a glaring skeleton!** Is there a corner in your life you have never opened to God? Is there a chamber we prefer that other eyes do not see, & into which we wish the light would never shine? Be wise, be practical, & **open it** by repentance & confession. If you don't, sooner or later God will have to break the seal, & reveal its dreadful contents.

Oh that we might pray with the psalmist : "Search me, O God, & know my heart; try me, & know my thoughts; & see if there be any wicked way in me."

3. This is an Honest Prayer & a Practical Prayer, **It Is Furthermore a Personal Prayer!**

One of the most difficult tasks we have in life is to come face-to-face with **ourselves**. It is easier for us to see the faults in others, than it is to admit a fault within ourselves. Jesus illustrates this with the story of our being critical of a **speck** in someone else's eye, **while having a beam in our own eye!** The standards we have for ourselves are rarely as strict as those we hold for others. We condemn in others, what we excuse in our own life

But here is a prayer that looks within! **It is so personal!** Note the **personal pronouns**: search **me**, O God; know **my** heart; try **me**; know **my** thoughts; see if there be any wicked way in **me**; & lead **me**. As the old Southern Spiritual says: "It's not my brother, nor my sister, **but its me**, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." The problem is, **the greater the guilt in a man's heart, the more he points his finger at others**. But in this prayer, we are **not** pointing our finger at others; we are pointing our finger at ourselves!

Ask yourself some personal questions: Am I cheating, lying, hiding, stealing? Am I envious, jealous proud, resentful? Is there any self-pity, or selfishness in **my** heart? Is there any unresolved conflicts; any unconfessed sin? Am I **warm** toward the things of God? Or have I become **cold** in my heart? What mask do I wear? What games do I play? What misleading impression do I try to leave behind? What will happen when the curtain is finally lifted?

Never mind how much I blunder; we all do at times. The question is, "Am I genuine & sincere; a stranger to hypocrisy?" If my motives are right, God will overlook my mistakes. I may make mistakes, but is there any **mistaken way** in me?

Charles Wesley was a great hymn writer; many of his songs are still favorites in the Church. He wrote the words:

*A charge to keep I have, -- A God to glorify; A never dying soul to save, -- & fit it for the sky.
Help **me** to watch & pray -- & on Thyself rely, Assured if I my trust betray -- I shall forever die.*

I am responsible first of all for myself! You are responsible first of all -- for yourself!

Conclusion: - This kind of prayer is never a comfortable exercise. There is some kind of **reluctance** to bare our soul voluntarily to the **searching gaze of God**. But it is nevertheless **wholesome & spiritually rewarding!** There are **rich spiritual rewards** in submitting ourselves to the heart searching of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, if we are going to experience the best that God has for us, then the prayer for God to search our hearts is **necessary!** And God, Who is ever so faithful to us, will reveal the inward pollution within our soul! He does so, **not to condemn**, but so that He can **lead us** in the paths of **spiritual victory!** He does so that He might **cleanse us!**

To pray, "lead me" suggest a willingness on our part to follow, to obey, to respond, to His gentle leading. This

kind of **honest & practical & personal prayer** will bring genuine spiritual renewal & victory as we walk on the road of everlasting life.

One of the conditions of experiencing **spiritual victory** is to allow God to search the soul until inward defilement is frankly & honestly admitted, confessed & cleansed away by the precious blood of Christ. My friends, don't settle for anything less than the **best** that God has in store for you. This prayer can be a wonderful new beginning, as we ask God to search us, pointing out our hurtful ways, & to lead us on the path of everlasting life.

Today, if you are feeling a lack of love & power in your Christian life; & spiritually you are treading a "dry & thirsty land" maybe there is some soul searching that would be beneficial to you, in order for the Lord to cleanse you, & to pour His joy into your heart.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart today,
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray;
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleans me from every sin, and set me free.
I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill Thy word and make me pure within;
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.*

*Lord, take my life, and make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine;
Take all my will, my passion, self and pride;
I now surrender, Lord, in me abide.
O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee;
Send a revival, start the work in me;
Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need;
For blessings now, O Lord, I humbly plead. -- J. Edwin Orr*

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