



Week 35: Psalms 131-140

Study Guide for the week of Aug. 24-30

Personal reflection / journaling exercise

This week, spend time meditating on Ps 139:1, 23-24.

We live in an age of self-absorption, yet despite our obsessive navel-gazing, we too often miss an accurate assessment of the situation, ourselves and God.

Ps 139 invites us into a type of prayer called the prayer of examen. In it, we welcome God to “search me ... and lead me.” In this type of prayer, we discover how God has been present in our day and how we responded to him; we also allow God to show us those areas that need to be cleansed, purified and healed.

This week, invite God to join you in a spiritual inventory each evening. Quiet yourself and begin by praying Ps 139:23-24. Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you see through God’s eyes ...

- What gifts you have received during the day that you can be thankful for.
- Where God has been working during they day in your life; where you cooperated with God; where you were uncooperative with God.
- The forgiveness God offers for the times when you have not been attentive and responsive to God’s presence and love in your life.
- How God will guide you through tomorrow.

End by praying Ps 23.

Discussion starters

1. Have you ever been around young kids when they kept repeating, “Watch me, Mommy! Look at me, Daddy!”? Do you remember doing the same thing yourself when you were younger? Has your hunger for attention and adoration disappeared? What are the ways you seek attention today? Reread Ps 131. This psalm is one of humility (v. 1) and trust (v. 2). What would happen to your hunger for attention if you stopped striving for eventful experiences (including spiritual ones) and instead quietly slipped into God’s presence and allowed him to quiet and comfort you as a mother lovingly quiets her tired or frustrated child?
2. Reread Ps 133. What “brothers” (NLT) or “kindred” (NRSV) do you live with? Make a list of as many of your relationships as you can (including your small group). How are you contributing to unity in those relationships? To disunity? What good and pleasant things have you experienced when you work toward unity?
3. Do you enjoy reading Ps 136 with its response for each verse, or do you find it repetitious or boring? Why? Why do you think the psalmist constructed the psalm this way? More than likely, this psalm was read responsively with the congregation adding the refrain. Is it important to remember you are involved in God’s story? Are you more comfortable with being involved or do you tend to be more of a bystander or consumer of “God things”?

(over)

4. Ps 137 refers to the Babylonian Exile (587-538 BC) when Solomon's Temple was destroyed and the Israelites were forcibly taken to Babylon; as such, it expresses grief and anger (v. 1-4). The central theme of the psalm is found in v. 5-6 – what is it? Why is remembering so important? In the face of monstrous evil, what is the worst response? The best response? Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, has said he could tolerate a memory of silence but not a silence of memory. Why do you think Wiesel believes this?
5. The last verse of Ps 137, verse 9, is often omitted when the psalm is read. Why do you think people omit the verse? Are you shocked by the verse? Why or why not? Do you believe punishments should fit the crime? This is actually what the psalmist is demanding of God. Still uncomfortable? Miroslav Volf, a Christian theologian who was born in Croatia and lived through the violence between the Serbs and Croats in the 1990s, has said, "Rage belongs before God." How do you deal with rage? What does Ps 137 teach about dealing with rage?

Bible verse to memorize: Ps 139:23-24