

Welcome and Reminders

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Prayer and Praises

Introduction

In Greek mythology a beautiful youth named Narcissus refused all love, including that of the mountain nymph Echo. As a punishment, he was made to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool. Day after day he gazed lovingly at himself, unaware of his folly and unable to satisfy his longings.

The Bible does not emphasize self-love – although it does affirm our value as individuals. Scripture tells us: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Rom 12:3).

The only proper mirror for seeing our true selves is God's Word. As we look in the pages of Scripture, we find much to affirm and encourage us. We discover the astonishing fact that we are God's artwork, the masterpiece of God's creation. We find the answer to our longings to be loved and accepted unconditionally. Our spirits soar as we learn the wonder of what God intends us to become in Christ.

This study will gain a biblical and balanced vision of who we are in Christ.

Wonderfully Made

Psalm 139

- ¹ O SOVEREIGN, you have searched me
and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.
- ⁵ You hem me in—behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
- ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake,
I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ If only you would slay the wicked, O God!
Away from me, you bloodthirsty people!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,
and abhor those who rise up against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Craftsmen in medieval times would work for months on a special piece that displayed their finest artistic skill. Finally, when the work was finished, they would present it to the craftsmen's guild in hopes of achieving the rank of master. The work was called the masterpiece.

In Psalm 139 we see God the master craftsman, lovingly at work on God’s masterpiece. This Psalm can have a profound impact on the way we view ourselves.

Discussion

- *What qualities do you think must be present in a true masterpiece?*
- *According to Psalms 130, what specific things does God know about us (v. 1-6)?*
- *How do you respond to the fact that God constantly attends to your every thought, word and action?*
- *The psalmist declares that God’s knowledge of him is wonderful (v.6). Yet why do you think he also feels an urge to flee from God’s presence (v. 7-12)?*
- *How do you hide your true self from God?*
- *When do you hide your true self from others?*
- *What words are used to describe God’s Activity and artistry in making us? (v. 13-16)?*
- *What words might you add to that list?*
- *Do you think of yourself as God’s artwork, his masterpiece? Why or why not?*
- *In what sense are God’s constant thoughts “precious” to you?*
- *How does this psalm help you to feel more loved and valued by God?*
- *Take time to thank God for the fact that you are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Put verses 23-24 in your own words and express them to God in prayer.*

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Prayer and Praises

Fully Forgiven

In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy approaches Charlie Brown with a paper and pen: "Here, sign this. It absolves me of all blame." Then she goes to Schroeder: "Here, sign this. It absolves me of all blame." Finally she come to Linus: "Here, sign this. It absolves me of all blame." As she walks away, Linus comments: "Gee, that must be a nice document to have."

We all have various ways of dealing with our guilt. But this chapter of Hebrews describes the only true and lasting way to have a clear conscience.

- *What are some of the common reasons people feel guilty?*

Hebrews 10:1-18

¹The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ²If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;

⁶with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

⁷Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, O God.' “⁸First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ⁹Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

¹⁶"This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts,

and I will write them on their minds." ¹⁷Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts

I will remember no more." ¹⁸And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Discussion

- *The same Old Testament sacrifices were repeated endlessly year after year (v. 1) What does this imply about their effectiveness (v. 2)? Explain your answer.*
- *Instead of removing guilt, why did the Old Testament sacrifices sometimes produce guilt v. 3-4?*
- *What methods do you sometimes use to get rid of your guilt?*
- *How does the way God views you compare with the way you view yourself?*
- *What personal barriers hinder you from viewing yourself the way God views you?*
- *Verse 18 might be paraphrased: "Because God has completely forgiven you, there is nothing else you can or need to do to gain God's acceptance." What effect should this have on the way you see God viewing you?*
- *Thank God for the fact that you are full forgiven and eternally accepted in Christ. Ask God to heighten your awareness of God's grace?*

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Eternally Loved

Self-esteem is sometimes built on a weak foundation – the way we look, how much money we make, the size of our home, even the type of car we drive. In a materialistic society our personal worth is often measured by our net worth. Judged by these standards, Jesus himself would be considered a worthless failure.

Fortunately, the world's standards are not God's standards. God does not love us because we have material valuables. We are valuable because God loves us.

➤ *Why is being loved essential to our self-esteem?*

Romans 8:28-39

²⁸*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God, and who have been called according to the Divine's purpose.* ²⁹*For those God foreknew God also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus, to be the firstborn among humanity.* ³⁰*And those God predestined, God also called; those God called, God also justified; those God justified, God also glorified.*

³¹*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³²*The Almighty who did not spare God's own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will God not also, along with Christ, graciously give us all things?* ³³*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴*Who has right to condemn? Christ Jesus, who died—*

more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the Almighty who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Discussion

- Here in Romans Paul speaks of “the good” and “God’s purpose” in verse 28. What is God’s good purpose for us (v. 29)?
- How might God’s definition of “the good” sometimes conflict with ours?
- How can we know with absolute certainty that God is “for us” (v. 31-32)?
- What are the implications of God being for us?
- How might such things as trouble, hardship, famine or death (v. 35-36) cause us to question God’s love for us?
- How should God’s love for us and God’s good purpose for us affect the way we feel about ourselves?

Take some time to thank God for God’s unyielding love. Thank God for the intensity of God’s love which led God to sacrifice God’s son so that you might have life.

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Greatly Blessed

Augustine wrote that a “Christian should be a hallelujah from head to foot.” In other words, our lives should be filled with praise to God. But what if they're not? What can we do to ignite our souls when they are damp and cold?

The answer is found in Ephesians 1:3-14. These verses, which are one long sentence in Greek, contain Paul's prescription for praise.

- We sometimes speak of “counting our blessings.” Why is that a helpful exercise?

Ephesians 1:3-14

³Praise be to the God and Heavenly Parent of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in God's sight. In love ⁵God predestined us to be adopted as children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with God's pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of God's glorious grace, which is freely given us in the One God loves. ⁷In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And God made known to us the mystery of God's will according to God's good pleasure purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

¹¹In Jesus we were also chosen, having been predestined according to God's plan who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of God's will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of God's glory.

Discussion

- Why is Paul so full of praise to God in the Scripture above?
- We have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ (v. 3). What specific blessings are mentioned in verses 4-14?
- How should our new identity in Christ affect the way we view ourselves?
- Verse 10 describes God's ultimate goal, not only for us but for the entire universe. How would you describe that goal in your own words?
- To what extent do your personal goals reflect God's ultimate goal?
- Paul uses the phrase "to the praise of God's glory" three times in this passage (v. 6, 12, 14). What does it mean to praise God's glory?
- According to Paul, what role does praise have in our lives, both now and eternally?
- Praise is like a fire that needs fuel. If our lives are lacking in praise, what might Paul recommend?
- Reflect on the many ways God has greatly blessed you in Christ. As you feel motivated to do so, praise God for God's goodness and grace.