

Psalm 139:7-12. It is a testimony of God's steadfast love that despite all the times His people sin against Him, He never leaves them. David celebrates God's faithfulness to be with him throughout life.

Israel spent 40 heartbreaking years wandering in the wilderness. It's a pretty sad story. After witnessing plagues fall upon Pharaoh, the Red Sea part, and food rain from heaven, the people still questioned, doubted and disbelieved. Even when told to take the land that was theirs, they refused and the Lord condemned them to wander without purpose until every adult had passed (Num 14:22-23).

Forty wasted years. Moses led them out of Egypt into what should have been a crescendo of blessing. After that first generation had died, the mantle of leadership fell to Joshua. His first task was to conquer Canaan that the next generation could live in the land of promise, but the odds were greatly stacked against him. How could Israel dominate all of Canaan or take every one of their fortified cities? How could he lead a people prone to rebel and defy authority?

Joshua's orders must have been frightening though they were clear. On day one, God encouraged him with these words: "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Josh 1:5). The Lord wanted his servant to know that despite the odds, never would he be alone. What Joshua needed for success was not better people or a greater army, but God Himself. He already had what he needed to carry out his orders. He needed only to obey.

**"GIVE ME THE GRACE TO DO AS YOU COMMAND, AND
COMMAND ME [O LORD] TO DO AS YOU WILL."**

~ AUGUSTINE

No matter how far a believer might roam from God, God is always there never to leave. The assurance that God gave to Joshua is the same one that David refers to in Psalm 139:7-12. After rejoicing that God knows him, he celebrates that God is always with him. Verses 1-12 could be summarized as, "Lord, You know me, and You'll never leave me."

TWO QUESTIONS

Psalm 139:7—Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

David fled from God when he murdered Uriah, slept with Bathsheeba, and lied to the entire nation (2 Sam 11). He persisted in sin and fled from the Holy Spirit. What he discovered is that God's Spirit never abandoned him despite the depth of his sin. In those months of sin, no doubt, David wanted to escape. After confessing what he had done, he rejoiced.

Consider the prodigal prophet Jonah who fled "from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3). He was called to evangelize Ninevah, a city 600 miles east of Jerusalem. He, instead, made plans to retire in Tarshish, 2,000 miles west. He wanted to run as far as possible hoping the Almighty would never find him. His plan didn't go well.

What was Jonah thinking? He thought that God was like the gods of other nations. The Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians and every other world-power in the eighth century B.C. worshipped localized deities. Their gods exercised power only over a certain realm or location. No god at the time was thought to be sovereign over the entire universe and all it contains. Jonah took hold of this idea and fled. Bad thinking begat worse thinking, and he sinned.

Like Jonah, David knew the Lord, but for a period of his life fled from God's presence. He may not have localized God, but his thinking was no better. He thought he could escape without anyone ever knowing what he had done. Like forcing a ball under water with all his might, truth eventually surfaced for all to see. God saw and then used the prophet Nathan to show the world what the king had done (2 Sam 11).

Where could David go from God's Spirit or flee from His presence? There is nowhere. For a believer who is walking in sin this is an awful thought. For the one walking in righteousness with the Lord, no other truth could bring more peace, comfort and joy. It is as Paul celebrates in Romans 8:35-39 that nothing could separate him from the love of God. Nothing outside of him or even within his heart could make the Lord leave. As believers, we are secure in Him forever unable to flee His Spirit. In our worst moments, He is still with us.

The God Who Never Leaves

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Psalm 139:8—If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

David ponders that if he were to travel to the highest heaven, God's Spirit would be with him. Likewise, if he went to the lowest hell, he would not be abandoned there either. These are extremes. If God would be with David at the most polar extremes of creation, He would be with David anywhere in between.

God is all-present or omnipresent (2 Chr 6:18; Jer 23:24), but this isn't the focus of these verses. David is a sinner who has been personally touched by the depths of God's mercy and grace. He stands astonished not that God is present everywhere, but that God is with him everywhere.

David was from the small tribe of Judah, the youngest of his brothers, a mere shepherd boy. He was practically insignificant, and when he became significant sinned greatly. That the Spirit remained with him throughout life says little about David and everything about a God who is gracious and altogether faithful.

Psalm 139:9-10—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.

The "wings of the morning" are the earliest eastern lights of sunrise, the very cracks of dawn. The "uttermost parts of the sea" refer to the western ends of the Mediterranean. From the extents of east to west, the farthest extents a man could possibly travel, the Spirit of God would be there. The king who had once fallen into sin could not escape. Having been forgiven so much, he was glad and rejoiced in the thought.

The more we come to realize our sin, the more we see how faithful God is with His people. He's offended, and yet in Christ, He forgives and chooses to remain with us forever.

Psalm 139:11-12—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.

Light and darkness are frequent metaphors in Scripture for good and evil. Evil is often carried out in the darkness where it can hide. Goodness has nothing to hide, and so, light is enjoyable.

Regardless of whether David walked in the light or in the darkness, God's Spirit would not leave. He had never been to heaven or hell, nor had he traveled to the farthest extents of east and west. Yet, he did know what it was like to walk in light and in darkness. David knew experientially that the Spirit remained with him even in the depths of his most sinful moments.

FINAL THOUGHTS...

Heaven or hell, east or west, darkness or light—God's Spirit went with David wherever he went, whatever he did. As believers, if the Lord can see everything we do, how then should we live our lives (Psa 119:168)? David understood that even the darkest most hidden recesses of his heart were fully known by God. A sobering reality.

Psalm 139 is not a warning—it is celebratory. For those who are saved, we should rejoice that God's Spirit never leaves. In all of life's adversities, this should be our greatest comfort. We will never be abandoned or able to out-sin the grace and patience of God (Rom 5:20). He who created the world and ordered its events from age to age is the same God who dwells forever with His people. He is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23). In times of great hardship, what a comforting thought.

We can be tempted to think we need so much in life in order to serve God, have joy or be content. The truth is that as believers, we already have all that we need—God Himself. When Joshua was called to perform an impossible task, the Lord told him, "I will be with you." He gave the same promise to Gideon, Jeremiah and His disciples before sending them out into the world (Jdg 6:12; Jer 1:8; Matt 28:20). Whatever tasks God has for His people to do, He is all they need and never leaves. Let us rejoice with David that this is the case.