

You Can Run But You Cannot Hide

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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You know, we live in a world today that has a lot of different ideas, opinions, philosophies and such and there may be many of you even here today or those watching, or those who will hear about our service, who think, "Well, those are nice words. I mean, that we can have peace because greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world." And you may be wondering who came up with that? God. 1 John 4:4, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them," listen to this, "because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." The reason that we can have the peace that song talks about is not because we desire it, we want it, we hope for it, it's because God actually said greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. So today as we open the word of God, the promises that we're going to read today, though he wrote them historically 3,000 years ago, are just as real and relevant today.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we approach the reading, the studying and the responding to your word, God that is my very simple prayer, that this wouldn't be seen as just words of encouragement or ideas or just an opinion of one or a few or even the many but, Lord, we would hear today that these are your words from your throne for our lives. Thank you, O God, that as we come into this place, you've gathered us of all stages, there is all ages, Lord, we have come as your family, now Lord, instruct us, teach us, encourage us, but more than anything convict us of the truth of your word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I'm gonna make it easy on you, open to the middle of your Bible, what we typically know as the book of Psalm 139. As you're turning to Psalm 139, you know, today you and I whether we realize it or not, we have adopted a new vocabulary, a new language that I would daresay many of us never had as a part of our vocabulary some months ago. Prior to this global pandemic, did any of you ever ask anybody else to socially distance? It was just something we did not do. How about shelter at home? Self-quarantine? I mean, these are words that today we hear numerous times, we have a pretty good idea of what they mean, but essentially what has occurred and I understand the medical reasons, I understand all that, is that as a culture, as a society, as a humanity, because of what is happening around us, we're doing everything we can to isolate

ourselves from that which could possibly be harmful to us. I understand the medical reasons, I'm not disputing that, but you do understand that humanity was designed to interact with each other, humanity was designed to converse with each other. We were actually according to the Bible it says give a holy kiss in the book of Romans so I think a hug is, you know, being kind of liberal there. So we were designed and so what is happening is over the last few months is we've become very good at distancing ourselves, isolating ourselves, and becoming very individualistic. Here's the problem. Sometimes even though we're doing it for rightful reasons, our practice in life with other people can, shall I say, bleed over into our relationship with the Lord. Let me ask a question: how many of you have socially distanced yourself from God? How many of you, you know God's at work in a certain place, doing a certain thing, and you say, "You know what? I think I would rather just shelter in place." And so today as we turn to Psalm 139, we're gonna discover that there is no place we can go where he is not, there is no action that can take place that is somehow removed from his view or his understanding, and I hope today that, yes, it will bring conviction, but I hope it brings comfort that there's nothing you're gonna go through, there's nothing you're gonna walk through, there's nothing that you're gonna experience in life that God is not there with you the entire time.

Psalm 139, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. 7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. 13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. 15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. 17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! 18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. 19 Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. 20 For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. 21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that

hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? 22 I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

What we discover in Psalm 139 is when it comes to our relationship with God or our lack of relationship with God, is we can run but we cannot hide. In other words, wherever we believe that we can somehow arrange ourselves so as to be absent from his impact, absent from his influence in our lives, we think that if we distance, if we isolate, if we sequester, if we quarantine, whatever word we want to use, that somehow we can live our life completely independent from God's impact and influence and according to chapter 139 of Psalms, you can go up to heaven and he's there, you can go to the depths of hell, he's there. Everywhere you find yourself, he is there. Now for some of you that brings great comfort and for others maybe great conviction, and so today I just want to simply address the attributes of God that are addressed in this passage and the attitude that you and I should have in response to those attributes.

Now if we were just talking about who God is, his attributes, we could spend hours, days, in fact, we could spend literally years discussing but today three very simple yet broad concepts. Now these are some of those big what I call Scrabble words, the fact that God is omniscient, he's omnipresent, and he's omnipotent. Simply what that means is this: God knows everything, he's everywhere, and he is all-powerful.

Now let's work that out for just a moment. In fact, Psalm 139 begins to express this. Look in verse 2 when it says, "You have known my thoughts from afar." How many times did you see Jesus Christ, particularly in Mark 2, four friends bring a crippled man through the roof unto Jesus, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious individuals of the day, they were disputing with Jesus and what did he say? "He perceived the thoughts of their heart." You have never had a thought that the Lord has not been completely aware of. Let me give you a trite little phrase: has it ever occurred to you that nothing's ever occurred to God? He's never been taken by surprise. He's never been caught off-guard. Maybe you've found yourself in situations before where you had the "wisdom not to speak it but you know what you thought." Maybe you had the discernment not to go there but your heart wanted to.

On the other hand, maybe you're much like the early disciples who were called by Jesus. In fact, Nathanael is one of my favorite of the disciples. You say, "Why Nathanael? He doesn't do much in the Bible." Well, there's one specific scene there in John 1. The disciples are coming unto Jesus and Jesus makes this statement that he wants them to follow and Nathanael responds, "Can there be anything good come out of Galilee?" In other words, "Out of all the prophesies of who the Messiah would be, surely you can't be the guy." And he says, "Behold, one who has no guile." Do you know what he was saying to Nathanael? "I know that your heart is pure. I know that you're innocent. I know that you're not guilty of what they claim that you are." Do you know what he does? He falls at Jesus' feet and he says, "You must be the Messiah." He says, "If you think this is good, you're about to see the angels ascending and descending from the heavens." The Lord

knew Nathanael's innocence, he knew those Pharisees' guilt. There's never a thought we've ever had that he hasn't had complete knowledge of.

Then it begins there in verse 3, it says that, "You compassed my path. You are acquainted with all of my ways." You know, do you find it interesting that humanity when we're "up to no good" tries to do so in a place where nobody else can observe it? Now we've become very brazen in our culture today. That which used to be "hidden" we've now "come out" with, but generally speaking when we're up to "no good," we try to find a place to do so so that nobody else can observe, nobody else can see, we cannot "be caught." Here's the irony: you can go to the furthest place, you can do whatever you want, God knows every way, every action that you've ever participated in.

Now on the other hand, have you ever helped somebody, have you ever been generous and then somebody else got the credit? Have you ever done the work and somebody else got the promotion? And you're thinking, "Seriously, God, why did that...?" Guess what, I got news for you: he saw your excellence. He saw your righteousness. He saw you reject temptation even if you got accused of doing it anyway.

You see, he doesn't just know our thoughts, he knows our actions, and then there in verse 5 it says, "and he knows our words." You've heard this said before, in fact I've said it myself, words are a whole lot like toothpaste, you squeeze them out and you cannot get it back in the tube. But every word we've spoken.

Now let me continue with kind of that stream of thought here. I don't know about you but I have moments and I hope I'm not the only one in the room, but if I am, confession is good for the soul, have you ever had one of those moments where you just get all alone and just explode all over the walls? I mean, you just verbally vomit everything you're mad about? Everything you're upset about? Maybe I'm the only guy that screams at the walls and, by the way, if you don't think that's biblical, just read the Psalms. David had some choice words. Job had some choice words. I mean, they got upset, "God, why are you letting this happen?" I mean, every word that we've spoken whether it be good and/or ill.

So one of the things we discover right from the very beginning is that God is omniscient, Everything in our lives, he is completely aware of whether that's the ill or the righteous. And in today's world where there is surveillance everywhere and there are cameras everywhere, there is no amount of "security, surveillance or satellite system" that can somehow surpass what the Lord already has in and of himself. He is omniscient.

Then we get to verse 7 and we discover that God is omnipresent. That means he is everywhere. Now as we roll into verse 7 it says, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I go from your presence?" Verse 8, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." Now I know some of your Bibles will say, "If I make my bed in the grave, or if I make my bed in Sheol." I'm gonna unpack that for just a moment. You know, one of the things that happens over time is whether consciously or unconsciously our theology, our understanding of the things of God tends

to work itself out not just in popular culture but even in the songs that we sing. And maybe you've heard this phrase before: for those who don't want anything to do with God and particularly those who die without faith in Jesus Christ, we say just an eternity separated from God. You do realize that every single lost person in the world wants nothing to do with God, they want to be separated from God, and they hope that hell is a place separated from God. But what did we just read? Oh, you can go to the grave, you can go to hell and God is there.

You see, we have this theology that somehow, somehow God can't look upon, can't see and cannot be "in the presence" of sin. If that's the case, why were there people at the cross when Jesus was being hung? God was in the presence of sinful mocking man, and by the way, almost every day in Jesus' ministry he was around those that were sinful.

You say, "Well, why is this important?" If I make my home in heaven, you are there. Now that's exciting. I don't know about you but walking through a global pandemic, heaven looks better than it ever has in my life. The majesty, the glory, the radiance, the fact that there's no aging, there's no pain, there's no exhaustion, there's no tiredness, I could go, it's sounding better every single day.

Oh, if I make my place there, you are there. Oh, we celebrate that, but it's that next statement: if I make my bed in hell. Let me just work through some lyrics for you. I'm gonna start with a hymn, then I'm gonna go to a very popular chorus. There is a hymn written some years ago called, "How deep the Father's love for us," and it begins to talk about how vast beyond measure that he would send his only Son for us to turn a wretch into his treasure. Then it begins to go on about how he quenched and it says that the Father turned his face away. Now allow me to share with you what that song is saying. It's going back to the crucifixion, it's going back to when Jesus hung on the cross, that there when he bore our sins, there when he took on our sins, that somehow, somehow, this is our theology somehow, that God cannot look upon, God cannot be in the presence of, and God has to "look away" from what we know as sin.

If you want to go a little more contemporary, there's a song we often sing particularly around Easter time called "Forever." Forever he is glorified. Forever he is magnified. Forever he is lifted high. Then in the chorus it talks about the cross when heaven looked away. Now if you were to walk through the seven statements that Jesus made on the cross, that "theology" comes from the fourth statement when Jesus said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And I think unfortunately our theology has come out of this, that somehow, somehow when Jesus bore our sins, when Jesus paid the price, that God said, "I can't do this. I can't look. I can't be around this. I'm separated from this." Let me ask you a question: if somehow what we know as the Trinity was ripped in half, if somehow he separated himself, then how is it that at the very last statement he says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"? If he looked away, how could he call him Father? If he turned away, how could he call him Father?

You see, here's the problem and I'm not here just to throw stones at bad theology but if it goes through, it goes through. We've got a lot of folks nowadays that don't want anything

to do with God. "I want to be as far away from him as I possibly can." They want to isolate themselves from God here and forever. I've got news for you: if you're one of those folks that says, "I don't want to have anything to do with God," you'd better hope you don't go to hell because he's there too. You say, "I don't believe God can be in hell." How do you think the wrath is there?

Here's the problem: people who want to reject the things of God, people who want to go to hell for all of eternity to get away from God, find out they spend all of eternity with God, the problem is it's his wrath and not his majesty. I've got news for all of us: you're going to spend forever with God, which place you gonna be and what's it gonna look like? Because according to this passage, you can't go anywhere that God is not. Now that might bring conviction. "Uh-oh, he was there when I was?" Absolutely. Or a great comfort. When you're all alone and you haven't seen anybody for who knows how long, particularly as we "shelter in place," do you know that God is just as present in your home in those moments as he is anywhere else you find yourself?

God knows everything. God is everywhere. And then we pick it up in verse 13, we discover that God is all-powerful. "You have possessed my reins. You have covered me in my mother's womb." Has it ever crossed your mind that there is no task that God cannot complete? There is no journey that he cannot complete? There is nothing. In fact, the theologians of the Middle Ages, they loved to come up with these somewhat rhetorical theological quandrums like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? One of the questions was can God create a rock so big he can't pick it up? You know, and we think about these things and I think sometimes we think too hard about these things but realize that there is nothing that God cannot accomplish, nothing he cannot do. How many times have you asked yourself, "I don't know if God can do this?" He is all-powerful. There is nothing he cannot accomplish, nothing he cannot see to the end.

Do you find it interesting that in the first couple of verses here, it uses the illustration of article of life, correct? I've had the privilege three times in my life, and by the way, it's only been three times that I have been there in the delivery room, and when you see a newborn baby, when you see a child come into the world and breathe its first breath, it is awe-inspiring, to realize that less than a year before it was only two cells that you could hardly see through a microscope and now it's got fingers, it's got toes, it can scream and yell that it's hungry. I mean, it's got all this stuff all on day 1, and I didn't even talk about the other stuff that happens day 1 but that's a whole other message.

But why does the Lord use this illustration? Because you know of all the things that humanity has tried to accomplish, we still haven't figured out this thing called life, have we? Oh, we've tried to clone and we've tried to do this but originating a life out of nothing, only God has the power. And yet here's the deal and I know some of you have heard me say this before but I have to repeat it because I just marvel at it, that we live in a world today that spends billions of dollars, billions, trying to listen to distant radio signals of other planets and galaxies hoping, hoping that we'll find evidence that at one point ages ago life existed, and yet we look at a sonogram and go, "No, that's not life." Oh, it's got toes, it's got fingers and it's sucking it's thumb, but maybe billions of years ago there

was water on Mars. Do you know why? It's real simple: because we don't want the things of God in our life. We want to be distant from him. We want to be separated from him.

He says, "I'm all-powerful." Then when you get to the end, kind of this middle section in verse 18 and 19, it says, "Surely you will slay the wicked." You know, in the last few weeks because we've been walking through the Psalms, there's a lot of passages about what we call the Second Coming, a lot of passages about the day that Jesus comes in judgment, a lot of passages that verify the bumper sticker, "Jesus is coming back and, boy, is He mad." Surely he will slay the wicked and just for brevity today, you realize that there's a day coming where a character we commonly refer to as the Antichrist will gather the entire armies of the world and will try to usurp Jesus Christ and there's not one that gets a single blow in. It doesn't matter who the enemy is, it doesn't matter what they possess. We can build every armament, we've got nuclear weapons today that they claim can destroy the world multiple times over. I've got news for you: Jesus Christ can squash those like we put out a candle on a birthday cake.

There is nothing he cannot accomplish, notice, both in life and in death, and so when we look at who God is and we look at our own lives, that means he knows everything about you, he's been every place you've ever gone, he's heard everything you've ever said, and can do anything he wants. Can we just agree that the very fact that we're alive should be a picture of grace? The very fact that he has not squashed us is a picture of grace? So here's the big question: so how do we respond? What should our attitude be? How should we respond to an all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful God? Notice what it says here beginning in verse 21, it says, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. 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." Those verses, they share with us kind of what our attitude, what our response needs to be.

The first thing is this: we need to champion the things of God. I know that's one of those words kind of new to our vernacular in our culture. You've heard people say, "Well, they're championing a cause, or they're championing that individual, they're championing this, they're championing that." Basically what it means is this: you are for what they are for and you're against what they're against. Notice what it says in verse 21, "Those that hate you, God, I'm in the same boat with you." Let me share with you what our first attitude ought to be: if God despises it, we ought to despise it. If God celebrates it, we ought to celebrate it. So what does that mean? That means that if God is against it, how dare we be for it?

Now I know there are some of you that struggle and say, "Why is it that God hates some things?" That's a word that it's kind of extreme in our culture. It's a biblical word but it says that God hates some things. In fact, a few pages to the right in the book of Proverbs 6 beginning in verse 16 it says, "Yea, six things, even seven things does the Lord hate." Do you know what the Lord hates? He hates a proud look. Kind of puts selfies in a new perspective, does it not? It says he hates a lying tongue. Puts politics in a new perspective. It says he hates those who sow discord among the brethren. Puts churches in

a different perspective. In other words, we discover that there are some things that God is not in favor of and neither should we. If God calls it an abomination, how dare we celebrate it. If God calls it righteous, how dare we dismiss it as archaic and out-of-date.

You see, the problem is Isaiah 5. The great prophet of old said, "Woe unto those that call evil good and good evil." And what does David say here, how the Lord inspired him? He says, "God, if you're against it, I'm against it. If you're for it, I'm for it." I know you say, "Well, that's just not the day we live in. That's not the culture. That's not the times." I've got news for you: you're not gonna be with the culture for all of eternity. You're gonna be with the Lord and so we have a decision to make, are we gonna be on his side or some other side?

You do realize it's a dangerous position to say, "God, I don't care what you've said, this is what I think." You know, I've talked to a lot of people in my life that say, "One day, one day when I meet God face-to-face, I've got some things I want to tell him." I've got news for you: you're not gonna say a word. When you see him and you understand that he is all-knowing, when he begins to account things in your life that you didn't think anybody else knew about, when he begins to share with you things that you didn't think anybody else saw, there's not gonna be a word of dispute, not a word of debate.

We ought to champion those things that he champions. We ought to be against those things that he's against even if it is politically incorrect or culturally irrelevant, nonetheless champion them. Second of all is this: candid. Notice verse 23, "Search me O God and know my heart." I know we live in a world of reality television and there are numerous shows out there, most of them have comedians and such, though I put people in somewhat what we might call candid positions, having jokes being done, awkward situations that the individuals do not know that they're being videotaped. The original show for those of us who can remember was called "Candid Camera." There was an individual who would do some type of humorous skit with somebody who was unbeknownst to them, and then he would share with them, "Smile, you're on Candid Camera," and he would point to where the camera was and then they'd all laugh and, you know, they'd deal with all the scenario. The funny thing is we think or we believe that we control the camera when we don't.

You know, a couple of years ago there was a psychology department of a college, they did a study, they brought in young people, by the way, that's why many of us were not called to be a part of the study, they brought in some young people and they had them take a selfie of themselves and post it on a social media account. Now for most of us, okay, that's easy. Click, pose, done, right? Did you know that the average young person they had did that took their picture over 14 times to get it right? Which is why that whoever you're looking at in that profile doesn't really look the way you think they do. They doctor it. In some of our cases, we would stretch it. Whatever it may be, it's not very candid, is it? When we see, you've seen them before when they get candid shots of these celebrities, like, "Ah, what is that?" It's amazing what happens when you don't have make-up artists. It's amazing what happens when you don't have people picking out your

clothes for you. Do you know what we discover? They're just as ugly as we are. They are. We all ugly.

But candid, "Search me, O God." Our response to God should be, "Okay, you know it all. Search me." You know, it's funny some of you are thinking, "You know, I don't think I really want God searching me." Go back up to verse 1, "O LORD, you have searched me." I've got news for you: you're on Candid Camera even if you don't want to. He knows everything about you and so not only do we need to be in favor of what he's in favor of, against what he's against, but we need to be willing to say, "Okay, God, do the x-ray, do the x-ray of my heart, my life, my mind." Because I've got news for you: he's already performed the procedure, have we acknowledged its reality?

Last but not least: consent. Now in our culture today consent is when you say, "I approve. I am willing." We talk about those that were consenting in the relationship, those that were consenting in the business deal. Allow me to break this down to our new virtual world. Have you ever downloaded one of those apps or updated your software and you try to install it and you can't until you agree to the legal documents that come on your screen? Alright now, remember, number 1, you shouldn't lie in or out of church, but you are in church, raise your hand if you've ever read all 45 pages of what Apple gives us. None of us. Why? We just want the app to work. That's all we care about. I just want my computer, I just want this spreadsheet, whatever it may be. We could care less about all the legalese that we have to agree with.

Notice what it says here in verse 24, "And see if there be any wicked way in me. Lead me in the way everlasting." You see, our response to an all-knowing, everywhere, all-powerful God should be, "Okay, God, if you're for it, I'm for it. If you're against it, I'm against it." Our response should be, "Okay, God, you know everything about me." By the way, Hebrews 4:13 says we stand naked before God. You can dress it up anyway you want to but he sees all the way to the heart. And last but not least, "God, lead me in the way everlasting." In other words, whatever that 45 page document is, whatever it is that I've got to agree to when I check off that box, it doesn't matter it is, I'm willing.

This is where it gets hard, as if the rest has been easy. In Isaiah 6, famous missionary passage where Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up, he sees his robe going through the heavenly temple, he sees the pillars shake, he declares that he's a man of unclean lips and he dwells among people of unclean lips. It's a pretty similar picture to this, is it not? He sees God as one who knows all, is everywhere, and is all-powerful. In the next scene the Lord says, "Who will go for us and who shall I send?" Remember what Isaiah says? "Pick me! Pick me! I'm there!" And he says, "Okay." You remember the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say? The rest of the story is God says, "Alright, here's the deal. For every 10 people you talk to, one of them will pay attention. You're gonna have a 90% strike-out ratio. It's not gonna be pretty. Oh, and by the way, there's gonna be three years where nobody pays a single lick of attention to you. In fact, you could even run through the streets without a stitch of clothing and nobody will pay attention." How many of us would say, "I'm not signing up for that"?

That's the problem with consent. Consent isn't preference. You see, some of you need to have some hard conversations with people and say, "I don't wanna do that." Some of you need to take some stands where it's not comfortable, take the stand and say, "I don't wanna do that one, or I'm not comfortable with this, or this isn't really what I..." You see, that's the problem with consent, you say, "Okay, God, whatever you say, I will do it. I will go, I will do, I will be."

You see, when we read Psalm 139, we can rationalize, we can justify, we can explain it all away, "Well, I have feelings, I have a perspective, I have this, I have that." You do, the problem is you're not all-knowing and God is. You're not everywhere, God is. You're not all-powerful, God is. And so you can "run" if you want but you cannot hide. You will never be able to distance yourself from God. You will never be able to quarantine yourself from God. And so can I give you some very simple advice? Then you might as well just bow before him and you might as well just declare who he is and turn your life over to him.