

at the burning bush. When Elijah hid in a cave, God showed up for a visit. When Peter hovered around the fire after denying he knew Jesus three times, Jesus caught his eye.

In Psalm 139 David ends with an amazing prayer: *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* (Psalm 139:23-24) David invites the God who has been on an all-out pursuit of his life to look deep within him and point out anything that separates him from God. David trusts the God who knows everything about him, the God who knows everywhere he goes, and the God who made him. We’re pretty confident that God had a talk with David about his anger problem with his enemies, too. David teaches us that God is a God for us, even though we don’t recognize Him and we have no idea about Him.

Our God is able to reach us no matter how far we have drifted away. God is there and actively working to woo your loved one to himself. Like the prodigal son on the run from his father’s love and protection, we may wonder if we have journeyed too far from the Father’s reach. The God of the universe is at work. God loves each of us and wants us to come home.

Questions for Reflection

1. When and how do you experience God’s grace in your life?
2. There are four seasons of God’s grace; ‘prevenient grace,’ ‘justifying grace,’ ‘sanctifying grace,’ and ‘glorifying grace.’ Where are you in the season of God’s grace?
3. Have you ever had the experience that God searched for you even though you didn’t search for Him?
4. How can you help those who don’t know of God to experience God’s grace and love?

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A Grace-Full Life (1)

God’s All-Reaching Love

Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

How many of you heard messages like these? “Do your best!” “Keep your chin up!” “Work hard!” “There’s no free lunch!” “If you want something done right, then do it yourself!” Most of us grew up hearing these messages from our parents, teachers, and other leaders. It sounded right to us then, but perhaps later in life we began to question them. I think our relationship with God is infused with these childhood messages. These messages are all about our human efforts, abilities, and achievements. Sadly, when this message of effort, ability, and achievement creep into our relationship with God, God becomes a cruel tyrant who wants us to do better, and we become perfectionists who can never do enough, never measure up to please and appease our cruel, divine Taskmaster.

That’s why we’re so grateful for grace. In fact, we aren’t just grateful for grace; we’re counting on grace. Grace has been defined simply as God’s unconditional love for all of creation. You might know about the acronym of the word, ‘GRACE.’

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Grace means that all our efforts, abilities, and achievements can never make God love and accept us. Every human being has lived under grace. Bible teaches clearly that God’s grace is available to all.

My question for this new sermon series is ‘how do we experience grace in our journey from the womb to the tomb?’ Bible scholars and theologians have tried to describe the way we experience God’s grace in different seasons of our lives. Some call it “the order of salvation.”

The first season occurs before we become Christ-followers and is called 'prevenient grace.' The God of creation and the universe is wooing us into a relationship with God. The second season is 'justifying' or 'saving grace.' This is the moment when we come to recognize and claim Jesus' saving work for ourselves. The third season is 'sanctifying grace,' the journey to align our lives – in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the gift of Christian community – with the holiness of God. The fourth and final season of grace is 'glorifying grace.' This is our journey from abundant life in this life to eternal life in the life to come.

For four weeks we will look to the Bible to get a better understanding and experience of this amazing grace of God. The beauty of God's grace is that God desires for us to live in it! Grace transforms us, transforms those around us, and transforms our world.

Jesus regularly taught about God's gracious love and care for every person on the planet. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quickly reminds us why entrusting our lives to God is a very good thing: *"See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"* (Matthew 6:28-30)

We have a God who is like a daddy anxious to care for the needs of his children. Jesus tells us to "look up" at the birds of the air and "look out" at the flowers of the fields. These are living witnesses to the gentle care and tender love of God. These are nature's testimonies of God's grace for you and me. Our lives are a gift of God's grace. God created the heavens and the earth, and God lovingly placed us in the midst of it all. The best description in the Bible of God's very essence and character is *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8), and God's love is unconditional.

That is prevenient grace. That is God's all-reaching love. But every person on this planet doesn't know God's love yet. So, God is on an all-out search for us.

In Psalm 139 David describes that God knows everything about us. *"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely."* (Psalm 139:1-4) God has the capacity to look into the core of who we really are. God knows everything there is to know.

David describes God's omniscience in Psalm 139:5-12: *"You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."* (Psalm 139:5-12) David declares that neither the heights of heaven nor the depths of hell are beyond God's reach. God is persistent, tireless, and lovingly resolved to convince us to recognize and respond to his grace. God's love keeps on going and going and going.

In verses 19-22, David shifts a one-hundred-eighty-degree turn in tone and content. *"If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."* (Psalm 139:19-22) In the middle of the raw stuff of our lives, God pursues us. The story of the Bible is God's gigantic search-and-rescue mission for humanity. When Adam and Eve hid in the garden of Eden, God came searching for them. When Moses escaped to Midian, God found him