

Dangerous Prayers

Lesson 2

SEARCH ME

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 NLT).

Chapter 1.1 Search Me

Our author, Craig Groeschel, tells the story about a time when his mother was in the hospital and he and his family had gathered to visit her. They were trying to reassure her that the procedure would go smoothly the next morning. She was understandably nervous, so when a middle-aged man in a black suit and clerical collar knocked and asked if she would like him to pray for her, she exclaimed, “Well, of course I want you to pray for me!”

The man pulled out a worn black book and asked her what her denominational preference was. She said, “I’m just a...well...just a regular Christian. I don’t have a denominational preference. Just Protestant.” The chaplain didn’t share her casual attitude about denominations. He said, “I’m sorry, ma’am, it would just help me know which prayer to read if you could pick a denomination that you’re comfortable with.” She smiled and politely said, “Well, let’s just go with Methodist then.”

Relieved, he returned her smile and thumbed through his little book until he found the page he wanted. He then began reading the prayer, and honestly, the only way any of them knew it was a prayer was because he told them. Before he could finish, the author’s mom interrupted. Loud enough to be heard all the way to the nurses’ station, she playfully called out, “Will somebody please find me a chaplain who knows how to pray his own prayers?”

Insight: Praying from the heart is personal and unmistakable.

Reading a prayer can be a good starting point in learning how to pray your own. Over time, though, if you want to know God intimately, you will begin to pray more unscripted prayers that come straight from your heart. As your faith grows, your prayers will likely well up deep inside you. You may not even know how to express them in words. They’re simply communication between you and your Father, the living God Almighty—deeply personal and just as unique as your fingerprint.

Read: **Psalm 13:1-2**

Many of us aren’t comfortable praying openly and freely. We assume there’s a right way or a better way or a more eloquent way. We tend to stumble into ruts and pray for the same things over and over. We get bored with our prayers. And if we get bored praying then we wonder if we’re really praying.

Chapter 1.2 Truth or Dare

- Prayer is scared communication, the language of longing, a divine dialogue between you and your heavenly Father, your Abba, your daddy.
- When you pray, the God of the universe listens. And not only does He listen, but He:
 - Cares about what you have to say.
 - Cares about all the things you carry around in your heart that no one else knows about.
 - Maybe even some things you don't know about, God wants to hear you and speak to you.

Your prayers matter. How you pray matters. What you pray matters. Your prayers move God. We're told in the Bible that we can "come boldly to the throne of grace...(Heb. 4:16 NLT).

We don't have to approach timidly or feel awkward—we can come before Him with confidence, assurance, and boldness, all with reverence. When we pray this way then we will receive his mercy, and we will find mercy, and grace to help us, when we need it most.

- Do you need grace in your relationships with other people?
- Do you need mercy for all the secret things you struggle with?
- Do you need help to get through your day?

I do, in big ways, every day in every way.

So, these three simple prayers will help us grow some spiritual muscle: "*Search me, Break Me, Send Me.*" They are drawn from the Bible, but you can pray them and, make them your own. By this I simply mean you can pray them in your own words allowing them to rise up to heaven even as they sink into your bones. They are tools for focusing your prayers and communication with God.

- They are not safe prayers.
- They're not benign or polite, or lukewarm.
- You can't just memorize them in hopes of a warm and fuzzy moment with God.

Chapter 1.3 The State of Your Heart

The first prayer comes from David. In the Old Testament, we see David squaring off against God's enemies left and right. In a raging fit of jealousy, King Saul falsely accused David of treason and attempting to assassinate the king. Saul sent his full forces after David in repeated attempts to take his life and remove what Saul saw as his biggest threat. And he knew how to hit where it hurts—he claimed David wasn't faithful to his God.

- With all his heart, David wanted to please God. He fought against his anger in order to protect and show honor to the king.
- Yet knowing that his motives weren't always perfect (neither are ours) David surrendered his heart before God and prayed one of the most vulnerable, transparent, and dangerous prayer you'll ever hear.
- Wanting to honor God in every aspect of his being, David prayed, "*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 NLT).*"

Dangerous Prayers Craig Groeschel, Author, Zondervan; King James Open Bible, Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The Daily Walk Bible, NLT, Tyndale House Publishing, Inc.

Not only is this prayer difficult to pray, but it's even more challenging to apply and live out. Because if you have the courage to pray it, then you'll need to exercise the courage to live what God shows you in reply. So don't pray it if you don't mean it.

Be forewarned, this prayer has the potential to convict you, to correct you, and redirect your life. It can change the way you see yourself or how others see you.

Maybe you're still thinking this is no big deal. Maybe you're wondering why you should ask God to search your heart when he already knows all that's inside of you. We know what's in there. He knows what's in there. So why ask something so obvious?

This is where it's tricky. On the surface, it seems like we would know our own hearts, Right? *I know my motives. I know what's most important. I know why I do what I do.* Besides, you might tell yourself, *I've got a good heart. I'm not trying to hurt people. I want to do what's right. My heart is good. I'm praying aren't I?*

- But God's Word actually reveals the exact opposite. It might be a shock when you hear it the first time, but Jeremiah tells us some straight-up truth. Jeremiah was the son of a Levitical priest born around 650 B.C.
- During the reign of King Josiah, God raised up this young prophet to take God's Word to Israel and the nations. Jeremiah flat-out says you—along with me and everybody else—don't have a good heart. In fact, not only are our hearts not good, but our heart is wicked and sinful in all its ways.
- The prophet said, *"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"* (**Jer. 17:9 NLT**).

It's easy to pretend we are good at heart, but the Bible teaches us that our heart deceives us and is desperately wicked. At its core, our heart is all about self—not Christ. It's about what's temporary—not eternal. It's about what's easy—not what's right. Its obsessed with what we want—not what God wants.

You might think, not me. My heart is good. Please remember, without Christ it's not. If we think it is, we are being deceived by our own heart. Our original nature at birth is sinful (you never have to teach a two-year old to be selfish, right?).

Insight: Our ways are not God's ways. That's why we need Christ. Not just to forgive us, but to transform us. To make us new.

We don't know but it is possible that David was tempted to cope when he was running for his life from Saul. He could have used alcohol to escape. He could have turned angry, resentful, and bitter. Or David could have plotted to harm King Saul, justifying his actions in the name of self-preservation. But instead of taking the easy path, David chose a more daring one. The "man after [God's] own heart" (**1 Sam. 13:14**) decided to pray, knowing that his own heart was capable of tricking him again and again.

Without Christ, our hearts are deceitful. That is why this prayer of David is dangerous. "Search my heart, Lord."

Chapter 1.4 Hard Choices

The author says he was in high school the first time he came across David's dangerous prayer. On Wednesday nights at his Methodist church, he and his buddies would go to their weekly youth group meetings. (He said he wasn't sure how much he grew spiritually). A couple of things stood out to him from the meetings: 1) their epic four-square battles (never mentioned in the Bible) and 2) the refreshments in their small cafeteria. Each week, some of the ladies at the church would bake them goodies—brownies, cookies, or lemon bars. Some weeks he said he went just to see what the spread would be.

He also remembered that their youth pastors didn't last long. Most seemed temporary, like they were just visiting to see if their church might be where they wanted to settle in. But, one guy had a real impact on his life.

On a trip to a youth camp about two hours from their church, the first day of camp, after a time of worship, the youth pastor taught on David's prayer, "Search Me." At the end of the lesson, he encouraged them to go off alone and pray that prayer over and over again, listening for what God might tell them in response (the author said he had no idea what God was about to set in motion in his life).

- He left the crowd and walked to the edge of the playground where the trees hadn't been cut down. Sitting near the edge of the tree line, he took the assignment seriously. He said to himself, "it was time he learned to pray—really pray."
- He couldn't see anyone else around so he said out loud, "God, Search my heart."
- He said he wished he could tell you that God showed him that his heart was pure, his ways were holy and his motives all were about serving Christ. But on that day he distinctly remembered sensing an answer to his request.
- God didn't speak audibly and he didn't see a sign in the sky. There were no parting of the clouds or thunderbolts. He said that He just sensed a very personal and holy presence.
- And in the same moment he said that he felt an unmistakable heavenly love; he also simultaneously realized that the extent of his sinfulness. He said he was a hypocrite.

His peers had voted him to be president of their youth group, a leader and role model for all the other kids at their church. But, his life was a sham as far as his faith was concerned.

He acted sincere and serious on Wednesday nights at youth group and then partied with the wilder crowd on the weekend. He pretended like he knew God, but his life and heart revealed how far from Him he really was. He put on a show for one crowd and played a completely different role for a more comfortable audience.

So, when he paused to pray "Search me," that afternoon at church camp, he was blindsided by the reality of the depths of his sinfulness.

Years later he discovered a verse that says it well: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (**Isa. 29:3**). He realized that he gave God lip service, but his heart was wicked. He talked the talk but didn't walk the walk. He pretended to be a Christian, but he didn't know Christ.

Insight: He realized the closer he got to Jesus, the more he'd have to face his shortcomings.

Praying this dangerous prayer that day opened a channel of communication with God he didn't know existed.

Insight: Instead of simply asking God to do something *for* him, Pastor Groeschel asked God to reveal something in him.

And God revealed things to Pastor Groeschel that day that began his journey toward knowing God personally. It became clear to him that he was a mess. He lied, cheated, and stole. He also admits that he did what he wanted no matter who it hurt. What had seemed normal now felt wrong. The life he thought he wanted led him to become someone he hated.

Unfortunately, that moment of truth with God didn't change him instantly, but it did help him to recognize his spiritual need. He knew that something would need to be different. And he grew to learn that that *something* was actually learning to love and serve with every fiber of his being, a *someone* named Jesus.

It's a dangerous prayer. But it's one that could redirect your life. "Search me, God.

Homework: **Read 2 Cor. 12:9; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 John 4:18; and Ps.36:2-3.**