

Dangerous Prayers

Lesson 3

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 1.5 Reveal My Fears

What is it that makes you anxious? Nervous? Unsettled? Afraid?

I'm not talking about normal external fears like snakes, spiders, or the fear of flying. I'm wondering what keeps you up at night, those things that ricochet in your mind and refuse to be quieted. Things like losing your job, not getting married, being stuck in a bad marriage, having your health fail or draining your saving account just to get by.

We don't know what exact fears were running through David's mind, but it's clear he was troubled about his safety and perhaps his future. Because after asking God to search his heart, David prayed, "know my anxious thoughts" (**Ps. 139:23**). He wanted to share his worst fears with God, to face them and give them a name. To trust God was bigger than any fear David could dream up.

Are you willing to pray such a prayer? "Lord, reveal what holds my mind hostage. Show me what I fear the most. Go ahead help me face what terrifies me."

You might wonder why our "anxious thoughts" matter to God.

- It's not necessarily about our comfort and experiencing a stress-free life. But, the answer to this question is perhaps much more important than most of us would understand on the surface.
- What we fear matters.

Insight: What we fear the most often reveals where we trust God the least.

The author says that he learned this when his wife was sick after the birth of his third daughter. His wife became sick and his fears and worries snowballed out of control. Then it hit him. The things that kept him awake at night were the things that he wasn't trusting God to handle. He was holding onto them, ruminating over them, trying to find a way to gain control over them, to solve all of his problems.

Maybe it wasn't a sickness in our situation. What about you? What are the areas that you're clinging to even while allowing them to terrify you? What fears are you withholding from God?

- If you are gripped with fear about the future of your marriage, this is an indication that you don't completely trust God with your marriage.
- If you're overwhelmed with worry about how you will pay your bills, this reveals that you may not be trusting God to be your provider.

- If you are paralyzed with worry about the safety of your children, could it be that you aren't trusting God to keep them safe?

Craig Groeschel states that from his experience praying this prayer, God has often revealed his anxious thoughts and the fears fueling them. One of his first fears that God revealed that also has proven to be one of the most persistent was that he was terrified of failing. It started as a child while playing baseball and feeling scared to death he'd strike out in front of his father who was a former professional baseball player. As an adult, he was afraid of striking out on his next sermon, his next project or his responsibility to be a good dad. He was even scared to death of letting people down.

Insight: Our fears matter, because ultimately, our fears show how we're relying on our own efforts and not trusting in our Savior.

The truth is we—you and I and everyone—are always inadequate. We're never enough. We're always weak. But here's the incredible thing: when we're weak, God's power is made perfect. **2 Corinthians 12:9**, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness..."

Our greatest fear may point us to our best chance at making a difference in the world. We need God for every moment of everyday. Everything we do of value is born out of His heart, His power, and His grace.

Insight: To please God, to serve him, to honor him, to live for him, we cannot be driven by fear. We must be led by faith.

In fact, what God wants for you may be on the other side of what you fear the most. The apostle Paul encouraged his protégé, Timothy, to cling to faith by reminding him, "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (**2 Tim. 1:7 NLT**).

The Bible says a lot about fear and not being afraid. The word "fear" appears in the Bible 437 times. Both the words, "*fear not*" and the phrase "*do not be afraid*" appear 365 times in the Bible. That's enough for everyday of the year.

Through the centuries, many Christians have believed that God's enemy, the devil, attempts to influence believers with lies. If you're afraid of failing, it could be that your spiritual enemy is trying to talk you out of doing what God has created you to do. So, pray and step into your fear. Let God propel you forward by faith. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (**Hebrews 11:6 KJV**). Remind yourself that you love pleasing God more than you fear failing.

As you pray this dangerous prayer and he reveals what is keeping you from fully following him, don't miss out on experiencing his love. Remember, "perfect love drives out fear" (**1 John 4:18**).

Let's look at a few Scriptures: **Deut. 20:1-4; Joshua 1; 2 Chronicles 20:14-17; Psalm 23:4, 27:1**

Faith doesn't mean you don't get afraid. Faith means you don't let fear stop you.

Chapter 1.6 Uncover My Sins

If David's prayer hasn't seemed dangerous enough already, then be warned it's about to get even more intense.

David was called "a man after God's own heart" (see **1 Sam. 13:14** and **Acts 13:22**). He was devoted to God's will and worshiped passionately, gave extravagantly, and led courageously. Yet, he still made mistakes—big ones. Like you and like me, he was tempted to sin and didn't always make the right choice. Even after he knew the goodness of God and had walked with him for most of his life, David still blew it. And that's why he prayed this dangerous portion of the prayer: "Search me, God...know my anxious thoughts...See if there is any offensive way in me" (**Ps.139:23-24**).

Show me if I am doing anything that offends or hurts your heart.

Hearing God's response to this portion of the prayer can be challenging. It's not easy because most of us are masters at rationalizing our wrong actions.

Insight: Most of us are good at *accusing* others, and equally good at *excusing* ourselves.

We can point out other's faults but have a perfectly good explanation as to why we do anything that you might consider inappropriate (see **Matt. 7:1**).

How do you hear from God about any offensive way in you? Let's suggest three things to consider as you are searching God's heart with this dangerous prayer.

1. Consider what others have told you about you.

- a. Is there an area of your life, your habits, your relationships, or your actions that others have suggested need to change? Is there some area of your life that is challenged by others? Have loved ones expressed concern for you, or asked you to consider getting help?
- b. As you ask God to show you if you have any offensive ways, start with what others have mentioned to you. Is there something about your life that loved ones suggest is unhealthy or unwise?
- c. **Proverbs 12:15** says, "The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice."

2. Consider what you've rationalized.

- a. Is there something in your life that is wrong, but you continue to ignore God's gracious warning signals.
- b. Consider what you've rationalized. Is there an area of your life about which others have expressed concern? And you've defended yourself? "It's no big deal, I can handle this. This is just how I cope. Besides, I'm not hurting anyone anyway. It's my life."

3. Another reason why this dangerous prayer is not only important but imperative, is that we need God's help to see the sin that's so difficult to see in the mirror.

- a. If we are not careful, we can end up like the people David described in **Psalms 36**. He powerfully stated, "In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sins. The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful; they fail to act wisely or to do good" (**Psalms 36:2-3**).

b. How often do we flatter ourselves? I'm not like them. I'm fine spiritually.

Pastor Groeschel gives an example of how God showed him the error of his ways.

- As a young pastor he had dozens of people tell him that he was occasionally too crude in his preaching. They were concerned that his humor was at best off-color, at worst inappropriate. He didn't budge. He had a strategy. He wanted to show everyone that he was a regular guy and had fun like regular people.
- His problem was that his standard was connecting with people and not with God.
- After dozen of people had tried to help him see the error of his ways, finally, a guy helped him to see the light. After visiting over lunch for a few minutes, this friend tried a different approach to help Pastor Groeschel see his problem.
- He started by sincerely complimenting the pastor's preaching, his passion, his faithful study, and his courage to preach on tough subjects. He also encouraged him about his faith in God. He told him that he sincerely knew that the pastor loved people who needed Christ and that he wanted to honor Jesus by how he lived.
- As the friend continued to build the pastor up with his words, he told the pastor that he knew many were concerned about his crude humor. And rather than accusing the pastor he simply encouraged him. He said, "Would you ask God to show you if this is something he would have you change?"

Because of his loving spirit, he agreed to ask God. The pastor said that, truthfully, he didn't plan on hearing anything different from God at all. God knew his heart. God understood his plan. So, he prayed a dangerous prayer. "Show me if I'm wrong, God. Show me if I need to change."

Nothing happened, nothing at all. Until the next time he preached. It was "promotion weekend," when the kids in church move up into a new grade or class. On that weekend his oldest daughter, Catie, had graduated from kid's church and was now old enough to worship in "big church" every week.

Several minutes into his message, he preached away with confidence and passion, glancing to the side to see his precious daughter sitting next to him wife (who also thought his humor went too far). Right before he delivered a joke that some would have considered questionable, it dawned on him, "*I don't want my daughter to hear this. I would never want her to say this.*" And in that moment, God got through to him. They were right, he was wrong. He had been sinning against God, dishonoring Him, and disrespecting so many people.

Denying the truth doesn't change the facts. It took a dangerous prayer to accept the painful truth.

Chapter 1.7 Lead Me

Are you ready to pray this dangerous prayer? Are you prepared to hear what God might show you as you do? Do you have faith to ask and the courage to obey?

Search my heart, God. Reveal my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting. Every phrase in this faith-filled cry to God is important. But it's incomplete without the final passionate prayer—lead me in the way everlasting.

- We don't want God to just show us the impurity of our hearts. We want more than to simply know our fearful and anxious thoughts. We desire more than just knowing how we are offensive.
- We want God to lead us, to direct us, to guide us to become who He wants us to be. Lead us in the way everlasting.

When you pause to pray this prayer and listen, God will speak to you. But, don't take this prayer lightly. Don't pray it half-heartedly. This prayer isn't a game or a sterile little spiritual exercise to help you have a better day. This is a soul-cleaning, heart-mending, eternity-altering prayer.

Pastor Groeschel's result of this prayer was that he consistently battled with putting the approval of people ahead of the approval of God. He believed that it was keeping him from serving God with his whole heart. He felt that becoming obsessed with what people thought of him was the quickest way to forget what God thought of him. Being obsessed with the approval of others is, in a word, idolatry.

Lead me. Pray it. Search me, God. Know my anxious thoughts. See if there are any offensive ways in me. And lead me in the way everlasting.

As you do, listen for what God says. Watch for what he shows you. See how he connects the dots and points to your deepest need.

Insight: Your deepest need becomes a gift when it moves you to depend on Christ.

Let your fears drive you to God. The fear of God is the only cure for the fear of people.

- If you battle lust, let God's Word renew your mind.
- If you are tripping over pride, humble yourself and God will lift you up.
- If you are hiding a secret sin, find forgiveness by confessing it to God and healing by confessing it to trustworthy people.
- Ask God to show you the truth, because the truth will set you free.

Open your heart to healing from a divine God. Step into the beauty of God's forgiveness and grace. Seek his unfailing, unconditional, and unquenchable love. And have the courage to pray this dangerous prayer. But, don't just pray it. Respond to what he shows you.

Insight: Step through your greatest fear and into faith. Embrace your deepest need and let it drive you to depend on Christ.

Are You Ready?

"Search me, Lord."

Homework: **Break Me.** Read and meditate on **1 Corinthians 11:24** "And when he [Jesus] had given thanks, he broke [the bread] and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me'."