

**A Day**

**in the**

**Presence of God**

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## Release

### Psalm 139 (selected verses from *The Message*)

God, investigate my life, get all the facts firsthand.  
I'm an open book to you, even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.  
You know when I leave and when I get back, I'm never out of your sight.  
You know everything I'm going to say before I start the sentence.  
I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too--  
your reassuring presence, coming and going.  
This is too much, too wonderful--I can't take it all in!

Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit? to be out of your sight?  
If I climb to the sky, you're there!  
If I go underground, you're there!  
If I flew on morning's wings to the far western horizon, you'd find me in a minute--you're  
already there waiting!  
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark! At night I'm immersed in the  
light!"  
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you; night and day, darkness and light, they're all the  
same to you.

You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body;  
you know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing  
into something.  
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;  
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,  
the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day.

*Therefore, since you know all there is to know about me, Lord, help me to own it and tell  
you about it. Open my eyes to anything I don't see, and allow me to hand over all that I  
know, and discover.*

**Exercise:** Settle into a comfortable position in your body and sit quietly for a few  
moments, breathing deeply, paying attention to your inhaling and exhaling.

Sit quietly at the base of the tree that is your life and begin to notice what is true about  
you these days. Don't rush or try to make anything happen. Let your soul venture out  
and say something to you that perhaps you have had a hard time acknowledging: Is  
there a particular joy you want to celebrate? A loss you need to grieve? Are there tears  
that have been waiting to be shed? A question that is stirring? An emotion that needs  
expressing?

Sit with what comes into your awareness, becoming conscious of God's presence with  
you in that awareness. Don't try to do anything with [this] except be with it . . . Feel the

difference between trying to fix it and just being with it. Feel the difference between doing something with it and resting with it. Feel the difference between trying to fight it and letting God fight for you. What does it mean for you to be still and let God fight (or work) for you in this particular area? (taken from *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton)

**Your notes**

## Receive

Aren't you, like me, hoping that some person, thing or event will come along to give you that final feeling of inner well-being you desire? Don't you often hope "May this book, idea, course, trip, job, country or relationship fulfill my deepest desire." But as long as you are waiting for that mysterious moment you will go on running helter-skelter, always anxious and restless, always lustful and angry, never fully satisfied. You know that this is the compulsiveness that keeps us going and busy, but at the same time makes us wonder whether we are getting anywhere in the long run. This is the way to spiritual exhaustion and burnout. This is the way to spiritual death.

Well, you and I don't have to kill ourselves. We are the Beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children and friends loved or wounded us. That's the truth of our lives. That's the truth I want you to claim for yourself. That's the truth spoken by the voice that says, "You are my Beloved."

Listening to that voice with great inner attentiveness, I hear words that say: "I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for a child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own and I know you as my own. You belong to me . . . wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one." (*Life of the Beloved* by Henri J. M. Nouwen)

*Father, I have heard words like this before, but I confess that I still do not know much (or at least enough) of what your love for me is like. I am ever conscious of my sin and shortcomings, but it is hard for me to imagine that you would long to tell me I am your "beloved" until I get my act straightened up a bit. Would you whisper this truth to me as I am with you again? Can you help me believe that the words you spoke to Jesus--"You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life"--are words that are now for me too since Jesus and I are now one?*

**Exercise:** As you have already laid your life before the Lord as you know it to be, now your invitation is to listen to what he has to say about you--about how he feels about you, about how he thirsts and longs for you, about how you are his "beloved." Listen to him tell you, and receive the words from the One who is your true lover.

## Your notes

## Rest

Not long after moving to Chicago, I called a wise friend to ask for some spiritual direction. I described the pace at which things tend to move in my current setting. I told him about the rhythms of our family life and about the present condition of my heart, as best I could discern it. What did I need to do, I asked him, to be spiritually healthy?

Long pause.

“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life,” he said at last. Another long pause.

“Okay, I’ve written that one down,” I told him, a little impatiently. “That’s a good one. Now what else is there?” I had many things to do, and this was a long-distance conversation, so I was anxious to cram as many units of spiritual wisdom into the least amount of time possible.

Another long pause.

“There is nothing else,” he said.

He was the wisest spiritual mentor I have known. And while he doesn’t know every detail about every grain of sin in my life, he knows quite a bit. And from an immense quiver of spiritual sagacity, he drew only one arrow. “There is nothing else,” he said, “you must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

Imagine for a moment that someone gave you this prescription, with the warning that your life depends on it. Consider the possibility that perhaps your life *does* depend on it. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. Hurry can destroy our souls. Hurry can keep us from living well. As Carl Jung wrote, “Hurry is not *of* the devil; hurry *is* the devil.”

Again and again, as we pursue spiritual life, we must do battle with hurry. For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them. (*The Life You’ve Always Wanted* by John Ortberg)

*Oh my, hurry often seems to define my life. I don’t want to settle for a mediocre version of my faith or my relationship with you, Lord. Would you give me a taste of what it means to “stroll” rather than hurry? And could you give me a sense of your strolling with me?*

**Exercise:** You now have an hour to not hurry. You have been encouraged to observe what is around you with a sense of awe and wonder. Go, stroll, and see what God reveals to you as you rest. Let yourself wander--physically, mentally, and emotionally. Ponder, and enjoy, what you see, hear, and smell. Stop when you feel like stopping, and move when you feel like moving. “Consider the lilies . . .”

## Your notes

## Re-enter

Marking off space for God to be at work [in my life] is a challenge because God likes doing things with me that I hadn't counted on. He likes to decide the agenda rather than docilely going along with my carefully scripted list of activities. If I leave God too little space, the desires God has for me and for our time together simply don't happen. This is the why of solitude with God. I simply make room for God to do what only God is able to do. Yet the excuses I make (to myself and to others) for not making this space are endless. Why would I want to cheat myself out of God's deepest longing for me? Is it because I don't trust God? Is it because I'm addicted to being in charge? Is it because I'm simply afraid to let go and rest in the silence of God's presence?

If I am ever to enjoy a rhythm of solitude and silence, I will always need to exert some effort. However, the effort is not to be building outwardly but to protect that little cell of my heart, the part of me where God and I get to be together--to protect it and then to find the solitude where God will enter and spend time with me. (*Running on Empty* by Fil Anderson)

### A Rhythm to Create Space for God

Jesus moved in and out—into the presence of his Father, and back out to a broken, chaotic world of need and loss; in and out, in and out. He went into the presence of his Father to be reminded of who he was (his Father's beloved Son), of his security (his Father was well pleased with him), and to discover what he was to be about (he did only what his Father told him to do). These are our big questions as well: Who am I? Will I be okay? and What am I to be about? We need to hear the Father speak to these questions, to help us make sense of the fallen world into which he has sent us. But, like Jesus, we must be alone with the Father to hear his still, small voice that is often drowned out by the cacophony of noise in our broken world. There he will remind us of who we are (the beloved, who is one with Jesus), reassure us of our security (in the Father's love), and re-direct us as we move back into the world (through the Holy Spirit who lives within us). I want to suggest that this requires certain things of us.

**Motivation**—we may begin from a sense of need or duty, but unless our motivation moves to desire, it will wither like an unwatered plant. Lovers desire intimacy and we must become receptive to the idea that God desires intimacy with us and begin to see union with him as an ultimate aim in the Christian life. Kingdom work and ministry are natural outworkings of the union; if not, they are the mere result of our own gifts and determination.

**Time**—we must begin to carve out some extended, unhurried periods of time on a regular basis. It cannot be excess or free time; it must be a conscious choice to walk away from the world of need and chaos as it was for Jesus. And, we must be pretty unmovable about our commitment to it.

**Place**—it is important to identify a place where we can meet with God; a place that is specifically for that purpose; a place where we will not be interrupted or distracted by



the normal demands of life. Meeting with the One who loves us so deeply is best served in a special place.

**Persistence**—the major contribution on our part is that we show up! This kind of overhaul in life takes time and practice. We may experience frustration, a sense of futility, emptiness and all manner of “legitimate” reasons why we cannot do this or it will not work. But as we begin to let God have his way with us and let him set the agenda for when we meet alone, we will eventually realize that something very good is happening when we meet with him. It becomes our delight just as it is his. Our togetherness is becoming the “prize of life.”

**Exercise:** Take some time to examine your life once again and consider what it may take for you to “create some space for God.” This is not the five, or ten, or even thirty minutes a day time for God, it is the more extended time that true lovers seem to find for each other. Be realistic, this must fit into your life if it is to succeed, and then give yourself some flexibility if it is to be realistic. How will you carve out the time (will anyone else need to be involved in order to make this happen), what is the place (or places) you may find to meet with God, and what will help you keep showing up?

**Your notes**

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