

# THE LINK

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## **Opening Prayer reflecting on Psalm 139**

Loving, gracious God, you know us better than we know ourselves. You know my thoughts and the motives for the things I do. You know what I want to say even before I speak the words, and for that I am so thankful. Even when I struggle to find the words to worship you, you know what is in my heart. So, knowing your presence will surround me, and your love sustain me, may I have the assurance you will hear and accept my spoken and unspoken words, for wherever I go, You will be there. Amen

## **Hymn: 366 Thou hidden Source**

Thou hidden source of calm repose,  
thou all-sufficient love divine,  
my help and refuge from my foes,  
secure I am, if thou art mine:  
and lo, from sin, and grief, and shame,  
I hide me, Jesus, in thy name.

Thy mighty name salvation is,  
and keeps my happy soul above;  
comfort it brings, and power, and peace,  
and joy, and everlasting love:

to me, with thy dear name, are given  
pardon, and holiness, and heaven.

Jesus, my all in all thou art:  
my rest in toil, my ease in pain,  
the medicine of my broken heart,  
in war my peace, in loss my gain,  
my smile beneath the tyrant's frown,  
in shame my glory and my crown;

In want my plentiful supply,  
in weakness my almighty power,  
in bonds my perfect liberty,  
my light in Satan's darkest hour,  
in grief my joy unspeakable,  
my life in death, my heaven in hell.

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

Let us pray together:

Loving God, you are always ready to hear us.

Always wanting to show us the depths of your love and your understanding of us.

Always wanting to comfort us and celebrate with us.

Our words are not adequate to thank you for your forgiveness and for the privilege of knowing we are accepted as your children and, because we are your children, we can know your peace and joy and everlasting love.

**Today's Readings:** Psalm 139. 1-10, John 1.43-51

### **Time to Reflect**

The first encounter Nathanael had with Jesus must have been a disconcerting one. They had never met before, but immediately Jesus commends him for his faith and his integrity.

Nathanael's response shows his confusion as he asks Jesus, 'How do you know me?' Jesus explains he has seen him sitting under his fig-tree, indicating he knew Nathanael was a man of prayer. In rabbinic thought the fig tree was the place one sat to study the scriptures and so, in this initial conversation, Jesus was affirming he knew that he was meeting a man who spent time with, and who was devoted to God. Meeting someone who we feel can 'see through' us can provoke different responses. When someone says the same thing as us at the same time, it can just be something to smile or laugh at and we pass it off without thinking too much about it.

But, for Nathanael, the thought of Jesus knowing so much about him was disconcerting, as it was for the Psalmist who speaks of his inability to escape from God: 'where shall I go from your Spirit or where can I flee from your presence?' In the same way we can feel uncomfortable if we think someone knows too much about us. We may consider it an invasion of our privacy or make us feel anxious. One way of responding is to put up barriers so that person, that friend, maybe even God, can't get too close to challenge our comfort.

But there is a different way of dealing with that discomfort. It appears that Nathanael, despite that strange introduction, did not turn away (John 21.2) but stayed with Jesus. The Psalmist too, although he asks where he can go to escape from God, is also positive about the closeness of God's presence. He could affirm that wherever he was God's hand would guide him and hold him safe.

In a year when life has been so difficult, and when maybe we dreamed of escaping somewhere, the Psalmist's words still ring true, that wherever we are, in whatever circumstances, we can be assured of God's guidance and love and the conviction of God's inescapable presence.

Take a time to sit quietly:

God our companion, we bring to you all who feel alone:

For refugees who have left behind their country, their homes and all that is familiar.

For those, like the women in Saudi, imprisoned for protesting for human rights.

For those who have felt isolated because of the pandemic; for students, for those in nursing homes, for all those unable to see their families.

God, who rules over heaven and earth, we bring to you the USA as they prepare for a new administration.

For our government, that you will give our leaders wisdom and integrity.

For church leaders, in all denominations, that they will have a vision of your Kingdom, the courage to believe that change and transformation in the church and the world is possible, and the strength to work towards the fulfillment of your Kingdom. Amen.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **A prayer of blessing**

May God's grace fill our lives,  
Christ's love overflow in our hearts and  
the joy and peace of the Spirit challenge and inspire us today and  
always. Amen