

Did you know that spiritual growth is the number one desire among Christian people in America? But sometimes we define spiritual growth as knowledge or serving or praying, and even as good as those are, they do not equal spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is defined as becoming more like Christ. It is about your heart being shaped and filled by Christ’s Spirit. This series leading to Easter is dedicated to your spiritual growth. Let’s review again: Admit your need, Believe in Christ, Commit your way to him, Dig deeper. This leads us to our Scripture teaching for today found in **Psalm 139:1-4, 16 & 23-24**.

This whole Psalm is a marvelous record about God’s character. The subject is so mind-stretching that I just wanted to stick with the one emphasis, focusing on God’s attribute of omniscience. Nothing about you is hidden from him. Everything that is real and true is known by God. Psalm 139 presents two aspects that will help us understand God and ourselves better — like two sides of the coin.

☉ **Heads** — God’s examen. This is the Latin word for examination and refers to “an accurate assessment of the true situation.” “Lord, you have examined me and know all about me.” (verse 1, New Century Bible) David told his son Solomon this, “And you, my son Solomon, acknowledged the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understand every motive behind the thoughts.” (1 Chronicles 28:9)

- ✓ Know — “intimately acquainted.” This is a relational word from a relational God.
- ✓ Discern — “scrutiny as to sift through.” It is picture of the grain being separated from the chaff. Literally the word is “winnowing.” God already knows what is real and true in your life versus what is false. It is similar to the word “search,” which literally means to bore, dig or uncover.
- ✓ Completely — “Every action, attitude and thought.” The word “complete” isn’t even used in the Hebrew text, but it is the meaning throughout these verses. When it says “all my ways,” or “sit down and rise up,” or “know it all” (verse 4), pointing to the totality of God’s knowledge.

Sometimes we don’t let people get to know us completely because we are afraid they will discover something about us that they won’t like. But the message here is that God already knows everything. In fact, in verse 16 it says, “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” This idea can be upsetting, as if to have a video of our lives presenting every detail. But the Psalm is not about shame. It is leading up to a point of honesty before God. God knows, he loves, he understands, he thinks about you; nothing is hidden from him.

“Precious Lord, why do I fear your scrutiny? Yours is an examination of love, still, I am afraid of what may surface. Even so, I invite you to search me to the depths so that I may know myself - and you - in fuller measure. Amen.”

☉ **Tails** — Our examen. We pray to God, “I invite you to search me” (verse 23). We must believe God knows and loves us so that we are not afraid of his scrutiny. The Psalmist David seemed to be aware that he could deny, or ignore, or rationalize his thoughts, attitudes and/or behaviors. He was susceptible to self-deception. A familiar story of David is found in 2 Samuel 12, when Nathan the prophet helped David see his self-deception. David wrote this Psalm later in his life because now his understanding was more mature and much deeper. He now knows that growth and closeness to God is impossible without a “partnership of examen.”

- ✓ Test — As metal is tried under fire. It is the idea of probing and purifying. According to verse 19, we know that life was difficult for David. Trials are used by God to test us. This is about inviting God to go below the surface so that he might burn away what is keeping us from freedom and depth of relationship.
- ✓ Offensive — hurtful, drifting in the wrong direction. Literally it means “the way of idols.” Spiritually it refers to a distancing from God. When we are tempted to lean on other sources for help, relief or pleasure instead of God. David is saying, “Test me God to see if I am drifting in the wrong direction.
- ✓ Everlasting — The path of growth, the way of God. No longer will we construct our own path for finding love and acceptance, pleasure and relief. We now want God’s path where we find real life. God is the life-giver. He brings forgiveness, comfort, protection and meaning. His path is best.

**Response:** I have found denial or self-condemnation unhelpful in the pursuit of examen. Denial is obvious, it doesn't get us anywhere. However, left to ourselves when looking inward, we can think of ourselves as unredeemable. Our damaged self-image votes against us and we begin beating ourselves up mercilessly. But with God alongside, he leads us to a place of cleansing and growth that is gracious and effective. I invite you on the journey of examen, knowing that God loves you. Honesty before God is not the pursuit of self-condemning, rather the path of cleansing.

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:28)

### **Reflective Questions:**

1. How do you feel about honesty and confession before God? How do you feel about sharing that kind of honesty and confession with another person that you trust? Why are both important?
2. Why is God's love and forgiveness so important when we practice the prayer of examen? How do you understand this principle of examination?
3. What have you learned from Psalm 139 through this teaching? What have you learned about God; about yourself?
4. Why is examination so important in preparation for communion? How does spiritual examination help you grow? Why doesn't denial or self-condemnation lead to the life-giving growth that God has in mind?
5. What will you take with you from this study today that will help you on your journey of spiritual growth?

### **Reading Schedule for March 1-7, 2010**

Are you ready to read through the Book of Joshua in one week?! We won't read every chapter in Joshua, of course, but this is an exciting book highlighting when God's people entered the Promised Land. This week is a good week to emphasize the hopeful vision of New Harvest Church. We are at a crossroads after settling into this new property and location that God has given us. What does God have in mind for us as a church congregation? What kind of mission has he called us to? I believe the Promised Land is before us in that we would grow in our influence for the sake of Christ, that the Lord would give us a new harvest. We are six years old and I pray that we would be used by God to be a church of influence for 1,000 people. That God would give us a heart to win, build and send many more people. I believe that's the Promised Land for New Harvest church.

- March 1: **Joshua 3:1-17** – “The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.” (verse 17) God showed his great power by working a miracle of timing and location to allow his people to cross the river on dry ground. This testimony of God's supernatural power helped Israel have courage even when they were greatly outnumbered by the people that occupied the Promised Land. The next steps in our journey as a church will take a great deal of faith and courage. Living out God's purpose in your life will need the same. What rivers in your life does God need to part? How's your faith these days?
- March 2: **Joshua 5:13-6:27** – This is the most famous story in the Book of Joshua. If I mentioned the city Jericho you would immediately know what I was talking about. “When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.” (verse 20) God uses the most unusual approach to conquering the city of Jericho. In our lives, many times we need God to break down the walls that keep us stuck. Even this last Sunday I spoke on the importance of being honest about attitudes and hurts that keep you stuck. What walls do you want to collapse in your life? How does this story encourage you? What do you think is the main point?
- March 3: **Joshua 7:1-26** – This story isn't near as familiar as Jericho. But since Jericho went so well the people proceeded to Ai, and yet were not faithful to God's commands. “But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.” (verse 1) One person/family had offended the living God and the community would all be affected. We think that God always perceives things from an individual's point of view, but God is very mindful of the community. So when Israel eliminated the sin from their community, God would bless them to move on. I wonder how the sins of our church body affect our lives. I don't understand the full implication, but I know that we are more connected in the mind of God than our individualistic way of life would indicate. How conscious are you of the church body when you make choices? How have we lost our sense of united life together as God's people? What does this story teach you?
- March 4: **Joshua 10:1-15** – The Life Application Bible reading schedule has pointed us to this story as one that would encourage faith. Even though the Israelites were fighting, they could not finish off the enemy forces of the Amorites, so God extended the day that they could complete their victory. “The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!” (vv. 13b&14) It is clear that the day was prolonged by a miracle and that God's intervention turned the tide of the battle for his people. This is such a great encouragement that God will help us accomplish what he has called us to do. He often will empower the natural means of our intellect and effort, but do not count out the fact that he is able to do supernatural things on our behalf. How does this story encourage you? How do you need God's grace to be prolonged so that you can accomplish what he has called you to do? How might you need to be patient and trust him that he will bring to completion his promises in your life?
- March 5: **Joshua 23:1-16** – “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.” (verse 6) These words are almost identical to what the Lord had spoken to Joshua in chapter 1. Joshua was faithful to take what God had taught him and pass it on. Even though his life was coming to a close, he wanted those closest to him to carry on with the same heartbeat for God. In verse 8 he uses the phrase, “hold fast to the Lord.” This could be a summary of his life. Joshua wanted to leave a legacy for the leaders they would follow. What do you think of a legacy? Is leaving a legacy an ambition that you have? Why or why not? How did God use Joshua to prepare the next generation?
- March 6: **Joshua 24:1-31** – “But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” (verse 15) You know this verse. Wendy and I used to have a plaque that would hang near the front door of our house. It had these words on it. Committing our whole lives to the Lord is the only way to assure that God's best will be accomplished (in our lives). But it is a decision. Joshua chose allegiance to God and he invites others to do the same. “Choose for yourselves this day” – what are you choosing? Could you hang a plaque that have the words of this verse written on it and it be authentic? Why or why not?
- March 7: **Judges 4:4-24** – We will meet Deborah, the judge. One Mother's Day Deborah was the focus of my message. Deborah is a great example of courage and leadership through a godly woman. “Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.” (vv. 4 & 5) God chose Deborah to lead Israel. He can choose anyone to lead his people, young or old, man or woman. Don't let your prejudices get in the way of those God may have chosen to lead you. How does Deborah's example encourage women to be fully engaged in ministry and leadership. If you are a woman, what is God saying to you through her life? If you are a man, how might God use you to appreciate the godly women in your life?