

The Truth About Identity - *Psalm 139*

Introduction:

- I want to begin with a question: What is it that makes you, *you*?
- If you only had 15 seconds, what would you say to someone you've never met, to communicate who you are?
- Essentially, where do you find your identity? What is it that makes you who you are?
- This is an important question because how you view yourself, and your own identity, even if you don't realize it, is something that impacts every part of your life.
- Recently, I've been reading through a book written by a pastor named Steve Viars. It's called "*Do You Believe What God Says About You?*". It's a great book all about gaining a proper understanding our own identity, and in the beginning of the book, he points out how much of our lives are impacted by what we believe about ourselves. He says,
 - "*Your self-image goes a long way toward explaining why you are happy, or angry, or worried, or talkative, or shy, or hundreds of other behaviours and attitudes we could mention.*" (Pg. 10)
- Your identity, and how you define yourself, is an incredibly powerful thing, and everything about the way that you live, and act flows out of what you believe about yourself.
- In a lot of ways this idea of our identity is very similar to what we looked at last week about fulfilment. "Where do you look to find your fulfilment?", and "Where do you look to find the source of your identity?"
- It fits in perfectly with this series "*Two lies and a truth*", because there are so many different lies that we are told, and that we tend to believe about our identity, who we are, and where our identity comes from. And beyond just being hurtful much of the time, these lies can be incredibly dangerous things if we allow ourselves to believe them.
- Again, Steve Viars writes,
 - "*Often these analyses are filled with lies or half-truths that can impact your heart and life in all sorts of negative ways.*" (Pg. 10)
- As much as what we think about ourselves and our own identity has a huge impact on our lives, the lies that we hear about our identity can also have a significant impact on us.

- And this is something that has always been true, going all the way back to Adam and Eve's very first sin in the Garden of Eden, and we'll look at a couple of examples of what that looked like later on.
- And we'll see that a wrong view of our own identity can lead us down some very destructive paths.
- But it doesn't have to be that way. As much as a wrong view of our identity has the potential to cause a lot of damage and pain, having a right view and understanding of our identity has the potential to bring so much joy and freedom to our lives.
- The title of Dr. Viars' book is literally "*Do you believe what God says about you?*"
- And the subtitle is, "*How a right view of your identity in Christ changes everything.*"
- So that's our goal today, understanding how a correct understanding of our identity really does change everything, and to do that, we're looking at one of my favourite passages in the entire Bible, Psalm 139. We had two sections of this passage read for us, but like last week, we're going to be jumping around the entire chapter, so if you have your Bible with you, or on your phone, I'd recommend having it open to Psalm 139 so you can follow along.
- What we're going to see in this passage, is an example of what it takes to come to a proper understanding of your own identity. How do you get to that place of having the right view of your identity, and avoid falling into the lies that we hear from the world around us?
- Basically, as we look at the words of the Psalmist in this passage, I want you to be asking these questions, "What does he believe about himself?" If you were to ask him to sum himself up in 15 seconds, what do you think he would say, and why?

A proper understanding of identity begins with a heart of humility

- The heading of this Psalm indicates that it was written by David, "*To the choirmaster*", meaning that essentially what we have here in this passage, is an ancient worship song written by King David.
- And as we look at this song I want to spend some time actually looking at David's posture and attitude throughout this passage, as well as the words that he says.
- He begins in V. 1, saying,

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me!" - Psalm 139:1 (ESV)

- This introduces the major theme that runs throughout this chapter, which is God's deep knowledge and understanding, and his constant presence.
- So as we're seeking to understand our own identity, what makes us who we are, we're beginning with these words "*God you have searched me, and known me.*"

- David then continues on to say,

“You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

you discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down” - Psalm 139:2-3 (ESV)

- He’s using some poetic language here to continue emphasizing the fact that God knows everything about him, completely, and is always with him.
- And as we read these first few verses, we can see that David begins this song with an incredible attitude of humble submission to God.
- He’s not coming to God with an attitude that says, “I need to help you understand who I am, let me tell you what you need to know about me.”
- He’s coming to God saying *“God you already know me completely. You see me, and know everything about who I am.”*
- But it goes deeper than just admitting that God knows us.
- We often say things like, “no one knows you better than you know yourself”, but if you go down to V. 4, you see that David actually says that God knows him even better than he knows himself.

“Even before a word is on my tongue,

behold, O LORD, you know it altogether” - Psalm 139:4 (ESV)

- And later in V. 16,

“in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,

when as yet there was none of them.” - Psalm 139:16 (ESV)

- We live in a world where the near constant message is, everything is about you. You have the right to be whoever you want to be, and you can do anything that you want. It’s up to you to decide who you are.
- In an article written by Brian Rosner, he remarks on our world’s view of identity, saying that in the eyes of the world *“identity is a do-it-yourself project”*.

- You have the freedom to decide who or what you want to be, to build your own sense of identity, and then you have a responsibility to defend your sense of identity at all costs, against anyone who thinks that they have the right to tell you who you are.
- That's the message we hear from the world, but look at how David approaches God here. He's not stepping into the boxing ring here, ready to fight for his own sense of identity and show God who's boss. He comes humbly to God, you almost get this mental picture of David on his knees, open hands, coming before God saying "*O Lord, you have searched me and known me*"
- He recognizes that God knows him more deeply than he could ever know himself, that he was known completely before he was even born, so he submits himself to God's knowledge of himself. And he does this, not out of a begrudging sense of duty, but out of a deep love and respect for God.

"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

If I would count them, they are more than the sand.

I awake, and I am still with you." - Psalm 139:17-18 (ESV)

- He doesn't resent God's knowledge and understanding of him, he values it, and submits willingly with a desire to hear, and know God's thoughts.
- And this humble posture towards God is hammered home right at the end of the passage in V. 23-24, which says,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting!" - Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

- It's not just that God knows him, it's that God knows what's best for him, and his prayer in this Psalm is that God would search him, know him, and then teach him, change him, and lead him in the way everlasting.
- See if there is anything displeasing in me, and lead me in a better way. Show me how to live a life, not for myself, but to glorify you.
- This is a Psalm of complete surrender to the infinite knowledge of God.

- And the first thing that we see from David's example here is that a proper understanding of identity begins with a heart of humility.
- And we see this played out so beautifully in this Psalm, coming to God with a heart of complete humility and surrender, but it's not always as easy to have this attitude ourselves, is it?
- I mentioned earlier that this issue and struggle with a misplaced sense of identity goes all the way back to the fall in the Garden of Eden, and I want to read you Genesis 3:5, as the serpent is talking with Eve, tempting her to disobey God and eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is what the serpent says,

"You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." - Gen. 3:4b-5 (ESV)

- Do you see what is Eve being tempted with there? The serpent is tempting her with her pride. The chance to *"be like God"*, and know good and evil for herself.
- Rather than trusting God's perfect and good design for the world, rather than trusting that he knows best, Eve takes the fruit, and she eats it, disobeying the one command that God had given.
- For Adam and Eve, their pride, their desire to be *"like God"*, to take that power and knowledge for themselves, be in control of their own lives and destinies outweighed their trust in their creator, and the consequences were devastating. We are still dealing with the implications of that decision today.
- And so often we make that exact same decision.
- The message from the world is the same as the message from the snake, you don't need God. He doesn't really know what's best for you. Forget what he thinks, and decide what's best for yourself. Create your own sense of identity and self apart from him, and be anything that you want to be. Don't let yourself be limited by a closed minded view of what God thinks of you, when you can be whatever you want.
- And it's the same kind of pride as Adam and Eve that causes us to ignore what God says about us, and seek out our own sense of identity for ourselves, believing that we will be better off without him. That in order to be our truest self we can't let anyone, even God tell us who we are. Your sense of identity is the most important thing about you.
- But that kind of prideful attitude is the opposite of what you see playing out here in Psalm 139.
- You see a clear picture that a proper understanding of identity begins with a heart of humility. To know that God knows you, even better than you know yourself, and that he knows what's best for you. To come to come before him with a humble heart, saying *"search me, and know my thoughts, and lead me in the way everlasting"*.

A proper understanding of identity comes from an understanding of God's love

- But those words can be kind of intimidating can't they? To come to God and say, "*search me, and know my heart*". Those words almost leave a bit of a pit in our stomachs.
- So often we're afraid of words like this, of submitting to God in this way, because if he were to "*search our hearts*", we know what he'd find. And we know that he'd find some stuff that we're not proud of. Do we really want God searching and knowing the deepest darkest part of our hearts?
- When we really consider what's in our hearts, and what God would find if he were to "*search us and know us*", it leaves us with the question, "*How could God ever really love me?*" We feel too far gone, even for God's love.
- And this is an insecurity that is backed up for us by so many messages that we hear in the world.
- Because as much as we hear the "*it's all about you*" message everywhere we go, there also seems to be this constant message of "*you're not good enough, and you don't measure up*". Those two things don't seem like they should be able to go together, yet we hear and believe them both at the same time so often.
- And as you think about the depth of God's knowledge, and the way that he knows us, it makes this lie all the more difficult, because we begin to tell ourselves, "*You're not good enough for him*". "*He knows you so deeply, so how could he ever love you? He's seen the worst parts of you, and no one could look past that.*"
- And this is one of the key reasons that we struggle so much with a proper understanding of our own identity, because we struggle to understand and trust in the love that God has for us.
- And this struggle plays out in so many different ways.
- Another example of this lie goes back to Genesis 3, you see this idea of doubting God's love in the very first words that the serpent says to Eve.

"He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" - Gen. 3:1b (ESV)

- He begins with twisting God's words and getting her to doubt God's intentions. He was trying to get them to believe that God was actively keeping something good from them that would ultimately be to their benefit, and how could a good and loving God do that?

- Whether it's doubting that God does love us, and have our best interests in mind, or doubting that he could ever love us because of what we've done, we struggle to trust in God's love for us, and it leads to a warped sense of identity, because we stop trusting who God is.
- And this goes back to some of the things that we looked at last week, if we lose trust in God and his love for us, we will begin to look for our identity, and our fulfillment in ourselves, or the things of this world, none of which can really do what we want them to. They will always leave us empty.
- A proper understanding of identity begins with a heart of humility, but it also comes from an understanding of God's love.
- I want to read for you again this section of Psalm 139, from V. 13-16 as David describes God's intimate knowledge of him.

"For you formed my inward parts;

you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,

when I was being made in secret,

intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance;

in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,

when as yet there was none of them." - Psalm 139:13-16 (ESV)

- There is so much care and intimacy in these verses.
- God's knowledge and understanding of us isn't the knowledge of some far off observer, but a God who is intimately involved and present in every element of our lives.
- Look at those words "*I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*"
- Again, the language that is used in these verses is so poetic, but paints such an amazing picture of God as a great, loving, and intimate creator who cares deeply for his creation.

- The knowledge of God that we talked about a moment ago isn't just a detached, academic kind of knowledge, it is a deeply intimate knowledge, full of love.
- And in V. 5-6 David describes God's constant presence in his life.

*"You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it." - Psalm 139:5-6 (ESV)*

- This is such a great image of being surrounded, and protected by God. David sees God as an intimate and loving creator, and ever-present protector.
- As you read David's words in this passage, you really get the sense that he sees, and trusts in the deep love that God has for him.
- In order to really trust that God knows what's best for us, we have to believe that he truly loves us.
- And the greatest expression of that love is found in the Gospel itself.
- Romans 5:8 says,

"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." - Rom. 5:8 (ESV)

- While we were still sinners, while we were still enemies of God, he loved us enough to send his son to die for us. There is no greater expression of love than that.
- Going back to Dr. Viars book, one of the things that he says in the very last chapter is this:
 - *"The most important decision that any person will ever make is what they believe about Jesus Christ." (Pg. 196)*
- So what do you believe about Christ? Do you believe that he loved you enough to die for you, while you were still a sinner?
- Because the reality is that God does know you, and see even the worst, deepest, darkest parts of your heart. Like it or not, that's true. But the beauty of the Gospel is that even after seeing that, and knowing all the worst parts of you, he sent his Son to die on the cross, so that you could be forgiven on your sins and spend eternity with him.
- All that he asks of you is to turn from your sin, and trust in him as your Lord and Saviour.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 gives such a great description of what happens to our identity when we come to know Christ, it says,

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” - 2 Cor. 5:17 (ESV)

- When you are in Christ, you are given a completely new identity, not built from the messages that the world tries to tell you, but an identity that is rooted in Christ, and his love for you.

Conclusion:

- So I hope that you’re beginning to see that a proper sense of identity has as much to do with what you believe about God as it does what you believe about yourself.
- Do you believe that God knows you, and knows what’s best for you? Do you believe that God truly loves you, and *wants* what’s best for you?
- If you have a wrong view of God, it will inevitably lead to a wrong view of your own identity, because you will begin to look for your identity in yourself, rather than in him.
- That’s why Psalm 139 is such an impactful passage. It’s one of my favourites, and a passage that I return to often when I am struggling, to be reminded of the truths of this passage.
- God knows you, even better than you know yourself, and he knows what’s best for you. And God loves you. He cares deeply and intimately for you.
- And having a right view of your own identity essentially comes down to believing what God says about you. Believing what the one who knows you better than you know yourself, and loves you so deeply, has to say about you.
- When you come to know Christ, your identity is defined as a fully known and deeply loved child of God.
- And the more time you spend in Scripture, the more you learn and come to appreciate the depth of the identity that you have in Christ.
- If you’re going to believe what God says about you, you have to take the time to know what God says about you.
- And we say it all the time, but it continues to be true, you need to be spending time in God’s Word, studying, learning from him, seeing the love that he has for you. It is the best defence against the lies that we hear in this world, to know God’s Word, and trust that the things that it says are true. That you are known, and that you are loved.
- Because as we consider our identity, God’s Word shows us that “A true understanding of our own identity can only come from an understanding of who God is, and what he says about us.”