



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

PSALM 139:23-24

JULY 2015

Honest to God

I just attended my high school class reunion and heard several times, "People don't change much." In one sense that is true. Our temperaments and family traits tend to stick with us.

Sadly, unaddressed perspectives and habits stick around too. But is it true that people don't really change?

I have great hope that we can change. My hope is bolstered by Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 6:11. After listing a long list of dysfunctional and sinful people, he wrote, "*And such were some of you. **But** . . .*"

I think history proves that if the focus stays on outward behavior, change is slight and often temporary. But when the human dilemma is diagnosed properly and the gospel solution is applied, dramatic change

can occur. Getting the diagnosis right is essential. David's request shows the way:

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)

That is a scary request. The same God who sees all and knows all cannot be fooled about my condition. It is scary to have anyone searching our hearts. I, personally, have never enjoyed examinations. Just

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going to the doctor for a physical can cause hypertension. I had a high school teacher who would have us as students individually come up to her desk while she graded our papers. I hated it. When I played football at Samford University, the game was fun. The practice was bearable. But Sunday afternoon film grades were awful. In those sessions, the score of the game didn't matter. Grades were given based on how each person did his job according to the techniques the coaches thought we should use. The camera doesn't lie. One friend, an all-American at the University of Arkansas, said that for decades he lived life like he felt on those Sunday afternoons in the film room—like

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there was always a camera watching every detail of his life. If a coach and his camera are frightening, what about asking God to search me?

If there is no possibility for real change, there is no need for the search. But if there is a way to find the enemy within—the one wreaking havoc with my life, then I want the best to do the examination. We are notoriously bad at grading our own hearts. We incorrectly define sin; excuse irresponsibility; transfer blame; and rationalize what our heart holds dear—regardless of what is obviously true. Other accountability partners can be helpful, but they too are limited in their ability to see the issues of the heart. Only the one who searches the deep things of the heart can expose the root of deception.

The cost is too great to continue unexamined. In the previous verses of this Psalm, David speaks of how much he hates the enemies of God. In verse 22, he writes, *"I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies."* He is wise enough to know that the enemy within is as dangerous as the one without. That which is hostile toward God, which cherishes its idols, that treats God as irrelevant, that demands its own

way is destroying life as God ordered it. It must be identified and displaced.

David speaks of “*anxious thoughts*” (that’s how the NIV translates verse 23). What are they? They are the wrong thinking that results from neglecting the reality that God has acted in my behalf to restore my son-father relationship with himself. All thoughts that do not sprout from that foundational reality are destructive. They deny his grace. They mock his mercy. They enthrone substitute gods. They allow worry, fear, and greed to grow unhindered in the heart. They are filled with the guilt, shame, and condemnation that come from living in an ordered world while conscious of personal imperfection.

There’s an old prayer that conveys the appropriate approach:

*Lord, show me every way original sin
has distorted me.*

*And every way that indwelling sin
manipulates me.*

*And lead me in the way of true
repentance unto life and wholeness.*

David recognized that repentance is involved. For many who don’t get their definition of repentance from God, that is a complicated exercise. When repentance is

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only seen as a regretful response to personal sin, it is shunned. Too many have given up vices and made promises to do better, only to fail again. They are ready to declare that it doesn’t work.

A great benefit of God’s searching is his view of repentance. He knows that our sin is so deep that nothing we can do will eradicate it. So he acted in our behalf in the person of Jesus Christ. Through his death, he killed the heart that is so bent it could not straighten itself. Through his resurrection, he provided a new perspective and a new power to live beyond self-absorption. Repentance is changing the way we think

about God and ourselves. We make each decision based on the truth of the gospel. Our old patterns of thought and action no longer rule. For instance, we are not orphans hoping to get back into the family one day when we qualify. We are not servants who are trying to rise in rank on the basis of our service. We are not isolated individuals trying to survive on our own wits. We are sons of God destined to display the full majesty of his splendor. When we have repented, we think in those terms.

Every **deficit** he exposes will be an opportunity to **embrace his grace**, which he has been **storing up** since before the world began.

One more thing! David asked for guidance. “. . . *lead me in the way everlasting!*” Healthy living is the result of being led by the correct Lord. We all need a Lord. We are just not qualified to make it alone. Someone is leading us, in spite of our pro-

tests that we don't need anyone. Human life was designed to be lived in trusting dependence upon a personal God who loves us and provides for us. We just aren't made to live by precepts alone. We can never find our way apart from being led by the one who sees all and knows all.

If you are tired of being tormented by the enemy within, venture the request for God to search your heart. Every deficit he exposes will be an opportunity to embrace his grace, which he has been storing up since before the world began. He only wants to give what you desperately need, but cannot afford.



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