



Sunday 26 April 2020
Formation towards Transformation – Psalm 139

A little intro and some tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us, and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. I encourage you to use this guide in a way that feels comfortable and most helpful and here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice, it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

It's important, when we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship. Be intentional. Some examples of how you might prepare:

- Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden);
- Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image);
- Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. Or you might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space.

Bible Reading: Psalm 139 (NIV)

(If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections)

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- ¹You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- ²You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- ⁵You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
- ¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.
- ¹⁹If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.

- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Message

Lego Masters

I love the fact that Lego Masters is on right now in our current global climate of heightened fear and anxiety. It's a show that celebrates colour, creativity, imagination, it's family friendly, it celebrates all kinds of unlikely relationships, it is funny and awe-inspiring – but mostly Lego Masters is a great visual reminder of the essential nature of formation.

Lego Masters & Formation



- Things take time
- There are points of pain, adjustment, fragility, breaking down, restoration and reshaping
- There is a huge amount of diversity
- The formations are fearfully and wonderfully made

Formation is not just something that happens in the past but it is an ongoing sense of growth, deepening and shaping over time

Anyone who has ever had me as their lecturer will know that one of my favourite questions to students is:

“How is God shaping you through your experiences?”

I don't know about you but I am well aware that right now – in our present lock-down experiences – God is shaping/forming me in some unexpected and at times uncomfortable ways. What about you?

One of the things that I teach when considering spiritual formation is that it is often times that are difficult and painful where some of our deepest formation happens.

Paul, in Romans 5:3-4 says, “suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us”... suffering is formative. Do we desire and seek after pain and complexity? No. Is it formative? Yes.

Biblical images of formation seem to generally have an element of discomfort in them. Take for example the image of a Potter **moulding** clay (Isaiah 64:8) or the Great Gardener **pruning** the vine

in John 15, or the metaphor of **refining** fire mentioned many times in the Old Testament. Each of them highlights the nature of how we grow and are formed in relationship with a loving and intimate God.

Psalm 139 talks beautifully about a God who is intimately personal with his creation. **“The God who is near to us is the God who knows us—who knows even those parts of our lives we would prefer to remain hidden”¹**

Often it is tempting to read just the beautiful and inspiring bits of this Psalm – and skip over the verses 19-22:

If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.

What might the modern-day equivalent of this be?

“I just HATE people who don’t seem to care less about anyone but themselves right now and the idiots who keep on meeting together and putting people at risk despite the clear instructions that we have been given – God would you just take them out? And don’t get me started on Donald Trump and the rest of the nutbags we’d all be better off without – maybe just strike them all dead God?”

This is not me at my best – it’s closer to me at my worst... and this time of pandemic and isolation is pushing many of us to some of our darker places. I myself am struggling with exhaustion, insecurity and deepened anxiety – how about you?

Psalm 139 assures us though...

“The God who has known us from our very beginnings is the God who has watched us all along. He has seen our comings and goings, our faithfulness and faithlessness. Yet he has remained present with us (v. 18). **Because God has known us, fully known us, we can trust in him when the world goes awry and seems to be in open rebellion against his ways** (vv. 19–22). And because God has known us, fully known us, we (can be brave enough) to ask God to search us to see whether there is any offensive way in us (vv. 23–24).”² to hold us, rebuild us, mould us, prune us, refine us and lead us in the way everlasting

¹ W. Dennis Tucker and Jamie A. Grant, The NIV Application Commentary, Psalms Vol 2, 925.

² Ibid., 927. (My adaptation in brackets)

A reflection and prayer of Formation (P Martin)

Written 8 April 2020

I still get to choose

Unlike so many others

I still get to choose how I will be in this in between time

Longing for back then

Not knowing what is coming next

I get to choose whether I crumble into the folded mess of self-pity

Or embrace humility and patience

I get to choose whether to self-protect and self-medicate

Or be desperately creative and hopeful

I get to choose to be vulnerable to the deep formation that comes from discomfort

Or to look for all the easy exits out of complexity

Some don't get to choose in these times and for my choices I am grateful

For my little patch of pity

For my tenderness today

For the truth of how I feel

For the fact that all of this is hard

For the sake of the little pieces of my soul that are shrivelling in the face of isolation and dislocation

God hold me and shape me – I am yours.

God let the gentle balm of your mercy meet me this day and in the days to come.

God have mercy on us all.

Amen



Communion – (have some food and drink prepared for this time)

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday on Zoom to share in communion together at rnqwd.com/communion or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "Take, eat, this is my body". Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

And now, we can do this, quietly reflecting and giving thanks to God for the ways we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We can ask God to bring to mind the ways we are being shaped and honed and moulded in this time. We can also ask God for the courage to press vulnerably into such places of formation – trusting that we will be held.

Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

Prayer

Creator and creative God, giver of life and beauty we praise you for creating us in your divine image. Thank you that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank you for the gift of free will, the knowledge of your word and the opportunities of our days. Remind us today of your desire to teach us, mould us and form us as your people in this world – as representatives of your Kingdom of love and hope and give us courage to place ourselves in your firm and gentle hands.

Strengthen us this day with the virtues of faith, hope and love. Grant us your loving guidance.

Amen.