

EHC Week 2
“Go In to Go Forward”
Psalm 139

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. **Psalm 139. Pray.**

Last week we started on the **4 essential movements for going forward into emotional health**. What are the steps we can take to grow up more and more into emotional maturity.

And we said that the first and most essential movement is to **“go up”**. We must bring our emotions and emotional life up to God. To not hide from Him but rather bring all of our feelings, desires, emotions, up to Him - pouring out our hearts before Him and waiting on Him to move.

Today, I want to talk about the 2nd movement - **Go in to go forward.**

Voyage of the Dawn Treader - Dragon.

There is a scene from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by CS Lewis that I think puts this movement on display so perfectly.

In the book at one point Eustace, who is a young boy - he's the cousin of the 4 siblings who originally found the land of Narnia - becomes a big, ugly dragon as a consequence of being selfish and stubborn. He literally morphs into the status of his heart. After being a dragon for a little bit he wants to change and go back to being a little boy.

In order to change back, he has to shed his skin like a snake. He starts by taking a layer off himself. He starts feeling better, but soon realizes that there is yet another hard, rough, scaly layer still on him. He's frustrated, he's tired, he's in pain - he asks himself, "How many skins do I have to take off?"

After shedding three layers, he gives up, realizing he can't do it. Aslan, who is the lion in the story and a representation of Jesus Christ, tells Eustace - "You will have to let me help you."

This is how Eustace describes the scene: *"I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back and let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt."*

Aslan removes all of the rest of the dragon skin from the boy, and after it is over Eustace describes it as the most painful and yet wonderful thing - he was a boy again. He was healed.

The False Self

All of us, at some level, are like Eustace (not because we're dragons, although that would be kind of sweet). We're like Eustace because who we really are is hidden underneath layers of falsehood and deception put there because of what we love (worship, idolize), because of what we've done, and because of what has been done to us.

We have learned, in varying degrees of intentionality and awareness, over time through self-protection and sin, to live out of what theologians call - **a false self**.

The true us meant to live in vulnerability and honesty and confession with God and others has gone into hiding and been replaced by a premeditated, put on display version of us.

In the words of **Thomas Merton**, who was a monk and writer on spirituality in the early 1900s - **"Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him."**

The false self is the dragon skin. It's the me I want God, others, and myself to believe is real.

The false self is...

- The me that runs from, shoves down, or just chooses to ignore anything within my heart that looks ugly and wicked so that I can trick God into thinking I'm not as desperately in need of grace as I actually am.
- The voice in our head that rises up with a hundred justifications for why it's ok you just yelled at your spouse, why it's ok you just lied to a friend, why it's ok you just gossiped about a coworker so that you can escape any feelings of guilt, shame, or inadequacy.
- The you that ignores all of the bad things that happened to you. That says "it wasn't that bad". That hasn't told a soul because you're afraid of what might happen if you acknowledge the hurt or the pain or the suffering.
- The character that just sort of comes out of you when you step into the party - where you make that joke at someone else's expense without thinking about it, where you've learned to perform to make people like you or accept you so that you feel less alone.

What happens when we choose to live out of a false self we just want God to deal with the outer layers, **we want him to heal a version of us that isn't even real and we cut ourselves off from healing, redemption, repentance - and emotional health.**

So this is the second movement we must take on in order to move forward into emotional health - **we must go in to go forward.**

There's an invitation here for us in Psalm 139, to bring God in, with his claws like Aslan, and begin to do the painful and yet necessary work of helping us see what's truly underneath so that we can move forward in redemption and healing.

There's 4 requests David is going to make of God in these 2 verses. I think they chart a path for us on how, with God, to put off the false self. To go in to go forward.

We're actually going to handle them backwards. I want to teach them, and then at the end we'll spend time showing what this might look like specifically in our lives.

Psalm 139:23-24

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

See My Grievous Ways

Layer #1 → **24 See if there be any grievous way in me.**

The first invitation from David to God is to look at his life. God see if there be any grievous or sinful, idolatrous way of living or action in me.

The first invitation is simple - come see my life. Come see all the ways that I'm living that are not glorifying and pleasing to you.

AND...Help me to see it too. Help me not to justify my actions, excuse my actions, ignore my sinful actions, lie about my actions - I want a life that's pleasing to you.

The first layer we have to peel back on this false self is lying to God, ourselves, and others about the day in and day out realities of our lives - including our emotions.

I heard a ton of feedback from week 1 where an overwhelming number of folks said - "I suppress my emotions."

Now, I'm not going to outright disagree with you, ok? But let me just kind of challenge you with something - There is a difference between **suppressing** (meaning I'm not going to let myself feel this) and **obeying but lying** - meaning I'm going to feel it and feel all of it - I'm just not going to let God, others, or even myself know what's really going on. Obeying but lying is living out of a false self.

- When you're sad, and you're sitting in that sadness and someone in your CG asks - are you Ok? And you say "Yeah I'm fine." That is a false self.
- When you're angry as all get-out, and you start praying but you're like "God, I love you so much you're the best ever yessss." That's a false self.
- When you're joyful and happy, and yet you feel like you have to put on some "world is ending so I have to be freaking out" to get attention - that is a false self.

So the first invitation is just to stop before the Lord and ok - **God see my actual life. Look at what's really going on. See what ways I'm sinning. See what ways I'm hiding. See what ways I'm off. Help me be honest about reality.**

That's the first step, but there's another layer...

Know My Thoughts

Layer #2 → 23 Try me and know my thoughts!

Now “thoughts” here in 139:23 are not like “see what my opinions are on lasagna” or something like that. The Hebrew word is “**sarapim**” (sare-apeem) and it more literally translates - anxieties or worries. Some English translations have “anxious thoughts” or “cares” - I think that’s helpful.

First invitation - Lord, know what I’m actually doing/feeling. Know what’s actually going on with me. Willing to be honest about the surface.

Second invitation - Lord, know what I worry about. Know what’s causing this. Know what’s at that next layer.

Try me and see what I’m anxious over. See what I fixate on and turn around in my head over and over again when I can’t sleep at night. Test me and see why I’m actually angry. Help me know I’m feeling lonely.

I want to be honest about the “**what**” - this is what I’m feeling - honest about that before God, myself, and others.

Now let me take the first step into the “**why**”. Why am I feeling this way?

- Alright, I’m angry but why? I’m angry because I’m worried about the future and that person is getting in the way of it.
- Ok, I’m feeling shame, but why? Well I went against God’s holy commands and sinned against him, and I’m worried God doesn’t actually love me after what I just did.

There’s a whole host of things we worry about that can drive our emotions:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| - Jobs | - Physical Health |
| - Marriages | - Economy |
| - Kids | - Global Pandemics |
| - Friendships | - War + Violence |

All of these things can be layer 2 worries leading to our (often unhealthy) emotional responses. But there’s one more layer even still. **One more step below that that even drives our worries. The “why” behind the “why” if you will.**

Have to be willing to peel back one more layer, to take it one step further...

Search Me → Heart

Layer #3 → 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart!

This is the layer underneath all of our actions, underneath all of our worries → It’s the heart.

“The heart” in the Scriptures is more than just our emotions or our feelings.

It's best to think about the heart as the **core of our being**. Or to put it another way it's the **driving force behind all we do and think**. It's our affections, it's our will. The heart is what drives us or orients us into a particular direction.

Proverbs 4:23 - Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

So David here, in inviting the Lord to search and know His heart, is inviting the Lord to get down to the core of who he actually is. God - see what it is that drives me. See what it is that motivates me. See what it is that gets me up in the morning. See what it is that I'll fight for, bleed for, cry for.

Ok Lord - you've seen what it is I'm actually experiencing, doing, feeling.
You've seen what's underneath that - what I'm truly worried about.

But I'm inviting you to see even below that level → **See and know what it is that I love.**

What we love → What we worry about → What we feel.

I'm reminded of **James 4:1-2 - 1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.**

What the core driving motivation is within your heart is going to have emotional power in your life.

"Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow." - James K.A. Smith

So in order to move forward into emotional health and maturity, we must learn to be honest with God, with others, and with ourselves about what it is that we truly love, and what it is we love more than God.

Which is the core of idolatry. Idolatry is not simply worshiping some wooden statue we set up in our house. Idolatry is anything or anyone we love more than God. And because we love that thing or person or status or idea more than God, we put it in the place of God and it gets to run our lives - and dictate our emotions.

What we love → What we worry about → What we feel.

And David invites God to search and know all of that. See my grievous ways. See my anxious thoughts. See my driving and motivating loves.

Why Do We Hide?

Let's pause here. These are beautiful invitations. It's God Word - so we know it's right and true and good and life-giving. I think at our core all of us would say we want to be known. We don't want to hide. We don't want to run or fake or pretend.

So why do we? Why do we put on a false self? Why do we hide from God, from ourselves, from others? Why do we put on the facade?

Certainly there a number of reasons we might give:

We ignore what's underneath the surface for a variety of reasons:

- Going underneath the surface feels **unimportant and time consuming** - there's things to be done and tasks to be accomplished and mission to be moved towards. Can't I just like learn some more theology?
- It feels **difficult** and **painful** - As one pastor says - "It's the hard work of heart work", and sometimes it's easier to just be mad. To just be sad. To just be afraid. Feel it and move on.
- It can feel **hopeless** - what's the point? Nothing is going to change regardless of how much I try.
- Maybe for some of us, it feels **selfish** - shouldn't I be focused on caring for and serving others?

But I think the #1 reason we live out of a false self is what we read in Mark 7:20-23. Where Jesus speaks to the reality of our hearts and this is what he says...

Mark 7:20-23:

20 And Jesus said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

We hide, because when we look beneath the surface, often we don't like what we find.

Jesus says from the heart come - evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, wickedness, deceit, envy, pride, foolishness.

If we're willing to journey deeper, if we're willing to peel back the layers and be honest about our hearts, if we start looking at the base desires, love, worship behind so much of our emotional responses and emotional life - chances are we might not like a lot of what we see.

In fact → **our doctrine of sin tells us it's going to get ugly before it gets beautiful.**

And our temptation when we see that ugliness is to hide it. To ignore it. To pretend it doesn't exist or it's not that big of a deal or it's everyone else's and everything else's fault but ours.

Danger of False Self

Leaving for the Gathering.

I know this firsthand....A couple of weeks ago I was on my way out the door to head to the Gathering. Was actually going to go to Giddy Goat and read with a friend for a little bit then head over to help get stuff set up. I'm packing up my bag in the kitchen and Lindsay asks me the most simple question - "Hey, can we sync up on our schedule for the week really quickly, I'm trying to make some plans." We're type A. We plan weeks (plural) in advance, I don't know what you do, but that's us and life with 2 kids, ok?

So she says - "Hey, can we plan the week real quick?" Simple request. Sure. Will take 5 minutes. I've got a ton of buffer. I'm going to read for a while anyways, I have time. IS WHAT I SHOULD HAVE SAID....

But instead it was like something within me just snapped. I couldn't explain it. All of this anxiety and worry started to just rise up in me, I got angry. Like all of this emotional response. I lash out at Lindsay - "Why do we have to do this now!? I'm walking out the door!!" The whole nine-yards.

Now, I realize I'm off right away. Basically instantly - I'm the bad guy here. Simple request. I'm an idiot and a jerk.

I realize that, and now in that moment I can literally feel within myself two options:

Option 1 - The false self.

I can buffer off what's really happening inside of me. I can say it's no big deal I didn't actually respond that badly, whatever.

OR I can admit I snapped and that was wrong, but she should understand - it's Sunday and I'm a pastor. This is the most important day of work, some would say it's the only day I work. I'm literally heading out the door, bag in hand. I'm going to meet a friend who I haven't seen in a while, doesn't she understand?

Or even the more humble version - sorry, it's just been a stressful morning. I've got a lot on my mind. I shouldn't have responded that way.

Option 2 - painfully peel back the layers with God.

I just lashed out at you for a simple, harmless, normal question. Why did I do that? Oh yeah - I've got some things I'm worried about.

Michael Bailey is coming to town. And he's someone I respect and admire, and I want him to think highly of our church. We had some volunteers call out last minute, including one of our directors and I'm worried things aren't going to go well.

But why am I worried about that? Oh yeah because of my heart - all of my identity can be so easily wrapped up in this whole church planting thing actually working as some sick twisted means of self-actualization that comes from a system I learned early on that to matter in life you have to succeed no matter what.

Oh and also I want you and our house to revolve around me because I'm selfish, lazy, and often prioritize my comfort over everything else.

Question:

- Which option do you think is easier at that moment?
- And which do you think leads to true healing, freedom, and emotional maturity in Christ?

The longer I walk with Jesus, the more I see the ugliness of my heart.

21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

How true of Tim Olson. And yet every time I try to ignore what's truly going on, live out of a false self, buffer the reality of my heart from God, from myself, and from others - I miss the beautiful invitation of the true transforming work of the gospel.

Application:

So how might this look for you? Let me give just a few practical examples, for you to take into your Community Groups this week and wrestle with.

Anger:

Step 1 - I'm not going to live out of a false self. A false self would say either I'm not angry or the reason why I'm angry is all because of my circumstances, experiences, other people - it's their fault. They're the problem. You're why my life is so hard.

I'm not going to do that. Instead, I'm going to ask God to peel back the layers.

See my grievous ways:

- Help me be honest with you, myself, and others about what's truly going on - I'm angry. OK why?

Lord, know my anxious thoughts:

- I'm angry because my life feels out of control. I'm worried about paying the bills, I'm worried about my career - it feels pointless and directionless. I'm worried about what's going on in the world right now, the economy, wars - how it might affect me.

Know my heart:

- God, I love control. I want more than anything else to be in control of my life. I want control often more than I want to trust in you. I love being in charge of my life. And I because I idolize control, and don't have it, that's making me angry.

Guilt:

Step 1 - I'm not going to live out of a false self. A false self would say either say I don't feel guilty, or well it's not that big of a deal anyways don't feel guilty, don't worry about it.

Instead, I'm going to ask God to peel back the layers.

See my grievous ways:

- Help me be honest with you, myself, and others about what's truly going on - I'm struggling with these feelings of guilt. Ok, why?

Lord, know my anxious thoughts:

- I'm feeling guilty because I gossiped about that person I shouldn't have. I told that kind of half-truth about one friend to another friend. I shouldn't have said what I did, now I feel bad and I'm worried that person is going to find out and be hurt. I'm worried about what they're going to think about me.

Know my heart:

- God, I love approval and I'm ultimately self-serving - that's the wickedness of my heart. And I don't want that person to be hurt, not because I care about them, but because I care about me - my reputation and my comfort - and if they're hurt that's drama I have to deal with and I just want everyone to like me. That's even why I said the thing I did in the first place, I wanted the person to like me.

BINGO. That's the layers. That's what we're inviting God into. That's the hard work of heart work where we can actually repent and God can actually heal.

We don't buffer him off through lying and deceit. God I will not hide from you. See my ways. Know my thoughts. Know my heart.

Lead Me In the Way Everlasting

We must do the hard work of heart work. But it must not stop there. Alright Lord, know a bunch of stuff about me. Know my heart, know my thoughts, know my ways but don't leave me there!

It's not self-awareness for the sake of self-awareness. This is not just some introspection project. Ok great, I know a little bit more about what I love instead of God and why that makes me sad.

That's not the goal. The goal is that God would see and show us more of who we really are so that we would repent and then actually begin to be healed, redeemed, and transformed.

No David says search me, know me, but then do this Lord:

24 Lead me in the way everlasting!

Lead me into a better, more abundant, more healthy, more mature life in you!

Lead me in the better way. Lead me in the life that is truly life. Peel back all of these layers so that I can see my brokenness and sin and everything I love that is not of you so that I can experience true healing, true freedom and redemption.

Don't just let me be aware of my idols as some self-aware defense mechanism - "Oh that's just how I am, I just love control." "Oh that's just me, I'm just a big approval guy over here."

No God, search me, know me, try me - and lead me into a better way. Change my heart. Make me love you, worship you more than anything else.

That's what will actually grow me into emotionally maturity - if you'll change what I love - which will change what I care and worry about - which will then change my emotions.

Gospel

And here's the gospel hope for us in this...Look up at the beginning of the chapter. Psalm 139:1...

Read Psalm 139:1-6

1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

David in Psalm 139:23-24 asks God to do the very thing, He already knows God does. He says at the beginning of this Psalm - you've searched me and you've known me. You know everything about me. You know my thoughts, my worries, my anxieties. You are well acquainted with all of my ways - even the grievous ones. You know what I'm going to say before I say it.

You know everything about me. You see all the ugly. You see all the mess. You see all the facades and the false selves and the ways I try to act different or better than I am. You see everything that I try to hide, even from myself.

You've seen all of it. There's no hiding here. You know every single thing about me.

And yet...

7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

I've always been taught this was a negative thing, like - everywhere you go, God is there so watch what you say and do, you can't escape Him!

But that's not how the text reads. This is beautiful - David says that God sees and knows every single thing about his heart. All of the wickedness. All of the evil. All of the ways David loves other things more than God. All of the anxious thoughts and worries and cares he has when he's not trusting God. God knows all of the evil ways he tries to live his life.

And yet David says → **There is nowhere I can go that is outside of your presence.** There is nowhere I could run that you won't hold me and lead me and be light to me. I cannot escape your presence.

You saw all of my brokenness, you saw underneath all of the layers of hiding - and you won't leave.

- Do you want to change my heart? Absolutely.
- Do you want to lead me into a better, more glorifying way to live? Absolutely.
- Do you invite me to turn from sin, to repent from all of my earthly worries and trust in you? Absolutely.
- Are you grieved by my sin, my rebellion, my turning away from you? Of course!

But you won't leave me alone. In Christ, I cannot escape your presence. In Christ I am united to you forever. In Christ - the way everlasting is a promise. You see all my wickedness, you died for all of my brokenness. You saw all of the mess. And because of Christ Jesus, you will not let me go.

So I'm not going to hide from you. I don't have to live in hiding anymore. I can look underneath the surface and do the hard work of heart work. Because in Christ Jesus, you won't let me go.

Church we must **go in to go forward.**

That is the invitation of Jesus. To journey with God as he peels back the layers to our hearts, our worries, our ways - and leads us in the way everlasting.

Communion. Pray.