

Have you ever felt like running away? Maybe the kids are making so much noise that you want to run away to a quiet place. Or maybe the total of the bills on your desk outnumbers the total in your checkbook and you want to run away from responsibility. Or maybe the boss at work is asking so much of you that you want to run away to a place of freedom.

Maybe you've felt like the young boy, Timmy, who told his friend, "I'm running away from home. My parents don't like me anymore."

"How do you know?" the friend asked.

"They won't let me do whatever I want, so I'm running away. Then I can do whatever I want to do."

"Where will you go?"

"I'm not sure," Timmy replied.

"Maybe you could stay at my house," Timmy's friend suggested. "I bet my mom would even let you stay for lunch."

"Well, if she knows I'm running away, then she would call my mom."

"OK. You can hide in my room and I'll bring the food to you. We could have a picnic in my room. But you won't be able to play downstairs on the video game or go outside and play catch with me."

"Why not?" Timmy asked. "When I run away I can do whatever I want."

"Because mom would see you and tell your parents you're at our house. Then you would have to go home."

"Oh, that's OK," replied Timmy. "I have to be home for supper anyway."

From the sound of Psalm 139, it sounds as though the writer had thought about trying to run away as well, for in verse 7 he wrote,

Where could I go to get away from your spirit?
Where could I go to escape your presence?

The psalmist acknowledged that God would be in heaven, in the grave, the far side of the ocean, and even in the midst of the darkest night. There is nowhere that one can escape God's presence, though there may be days when we wonder if God is with us. Have you ever asked, "Where are you God?"

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Maybe in the midst of a terrible loss...On a day when everything seems to go wrong...When hope seems to disappear. On those days, we may not feel God's presence; we may struggle to trust that God is even real. Our voices may yell "Why me, God? Don't you care? Where are you?"

When you ask those questions, you are not alone, for even the most faithful people you know probably asked those same questions. Even Mother Teresa, who is being recognized today as one of the great saints within the Catholic Church, had days—even years—when she didn't sense God's presence. She wrote in 1959, "In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me — of God not being God — of God not existing." Only her closest friends knew of her inner struggle, but in 2007 her private journals and letters were released in the book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*.¹ She wrote:

There is so much contradiction in my soul. Such deep longing for God, so deep that it is painful, a suffering continual, and yet not wanted by

God, repulsed, empty, no faith, no love no zeal. Souls hold no attraction. Heaven means nothing, to me it looks like an empty place. The thought of it means nothing to me and yet this torturing longing for God. Pray for me please that I keep smiling at him in spite of everything.²

There are those moments when God seems to break into our normal routines of life, when we know without doubt that God is traveling with us along the pathway of life. Mother Teresa sensed this at age 36 when she became ill and took the train in order to get some much needed rest from the girls' school where she had been working. "She had heard what she would later call a 'voice' asking her to work with the poorest of the poor, and experienced a profound sense of God's presence."³

In the midst of her 47 years of caring for "the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society

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and are shunned by everyone,”⁴ it’s hard for us to believe that she didn’t sense God’s presence every day of her ministry.

But she did not, and neither do we every day. Everyone has those days when we wonder if God even knows who we are. Thousands of years ago the psalmist recognized that God knows us so well. Psalm 139 says:

You know me. ²You know when I sit down and when I stand up. Even from far away, you comprehend my plans...

¹³ You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother’s womb...

¹⁵ My bones weren’t hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my embryo.

It’s amazing how we are formed in the womb and become such wondrous humans. Although we know so much more today about the complexity of our bodies, even the writer of Psalm 139 had an understanding how God put us together. He used

the Hebrew word *tsukke*, often translated as “to weave together.” Amazingly, the instructions within us are woven together in each cell in our body. These individual instructions, known as DNA, make us each unique. DNA contains one hundred thousand genes, “that, if written out, would fill a thousand six-hundred-page books...The DNA is so narrow and compacted that all the genes in all my body’s cells would fit into an ice cube; yet if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back more than four hundred times.”⁵

In the midst of all that complexity, God knows you and me so well. There is nowhere we can run away from God, for God knows our deepest struggles and pains. God knows our anger and hurt, our joy and celebration, and even our innermost secrets that we have never shared with anyone. And yet, God still loves us and stays by our side, even when we don’t sense that God is with us.

God also knows our church just as well—fears about the future, our uncertainty about finances,

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our sadness about how the church is not as large as in past generations, our mourning for those who are no longer among us. We may wonder, “Why, God, aren’t we the same as before? What are we going to do about our expenses? How do we invite more people to worship with us?” When it feels as though the darkness surrounds us, hiding us from those searching for hope, the psalmist reminds us,

¹² even then the darkness isn’t too dark for you!

Nighttime would shine bright as day because darkness is the same as light to you!

Isn’t that great news? Even in the midst of the gloomiest of days, when we don’t sense God’s presence, when we can’t see how to get through the next day, God’s hope shines forth a light that breaks into our doubts and struggles, whether it’s our personal lives or our life together in our church.

There are those in Elkhart and surrounding communities who need to know what the psalmist proclaimed thousands of years ago and what Jesus came to remind us—that we are not alone, God is with us no matter where we try to hide.

I’ve only been here a short time, but I have learned that you have been proclaiming and living words of hope for quite some time—all the way back to when Disciples began here in the 1870s.

Now I realize you don’t know me so well, but I trust that together we can let others know what Psalm 139 proclaims: that God knows us so well, that God is with us even when we don’t sense that God is here. I look forward to getting to know all of you better, but even on those days when we wonder what God is doing, we can still pray, “Thank you, God, for knowing us so well.”

¹ James Martin, “A Saint’s Dark Night,” Aug. 29, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/08/29/opinion/29martin.html?_r=1

² “Mother Teresa: A saint despite spiritual 'darkness',” www.yahoo.com/news/mother-teresa-saint-despite-spiritual-darkness-101727337.html

³ Martin.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Teresa

⁵ Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, 45-6.