

Seeking God's Research on Our Lives

According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, research is a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding.

Some of you are researchers. You study humans, disorders, health, clinical outcomes and practice. I am grateful for your work, as it informs and benefits my clinical outreach. I used to think of myself only as a clinician and not a researcher. However, given the previous definition, I, too, study a subject in detail for the purpose of new understanding. This is precisely what I do every time I sit with a client. I am studying the person in front of me intently, checking out my hypotheses, receiving feedback, altering my course, and refining my work. I need to learn what it is like to be him or her.

Counseling, however, is far more complex than the description mentioned earlier. Therapy is not simply about facts and outcomes, though these certainly matter. It is about a person created by the hand of God and in His image. Therapy is also about the twistings and turnings, and often the destruction, of that image. It is about relationships and suffering... wounds and despair. All of this and more are present in an individual life that matters eternally. We see and hear clients, and we work hard to understand life in their skin and with their history, but we also never fully know.

Given such complexities and significance, it is clear that part of my "research" needs to focus on me. I need to study myself in detail and continue to increase my understanding of myself. Where am I blind or deaf about others? Where



and when do I retreat? What leads me to serve and protect myself rather than the one sitting across from me? Where am I arrogant, lacking the humility to say, "I do not know?" Where do I need integrity or play loose with ethical guidelines? How do my own history and current life circumstances affect me? When am I tempted to feed off the one who came for help? Who knows what I am doing behind closed doors with vulnerable people?

If I am to be a safe place for others, to have integrity of character and serve suffering and vulnerable people well, I believe there is another subject I need to research faithfully and deeply. I need to perennially study and come to new understandings of Jesus Christ. How else will I continue to grow in likeness to Him? Where else can I find an infinite pool of wisdom, trust, and love? As

we study our Savior, the ongoing outcome should be that our knowledge and understanding of Him result in a maturing character of ever-increasing Christlikeness. He will not let us dodge truth or hide in "a little bit" of darkness. He will not allow us to choose a wrong to "protect" a good. He longs for us to seek Him out. He died so that we might bear His likeness.

These musings sent me to Psalm 139. The ultimate research is actually *God's research of me*. It is a piercing, thorough research leaving nothing hidden. It goes far beyond my "research" of myself. The Psalmist says, "You have searched me and known me... you know my thoughts before I do... there is not a word on my tongue that you do not know... where can I go... where can I flee that you are not there?" We are known in our mother's womb and

are never hidden from you under any circumstance. “Search and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me.” Have you ever asked God what His research of you has exposed? Do you want to know what He sees?

God sees things in us that we do not see. He sees motives. He sees our cover-ups. He sees where we speak or question to feed ourselves rather than another. He sees how we use others. He sees how we flee from hard places—in ourselves or others. He is El Roi, the God who sees me. When we are in need, as Hagar was, we are eager for the God who sees. When we are deceiving, manipulating, or feeding ourselves with the lives of others, we do not want to see what He sees.

I suggest that you and I are not safe shepherds of the sheep unless

we are willing to be “researched” by our God. If the feedback we give ourselves and our self-assessments are sufficient for us, we have chosen blindness instead of truth. I encourage us to ask God for His point of view. What does He see that we do not? What do we think that is not in accord with His thoughts? From what light do we run? What truth do we push away? To what pricking of the conscience do we anesthetize ourselves? We do so at our own peril... and the jeopardy of those who seek us out for care. We become the blind leading the blind and both will fall into a pit.

This work we do, this thing called counseling, should lead to a constant seeking of the God who sees, a hunger for His truth in our lives, a burning desire to be shaped into His likeness, and a steadfast pursuit of

Him, simply for Himself. We need not be afraid of the searching of our God because we also know that He bore anything He finds hidden within. We also know that the exposure that results from His searching is always driven by love with the unchanging goal of making us more like Christ. ✝



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