

Lesson Title

God tests me

Text

Psalm 139:19-24

Big Idea

David asks God to remove all wickedness, even in his own heart, and lead him on the right path.

Aim

To teach that God can be trusted to remove all wickedness, including in our own hearts, and keep us on the right path.

Leader's Study Notes

Read the whole of Psalm 139, noting the change of tone in verses 19-24 and what David is asking God to do.

Use the following notes to help you think about the passage in more detail.

Verses 19-24 need to be understood in the context of the entire Psalm. David moves from reflecting on God's complete and intimate knowledge of and constant presence with him to a prayer for God's guidance and examination.

David expresses deep reverence for God's justice and asks for discernment between those who are righteous and those who are wicked. He also acknowledges his own imperfections and invites God to search his heart, thoughts, and motives. David sincerely desires to align himself with God's ways and to be led in the path of everlasting life.

139:19-20 — David reveals that not everyone delights in God's knowledge, presence and creating works. Consequently, not everyone responds in worship as he does (139:17-18). The wicked speak against God's name and live in active opposition to his goodness. Though David wants nothing to do with these people, he doesn't act against them. Nor are his words motivated by a desire to 'get even'. Instead, he calls on God to judge the attitudes of such people according to his righteousness.

139:21-22 — David's words appear to a modern audience to be very harsh. He views with contempt anyone who rejects the holy, sovereign, creator God whom he loves and worships. 'Hate' does not describe an unreasonable and purely emotional response. David could not be expected to have felt any warmth or respect for the enemies of God. To 'abhor' them is a consequence of siding with God; to love what is holy requires hating what is evil. Jesus expresses similar contempt for evildoers in Matthew 25:41. While many in our society may appear to be respectable and morally upright if they have rejected Jesus, the Bible calls them 'evil'.

139:23-24 — In light of who God is, David submits himself to the same divine scrutiny as those who oppose him. This reveals a humble understanding of his sinful heart's inclination to neglect God's knowledge and presence and live in rebellion to his perfect design and plan. David requests that God continue to examine him and eradicate any attitude, thought, word or action opposed to God. David concludes his prayer by asking for God's guiding hand to continually lead him along the everlasting path (139:5, 10).

Reflect

- What do you find most challenging about being evaluated, whether through writing an examination or undergoing a performance appraisal at work?
 - How does your relationship with the person who provides critical feedback affect your attitude and willingness to accept it and change?
 - Give thanks that God knows you intimately, loves you dearly, and only wants what's best for you. Ask him to grant you a willingness to be examined by him through his word and the desire to repent where necessary.
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Review

Review the previous lesson using the following questions:

- Who made David? [*God (139:13)*]
 - When was David's life planned? [*Before he was even born (139:16)*]
 - How does David feel about his maker? [*Amazement and worship (139:17-18)*]
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Introductory Idea – Option 1

Before the lesson, gather several images of good and bad versions of an item. For example:

- A broken toy and a brand-new toy
- A melted ice cream and a freshly made one
- Muddy shoes and shiny new shoes
- A burst ball and a well-inflated ball

Include an image of an obviously rotten piece of fruit, like an apple, paired with one that looks good on the outside. A third image in this set needs to be of an apple that is only rotten on the inside – these images will be used last.

Show the images to the children, who must say which they would prefer to have and why.

Finally, hold up the two images of the rotten fruit and the good apple. The children will likely all pick the good one. Once the children have voted, show the final image of the apple, which is rotten inside. Explain that just like the apple, people can look kind on the outside, but their hearts are not so good.

In this Psalm, David asks God to remove all wickedness – including things that people can see and the bad things inside every person's heart. [Use the Bridge Questions below to create a link with the lesson.]

Introductory Idea – Option 2

For older children. Maze. Divide the group into pairs and provide one of each pair with a copy of the Maze from the Media section of this webpage printed onto paper, a pen, and a blindfold. Have the pairs sit opposite each other at tables.

At the signal, the blindfolded players must follow the instructions of their partners to trace the shaded path through the maze. Warn the teams that they will be penalised each time they cross the maze lines with their pens. Take note of the order in which teams complete the task. They then swap the maze with the team next to them to count penalties – one penalty each time a pen line crosses the maze line in the wrong direction (ignore those that touch the line but remain within the correct path). The team with the fastest time and the least penalties wins.

Discuss how the children found the challenge. Was it difficult for the blindfolded players to hear and follow their partner's instructions among those of the other teams?

In this Psalm, David asks God to lead him along the path to everlasting life because he is the only one who can do it. [Use the Bridge Questions below to create a link with the lesson.]

Bridge Questions

The children must listen carefully to today's true Bible lesson to discover the answers to the following questions:

- What does David ask God to remove? [*Wickedness, evil, and anything offensive (139:19, 20, 24)*]
 - What does David ask God to search? [*His heart (139:23)*]
 - What does David want God to do? [*Guide him on the right path (139:24)*]
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Teaching Plan

This section of the psalm deals with two main ideas, but they need to be understood in the context of the rest of the psalm. Therefore, it is necessary first to provide an introductory point summarising the rest of the psalm before teaching the two remaining points in this section. Therefore, this lesson has three sections:

- God is the perfect creator who is worthy of worship (139:1-18)
- God will judge all people who reject him (139:19-22)
- God can help us to live in a way that pleases him (139:23-24)

The Creator who is worthy of worship (139:1-18)

Use the visual aids from the media section of this webpage to help prompt the children to recall the previous lessons.

David's song says that:

- God knows everything about him (139:1-6)
- God is always with him (139:7-12)
- God created him (139:13-18)

Ask the children how David feels about these. How does he respond to God?

Ask the children if they have ever had to ask a parent, teacher or other adult to resolve a fight or argument with another child. Explain that the adult's task in that situation is to decide who was wrong and right. They might ask each child to explain what happened. But because they were not there, they might not make the right decision about who was right and who was wrong. Explain that the best person to help would be someone who saw and heard everything.

All people sometimes do wrong things and hurt other people. This is because people don't love God as they should or obey him. God is the one who made us, and we should love and worship him. In the final part of David's song, he asks God to judge everyone who has done wrong.

Why is God the best person to judge every person in the world? Point again to the visual aids and remind the children that God knows everything about every person, even what they think. He is always with everyone everywhere, so he has seen and heard everything anyone has ever done or said. He is the best person to judge, and we can trust him to do a good job.

The judgment of those who reject God (139:19-22)

Explain that not everyone understands that God is their loving creator, and not everyone wants God to tell them how to live – people reject God or ignore him. David loved God very much and was angry when people said bad things about God and didn't love God and other people as they ought. These people hated God.

Ask the children how they feel about someone being rude to their closest friend or someone they love. Does it make them angry? David felt like this when people treated God and other people badly. But David didn't try to be nasty to these people, as we might be to the person who is nasty to people we love. Instead, David prayed to God, telling him how he felt and asking him to judge. He trusted God to remove all wickedness from the world.

God helps us to live in a way that pleases him (139:23-24)

Unlike the wicked, who hated God and wanted nothing to do with him, David knew it was good that God was always with him and wanted to live his way. The Bible describes living God's way as walking along the path of everlasting life.

Explain that although David loved God, he didn't always worship and follow God as he should. David's sinful feelings, thoughts, words, and actions would lead him away from the good path. So, he asked God to search his heart and show him the bad things that need to be removed.

For older children – use the pictures above to teach the first, introductory point, and read the verses directly from the Bible. You could then go through it a second time, summarising what each section says.

A good metaphor for the final section is a medical examination. People make an appointment to see a doctor when they become aware of their symptoms. A doctor examines them to find the cause of the problem. Sometimes, surgery is necessary to correct the issue, which might involve removing, e.g. a tumour. David recognises the sinfulness of his own heart. He invites God to examine him and expose or cut out the root cause of his sinful behaviour. He knows that failure to subject himself to this examination and allowing sin to continue affecting his thinking and behaviour will be detrimental to the health of his relationship with God.

Use the following questions to help the children think about the passage in more detail:

- How does David describe the wicked? What are some of the things they do? (139:19-22)
 - Can you describe David's feelings towards the wicked? How does this compare to his feelings towards God?
 - Why does David feel this way about the wicked?
 - What does he ask God to do? The wicked and himself?
 - How will God help David to continue on the good path?
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Game Idea – Option 1

For younger children. Search Me! Before the lesson, print Game Idea Option 1 from the Media section of this webpage. You will need one copy of the cross and enough copies of the heart, so each child receives one pasted to an envelope. You could also simply draw a heart on an envelope for each child instead of printing the hearts.

Draft a list of various good and bad things the children might do in the average week. Good things might include helping to tidy their room and obeying their parents. Bad things might include disobeying their parents, fighting with their siblings, or lying. Try to include thoughts, feelings, words, and actions and a balance of good and bad. Print or write these onto paper strips and place one into each envelope.

To play, place the cross on the floor in one corner of the room and scatter the unsealed envelopes on the floor. The children move around to music. When the music stops, they each grab an envelope. Explain that some envelopes have good things inside, others have bad things. Ask if any of them would like you to look at their envelope to see if it's good or bad. They should hold their envelope in the air and say, 'Search me!'. Some might be reluctant to volunteer, fearing exclusion if anything bad is found.

Only search one or two envelopes each round, depending on the number of children and how long you want the game to last. When you search an envelope, read the action aloud and ask the children if it's good or bad. If it's bad, give the child the option of being excluded from the game or placing the slip of paper on the cross and continuing the game. Then, scatter all the envelopes, including any empty ones, around the room and repeat until all the bad envelopes have been discovered or as time allows.

Remind the children that David knew he didn't always love God or other people as he should. He asked God to search his heart and help him not to sin. Remind the children that even when we do sin, we can ask God to forgive us because Jesus died on the cross to rescue us.

Game Idea – Option 2

Guide Me! Use masking tape to mark a path on the floor using parallel lines. Divide the group into pairs – one will be blindfolded, and the other will be their guide. Guides take turns to provide verbal instructions for their blindfolded partner to walk along the path as fast as possible. Award a two-second penalty each time a player steps outside the path. **Younger children who may not know their right from their left can instead be guided by hand instead.**

Remind the children that in this Psalm, David asks God to lead him along the path to everlasting life because he is the only one who can do it.

Game Idea – Option 3

For older children. Marble Run. Divide the group into teams and provide each team with a marble and a selection of materials. The materials can be used to create a course along which the marble must run. It's helpful if the starting point is higher than the endpoint, as the marble may only be propelled by gravity and momentum.

- cardboard tubes
- strips of card cut from cardboard boxes
- sticky tape
- rubber bands
- string

Indicate the start and end points and give the teams ten minutes to construct their courses. During the construction phase, they can make as many changes to their design as necessary. However, they may not interfere with the marble or the course once the competition begins. The marble that is closest to the endpoint wins.

If marbles fail to reach the endpoint, allow the team time to make further changes. Also, allow them to guide and push the marble as necessary to get it across the line.

Discuss how they had to identify the obstacles and guide the marble to make it run along the right path.

Alternatively, if you have limited access to the materials listed above, set up a domino rally. You will require a flat surface and numerous dominoes or similar blocks – distributing an equal number to each team. They aim to place the blocks so that pushing the first one onto the adjacent block triggers a chain reaction until the whole line falls. You could make this activity by using masking tape to create a course for each team so they don't only make a straight line.

Remind the children that in this Psalm, David asks God to search and remove any wickedness in his heart, and keep him on the everlasting path.

Discuss and Apply

Help the children to understand that it's a good thing that God judges sin. How would the children feel if they were unfairly treated or teased by other children and no adult ever did anything to stop the other children? We want a God who will punish sin.

But if God is going to punish the sin of others, then he will also judge our sin. Ask the children to think about something they recently did that was wrong, disobedient, or unkind. What was it, and how did they act afterwards? Did they admit to what they had done and say sorry straight away? Or did they hide the problem and pretend they didn't do anything? **Younger children will not readily admit to wrongdoing, so you may have to give age-appropriate examples of things they might have done.** Help them understand from David's example that we all feel, think, speak and act in ways that are against God and his good ways. David asked God to test him to see where the problems were. **Older children will be familiar with the concept of writing tests at school. Explain that tests in education assess our ability in a subject and discover where we are weak so we can make corrections before the final exam. In the same way, we should eagerly invite God to test us so we can know where we are going wrong and focus on making changes with God's help.**

When God helps us see our sin, the best thing to do is to admit we've done wrong and say sorry to God. We know that God will forgive us because of Jesus and help us keep on the right path.

Finally, discuss the importance of prayer and the Bible in helping them know which feelings, thoughts, words, and actions are wrong. Have them consider how they might wander from the right path and why. Do they easily get angry? Do they say rude or nasty things to others? Are they jealous of what others have? Encourage them to ask God to test them, helping them know what to stop doing. Assure them that the Holy Spirit gives them the power to say no to sin and keep on the right path so they become more like Jesus.

Prayer Idea

Encourage the children to think of times when don't live God's way. Remind the group that God knows and sees everything they do and that he loves them, and wants the best for their lives.

Encourage them to pray:

- Thanking God that he knows and loves them.
 - For his help to remove their sin and to keep them on the right path.
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Activity A

For younger children, choose either this activity or Activity B.

From the Media section of this webpage, print Activity A-1 onto paper for each child. Print Activity A-2 also onto paper (one copy for every four children), and cut out one set of six footprints for each child. Fold along the line before cutting so you can cut out two footprints at a time. Place a set of footprints in an envelope for each child.

The children colour the path on Activity B-1 brown and then glue the footprints in place. Remind them that God searches our hearts and helps us to walk on the right path.

Activity B

For younger children, choose either this activity or Activity A.

From the Media section of this webpage, print onto paper Activity B-1 (one copy for each child) and Activity B-2 (one copy for every two children).

Before the lesson, cut out the heart shape on B-1, fold and staple as shown. Cut B-2 into strips as marked.

The children colour in the pictures.

Help the children insert the two strips between pages so the pictures of the badly behaved children appear in the heart. Fold over the tabs at either end of the strips to stop them from being pulled out too easily. Show the children how to pull the strips to the right to replace the sinful behaviour with the Bible.

Remind the children that God searches our hearts to show us the things that do not please him. He forgives our sin and his word helps us to know the right way to live.

Worksheets

For older children – choose either Worksheet C or Worksheet D from the Media section of this webpage. Print whichever is appropriate onto paper for each child and use it to reinforce the lesson or as a discussion starter.

Memory Verse

Use one of the memory verse ideas in the Series Introduction to help the children memorise the following verse:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Psalm 139:23 [NIV]
