



*Priscilla Hochhalter*

After losing my mom in 2010 when she was 87, I lost my dad, Dr. Wayne Roberts, in 2013 at age 92. When I miss them, I find comfort in lessons they taught, teaching not by words but by example. One of the greatest lessons of Dad's life was that he lived as if he knew beyond doubt that God is good and kind.

Dad's view was based not on naïveté—he had known pain—but on personal experience of God's faithful love. This week we'll explore Psalm 139 (usually attributed to David) and Romans 8, both favorites of Dad's because they affirm that love. The photo is the last one of Dad and me, taken on August 17, 2013 (his 92 birthday) by my husband, Dan.

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:1-6 (NLT)*

A little girl once heard that God sees us everywhere. In shock she replied, “I think that’s indecent!” We may not want to be seen, but God always sees and has full insight into our lives. Fortunately, in Christ he does not condemn us.

Just as David felt deeply seen and known by God, Dad felt deeply seen and known by his father, Frank; they talked about life while milking the cows. But when Dad was just 17, Frank died, leaving a widow and three teenage sons with no other adults to run the family farm. They felt alone.

I once said, “Dad, you were so young when you lost your father. Some kids might have stayed mad, or sad, or adrift—but not you. Why not?”

He replied, “Well, I had a lot of my dad while I had him.”

Because Dad had felt deeply known and loved by Frank, he was able to transfer that feeling to God as “the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). Unlike the little girl, Dad grew to believe that always being seen by God is a good thing.

If you were not close to your dad, can you overcome your past and trust God like that? Yes! You can. Even if our earthly fathers were bad or absent, God is good and present; he sees and understands. Fatherless at 17, Dad was able to trust God with a scary, uncertain future. And so can we.

*SONG: Surely Goodness and Mercy*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, thank you that whatever I face, you precede and follow me and place your hand of blessing on my head (Psalm 139:5).*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:7-12 (NLT)*

Every life holds some danger, and Dad's did too. In World War II he joined the service, but as a noncombatant since he was a pacifist. Though stationed stateside, he knew he could be moved to a hot spot and possibly lose his life.

I knew this, but years later I saw it in a new way. Dad visited me down South and drove me through the nearby base where he had lived. It was empty, but I was amazed at its size and scope. The rows of barracks looked endless. We passed one church and post office after another.

I exclaimed, "How many churches did this base have?"

Dad said, "Honey, over 16 million Americans served in the war. This base held tens of thousands of soldiers and many churches too, just like any city of that size. And there were countless others like it. Every life was at risk."

Dad said all of the soldiers' papers showed the length of their term as "for the duration"—meaning they had to serve indefinitely, until the war ended. No one knew if they'd win or lose the war—or if they'd return home alive.

Again, Dad's future was very uncertain. Would he ever finish college, or marry, or have kids? No one knew. Yet he trusted God, even while living with guys who didn't. Physically and spiritually, he survived the war. He never forgot God's hand over him during that dark time.

*SONG: The Love of God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to believe and to know, like David, that your love is inescapable—even when life feels dark and perilous.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:13-16 (NLT)*

After the war, Dad wanted to use the G.I. Bill to finish his education. But so did lots of other great candidates. By the skin of his teeth, he scored one of the last two admissions slots to medical school in St. Louis—partly because he and his admissions interviewer discovered they both hailed from tiny Caldwell, Idaho! I consider that a miracle, not a coincidence. (What are the odds?)

After medical school Dad practiced medicine in Oregon for over 30 years. He never lost his wonder at the intricacies of the human body, especially when he delivered babies. He loved David's idea that we are "knit together" in the womb.

Imagine the detail God pours into each person! He could make us all from one mold, but he doesn't. Instead, he gives each of us unique fingerprints and toe-prints, hand-prints, footprints, lip-prints, hair whorls, eye patterns, and much more. Of the billions of people who've lived on earth, every part of each one has been unique.

There is no practical need for such extreme uniqueness. I think God just went nuts, cramming every inch of our bodies with millions of reminders of his crazy love for us!

Dad saw that crazy love in his daily work, observing the miracles of the body and in every other detail of his life. We can see it in our own lives, too.

*SONG: How Great Thou Art*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, the intricacies of your creation are everywhere, even in my own body. Help me to live in awe over every detail.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:17-18 (NLT)*

Today's passage was one of Dad's all-time favorites; I can still hear his voice—filled with joy and awe—as he recited it from memory in the original Living Version every morning for many years. Dad was deeply comforted to know he was always in God's thoughts.

How can God be thinking of every single person, every single moment? I heard one speaker say that metaphysically it's possible if each moment is fractioned into as many parts as there are persons alive (now over 7 billion), with each part devoted to thinking about just one person. The speaker said God's mind is able to do this. I don't really care how God does it; I just know he does. But sometimes I forget.

I think if I truly believed God is always thinking of me, I'd trust more and worry less. Since he thinks of me night and day, how can I stress out about anything? How can I fail to trust? Don't I know he's got this?

To emphasize the constancy of God's love and attention towards us, Jesus used a profound example. He said the wild birds and flowers never do any work, yet God takes care of them—and will do so even more for us because we matter to him more than they do (Matthew 6:26-30; Luke 12:22-31). God is intimately concerned about us; we are always on his mind.

*SONG: His Eye Is on the Sparrow*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you that you are always thinking of me. When I feel alone, help me to remember that you are still here.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:19-22 (NLT)*

In today's passage, note that David longs for God to destroy the wicked, but he does not destroy them himself. Dad and I never discussed this subtle point, but since Proverbs 20:22 and Romans 12:17-21 and many other verses tell us not to repay evil with evil, it seems clear that such passages advocate not "holy war" but godly zeal. We should share God's intensity for loving what is right, hating what is not, and always pursuing good—in ways that are loving and just.

Likewise, Jesus taught us not to visit evil on others but to tell God our concerns (Matthew 5:39-48; Luke 18:1-8). So if we see unholiness or injustice, we should pray: "Lord, this is wrong and I am distressed; but you are always right, and your law is perfect (Psalm 19:7-14). Bring your kingdom to earth. Show me if there's anything I can do, and purify my own heart too." We can pray also for evil plans to be thwarted and evildoers to be redeemed. Such prayers clearly match the will of God, so we should pray them with persistence and faith, believing he will answer.

If all believers prayed like that, the world would change! Those prayers invite not the wrath of God but the riches of God to come to earth until the day he sets all things right. And Dad definitely prayed for that day, too.

*SONG: O the Depths of the Riches*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, you are holy, loving, and just. Let us see what you see. Let your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)*

Growing up in church, I was afraid of such scrutiny. Like the little girl mentioned in Sunday's writing, I found the idea that God could see me at all times, in all places, alarming rather than comforting. I feared God's holy requirements because I knew I was a sinner, and I did not yet grasp the depths of his counterbalancing love and grace.

But David does. He invites God to examine his heart, as if with the most blinding searchlight, the most powerful microscope. This invitation shows that David trusted God to be gracious and kind.

Dad did, too. His early fears of God's holiness were conquered later by trust in God's mercy. At one point he made a list of all his sins and grieved over how to fix them; then he felt God telling him to destroy the list, because he was forgiven. This example reminded me that sin is overcome by grace.

This psalm ends with an invitation, using a Hebrew verb that means to scrutinize closely in a most thorough, exacting way. Dad's example helped me view God with less fear and more faith as I saw how sin is overcome by grace. Dad and I shared the trait of a tender conscience toward our sins, so Dad's faith in God's kindness was a great gift to me. That faith calls me to bare my soul in repentance to God, not hiding my sin but trusting him to cleanse me of it.

*SONG: Search Me, O God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, you require penitence, not perfection. I invite you to reveal my sins, known and unknown, and purify my heart.*

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*BIBLE READING: Romans 8:28-39*

“Ineffable” means “inexpressible.” Today’s passage, another favorite of Dad’s, reiterates the Psalm 139 theme of God’s ineffable love and care for every need in our lives.

Between WWII and medical school, Dad lived in Kansas City with relatives. They kept raving about “Bertie,” a young lovely at Youth for Christ, which was exploding with huge weekly rallies led by Billy Graham and other dynamic young evangelists. But Bertie was sold out for Jesus and Dad wasn’t sure, causing them both to doubt whether they should date.

One night, on a hill above the city, he sat for literally hours in wordless torment while she silently prayed. Some time later, he recommitted himself to Christ, and to Bertie. They were happily married for over 62 years until she died. Knowing Dad needed a wife and a deeper spiritual walk, God used Bertie to spur him to “man up” and pursue both. God met two needs in one sweet package.

Dad’s life wasn’t all roses. He experienced the loss of his father, the terror of war, and the uncertainties of marriage, career, and parenting. He nursed Mom during two life-threatening illnesses. He had some serious accidents, and many scares over his children. Yet he learned to trust in God’s ineffable love. That trust has inspired me all my life, and I hope it has inspired you too.

*SONG: Through It All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, your love is all around me. Open my eyes to examples of your tender care in others’ lives, and in my own.*

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