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Psalm 139 (UMH 854-855)

At the Movies: *Bourne Identity*

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Psalm 139 Hymnal 854-855

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you. O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil! Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The opening scene in The Bourne Identity shows a body floating in the open water. Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) doesn’t know how he got there or who he is. He has no memory, no name, no identity. The movie is about him trying to discover who he is.

MOVIE CLIP

I love the Bourne movies. I love movies where there are car chases and things blow up and where you feel like you got your money’s worth! If I am paying $10 or more, I want to see some action! I also love that Jason Bourne is trying to discover who he is. We are all trying to find out who we are.

The two most important questions that we can answer in life are who is God and who am I? We discover who God is through scripture. Each one of us is going to interpret the Bible differently because we are all unique. There are so many things that shape who we are: gender, race, education, tradition, sexual orientation, demographics, church, health, and family.[[1]](#footnote-2) And all of that influences what we experience when we read scripture.

I have always loved the story of Genesis 32 where Jacob wrestles with the man/angel/God. Do you remember Jacob? He stole his brother Esau’s birthright. Esau was the first born and his birthright was to receive his family’s land and property. Esau was really hairy and Jacob tricks his nearly blind dad Isaac by wearing goat fur so he can receive his dad’s blessing and Esau’s birthright. Jacob has to leave because Esau says he is going to kill his brother, then Jacob meets Rachel but ends up marrying Leah and Rachel too. The Bible is so exciting!

20 years pass. Jacob decided to return back home and he is very nervous about seeing his brother again. Jacob sends some messengers ahead of him to tell his brother that he is coming, and the messengers return saying that Esau has 400 men and they are on their way. Jacob is terrified and he divides all the people that are with him and all of the livestock into two camps thinking that if Esau and the 400 men destroy one camp then the other camp will escape. Jacob sends a present ahead to Esau, 220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 camels, 40 cows and 10 bulls, 30 donkeys. Jacob thought that he could appease his brother’s anger with the presents that he sent ahead of him.

So, Jacob takes his 2 wives, his 2 maids, his 11 children and everything he has and sends them across the stream. Jacob is alone knowing that tomorrow he will see his brother again. His brother that he cheated, his brother that he stole from, his brother that hated him. That night a man wrestles with Jacob until daybreak. In the book of Hosea the writer says Jacob wrestled an angel. Jacob says that he saw God face to face, so it could have been God that night. So, Jacob and this man or angel or God are wrestling and Jacob demands a blessing. And Jacob is renamed Israel which means one who struggles with God. The story ends with Esau running to meet Jacob, embracing him, falling on his neck and kissing him as they wept. They forgave each other!

Now you might wonder why I love that story so much. I love that story because I love that Jacob wrestles with the man/God/angel. We like to wrestle with God. We like to go our own way, we like to pretend that we can do life all on our own, thank you very much. Until we are at a crossroads in our life and we don’t know what is going to happen next. After wrestling with the man/angel/God all night long, Jacob limped. Jacob was affected by that experience. I think of the things that have happened in my life to make me who I am. My parent’s divorce when I was 2 or my stepdad’s tragic death when I was 17, and through those experiences and so many more I have wrestled with God.

Jacob demands a blessing from God and he receives a new name as one who struggles with God. What is in a name anyway? Your name is your identity, it tells you who you are. When I was 12 years old my dad gave me one of those things that tells you the meaning of your name and it said “Kerry… Darkness.” A few months later my mom gave me a name thing and it said “Lover of Light.” I liked “Lover of Light” a lot more.

Jacob's new name of Israel is a reminder of his struggle and the positive outcome from that struggle. What we believe our name means, is probably a lot more important than what a sign maker says it is. Our name means that we are cherished, called by our God.

Jacob did some horrible things in his life. But he didn’t give up on himself, he didn’t give up on his family, he didn’t give up on love, and he didn’t give up on God. He was able to accept that he was lovable. And he claimed that love, he claimed God’s love. When he wrestled with the man/God/angel, he knew that he was a beloved child of God and that he was worthy of God’s love and blessing. Yes, he struggled, with his family, with his work, with God, but through that struggling he remembered that God loved him, from the very beginning.

Who is God? God is love. Who am I? I am a beloved child of that love. The Psalm that we shared together reminds us that we are God’s beloved. God loves us so much.

On the Olympic opening ceremony Friday night, they gave out this new award, the Olympic Laurel award. Kip Keino won a gold medal in 1968 and in 1972. He returned to Kenya and opened an orphanage. Kip said, “We came into this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing.” So in the time that we are alive, he asked us all to support all the youth of this world to get the basics of humanity: food, shelter and education. He said education not only empowers our youth to be better citizens and leaders of the future, but it also helps them make a positive change and a mighty difference. Watching the Opening Ceremonies I took away that we need to take better care of the planet and take better care of each other. They showed 200 white kites, those kites were taken to Kenya and given to children who had never played with kites before. Those children wrote messages of peace on them, and sent them back to Brazil to be flown by children there.

The medieval mystic, Saint Teresa of Avila said, “As I see it, we shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God.” Crises have a way of helping us discover who God is and who we are. It is those times when I have felt like a disappointment or a failure, those tough times in my life, that reveal who God is and who I am. It was for Jacob. He was able to see all of the ways that God had blessed him his whole life long. He needed a crisis, a wrestling match with the man/God/angel to help him see this but he did.

May we see ourselves as God sees us because God made us and God sees us as good, as beloved. When we face a crisis, may we struggle through the process, trusting that we will see the blessings of God all around us.

1. From SHE: Five Keys to Unlocking the Power of Women in Ministry. By Karoline M. Lewis. P. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)