

“Living in God’s Grip”—Psalm 139:7-10

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Living in God’s Grip”, is Psalm 139:7-10 → King David prays: *Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall 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 dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

How many times in your life, or on a given day, have you said or thought, “I’ve gotta get a grip!” It usually happens when you feel like your life is spiraling out of control and it doesn’t seem you can do anything to stop it. It can happen when you feel captive to circumstances which challenge your anxiety levels and ability to function properly. You may find yourself giving into temptations to sin in the midst of spiritual battles, driving you deeper and deeper into guilt or even despair. “I’ve just gotta get a grip!”

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my

thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (cf. Psalm 139:23-24) This is quite a prayer flowing from the lips of King David as he concluded his song to Yahweh in Psalm 139. Many of His psalms were prayers in his effort to “get a grip” in his physical and spiritual battles. From whence did he find such confidence to ask God to *know his heart* and *try his thoughts* to *see if there be any grievous way in him*? Other psalms of David reveal his sinful heart and *grievous ways*. For instance, in Psalm 51:3-4 he told the LORD: *I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment.* In the midst of his sin where it felt like his life was falling apart and he couldn’t “get a grip,” He knew he was still living in God’s grip.

This prayer came after contemplating God’s omniscience—the fact that He knows you in every way at all times. He knows all your actions and all your thoughts. He even knows them before they happen or you are aware of them. Even contemplating *such knowledge* was *too wonderful* for him and so *high* he could not *attain it* (cf. Psalm 139:1-6).

This prayer of living confidently in God’s grip came after also contemplating God’s omnipresence—the fact that He is present with you no matter where in the universe you may be. He asks two simple questions in verse 7 of our text: *Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or*

where shall I flee from Your presence? In his answer he uses the picture of the vertical and the horizontal space of all creation. In other words from *heaven* to *Sheol* (i.e. the depths of the earth) and from where the sun rises to the place where it sets, you are never out of God's presence (verses 8-9).

David found comfort in Yahweh's omnipresence, even as he dealt with his sin in the sight of God and his efforts to "get a grip" in the midst of his sins. Why? He states it in verse 10 of our text: *there* (i.e. everywhere) *Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me*. He knew that the LORD had a grip on Him.

Throughout Scripture God refers to His "hand" delivering, disciplining, holding, strengthening and so forth. In fact, it is many times specified as His *right hand*, as in our text. Since it is impossible to describe the indescribable, God condescends to our understanding and describes His power as contained in His *right hand*, based upon most people in the world being right handed (i.e. a dominant hand with more strength and agility). It is a picture of His powerful presence at work in our lives, especially through the work of His Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the One Who works in us who have been given a spirit by God when He created us in His *image* (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). Sin corrupted our spirit in the presence of God, actually causing Adam & Eve to literally try and hide *themselves from the presence of the Lord*

God among the trees of the garden of Eden when they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day (cf. Genesis 3:8). Unfortunately, sinners have been trying to run from God ever since, but to no avail. He does have the last word on the Last Day.

Thus, God gives His Holy Spirit to sinners so that they may recognize Him in a proper relationship with Him again. Romans 6:16-17 says: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.* Because of the Holy Spirit giving David such faith he could come to the LORD in submission to His omniscience in knowing Him completely, to His omnipresence in being with Him always, and to His omnipotence in giving and sustaining his life (cf. Psalm 139:13-16). The Holy Spirit gave Him the confidence that he was living in God’s grip so “he could with all boldness and confidence . . . ask Him as dear children ask their dear father” (Meaning of the Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer from the Small Catechism).

Where do you turn when you are faced by your many failings, shortcomings and especially your sins (i.e. actions which go against God’s Word)? Do you ever try to run in an effort to get away from His grip? This is exactly what’s happening when people try to discredit God’s omnipresence, refusing to trust in Him. It happens when they feel the convicting grip of the Holy Spirit upon their sin and try to justify it in some way. It happens when people deliberately stay away from or avoid God’s

written Word, His means of grace and reject those who bring it to them.

Notice David describes God's work in his life in two ways: *Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me*. He described Yahweh's leading with the picture of a shepherd in Psalm 23. This was natural coming from one who spent his year growing up tending sheep. I wonder how many times David literally had to grip the sheep somehow to rescue them from danger or keep them from straying. Jesus carried this picture further by referring to Himself saying, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*. (cf. John 10:11)

Jesus was telling the people that He was Yahweh (i.e. *I am*) in the flesh, come to fulfill God's grip on all mankind by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of all sins. God's presence was physically seen in Jesus, the Messiah. When they questioned His claim he responded: *I and the Father are one* (cf. John 10:30). Jesus was leading them to the Father while restoring their relationship with the Father so they could repent and trust in His atoning work for them. The Holy Spirit will always lead you to Jesus, especially with anything grievous in you, so that you will experience His grip on you in forgiveness and grace for eternity!

In this way you know that you are held by the LORD and upheld by His power (i.e. His *right hand*). You can live knowing He has His grip on you

no matter what this sinful world takes you through; no matter what spiritual battles you face each day; no matter what the circumstances. His promise to you in the words of Isaiah 41:10 are: *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.* His power, ultimately displayed in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus “to the right hand of God the Father Almighty,” holds you.

Thus, you get to *draw near to the throne of grace . . . with confidence to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (cf. Hebrews 4:16). You will recognize your sins in His omnipresence and sing with David: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.* (cf. Psalm 51:10-12) You can “get a grip” because God has His grip on you! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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