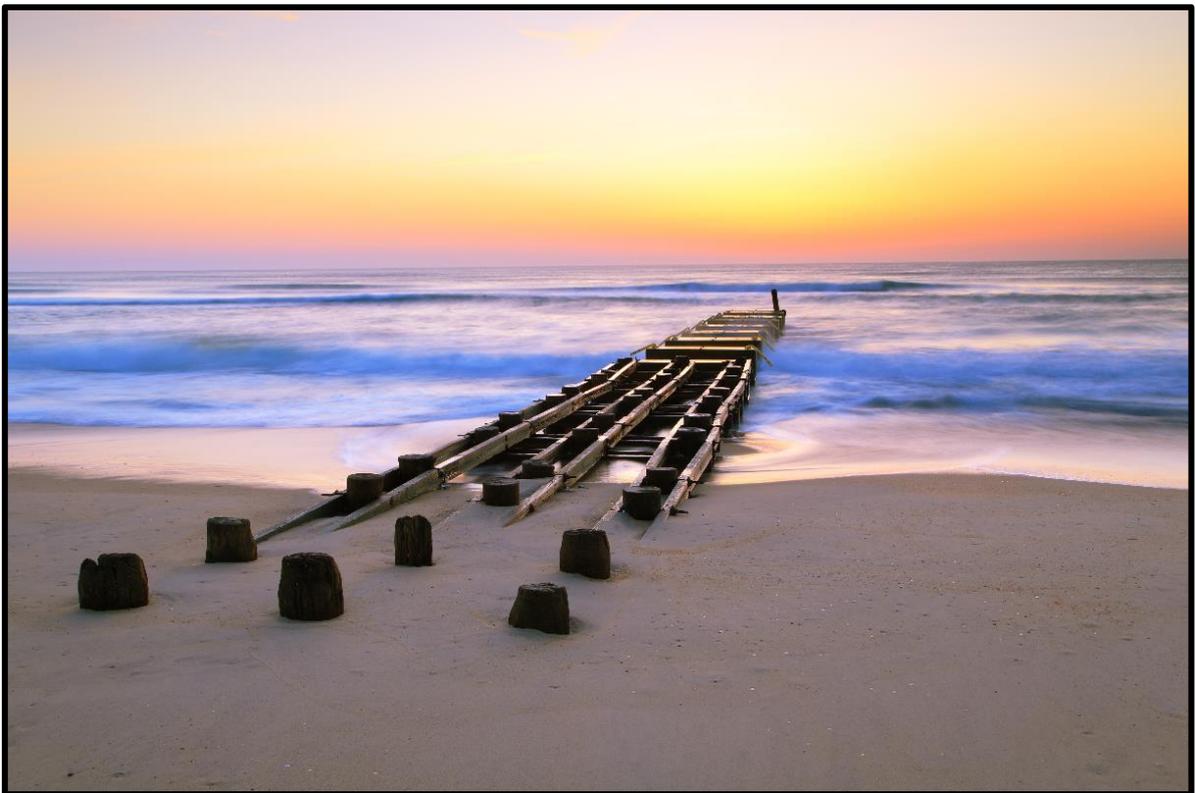


# The Wings of the Dawn

## Psalm 138 (139)



**Your thoughts are more than the sands on the shore**

**If I take the wings of the dawn  
and dwell at the sea's furthest end,  
even there your hand would lead me,  
your right hand would hold me fast**

## *Psalm 138 (139)*

Lord, you search me and you know me,  
you know my resting and my rising,  
you discern my purpose from afar.  
You mark when I walk or lie down,  
all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue  
you know it, O Lord, through and through.  
Behind and before you besiege me,  
your hand ever laid upon me.  
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,  
too high, beyond my reach.

where can I go from your spirit,  
or where can I flee from your face?  
If I climb the heavens, you are there.  
If I lie in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn  
and dwell at the sea's furthest end,  
even there your hand would lead me,  
your right hand would hold me fast.

It was you who created my being,  
knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I thank you for the wonder of my being,  
for the wonders of all your creation.

Already you knew my soul,  
my body held no secret from you  
when I was being fashioned in secret  
and moulded in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw all my actions,  
they were all of them written in your book;  
every one of my days was decreed  
before one of them came into being.

To me, how mysterious your thoughts,  
the sum of them not to be numbered!  
If I count them, they are more than the sand;  
to finish, I must be eternal, like you.

Search me, God, and know my heart.  
O test me and know my thoughts.  
See that I follow not the wrong path  
and lead me in the path of life eternal

# Search Me, O God, and Know my Heart

*Psalm 138 (139)*

1. Lord, you search me and you know me,  
you know my resting and my rising,  
you discern my purpose from afar.  
You mark when I walk or lie down,  
all my ways lie open to you.
2. Before ever a word is on my tongue  
you know it, O Lord, through and through.  
Behind and before you besiege me,  
your hand ever laid upon me.  
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,  
too high, beyond my reach.

*Be still and be aware that you are in the presence of God.*

**Relax**

*as you pray these words and recall that Jesus breathed the same air we breathe.*

*Breathing in, calm the body.*

*Breathing out, smile.*

*Breathing in, dwell in the present moment.*

*Breathing out, know it is a wonderful moment.*

“No, John, don’t even think about it!” John looked surprised – how did Miss know he was thinking of throwing his rubber at his friend Clive over the other side of the class? He hadn’t moved or touched his rubber – how did she know? However, she obviously did, so he grinned at her and got on with his work, still wondering.

I often think God’s a bit like that – he knows us so well!

***Stop and re-read the first two verses of psalm 138. - Think. - Do they make you uneasy? Why?***

This Psalm has been called ‘The Sinner’s Lament’ and you can see why! We can’t move or even think without God knowing. If God was a vengeful God, we’d have a hard time of it, but God is love, and we are loved! Pope Francis made it clear that God is a God of Mercy – and mercy is the “unconditional love a parent has for their child”.

We call God “Our Father”, so we should not be surprised that He knows us through and through.

***What does it mean to call God “Our Father”? (Pause and consider. Take your time)***

***Consider this:***

I loved you first: but afterwards your love  
Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song  
As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.

Which owes the other most? my love was long,  
And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;  
I loved and guessed at you, you construed me  
And loved me for what might or might not be –  
Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.

For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';  
With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,  
For one is both and both are one in love:  
Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';  
Both have the strength and both the length thereof,  
Both of us, of the love which makes us one.

*(Christina Rossetti)*

Have you ever been in love? When you were, didn't you want to spend all your time with your beloved?

As Shakespeare says, in *Romeo and Juliette*:

Sweet, so would I.  
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.  
Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow  
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

***Was the Psalmist saying the same thing? Read the first two verses again.  
What do you think? Perhaps God loves us so much He wants to spend all His  
time with us.***

***How should we respond? How can we respond?***

Spend a few moments quietly in prayer: *(Pause a while and pray quietly)*

Lord, I'm shy!

I want to say "I love you!"

But....

I'm afraid:

- afraid of letting you trust me  
I let myself down so often; and if I return your love, I'll let you down too.
- afraid of giving myself to you  
if I give myself to you, what will you do with me? Do I *really* trust you?
- afraid of the responsibility  
if I love you, your concerns are my concerns. How could I take that on?
- afraid of love  
If I love you, your friends are my friends. Lord, I'm not sure I like some of your friends – you seem to have some very dodgy friends, and some are not my type at all.
- afraid of trusting you  
if I love you, I have to trust you – I have to let go of control. I have to let you into my life and sink into you completely. I have to trust that you will give me back myself, but that you will be there – always and completely.

Lord, I'm still shy – and afraid

But...

I love you! *(there – I've said it!)*

Help me to love you more and more, to trust you more and never to let you out of my life. Amen.

## If I take the wings of the dawn

3. where can I go from your spirit,  
or where can I flee from your face?  
If I climb the heavens, you are there.  
If I lie in the grave, you are there.
4. If I take the wings of the dawn  
and dwell at the sea's furthest end,  
even there your hand would lead me,  
your right hand would hold me fast.

Be still and be aware that you are in the presence of God.

### Relax

as you pray these words and recall that Jesus walked as we walk.

Breathing in, calm the body.

Breathing out, smile.

Breathing in, dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, know it is a wonderful moment.

God, give me a break. Leave me be – just for a bit!

One year, coming back from holiday, we chased the sunset, more or less west across Europe. We lost the race, and it was dark when we arrived in London. We were travelling at about 350 m.p.h., and we would have needed to travel at about 500 m.p.h. to keep up with it. Nevertheless, it was beautiful: gold and red, eventually deepening through orange and royal blue to the navy of the night sky.

The psalmist, where he lived, would have needed to travel at about 800m.p.h. to keep up with the dawn, but he would have seen, as the sunlight chased the shadows across the land, the dawn's incredible speed flooding the fields and hills. "The wings of the dawn" - You can't outrun God, even at that speed!

If he climbs to the top of the mountain, into the sky, God is there, and even if he goes down to the realm of the dead – he can't escape from God!

**What can we do to escape and shut God out? Do you try? Would you like to? (even sometimes?)**

We can immerse ourselves in pleasure: food, drink, parties, social activities, shopping ('retail therapy'), hobbies, music – none of which are bad in themselves, but can take over, as can the more illegal pleasures of sex and drugs.

Or how about wealth? - Material possessions – good car, (very) nice house, big debt – and working long stressful hours (or maybe indulging in doubtful wheeling and dealing) to get the money to pay for all this.

Power? – boss of your own section / division / company. Involved in politics – national, local, office - or controlling family / friends. Liking and working to dominate and get the better of people.

Or maybe an obsession with gaining honours, being noticed and approved. In some societies this aspect is very strong – think of gangland culture or 'honour killings'; and not so long ago, in our own culture, babies being taken away from their unmarried mothers. Does it still exist? How?

Obviously, we all use these four categories to live in our everyday lives – but how far do we use them to escape God? – maybe, even accidentally. Can we distance ourselves from them?

***Pause and consider.***

Robert Barron says (paraphrasing Thomas Aquinas):

“We seek to escape through the piling up of pleasure, wealth, power or honour, but we discover, soon enough, that all these worldly realities are as transient as we are and hence cannot satisfy us.”

***Read, consider and pray Psalm 61 (62):***

In God alone is my soul at rest;  
my help comes from him.  
He alone is my rock, my stronghold,  
my fortress: I stand firm.

In God alone be at rest, my soul;  
for my hope comes from him.  
He alone is my rock, my stronghold,  
my fortress: I stand firm.

One thing God has revealed;  
two things I have heard:  
that to God alone belongs power  
and to you, Lord, love;  
and that you repay each man  
according to his deeds.

***Go back and read verses 3 and 4, Psalm 138 again.***

What did God say to Moses?

“I am who am” - ‘I am being’ ‘I am existence’

How can you run from existence?

***Pause and consider.***

***Now read:***

“Holy Saturday – the forgotten day, yet the most amazing day of destiny. On Holy Saturday last year I felt the need to be alone.... I headed for Scarborough.... The Resurrection was first *into* the universe, not out of it. Because of what happened on Holy Saturday, the Christ who was raised on Easter Sunday was a Christ of a restored creation...

Holy Saturday’s Divine Office recalls the most moving words of Jesus, having gate-crashed Hell, to an astonished Adam and Eve, symbolising all humanity and all creation: ‘in the past I threw you out of my garden; now I have come to take you home. Then I posted the cherubim to guard you as they would slaves; now I make the cherubim worship you as they would God.’

Alone on that long, misty, east-coast shoreline, I was moved and excited by such a beautiful theology of redemption...Jesus, now, is the essence of this earthly world... We do not need to leave this world to find heaven. God is always, already, at the heart of the world.” (Fr Daniel O’Leary. ‘Already Within’)

***Slowly and quietly read and pray verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 138 (139) again, and then pray the prayer of St Anselm, below.***

O Lord my God,

Teach my heart this day where and how to see you, where and how to find you. You have made me and remade me, and you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess, and still I do not know you. I have not yet done that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire, let me desire you in my seeking.

Let me find you by loving you, let me love you when I find you.

*Saint Anselm /1033-1109)*

# It was you who created my being.

## Who do you think you are?

Who do you think you are  
and where do you think you came from?

From toenails to the hair of your head you are mixed of the earth, of the air,  
of compounds equal to the burning gold and amethyst lights of the mountains  
of the Blood of Christ at Santa Fe.

Listen to the laboratory man tell what you are made of, man, listen while he  
takes you apart:

Gas: Oxygen, Hydrogen, Nitrogen,  
Carbon (9,000 lead pencils), Fe (Iron enough to hold your weight), P  
(phosphorus to make 800,000 matches);  
Sugars (in various combinations); NaCl; H<sub>2</sub>O; CaO; KCl; Mn; S and HCl.

You are a walking drugstore and also a cosmos and a phantasmagoria treading a  
lonesome valley, one of the people, one of the minions and myrmidons who  
would like an answer to the question: "Who and what are you?"

*Carl Sandburg (adapted)*

**So who do you think you are?** (pause, and consider the question!)

- 
5. It was you who created my being,  
knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I thank you for the wonder of my being,  
for the wonders of all your creation.
  6. Already you knew my soul,  
my body held no secret from you  
when I was being fashioned in secret  
and moulded in the depths of the earth.

Be still and be aware that you are in the presence of God.

### Relax

as you pray these words and recall that Jesus learnt as we learn.

Breathing in, calm the body.

Breathing out, smile.

Breathing in, dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, know it is a wonderful moment.

Think of creation – the moment of the ‘Big Bang’. – this is Our God! Think of the unimaginable power and energy poured into that instant. Who could say the word that set it off? Our God, Our King!

As St John says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Moses asked “who are you?” and the answer came back “I am who I am” He then asked “can I see you?” and the answer came back “nobody can look on me and live – but look around, you can see my creation.” (Exodus chap. 33)

As an artist is known in their painting, and a musician is known in their music, so God is known in His creation – the vast cosmos and the tiny atom, all are God’s creation, all are one.

### **Stop. Think. Where do you fit in?**

The day was hot and sunny and the lawn was soft – mossy, with daisies and dandelions – and further up, a cowslip. A soft breeze and the faint growl of distant traffic added to the quiet. A dandelion nods next to the book; small, yellow, exquisite. My dandelion!

The book was good. ‘The Cosmos.’ Big pictures, bright colours. Wow! Mind-blowing distances – the Andromeda Galaxy – beautiful – but how far away! Two million light years – that’s two million lots of six trillion miles. Imagine! I can’t, but the picture’s beautiful; and God made it. Did He make it for me? If me and the dandelion were alone on the Earth, would it still be there? Can we both be that special? It’s all God’s work, God’s Kingdom.

What a king!

The others come to share my dandelion, but not my book. They sit and talk of friends, of what they’ll do and people they know. The talk is quick and noisy. I have things to do, places to go. I should be busy: - I am called – but I can’t forget the book, the pictures, the vast spaces. The others chat and the dandelion nods, close, bright, beautiful, small. We’re all a part of God’s mighty Kingdom. It’s so vast - and yet so close.

**Go back and re-read the verses from Psalm 138. Take your time and think about them:**

It was you who created my being,  
knit me together in my mother's  
womb.  
I thank you for the wonder of my  
being,  
for the wonders of all your creation.

Already you knew my soul,  
my body held no secret from you  
when I was being fashioned in secret  
and moulded in the depths of the  
earth.

‘God said: “let us make man in our image, to our likeness...” So God created man in His image; in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them...’ (*Genesis 1: 26 – 27.*)

- So God made me - in His own image? - I’m like God? - Really?
- Maybe the writer of Genesis was mistaken – indulging in some Old Testament ego-trip – some political power drive – some religious clerical take-over bid.
- I don’t *feel* like God – I bet God doesn’t swear at too-slow drivers when He’s in a hurry.

But then there’s Christmas: God became Man - one of us.

**(Pause and consider. Is all this true? - What does it mean?)**

On Christmas Eve a few years ago when the assembled parishioners came to their feet for the gospel at mid-night Mass, I noticed a tiny baby, no more than a few days old, asleep in her mother’s arms. An idea hit me. I spoke briefly about the Almighty Creator and Judge that we worshipped and feared. ‘How frightening would it be’, I asked, ‘if this omniscient God thundered into our world just now?’ I stooped down to lift aloft the small child, no bigger than my fist. ‘There,’ I said, ‘there is the power of God. Who can be afraid of a God like that?’

There are many faces to a baby. When you think about it, a baby is an amazing symbol of both power and powerlessness, or, perhaps, more accurately, of power within powerlessness. As I felt the totally trusting baby stir sleepily in my hands I thought about her utter vulnerability, her total trust. How ambiguous and paradoxical it all was. And how shocking, too. This is what love does. It gives away its power. It renders itself destructible. All of this runs against the grain of our competitive and controlling nature. How can weakness ever be understood as the secret of true love? With every birth we ask ourselves the same question.

When loving couples have a baby, their lives become as precarious as that of the baby of their love. The beauty they have created shatters their former security. Their lives are irrevocably transformed. But that is what love is like. It surrenders. It has no more masks, no more expectations, no more certainties. The Bethlehem baby's defenceless presence, his shocking and precarious weakness, his overturning of all our ideas about the nature of God, stun us into silence. It is in this sacred silence, during these few precious days, that the hard thoughts within us can soften, that the unforgiving walls of judgement and blame can crumble, that the cold shadows of our pride can be melted by the warmth of an infant's smile. Such is the power of a baby.

As R. S. Thomas puts it:

When we are weak, we are Strong.  
When our eyes close on the world,  
then somewhere within us the bush Burns.  
When we are poor and aware of the inadequacy of our table,  
it is to that, uninvited, the guest comes

*(Taken from 'If you dare to love, be prepared to grieve' by Fr Daniel O'Leary)*

- And then, a few years later, Jesus says: "to know me, is to know the Father.."
- So perhaps the writer of Genesis had a point -
  - o ***Did he? Can God trust us that much? Can He love us that much?***

**(Pause and consider. Is all this true? - What does it mean?)**

***Now pray this Psalm: (Psalm 8)***

How great is your name, O Lord our God,  
through all the earth

Your majesty is praised above the heavens;  
on the lips of children and of babes  
you have found praise to foil your enemy,  
to silence the foe and the rebel.

When I see the heavens, the work of your hands,  
the moon and the stars which you arranged,  
what is man that you should keep him in mind,  
mortal man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him little less than a God;  
with glory and honour you crowned him,  
gave him power over the works of your hand,  
put all things under his feet.

All of them, sheep and cattle,  
yes, even the savage beasts,  
birds of the air, and fish  
that make their way through the waters.  
How great is your name, O Lord our God,  
through all the earth!

## Test me and know my thoughts.

7. Your eyes saw all my actions,  
they were all of them written in your book;  
every one of my days was decreed  
before one of them came into being.
8. To me, how mysterious your thoughts,  
the sum of them not to be numbered!  
If I count them, they are more than the sand;  
to finish, I must be eternal, like you.

Be still and be aware that you are in the presence of God.

### Relax

as you pray these words and recall that Jesus talked as we talk.

Breathing in, calm the body.

Breathing out, smile.

Breathing in, dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, know it is a wonderful moment.

***Keep your eyes closed and repeat twice more.***

I have a picture here of a stern-faced God, indelible pen in one hand and thick ledger in the other writing down all my thoughts, my words and the things I do - credits and debits – good and bad. An angel on one side scrabbling around for the odd good point, and a devil on the other gleefully gathering up all the bad points! Mind you, these days he probably uses a computer and an Excel sheet – or He's got an app that does it automatically for Him.

***Is this how it is? What do you think? Consider. How would you do?***

Here's another thought: if every one of my days is decreed from before I was born, what's the point in trying at all? Everything is already decreed and fixed – why bother? Free will? – forget it! It's all an illusion!

***Depressed? What do you think? Stop and Consider.***

Think of hikers with a Smartphone. They want to go from A to B. They look at the app and the app decrees a route. (If you're old-fashioned or a Scout, you'll use a map, but the principle's the same!) So they set off, and come to a fork in the road. Do they have a choice? Maybe the other way looks more interesting!

Think of a scientist constructing a maze to test the learning of a mouse. The maze is set, the choices are decreed, but the mouse can choose which turning it will take.

God made the universe – and everything in it. That is the lesson of Genesis 1. Time is part of the universe that God created. Although it is very difficult for us to imagine an environment without our familiar four dimensions, God created time along with the other three, and He is therefore part of His universe at every point – he is outside time. He exists simultaneously before we are born and after we die and he is with us at every point in our lives. It is part of the wonder of His creation, that we are free to choose. He may know what our choices have been/are/will be – but we are free to make them.

***So, what do you think?***

***Go back to verses 7 and 8 of Psalm 138 (139). Read through them again. What do you think?***

I wonder if the writer of Isaiah, chapter 55 had this psalm in mind when he wrote:

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.  
Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.  
Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

***Where would we go to discover the thoughts of God? Is it possible?***

***So what is he saying to us – us individually, and us collectively? How do we respond?***

***Let us pray:***

Lord God, whose we are and whom we serve, help us to glorify you this day, in all the thoughts of our hearts, in all the words of our lips, and in all the works of our hands, as becomes those who are your children, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Say again the prayer of St Anselm:***

O Lord my God,

Teach my heart this day where and how to see you, where and how to find you. You have made me and remade me, and you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess, and still I do not know you. I have not yet done that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire, let me desire you in my seeking.

Let me find you by loving you, let me love you when I find you.

*Saint Anselm /1033-1109)*

## Your right hand holds me fast.

9. Search me, God, and know my heart.  
O test me and know my thoughts.  
See that I follow not the wrong path  
and lead me in the path of life eternal

Be still and be aware: -

Pray these words and recall that Jesus loved as we love.

Breathing in, calm the body.

Breathing out, smile.

Breathing in, dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, know it is a wonderful moment:

**You are in the presence of God.**

If God searched you, what would He find?

If a police officer stops you to search you, they must tell you:

their name and police station; what they expect to find, e.g. drugs; the reason they want to search you, e.g. it looks like you're hiding something; why they are legally allowed to search you; that you can have a record of the search and if this isn't possible at the time, how you can get a copy.

Does God do the same?

Think about Reconciliation:

The advice is: "To see where our true faults lie we need God's help, so it is good to pray to the Holy Spirit for help, ...and to ask ourselves some questions..."

Who is doing the searching? Does God keep a record of the search?

What is the basis of our search –

- Do we search like the police do with an eye on the law?
- Do we search like a lover does, with any eye on love?

How do we attribute guilt –

- We haven't technically broken the law / commandments?
- Our friendship with God is not going great and could be better?

What are we going to do?

- Carry on, since we've broken no law and therefore done nothing wrong.
- See if there's any other way that God would like us to go, or anything else God would like us to do and we do it, or go, because we love Him?

***Read verse 9, Psalm 138 (139) again. Pause and think.***

What do you think the next line means?

“See that I follow not the wrong path”

- See, God, I am following the right path.
- Keep me on the right path, God.

The English translation gives us no help, and as a poem / song, it could mean either or both. ***Which do you think?***

***Read verse 9, Psalm 138 (139) again. Pause and think.***

Below is a quote from a BBC true story. Jesse was a down-and-out. Recently out of prison where he had started to educate himself, and in rehab for drug addiction, he was trying to continue his courses and find work, when he was contacted by an old school friend of his brother. After he left rehab, she offered to put him up and over the course of several months their relationship grew and they became close.

*"I thought I'd won the lottery - I was just a street guy, I don't know what she saw in me," Jesse says, "but when someone loves and trusts you that way, you just want to give it your all."*

The path ahead was not easy, but he eventually became a university professor.

This is not so much a rags-to-riches story, but a story about the transforming power of love. Perhaps this is the sort of situation the psalmist had in mind. What does God see in us for him to love us so much?

The last line is the psalmist's reply - a cry from the heart!

“lead me in the path of life eternal”

As Jesse's friend led him, through love (and many ups and downs), to a better life, so God leads us, if we let Him, through love, to his eternal home.

***Consider: how does God lead you? Think of at least three ways.***

*Pray this prayer from St Augustine (you may need to read it through several times):*

For see, you were within me, and I outside;  
and I looked for you outside and in my ugliness found  
those lovely things that you have made.

You were with me but I was not with you.  
I was kept from you by those lovely things,  
yet had they not been in you,  
they would not have existed at all.

You called and cried to me  
and crashed upon my deafness;  
and you sent forth your light and shone upon me,  
and chased away my blindness.

You breathed fragrance upon me,  
and I drew in my breath and do now yearn for you;  
you touched me, and I have burned for your peace.

*Saint Augustine (354-430)*

***Now read and pray the whole of psalm 138 (139) again.***

Lord, you search me and you know me,  
you know my resting and my rising,  
you discern my purpose from afar.  
You mark when I walk or lie down,  
all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue  
you know it, O Lord, through and through.  
Behind and before you besiege me,  
your hand ever laid upon me.  
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,  
too high, beyond my reach.

Where can I go from your spirit,  
or where can I flee from your face?  
If I climb the heavens, you are there.  
If I lie in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn  
and dwell at the sea's furthest end,  
even there your hand would lead me,  
your right hand would hold me fast.

It was you who created my being,  
knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I thank you for the wonder of my being,  
for the wonders of all your creation.

Already you knew my soul,  
my body held no secret from you  
when I was being fashioned in secret  
and moulded in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw all my actions,  
they were all of them written in your book;  
every one of my days was decreed  
before one of them came into being.

To me, how mysterious your thoughts,  
the sum of them not to be numbered!  
If I count them, they are more than the sand;  
to finish, I must be eternal, like you.

Search me, God, and know my heart.  
O test me and know my thoughts.  
See that I follow not the wrong path  
and lead me in the path of life eternal