

Created and Cherished

Psalm 139

Rev. Brian Bill

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How wonderful to hear a child reading Scripture that speaks of the wonder of God creating that child! Here's what we're going to learn today: *God cherishes what He created.*

I was struck by three headlines this past week...

- **A false alarm warning of a nuclear missile strike in Hawaii sent people running for their lives.** The first thing most parents did was to protect their own children. One picture that gripped me shows a dad forcing his little girl into a sewer to save her life.
- **A couple from California has been charged with torture and abuse after holding their 13 children captive in their home.** These parents didn't protect their kids. No child should ever be shackled to a bed with chains and padlocks.
- **A Georgia firefighter is being hailed as a hero after catching a child dropped from a burning apartment.** A video shows him cradling the girl and then carrying her away in a blanket to safety before collapsing to his knees. Another firefighter at the scene was being praised as well after separately catching a child during the rescue. This is what she said in an interview: "*That was the only thing running through my mind... 'Lord, let me catch this baby!'*"

In the first story we empathize with the agony of a dad seeking safety for his little girl. In the second story we're horrified and repulsed that parents could treat their children so terribly. And in the third story, we cheer for firefighters who saved a number of young lives.

I want to sound an alarm today and it's not a false one because another headline will hit Monday as our country marks the 45th Anniversary of legalized abortion. It's my prayer that some babies will end up being caught as a result of hearing God's Word today.

Last April I spoke at the Pregnancy Resources banquet and shared some statistics. It's important for us to start here.

1. There have been over 1.4 billion abortions performed around the world since 1980.
2. The Chinese government recently admitted that over the last four decades the country of China has aborted 336 million children, many of them forcibly. *That's equal to the combined populations of the United States and Australia.*
3. John MacArthur said this in a sermon, "*99% percent of all murders in the U.S. are abortions.*"
4. The number of American babies killed by abortion each year [around one million] is roughly equal to the combined number of U.S. military deaths that have occurred in all of the wars that the United States has been involved with. The greatest war today is taking place in the womb.

5. Every single day a tragedy greater than 9/11 takes place with over 3,000 abortions every 24 hours.
6. There have been nearly 60 million abortions in the U.S. since 1973. That's the combined population of 26 states.

Another way to understand the atrocity of abortion is to focus on the fact that statistically there is an abortion performed every 20 seconds in the United States. A couple years ago, I had our tech team play a loud “gong sound” every 20 seconds during the entire service – during announcements, prayers, music and the message without telling anyone what was happening. It was quite disconcerting. Towards the end of the message I explained that this jarring sound was a way to honor a life taken by abortion. Incidentally, during our 75-minute service, statistically speaking, 225 babies will lose their lives.

Have you noticed that abortion advocates are getting bolder? This month a local college featured a “#Abortion is Normal” art show which was part of a month-long campaign of events organized through #ShoutYourAbortion in an effort to normalize abortion. In the promo there were pictures of women of various ages wearing t-shirts with this slogan, *“Everyone knows I had an abortion.”* Interestingly, this event was organized in part because the Quad Cities no longer has any abortion providers since the recent closing of Planned Parenthood in Bettendorf.

There is some good news, however.

1. According to Lifenews.com, there were 49 abortion clinics that closed their doors in 2017. 77% of all abortion clinics open in 1991 have shut down.
2. Thankfully the annual abortion rate is at its lowest since 1973. But, as World Magazine says, *“When we mark finally killing less than a million unborn children in a single year, such a victory seems as tragic as it is sobering.”*
3. An increasing number of millennials are pro-life. Students for Life America, best known for its work with college students, now has 604 high school chapters. This group trains teens to engage their peers in conversations about the value of human life and the moral imperative to defend the rights of society’s most vulnerable people. BTW, I spoke in chapel at Quad City Christian on Friday on this topic. Afterwards, one student came up to me and I asked him what he learned. This is what he said, *“Abortion isn’t cool.”* A young teenage girl said, *“I didn’t know babies in the womb have their own DNA.”*
4. Ohio Governor John Kasich signed a bill into law in December that bans doctors from aborting babies testing positive for Down Syndrome.
5. It’s noteworthy that after the church shooting in November in Texas, state authorities released a complete list of those killed, including the unborn child of a woman who was killed. As tragic as all this is, authorities recognized her unborn baby as a human being.
6. The widespread use of ultrasound and other images is helping people see that life begins at conception.

We've been learning the importance of our identity in Christ during this brief series. Two weeks ago we celebrated our forgiveness and freedom. Last weekend we unpacked what it means for the saved to be sinner and saint. Today we're celebrating that *God cherishes what He created.*

As good as it is to celebrate our identity, I do want to share a caution. In our search to discover who we are we can inadvertently focus too much on our self-image, self-esteem and self-identity. The key is *not so much who I am but who God is.*

I came across a very helpful post written by Jen Wilken (BTW, our Wednesday night women's Bible study led by Deb McFate was developed by Jen Wilken).

Here's part of what she writes, "*We have misdiagnosed our primary problem. As long as we keep the emphasis on us instead of on a higher vision, we will take small comfort from discussions of identity — and we will see little lasting change. Our primary problem as Christian women [and men] is not that we lack self-worth, not that we lack a sense of significance or purpose. It's that we lack awe...Awe helps us worry less about self-worth by turning our eyes first toward God, then toward others. It also helps establish our self-worth in the best possible way: we understand both our insignificance within creation and our significance to our Creator.*"

I also appreciate her insight into our passage for today: "*Without question, the subject of Psalm 139 is not us. Rather than a reflection on me, fearfully and wonderfully made, it is an extended and exquisite celebration of God, fearful and wonderful...Don't tell me who I am until you have caused me to gaze in awe at 'I Am.' There can be no true self-awareness apart from right, reverent awe of God.*"

We've already heard most of Psalm 139 as it has guided our time of worship. That's appropriate because this psalm is directed to a worship leader. Known as a wisdom psalm, it divides into 4 stanzas of six verses each. Amazingly, there are 34 references to *Lord, God, You* and *Your* in this psalm!

I'm going to simply put the text on the screen and make some explanatory comments as we walk through this section of the Word. We're going to see David explode with praise and worshipful wonder as He considers who God is and what He has done.

1. Omnipresent: God knows what you do. (Psalm 139:1-6). In these opening verses there are eight different Hebrew words that pile on top of each other to show that God knows us intimately.

- 1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me!**
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.**
- 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.**
- 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.**
- 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.**
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.**

The psalm begins with, “***O Lord, you...***” That’s an emphatic way of showing that it’s all about God. He has searched us thoroughly so He knows us completely. Have you ever felt like no one really knows you or understands what you’re going through? God knows your heart, your fears, your thoughts, your words, dreams, frustrations, and actions. On top of that, He knows your past, present and future. He notices what’s going on inside you, what’s happening to you and what’s going on around you. He knows every move you make and every motive you have. He knows all the ways you lack and yet He still loves you. David says all of this is “***too wonderful***” to even understand.

Our family recently watched the movie *Wonder* over Christmas and cried through the whole film. I love how it establishes the worth and value of every human being as it follows a boy who was born with a disease that led to 27 reconstructive surgeries on his face. In one scene the mom, played by Julia Roberts, told her son he was beautiful when he said he was ugly. He responded that she had to say that because she’s the mom. Her reply is so good: “*You are not ugly Auggie...because I'm your mom it counts the most because I know you the most.*”

Listen. What God says about you counts the most because He knows you the most. He lays His hand on you with blessing because He loves you. *He cherishes what He created.*

2. Omnipresent: God goes where you go. David’s reaction to God’s penetrating knowledge is to bolt and bail. He just wants to get away from God. In Luke 5:8, after Jesus performed a miracle, we read, “***But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’***” When we’re faced with God’s holy gaze, just like Adam and Eve, we want to hide.

- 7 ***Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?***
- 8 ***If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!***
- 9 ***If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,***
- 10 ***even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.***
- 11 ***If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,”***
- 12 ***even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.***

As David contemplates hiding in heaven or burying himself among the dead, he knows that God will be wherever he is. No matter how high or how low you go; God is already there. He’s here, He’s there and He’s everywhere...all at the same time.

The “***wings of the morning***” is a reference to the sun coming up in the east and the “***uttermost parts of the sea***” refers to the furthest west he could go. Jonah learned that the speed of a ship couldn’t outrun God and for David the speed of light cannot outpace God’s omnipresence. When David realizes God goes where he goes, he rests in the fact that God’s hand both *guides* and *guards* him. He then considers having the darkness hide him and remembers that God can see in the dark.

The inability of darkness to conceal leads David to conclude that not even the darkness of the womb can hide the tiniest human being from His presence.

3. Omnipotent: God made who you are. Psalm 139:13-16 functions much like an ultrasound, as God's Word gives us a window into the womb. As we take a peek into God's prenatal care unit, we will see something so mysterious and so amazing it will forever change the way we look at life. In this *Womb with a View*, God is intimately involved in the entire process because *He cherishes what He created.*

- 13 **For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.**
- 14 **I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.**
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
- 15 **My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.**
- 16 **Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.**
- 17 **How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!**
- 18 **If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.**

The word “*for*” indicates that this section explains the preceding 12 verses where we see God as omniscient (all-knowing) – *God knows what you do.* He is omnipresent (everywhere present at the same time) – *He goes where you go.* We now see a demonstration of His omnipotence (all powerful) – *God made who you are.*

God formed each of us in our mother’s womb. The word “*you*” is used twice in verse 13 and is emphatic to show that it is God who is doing the forming.

The word “*formed*” is quite fascinating. It means “*to cut, frame or fashion*” and is used in Genesis 2:7: “*Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*” It also has the idea of buying or purchasing. Since He’s the creator, He has ownership rights over us. The Bible teaches that abortion is not an issue of women’s rights but of the womb’s rights. The Almighty owns the offspring of men and women and therefore we do not have the right to take the life the Lord has created.

It’s also stunning to note that David is strongly stating his personhood when he writes, “*You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together...*” We also see this in verse 15: “*My frame...when I was being made...*” And again in verse 16: “*Your eyes saw my unformed substance...that days that were formed for me...*” One reason abortion is wrong is because there is a little person in the womb! Protecting the preborn is the ultimate human rights issue.

This is similar to what Job writes in Job 10:11: “*You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews.*” Genesis 1:26 says that we are made in the image of God. In Latin this is called the *imago Dei*. The image of God has been stamped upon our very souls.

God clearly states in Jeremiah 1:5 that people have personalities even before they are created: “***Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...***” Isaiah 49:1 adds, “***The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.***”

The Scriptures are clear, and science is playing catch-up due to the widespread use of ultrasound technology: *Life begins at conception!* In Psalm 51:5, David considers his conception as the launch of his life: “***Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.***” Have you ever considered that from the time of conception, nothing else is added to the embryo? It simply begins a process of development.

When David considers all this, he busts out into praise. The word “***praise***” here means to, “*throw down or cast.*” He’s throwing down some praise because of what’s going down in the womb! We are “***fearfully made.***” Human life should be treated with reverence and awe. What God is doing in the womb should create so much wonder within us that we’re moved to worship Him wholeheartedly. Psalm 136:4: “***To Him alone who does great wonders.***”

The word “***wonderfully***” means distinct, unique, separate and “*amazingly constructed.*” This is where we get the idea of the “sanctity of human life.” Human life is distinct from animal life and every human is different than every other human. As David contemplates all this He declares that God’s works are extraordinary. His very “***soul***” knows it very well. Likewise, if people are honest, even those who support abortion know that there is something wonderful happening in the womb.

In verse 15, the word for “***frame***” refers to our bones or skeletal structure. The word “***made***” has the idea of performing an activity with a distinct purpose or goal in mind. Listen. God makes people on purpose *for* a purpose.

Being made “***in secret***” has the idea of covering or shelter. This word in Hebrew carries with it the idea of *protection*, which shows how precious the preborn are to God. I love the picture in Psalm 71:6: “***By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb.***” God is purposely protecting the developing baby as He hides this little human while doing wonders in the womb. A mother’s womb should be the safest place ever. Unfortunately it is often the most dangerous place for a baby to be.

Recently someone shared with me what sign language is for the word abortion [Demonstrate cradling a baby and then dropping or throwing].

The phrase, “***intricately woven together***” is a single word meaning, “*to skillfully weave*” like an expert embroiderer does. Threads are woven into precise patterns and designs to reflect the creativity of the Creator, as seen in Exodus 26:36: “***You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework.***” With God all the parts fit together just right so they support one another.

What’s in the womb is not a blob but a baby! We are not accidents or the products of impersonal chance.

It's a scientific fact that life begins at conception. Pastor Matt Chandler says it like this: "*When a sperm and an egg collide, a new strand of DNA was born that was totally separate from mom's DNA...on a scientific level, that baby is in your body but it is not your body. It has its own blood, its own DNA, its own brain, its own liver. It is inside of you, but it is not you.*"

We took some time as a staff team this week to list other groups and categories of people who are either marginalized or dehumanized. This list is by no means exhaustive but it may help to stretch our understanding that *God cherishes what He created*. Proverbs 3:27 says, "***Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.***"

- The unborn
- Elderly
- Widows and orphans
- Homeless
- Those with disabilities
- People from all races, countries, cultures and languages
- All minorities
- Members of the LGBTQ community
- Immigrants, refugees and their children
- Those who are less fortunate
- Prisoners and ex-cons
- Addicts
- Those who have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused
- Those with genetic defects (Pip)
- Those who are being trafficked – this is the second largest criminal activity worldwide generating \$32 billion. BTW, this is human trafficking awareness month.
- Gang members
- Muslims and members of other religions
- Those from opposite political parties

I must confess that there's one more group that's very difficult for me to love – the Minnesota Vikings! But I did love the interview by Vikings QB Case Keenum after throwing the game-winning touchdown last Sunday. When he was asked how he felt, he replied, "*It was the third best moment of my life behind giving my life to Jesus Christ and marrying my wife.*"

Nothing is hidden from God. He personally puts our skeleton in place and then creates all the delicate parts of our bodies, weaving them together to form His living masterpiece. I love the first words in verse 16: "***Your eyes saw my unformed substance...***" The mention of God's "eyes" reminds us that God is concerned with watching His creation and the word for "substance" is *embryo* or *fetus*. The idea behind "***unformed***" speaks of being wrapped together as in a bunch or a ball, which by the way, is exactly what an early embryo looks like.

It's helpful to consider what is medically true about you before you were born.

- Your heart began to beat just 21 days after fertilization
- At 8 weeks, you could respond to touch by reflex
- At 8 weeks, you had your own blood – not your mom’s blood but your own
- At 9 weeks, your limbs and fingers were growing and the bones in your arms began to calcify
- At 10 weeks, your brain began producing almost 250,000 new neurons every minute!
- At 11 weeks, your kidneys began to produce urine
- At 14 weeks you began to suck your thumb
- At about 16 weeks, your heart pumped about 26 quarts of blood every day.
- At around 20 weeks you were able to feel pain
- At birth, you had 100 billion neurons!

And consider the wonder of what God does in the womb with 60 trillion cells, 100 thousand miles of nerve fiber, 60 thousand miles of vessels carrying blood around the body, 250 bones, to say nothing of joints, ligaments and muscles.

The same God, who keeps His eye on the sparrow, also keeps His eyes on every human being as they grow and develop in the womb. When you think about it, we are all just grown-up embryos! There's no difference between a preborn baby and a newborn except location.

Check out the second half of verse 16: “*In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*” God didn’t just ordain our DNA; he ordained our days. He has pre-recorded each day of our life – before we began to breathe! I love to read this verse to new parents because it reminds them that God has plans for their child and that He’s written them all down in His book. That gives us confidence that God will do His work, as we’re faithful to do ours.

Friends, based on both biblical and medical evidence, the conclusion is obvious: human life is sacred and stamped with divine dignity and as such must be protected. It is therefore wrong to murder an innocent human being. To kill someone created in God’s image is to indirectly attack the God who created life. Abortion must be defined as the destruction of a human life in violation of the 6th Commandment: “***You shall not commit murder.***”

Don’t you love it when someone says they’ve been thinking about you? In verses 17-18, David is blown away by the fact that God is thinking about him all the time. The word “***precious***” means costly and valuable. God not only created us, He cherishes us. He made us and He can’t stop thinking about us. Matt Chandler writes, “*God doesn’t love some future version of you. He loves you now.*” When David contemplates how many times God’s thoughts are toward him, he says the number is too “***vast***” and uncountable like the number of grains of sand on the seashore. God ponders us and He’s present with us, or as David says, “***I awake, and I am still with you.***” *God cherishes what He created.*

*God knows what you do
God goes where you go
God made who you are*

4. Omniarch: God demands your all. The word “Omniarch” means “*absolutely supreme, the ruler of everything in the universe.*” The right response to God’s omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence is to surrender our lives to the One who gave us life. We must separate ourselves from that which is wicked and see sin as God sees it. We must not associate with outward sins and we must also be open to God pointing out our sins within.

- 19 Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!**
- 20 They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.**
- 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?**
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
- 22 I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.**

These are tough verses to understand. Here’s my take. After learning that God cherishes what He created, we are to hate the shedding of innocent blood as much as He does. We’re to see sin as an act of rebellion against a holy God. As we learned last weekend, since we are called saints, we must be separated *from* that which defiles us and separated *to* what brings God joy. David hates anything that is an affront to the holiness of God.

Look at the last two verses of Psalm 139: “***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.***” This is a courageous and very dangerous prayer to pray. God wants us to invite Him to search our lives. The verb “***search***” is used for digging up valuable minerals in a mine. The term “***try me***” refers to examining precious metals to prove their purity.

While it is certainly a good idea to do some self-analysis, it is even better to ask God to examine us. Most of us, when examining ourselves, will arrive at the conclusion that we’re OK – or that we’re at least better than our neighbor or co-worker. In asking God to evaluate our lives, we are really inviting Him to do four things. I should warn you that this takes a great deal of humility:

- **Search me.** All of me; even my darkest secrets and deeds.
- **Try me.** To see if I am pure and true and see if I have any sluggishness or selfishness.
- **See me.** Let me know what you find.
- **Lead me.** Show me how to correct my ways – lead me the right way.

We don’t want to just be against abortion, we must also be for life. One way we demonstrate that in a practical way is through our strategic partnership with Pregnancy Resources. Check out this video to hear a first-hand testimony of how God has used this ministry in the life of a young woman.

Play Video of Pregnancy Resources (clip of Jasmine)

Pregnancy Resources Stats – 2017

- Moms and Dads served – 1,153
- Pregnancy Tests – 867

- Ultrasounds Performed – 518
- “At Risk” for abortion – 325
- “At Risk” babies born – 266 (81% of “at risk” babies were saved)
- Spiritual Discussions – 951
- Individual Dads served – 78

Interview Pam White, Director of Moline Pregnancy Resources

1. What kind of services does Pregnancy Resources provide?
2. Edgewood recently contributed \$52,000 towards the purchase of the mobile medical van. Can you tell us how God is using this ministry tool?
3. What kinds of needs do you have for additional servants?

Interview Kim Hawkins, Edgewood deacon, member of Missions Committee and serves at Pregnancy Resources

1. What are some ways men can be involved at Pregnancy Resources?
2. What strikes you about how God is using Pregnancy Resources in the QCA?

How to Respond

How are you going to respond? We can't just sit back and do nothing. Proverbs 31:8-9 compels us to act: "*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*" Proverbs 24:11 lays out our responsibility: "*Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.*" Moses urges us to choose life in Deuteronomy 30:19: "...*I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*" Because the preborn are people they must be protected.

1. **Repent and confess our indifference.** We need to care because we know we've been created and we are cherished. Christians didn't stand against racism like we should have in the 60s and now I wonder if our grandkids will question why we were so quiet and complacent when abortion was allowed in our land.
2. **Adjust our attitudes.** Satan is the enemy of life, not doctors, people who are in favor of abortions, or politicians. It's way too easy for us to become self-righteous, smug and condemning. As I've said before, we're prone to get angry with people who sin differently than we do. We are often more *caustic* than *Christian* in our dealings with people. Remember that you can win an argument and in the process, lose a soul. Instead of building bridges with those who are lost, our venom can erect long-standing barriers that end up isolating people from the gospel.
3. **Stand up for life.** This cannot be minimized as you interject God's views on life into conversations, post pro-life status updates on social media and provide counsel to people who are

in crisis. I applaud each of you for your boldness on a controversial topic and as your pastors, we will do all we can to keep you encouraged and informed.

4. See yourself as an abortion survivor. Can you raise your hand if you were born *after* January 22, 1973? If so, you're an abortion survivor! Historically, those who have endured an atrocity have always labored in earnest to end acts of violence. A Gallup survey shows that teenagers today are more pro-life than the general adult population. 72% of teens said they believe abortion is "morally wrong" while just 26% of adults agree with this statement. I've said this before but I believe that Millennials will eventually put an end to abortion in our country.

5. We need to pray. Let's pray that an ethic of life will permeate our country.

6. Offer grace and forgiveness to those who need it. Abortion is a sin but it's also forgivable. While we need to speak out against moral concerns in our society, we must also offer love and compassion to those who need help. Studies show that the majority of women who've had abortions have significant emotional, physical and spiritual scars. Edgewood is a place of grace. If you've had an abortion, this message was no doubt hard for you to hear. It is my deepest prayer that you will experience God's redeeming grace and cleansing forgiveness.

We must be sensitive and non-judgmental toward those who have had abortions – and toward those who have encouraged abortions, like boyfriends or husbands or parents or grandparents. They are in need of grace and forgiveness, not condemnation.

I know that there are people in this room and listening online whose lives have been affected by abortion in some way. All of us have made decisions in the past that we regret. It is my deepest prayer that you will experience God's redeeming grace and cleansing forgiveness. Abortion is a sin but it's not the unpardonable sin.

We're not here to condemn you but to affirm the sanctity and value of life. You can find forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you've had an abortion, or were complicit in one, allow Jesus Christ to cleanse you. Repent and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. I like how the King James translates Romans 5:20: "**But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.**" That means when there's a lot of sin, there's even more grace to cover your guilt and forgiveness to erase your shame.

I long for the day that we will see another headline: "*Because Christians are convinced that God cherishes what He created, the culture is now protecting the preborn.*"

Closing Song: "My Strength"

Though I walk
Through the valley of death
With my fears and all my regrets

Though the darkness
Surrounds all I am
I'll praise You