

# PSALMS

**September 4, 2022**

**Psalm 139 - God Knows Us**

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We are going to Psalm 139 today. This will be our last week in Psalms, and next week we will begin a longer study through Galatians.

One of the things Grace Road is known for is biblical teaching. Our church is known as a place where the Bible is opened and true facts about God are communicated. Which is a good thing, as we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Mind is part of that, and so we don't want to do less for the life of the mind.

But it is also easy to be out on a backpacking trip, climbing a mountain, so focused on the map and following the right trail, that we miss the views and the beauty of it all. We can measure the number of miles we need to hike, we can know which direction we're headed, we can plan for which rivers we will stop at to refill our water bottles, but never pause to take it all in. We never stop to have our breath taken away by the majesty of the scenery, because we are so focused on the things we're trying to do and all of the technicalities and plans.

Lewis talks about needing both the experience of being at the seashore and possessing a map of the coast. They can each tell you a lot, but you need both to really encounter the seacoast.

And the Bible certainly gives us practical things we should do. It provides maps to life, for sure. But that's not all it does. In fact, even more than that, it provides breathtaking views of God. It presents His majesty and beauty, not just so we'll have three practical things to do with it this week, but so we can stand in awe of Him and worship.

And one of the reasons for the Psalms, which are songs and poems, it to make sure we feel. To make sure we take in a grand view of God. To cause us to stand in awe.

Because we are made to be not just thinkers, but worshippers. We were hard-wired for awe. We were made to behold something greater than us. And so some of the poems of the scriptures are to make sure we take it all in. To make sure God isn't just something we analyze, but someone we are in awe of, someone we celebrate, someone we herald.

He wants us to use our minds to study Him, to know what He is like and not like. But he doesn't want it to stop with our collecting facts. He wants it to sink in - he wants our feelings to line up with the truth, and He wants us to sing these truths, not just analyze and categorize them.

There's a difference between knowing God so you can pass a theology test, and knowing God. God wants to not only be studied and analyzed by His people, but known by His people. He doesn't just want us to know what to do, but He wants us to know Him.

And so in Psalm 139, there's not a lot of things to do. This chapter isn't mainly about steps we should follow. But it is mainly a big, beautiful, awe-inspiring picture of God, and the deep sense of wonder and trembling that sets in as we think about what it means that these things are true. So let's read the first six verses to start:

**139 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.**

So David, in pausing to take in the majesty of God, celebrates in song God's omniscience - the fact that God is all-knowing. This is affirmed all throughout the Bible - that God

knows all things, past, present, and future. Real and potential. There is no detail hidden from him.

**Matthew 10:30 “But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”**

**Psalm 94:9 “He who planted the ear, does he not hear?  
He who formed the eye, does he not see?”**

It would be almost ludicrous to say that the one who made us with the ability to see has anything hidden from his sight. As Hebrews 4:13 says:

**Hebrews 4:13 “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account”**

God is perfectly all-knowing, with nothing hidden from his sight. Nothing obscured.

And that means there is nothing he knows better than other things. We have areas of expertise, things we know well and things we know less well. But for an all-knowing God, there is nothing that he doesn't have perfect and infinite knowledge of.

Which means He is never surprised. Never learns anything. He knows everything about everything, and He knows it all fully. And because He has full knowledge of everything, He is paying perfect attention to everything all at once.

Which is interesting, but look how David is not just analyzing this but beholding it and in awe of this. It's hitting home for him because that means that God fully knows Him.

He says in verse 1, “You have searched me,” and he uses a term an archaeologist might use: you've dug into me to unearth what's down there. You've dug out everything in me that is hidden. You've excavated my heart.

So let this hit home for us. God knows everything we do (verse 2 - he knows our sitting down and rising up). Everything we think or plan (verse 3, “you know my path”), he knows not just what we think but how we think, how we operate (you know my ways). He knows everything we say before we do (verse 4). This means he knows us better than we know ourselves!

Because he doesn't know anything less well, that means He is, right now, paying full attention to you, and He is no less focused on you right now than anybody or anything else. You have his full attention. And he knows you far better than you know yourself.

Now, that might be a comfort, and it might not.

If you're out on a mountain, taking in the view from the heights, you might be soothed by the scenery, but then look down and be unnerved by how high up you are. It can be a comfort and a dread. You might have a mixed reaction to all you're taking in.

**And it's the same way in this Psalm - the omniscience of God is both a comfort and dread. A wonder, and something to lament.**

**God's omniscience as a wonder** (verse 6):

"I don't understand this. What an amazing view - Mind blown. God is incomprehensible. He is above us, other than us, worthy of worship. This is too wonderful for us to wrap our minds around."

So this enhances our worship of God, knowing He is that amazing in His knowledge and that far above us.

But there's also **another response to this truth about God. There's a note of lament: he doesn't like this!**

In verse 5 he says, "You hem me in." And that's not a happy term. The Hebrew term for "hem in" here doesn't mean God snuggles us. It's the word that's used elsewhere when a city is being laid siege to and surrounded. This could be translated "you besiege me," or "you have me trapped."

That's a strange thought.

But it makes sense.

**Because on a pretty deep level, we don't want anyone to know us all the way through.** We like to be in control and present an image of ourselves.

We prefer to control who knows about us, what they know about us, when they know those things. We want people to think of us what we want them to think of us, even if it's partially untrue.

This can be one of the difficulties in marriage - it is very difficult to hide your true self from the person who is closer to you than anyone on earth. You can fool a lot of people, and maintain an image with a lot of people, but it's hard to do that with the person you share a small space with for the rest of your life. And there are times it's frustrating that, "Dang, she knows me."

We don't like being known that well, not in a way that's beyond our control.

When Jesus sat at the well and revealed who He was to the Samaritan woman, she ran from there and told her friends, "Come see this man who told me everything I've ever done!" Eek. How many would want to take her up on that offer?

So David says, "It's amazing that you know me. And also I feel trapped by that. Because who could stand before that kind of scrutiny?"

David oscillates back and forth for awhile between celebrating the all-knowing presence of God in his life, celebrating the comfort of God knowing everything and guiding him, and also wanting to get away from it:

**Psalm 139:7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?  
Or where shall I flee from your presence?**

Here he uses a similar phrase the book of Jonah uses at its outset:

**Jonah 1 "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." 3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.**

God came to Jonah, commanded him to go to Nineveh, and Jonah did not want God's had to lead him in this regard, so he decided to flee from the presence of the Lord.

So David in this Psalm contemplates God's knowledge of all of his ways, and thinks, "If I could get away from that I would. But where would I go? Where could I go where the

omni-present Spirit of God is not?" Just like Jonah couldn't get away, it's not like I could either:

**Psalm 139:8 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.**

David says there is nowhere he could go to hide from God.<sup>1</sup>

At times I feel trapped by Him, constrained by Him. But what am I gonna do, go somewhere where He's not?

But notice again that David isn't only frustrated by God's sovereign rule and omniscience. He is also comforted by it.

Notice that twice now David has mentioned the hand of God: once negatively and once positively:

**Psalm 139:5 You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.**

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah echos this thought:

Jeremiah 23:23-24 "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD."

So this is a negative use - you lay your hand on me as part of hemming me in, you put pressure on me by telling me what to do. You constrain me.

And David uses it positively:

**Psalm 139:10 even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me.**

He celebrates the fact that anywhere he goes, the hand of God will lead him and hold him fast.

**It's almost like he has a love/hate relationship with the hand of God.**

Isn't this a normal way to think about God's hand in our lives? On the one hand, his hand creates some pressure and hems us in. God has told us what to do and not do, so that steals our options, it takes away our freedom. I can't be whoever I want to be if God's hand is upon me. If there is a God, and He has made me, then He has made me for a purpose, his commands are binding, I'm His, so I can't do or be whatever I want.

My purpose is not to live for myself, but to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. I don't get to be my own king, I'm constrained.

And sometimes we don't like those constraints.

But then, on the other hand, we want the hand of God to guide us and to uphold us and support us.

We love that God guides us. Except when He guides us to do something we don't want to do.

We love that God's hand will support us, but it's the same hand that puts pressure on us to live a certain way and not another.

But if we do run away from God, let's hypothetically say we could do that, where do we go for comfort and hope and peace?

Who sustains us when we run from God?

We can try to decide to be totally free with no hand to tell us what to do, but then what hand guides us? Whose hand do we rely on?

We want to have our cake and eat it, too.

But the whole idea is futile anyways - if darkness doesn't make any difference to God and He can see all things just like they're day, there is certainly no running from Him. There's no outwitting the wisdom of God, there is no hiding from the eye of God.

And then David gives an illustration of the knowledge and wisdom and majesty and power of God:

**Psalm 139: 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.**

The main point David is making in describing God's forming of a child in his mother's womb is that God is at work, fully present, even in the most hidden of places. But as he makes this point, he has to stop in verse 14 and praise God for his work of creating a child in the womb.

So he's saying, "You can't hide from God's all seeing eye - if we were not hidden from God when we were being intricately woven in the wombs of our mothers, there is no place we aren't fully seen by God. If God saw us when nobody else could see us in the



womb, then He certainly sees us now. If it's dark and hidden anywhere in the world, it's when we are microscopic and enclosed in the womb of our mothers.

But there, not hindered by the intricacy or the smallness or the darkness, God is present, weaving us together, with no need for a work light. Nothing is hidden from Him, there are no secrets before Him.

How crazy it would be to think we were getting away with anything, when God saw everything we did as our substance was being formed together in our mothers' wombs, the darkest and most hidden of places.

But in thinking about the wonder that God knits us together in the womb, David has to stop to worship.

And in verse 14 he says:

**Psalm 139:14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.**

He says of all the wonderful works of God, one of the most wonderful is the knitting together a child in the womb of his or her mother.

And by saying, "I wasn't hidden from you then so I can't hide from you now," David is affirming that he existed then, in the womb. His existence as a person didn't begin when he was born, it began when he was still very much unformed in the womb. That's when his life began, that's when he became a person.

Last week we looked at Psalm 51, and there David affirmed:

**Psalm 51:5 "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."**

For David to have been sinful from the time of conception, he must have been human from the time of conception. Animals don't sin have a sin nature, clumps of cells don't have a sin nature, humans have a sin nature. And if David had that nature from the moment of conception, he was human from the moment of conception.

And I know that can seem upsetting because it sounds political, but pushing politics aside, it's important that as Christians, we affirm with the scriptures that life begins at conception, and that human life has dignity and value not because of what it can do for society, but because it is made in the image of God.<sup>2</sup>

And Christian doctrine through the ages has said that the body doesn't exist before the soul, and the soul doesn't exist before the body. Our souls aren't around before the body is, entering the body at some later point. And our bodies, while alive, always contain a soul. From the moment of conception we are humans, made in the image of God.

And because we are made in the image of God, we have worth and value and human dignity, from the moment of conception.

People don't get their worth from being able to contribute to society, but because they are made in God's image. This means that a newly conceived child in the womb and an elderly person severely disabled by late-stage dementia both possess the image of God despite the perceived inconveniences of their existence to others.

If God knit us together, if his Supremacy and Sovereignty define us instead of our own self-determination - even if we are lacking what our culture defines as 'humanness', then our worth is fixed.

Science and reason, likewise, affirm the humanity of an unborn child. From the moment of conception, a fetus possesses human DNA, with all of the genetic instructions from both parents present . If that child grows, she will only grow into a more developed human and no other type of creature could emerge. A newly conceived child is indeed fully human.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sam Storms summarizes well the imago Dei as both human state and expression: "That which distinguishes man from the animal kingdom is the imago Dei, the image of God. The image of God has traditionally been identified with such things as rationality, self-consciousness, the exercise of dominion, and moral conscience. However, we must be careful in defining the image of God in wholly functional terms. The image of God is as much a state as it is a capacity. The image is not to be conceived as an end in a process whereby an unborn entity progresses into personhood. The image is a given, not a goal to which the fetus moves in its physiological development. No one denies that the fetus develops. But this development is not from non-person to part-person to full-person, but rather from full-person to the consummate expression and experience of all that personhood entails."

<sup>3</sup> The biology is clear. Human life begins at conception:  
<https://www.princeton.edu/~prolife/articles/embryoquotes2.html>

And respecting the dignity of the unborn child means opposing abortion, it means caring for moms, it means helping the poor, it means disciplining parents - there's a lot downstream from an embrace of the image of God in all people. And God's people should be about all of those activities.

And I also know there are women here who have had abortions, and this lands heavily. You may be carrying the weight of guilt, and maybe nobody knows about it but God. And God's knowledge of that doesn't feel like a comfort because of the guilt. But I want you to know the power of the Gospel - Jesus died for our sins, so that when we believe, any sin we turn from and confess and repent of is removed from us. He takes the guilt and stains, and He will do that for you as well.

So David is enamored with the picture of God who knows all, is everywhere, and he is amazed:

**Psalm 139:17 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.**

No matter where he goes, no matter how dark his thoughts have gotten, he awakes, and God is still there, vast is the sum of his thoughts.

But then David changes gears.

**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 some strange thoughts, and this way of thinking is almost foreign to us.

In verse 19, David is asking for vengeance on his enemies (not that he would take their lives, he is asking God to take their lives - and at least their lives are God's to give and take.) And his thoughts of God have become so precious, that those who speak against God and who use misuse God's name are his enemies.

Sometimes love for someone creates a hatred for those who would harm them - if you have kids, you've probably felt similar hatred-like-feelings for those who would harm them.

And David here so loves the majesty of God, that those who mock him and hate him are those who are opposed to something incredibly precious to him. So David honestly expresses his feelings in prayer to God, he isn't taking his own vengeance, but asking God to take vengeance. And this does show a deep love for God, when those who are opposed to his glory become frustrating, and like an enemy.

But nonetheless, Jesus called us to this standard:

**Matthew 5:43-45** “43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

And we will talk about what made the difference in a minute.

But first look what David says at the end of the Psalm:

**Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!**

This is an incredibly bold prayer in light of what David has just said.

He has said that God sees and knows all things, nothing is hidden from God. He has asked God to carry out vengeance on wicked people and slay them.

And then David says to God, "Search me."

God just prayed for God to slay the wicked, and then asks God to fully examine him.

How can you pray this?

There have been a number of what look like loose ends and contradictions in this Psalm:

**David wants to get away from God's knowledge of him, yet he invites it and revels in it.**

**David wants to get away from God's hand as it restricts, but embraces it when it guides and upholds.**

**He bristles at a God who steals his options and freedom, yet loves God's guidance.**

**He is afraid of God's scrutiny because he knows what is in his heart, yet he prays for God's judgment on the wicked- a dangerous prayer if you know what's in your own heart.**

So it's like this Psalm is loaded with these enigmas and contradictions. How could all of this be true?

The answer is that these words are not only David's words, but they're the inspired words of God. They're not just an isolated song, but part of a whole story.

And the focus of that whole story is the cross of Jesus - which makes sense of all of this.

**We are hungry for God's majesty, we need his presence, we want to be known. But we also know that we are wicked, there are unpleasant things in us.** And any God who knows us like God knows us, anyone who knows us better than we know ourselves, would surely reject us. He'd surely judge us. He'd surely carry out vengeance on us.

We want to be fully known and fully loved, but we are unlovable.

But Jesus Christ went to the cross.

He fully knew us - he knew our sin, he knew our rebellion against God, he knew that because of the wicked ways in us we would just assume flee from God's presence. So he paid for that. He went to the cross as our substitute, to absorb the wrath of God that was stored up for the wicked, the wrath we deserve. So that, if we will receive that free gift by faith, we are forgiven and cleansed.

Because Jesus took our sin, we can say to God, "search me! Know me!" And we can say it with confidence that we are accepted and loved by God, if we have laid hold of Jesus by faith.

**We have a love/hate relationship with God's hand.** We want it to guide us, we want Him to hold us fast, we want his care and support. But we don't want it to tell us what to do, because that seems so unpleasant.

But the God who sent his son to die for us is the same God who gave us those unpleasant commands. And if he loved us enough to send his son, he had that kind of a heart toward us, then when his hand seems to constrain us too much, we can know that even that constraint is for our good.

He didn't love us enough to send his son, and then have a massive change of heart and decide to torture us unnecessarily with his commands. The God who gave his son gave his commands. So his hand, while sometime unpleasant, is always for our good.

**We have the apparent contradiction between David praying for vengeance for enemies and Jesus saying to love them.** But the cross, again, makes the difference. God's truest heart for his enemies like us is that we would be forgiven and saved. And as people who have received the forgiveness of God, we have to see even our worst enemies as people like us and seek their redemption.

**God knows us better than we know ourselves.** It's a dread, and something to want to get away from, unless we know that He died for all of the sins and insufficiencies, and that God actually loves us far more than we could ever imagine.

Our deep desire to be fully loved and fully known is met only in Jesus.

So stand in awe of Him today. Trust Him with your life today. If you don't yet believe, turn from sin and unbelief and other ultimates, trust in his death, burial, and resurrection, and find in Him the welcome to what your heart desires at its deepest level.

## **Time of Confession.**

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Father, we are in awe of you. You are too wonderful for us, beyond our comprehension. You know all things, and you know us better than we know ourselves. Yet we confess that instead of that fact driving us to the cross, we often futilely try to run from you and hide from you and avoid you, as if we could go anywhere to get away from your Spirit. So forgive us.

Jesus, we thank you that you gave your life for your enemies like us. Though we foolishly ran away, you pursued us. You redeemed us. You cleansed us so we could be fully known by God, and still fully accepted. We are in awe of your great Gospel.

Spirit, we pray you would continue to search us, convict us, show us the wicked ways in us. And send us running back to the cross with all of them.

### **Assurance of Pardon:**

Stand in awe of this:

**Micah 7:18-20 “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. 19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. 20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.**