


Learning how to
talk to God
from the great prayers of the Bible

David's Prayer of Meditation

Psalm 139

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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DAVID'S PRAYER OF MEDITATION

Psalm 139

The majestic creator of the universe has invited us to talk to Him.

Prayer is the wonderful gift of experiencing a relationship with God and having a conversation with Him. This invitation to pray proves how much God loves us and cares about us. It's permission to cry out to Him for help and ask Him to meet our needs. And it really makes a difference. Prayer makes a difference because He promises to listen and He promises to act.

So, why do we pray so little? Why don't we pray more? One reason is self-reliance. We think we can handle life without God. So we rely on self, on money, and how smart we are. Another reason we don't pray is a lack of faith. Perhaps we've tried and it didn't work, so we stop praying. Yet, when life falls apart, we can't help crying out to God.

God invites us to talk to Him, and nothing could be more important in our discipleship than learning how to talk to Him ... and how to listen to Him. So this spring, we are ***learning how to talk to God from the great prayers of the Bible***. Studying the great prayers of David and Solomon. The desperate prayers of Jonah and Jeremiah. The great prayer of Jesus in garden. We're going to see how Jesus talked to His Father and how Jesus prayed for us. We're also going to study the great principles of prayer like praying with faith. But the goal is not to learn more, but to pray more!

This morning, we're going to look at one of greatest prayers in the Bible – Psalm 139. It is one of the greatest theological chapters in the Bible, yet even more, it is one of the most personal and intimate prayers in the Bible. And it is less about David talking to God and more about David meditating on God.

Eastern religions teach meditation as emptying the mind, but biblical meditation is filling the mind with truth, truth about who God is and what God says.

Yet sadly, the way most of us live today, our minds are so fragmented and distracted. We have the attention span of a squirrel. Life is one interruption after another – a task, a text, a call, scrolling, eating, listening to the radio in the car, watching television at night. With a smart phone, all the information in the world is at our fingertips, yet we rarely stop to think, we rarely daydream, we rarely meditate on God. I not only fear that many Christians rarely pray, I fear that many Christians never stop and sit and meditate on God. Oh, if we only realized what we were missing.

When David meditated on God, he said, "I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night" (Psalm 63:6, NLT). He said, "On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate" (Psalm 145:5, NAS). He said, "I meditate on all that you have done and ponder the work of your hands" (Psalm 143:5, ESV). David meditated on God's word, and said, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Psalm 119:97, NIV). And the benefit? David said, "The meditation of my heart brings understanding" (Psalm 49:3, ESV).

Meditation is thinking about God, thinking about who God is and what God says. It's pondering His attributes. His goodness, His love, His holiness, His grace, and His faithfulness. It's pondering His truth, sitting with an open Bible and allowing what He has said to penetrate our minds and our hearts.¹ Meditation is both reverence for God and delight in God. It is an intense focus on Him because He is worthy of our attention. Meditation is allowing God's character and God's truth to renew our faith, adjust our thinking, stabilize our emotions, and align our hearts with His heart. Meditating on God and His truth shapes our perspective on everything.²

Again, Psalm 139 is one of the greatest prayers in the Bible. It's less about talking to God and more about meditating on God. So this morning, I pray that we will no longer ignore this great invitation. May we pray more and meditate more on our glorious and wonderful God.

HE KNOWS EVERYTHING

Reading Psalms is like reading David's personal prayer journal. Psalm 139 gives us a picture of the theological and emotional sides of David. It shows us how to talk to God and how to meditate on God.

David realized his entire life was an "open book."³ He began Psalm 139 by saying, "O Lord, You have searched me and known me" (Psalm 139:1, NIV).⁴ ***God knows everything***. The theological term is ***omniscience***.⁵ The Bible says, "The Lord looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race" (Psalm 33:13, NLT).⁶ One theologian wrote, "Nothing escapes His notice, nothing can be hidden from Him."⁷

David realized this all-knowing God "searched" him. The Hebrew word is a picture of an archaeologist digging through layers of ancient rubble in search of a precious artifact. In the same way, the Lord mines and "searches" our hearts.⁸

He is aware of every second of our lives. "You know when I sit down and when I rise up," David said (Psalm 139:2, NIV). He sees us when we wake up in the morning, and He sees us when we go to bed at night. The Lord knows every step we take during the day. He sees us when we're stuck in traffic, standing in the grocery store line, playing golf, or watching television. God is aware of every second of our lives.

He is aware of every thought that passes through our minds. David said, "You perceive my thoughts from afar" (Psalm 139:2, NIV).⁹ He knows every thought we think. Every worry, every doubt, every secret.¹⁰ God can literally read our minds!

He is aware of every motive behind everything we do. "You discern my going out and my lying down, You are familiar with all my ways" (Psalm 139:3, NIV). The NAS says He "scrutinizes" our ways. To scrutinize means to sift.¹¹ It's the picture of a farmer scooping up harvested wheat with a pitchfork and tossing it in the air so the wind can blow away the useless chaff and allow the good grain to fall into a basket. God literally throws our hearts to the wind and examines every grain. The NAS says He is "intimately acquainted" with all our ways.¹²

David made a point to explain this to his son Solomon. “Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9, NAS).¹³ The Lord is aware of every motive behind everything we do.

He is aware of every word we say. “Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely,” David said (Psalm 139:4, NIV). The Lord knows what you said yesterday, and He knows what you’re about to say before you say it. Jesus warned us about this. “Every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36, NAS). God is aware of every word we say.

God knows everything. “O Lord, You have searched me and known me” (Psalm 139:1, NIV).

*He knows when you are sleeping,
He knows when you’re awake
He knows when you’ve been bad or good
So be good for goodness’ sake.*¹⁴

That song may be about Santa, but it’s only true of God. And how wonderful that’s true. How comforting that He knows everything we’re going through.

When God’s people suffered in slavery, the Lord reassured Moses, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering” (Exodus 3:7, NLT). What did God say? “I have seen ... I have heard ... I am aware.” And that’s still true. He sees, He hears, and He is fully aware of everything we’re going through. Oh, how comforting.

David did not just believe that, he experienced that. “You are intimately acquainted with all my ways ... O Lord, You know it all” (Psalm 139:3, 4).¹⁵

HE IS EVERYWHERE

As David meditated on God, he realized God knows everything and *God is everywhere*. The theological term is *omnipresence*.¹⁶ David said, “You hem me in – behind and before – You have laid Your hand upon me ... Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psalm 139:5, 7, NIV). The Hebrew word “presence” means face. Meaning that, there is no place we can go to escape the face of God.¹⁷ You get the idea from David that the presence of God was as intimidating as it was comforting.

In battle, David had surrounded enemies and had been surrounded by enemies. He knew what it felt like to be hemmed in.¹⁸ Spiritually speaking, David felt like a besieged city. “You have laid Your hand upon me” (Psalm 139:5, NIV). The great warrior and king felt like a little boy unable to squirm away from his father, because God’s hand was constantly on his shoulder.

Listen to David meditate on the presence of God. “If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:8-10, NIV). As the sun breaks the horizon, no one can outrun the dawn, and no one can outrun God. No one can hide from God in the deepest part of the sea.¹⁹ “Even there,” David said, even in the deepest ocean, “Your right hand will lay hold of me” (Psalm 139:10, NAS).

David realized, “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to You, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You” (Psalm 139:11-12, NIV). God sees in the dark.

Sometimes, we’re like little children thinking we can hide from God. Sometimes, we’re like my granddaughter Lucy playing hide-and-seek. We can hide from others, we can keep secrets from others, but not from God. He knows everything there is to know about you and is with you wherever you go.²⁰ And what was meant to be comforting was also a bit unsettling to David.²¹

My mom taught me this lesson the hard way. At about age 5, I began to wonder if I really had to listen to my mom when she told me to do something. So, on a particular summer day – a day which lives in infamy – I put my thinking to the test. When my mom was in her prime, she was the type of woman who could reupholster the furniture and re-roof the house all in one day. She was a strong woman. She gave strong hugs to let us know we were loved and had a strong voice to let us know when we were in trouble. So when my mom said come, it meant something.

But on this particular day, I reasoned in my 5-year-old mind, she’s big and she’s slow, I’m little and I’m fast. So the third time she said come, I took off running around the house. When I looked back, she was nowhere to be seen. The wind was blowing through my hair and the sense of freedom was exhilarating. But when I rounded the corner of the house, there she was! She had doubled back. She was crouching down like a middle linebacker, and she was grinning! What happened next involved something called a switch. If you know what a switch is, you know the rest of the story. That day I learned that I could not run from my mom.

David felt the same way. “You hem me in – behind and before – You have laid Your hand on me” (Psalm 139:5, NIV). David admitted that God’s presence was both comforting and intimidating.

His presence feels intimidating if we’re doing something we should not be doing. If you’re speeding and see a police car, how do you feel? Guilty, because you’re about to get caught. But if you’ve been in an accident and see a police car, how do you feel? Relieved, because help is on the way. We should rejoice that God is with us every moment of the day and with us everywhere we go.

HE CREATED EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE

God knows everything. God is everywhere. And *God created everything and everyone*. The theological term is *omnipotence*.²² Notice David was not talking about these theological

attributes – omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence – in some dry, textbook way. He was meditating on God. He was pondering the greatness of God. He realized who he was talking to!

In one of the most precious paragraphs in the Bible, in verses 13-15, David said, “For You created my inmost being, You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place” (Psalm 139:13-15, NIV).

When God called Jeremiah to be His prophet, He said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you,” and had a purpose for his life (Jeremiah 1:5, ESV). That’s true for all of us.

David was in awe as he meditated on the one who created him. “You created my inmost being ... You knit me together in my mother’s womb ... Your eyes saw my unformed body” (Psalm 139:13, 16, NIV). In awe, he said, “I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14, NIV).

OUR RESPONSE

Again, David was not talking about these theological attributes – omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence – in some dry, textbook way. He was meditating on God. That’s what Psalm 139 is about.

But what does it mean to walk and talk with a God who knows everything, who is everywhere, and who created everything and everyone? What does it mean to walk and talk with a God whom the Bible calls “compassionate” on the one hand and a “consuming fire” on the other?²³ How do we respond to a God like that? How did David respond to a God like that?

He was in awe of God and felt loved by God at the same time. As we pray, that’s how we should feel. In awe of God and loved by God at the same time. David said, “How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand” (Psalm 139:17-18, NIV). In Psalm 8, David said, “Oh Lord, who am I that You think and care about me?” David cherished the thought that God cared about him.

- David believed God cared about him so much that he said, “God led me to a place of safety. He rescued me because He delights in me” (Psalm 18:19, NLT). And God delights in you too.
- David believed God cared about him so much that he said, “The righteous cry and the Lord hears” (Psalm 34:17, NAS). And the Lord hears you too.
- David believed God cared about him so much that he said, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in Your bottle. You have recorded each one in Your book” (Psalm 56:8, NLT). He collects your tears too.
- David believed God cared about him so much that he said, “God is my helper, the Lord is the sustainer of my soul” (Psalm 54:4, NAS). He is your helper too.

How did David feel as he meditated on this all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful God? He was in awe of God and felt loved by God at the same time.

He also felt something else. ***He dreaded the thought of doing anything that would offend God.*** He dreaded the thought of doing anything that would offend the one who loved him so much. And he dared to pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23-24, NIV). If you don’t stop and sit and meditate on God, you will never get to a place like this. You will never pray David’s prayer unless you stop and sit before God. May we dread the thought of doing anything that would offend His holiness, that would insult the sacrifice of Christ, that would break His heart.

David dared to pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me ... and see if there is any offensive way in me.”²⁴

Why would we pray that prayer? Why would we ask God to inspect us and expose what’s there? For the same reason, we want a doctor to do an MRI. To reveal what’s wrong, to reveal what’s making us sick, to reveal what may be life threatening. Yet, I fear that most of us pray x-ray prayers. Let me explain what I mean. An x-ray can tell if you have a broken bone. But an MRI can create cross-section images and provide the most detailed diagnosis. An x-ray prayer is “Lord, just tell me if I have a broken bone, and don’t go much deeper than that.” But an MRI prayer is “Lord, slice the layers of my heart and expose any cell in my life that offends Your holiness or is contrary to the character of Jesus.”

David had the courage to pray “search me.” He also prayed, “Lead me in the everlasting way.” “Lord, keep me on the right track,” that’s what David was praying. Why ask God to inspect our hearts? To keep us on the right track. So we can walk with God and experience His best.

CONCLUSION

As I said earlier, I not only fear that many Christians rarely pray, I fear that many Christians never stop and sit and meditate on God. Oh, if we only realized what we were missing.

When David meditated on God, he said, “I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night” (Psalm 63:6, NLT).

Meditation is thinking about God, thinking about who God is and what God says. Meditation is allowing God’s character and God’s truth to renew our faith, to adjust our thinking, to stabilize our emotions, and to align our hearts with His heart. Meditating on God and His truth shapes our perspective on everything.

David walked with God. He talked to God. He experienced God, and so can we. David experienced a personal and intimate relationship with God, and so can we. But it requires that we stop, sit before God, and meditate on who He is and what He says.

NOTES

¹ Verses on meditating on His word – Psalm 1:2, 119:15-16, 47-48, Joshua 1:8.

² After meditation, the next step is living according to who He is and what He has said.

³ Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1993, 1994, 1995).

⁴ The NLT version reads, “You have examined my heart and know everything about me.”

⁵ Verses about God’s omniscience – 1 Chronicles 28:9, Psalm 56:8, Proverbs 5:21. Isaiah 40:28, Matthew 10:30, Acts 1:24, Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 3:20.

⁶ See Proverbs 15:3, which says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (ESV).

⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), page 17

⁸ The Apostle John knew what that felt like, when he wrote, “God is greater than our heart and knows all things” (1 John 3:20).

⁹ This Hebrew word for thoughts includes one’s intentions, motivations, and agendas.

¹⁰ Psalm 94:11 says, “The Lord knows the thoughts of a man.” Psalm 44:21 says, “He knows the secrets of the heart.”

¹¹ The Hebrew word is *zāra* – R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 1 (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), #579.

¹² The Hebrew word is *sākan* – TWOT, #1494.

¹³ Solomon affirmed this years later. “The Lord sees clearly what a man does, examining every path he takes” (Proverbs 5:21, NLT). The prophet Jeremiah affirmed the omniscience of God. “O Lord, know me; you see me, and test my heart” (Jeremiah 12:3, ESV).

¹⁴ Lyrics to “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town.”

¹⁵ Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “I cannot grasp it. I can hardly endure to think of it. The theme overwhelms me. I am amazed and astounded at it.” [Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) Vol. III, page 260.]

¹⁶ Verses about God’s omnipresence – See Job 28:24, Isaiah 43:2, Jeremiah 23:24, Acts 17:24-25, 27.

¹⁷ See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), page 464.

¹⁸ The Hebrew word means besieged.

¹⁹ Not even the Marianas Trench, which is 36,000 feet deep in the Pacific Ocean, is deep enough for a person to hide from God.

²⁰ See Jeremiah 23:23-24.

²¹ After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the Bible says, “They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Genesis 3:7). Not to cover their nakedness, but to cover their shame. When they “heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8, NIV). Adam and Eve wanted to hide from God, but quickly found out it was impossible. In Psalm 90, Moses said, “You spread out our sins before you – our secret sins – and you see them all” (Psalm 90:8, NLT).

²² Verses about God’s omnipotence – Genesis 1:1, Psalm 33:6, 9, Psalm 147:5, Isaiah 44:24, Jeremiah 32:17, Matthew 19:26, Romans 1:19-20.

²³ See Psalm 103:8 and Hebrews 12:29.

²⁴ “Any wicked way” (NKJV). “Anything that makes (You) sad” (LB). The phrase “hurtful way” can also be translated “way of idolatry.” It suggests a streak of “apostasy.” [A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms, Volume II, Psalms 73-150*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1989), page 912.]