

God Is All-knowing

Lesson Text: Psalm 139:1–6, 13–16, 23, 24

Background Scripture: Psalm 139

Devotional Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:11

Psalm 139:1–6, 13–16, 23, 24

¹ You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. ⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The superscription of Psalm 139 tells us that it was written by David. The difficulty of understanding this psalm is in determining how verses 19 and following (dealing with vengeance) relate to verses 1–18 (dealing with praise) since the tones of the two sections are so different. Some scholars have proposed excising verses 19–24, declaring that they do not belong with the psalm. This is surely wrong. All of Psalm 139 must be considered.

There are examples throughout the psalms that feature much praise of God along with condemnation of enemies and “the wicked” (see Psalms 5, 7, 17; 104:35). The unity of Psalm 139 can be seen in various ways. We begin by noting that verses 23, 24 function as an inclusion with verses 1, 2; this is seen as we observe the use of search, know, Yahweh/God, and thoughts in both places. Within verses 23, 24 we find a possible accusation by the enemies of the psalmist. The phrase “offensive way” in verse 24 can refer to idolatry; such an accusation can mean death if the accused cannot defend himself. Therefore, the psalmist submits to a divine judgment, with verses 1–18 describing the scrutiny that is requested in verses 23,24.

Thus one must account for verses 19–24 and not dismiss them. The psalmist has encountered enemies who seek his harm, perhaps his life, if they can make the charge of idolatry stick. God can examine the accused in the most thorough manner because He is omniscient (“all knowing,” vs. 1–6), omnipresent (“present everywhere,” vs. 7–12), and omnipotent (“all powerful,” vs. 13–18).

Standing alongside these characteristics of God is the fact that we are always being known, accompanied, and fashioned by God. God knows us and cares for us. Indeed, He is fearfully wonderful! That is why we are dependent on Him and praise Him.

TODAY'S AIM

- Facts: to show that God created us and thus knows everything about us.
- **Principle:** to remind us that we can fully trust God's omniscient protection.
- **Application:** to encourage recognition that there is nothing we can hide from God and that we should therefore trust Him unreservedly. Use verses 23,24 daily in prayer in the week ahead.

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE ABOUT US (Psalm 139:1-6)

David stated in Psalm 139 that the Lord had “searched” him. He used the word as a metaphor describing a spiritual, internal search by which God examined his heart and mind in order to know how he was thinking. God, then, knew things about David that no one else could see or know. He knew the inner motives behind all his actions.

David was encouraged by knowing that God had examined his heart and that God knew his every movement. His mention of sitting down and rising up (v. 2) is a merism (citing the extremes to include everything in between) referring to his every action. When the king of Assyria came against Judah, God said to him, “*But I know where you are and when you come and go and how you rage against me.*” (2 Kings 19:27). No human activity is unknown to God.

Nor is any thought unknown to the God who “*perceives my thoughts from afar*” (Ps. 139:2). Long before we think our thoughts, God knows them. This should be an encouragement for us to guard our thoughts carefully. Paul said we should bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Every unspoken word is clear to God. The fact that Christians believe this is seen in our practice of silent prayer. God hears every word of such un verbalized prayers.

1. What word did David use to describe God's knowledge of his inner spiritual condition (Psalm 139:1,2)?

What Do You Think?

What comforts and convictions are yours because God understands your very thoughts?

Talking Points for Your Discussion –

- Comforts: issues of God’s patience and provisions (2 Corinthians 1:3–7; 7:5–7).
- Convictions: issues of things I know I need to change or do (John 16:8; Jude 15).

The word “*discern*” means “to winnow,” that is, to sift out the good from the bad. God was thoroughly acquainted with David's every daily activity, both noble and ignoble.

This is an exceptionally complete knowledge of a person's activities, and it serves as another challenge to us to live godly lives. Not a movement of one finger escapes God's attention. This knowledge is comforting to those who are right with God but scary to those who are not, for it is illustrative of the omniscience of God.

God's omniscience might be defined this way: God knows all things, both actual and possible. This includes everything past, present, and future and is such a perfect knowledge that it includes everything possible that never did or will take place. Because God's knowledge is perfect, none of it was or ever will be acquired by learning. All things are known equally well, and nothing will ever surprise or amaze God.

David then moved from God's knowledge of his every thought to His knowledge of his every word (v. 4). Just as God knows the thoughts we think long before we actually think them, so too He knows our words before we speak them. The Hebrew word translated “altogether” means “all,” “any,” or “every.” Not a single word that comes off our tongue escapes God's attention. This should encourage every believer to examine his thought and speech patterns. If we want to have intimate fellowship with God, we need to be very careful in these areas.

2. What figure of speech did David use to refer to all his daily activities (vs. 3,4)?

The word “hem” means “to encircle, barricade, lay siege to.” It can be used as a word of judgment. In that sense, it would mean that the psalmist cannot escape, as if he were in a city besieged by an enemy (see Jeremiah 21:4, 9, where the same root word is used). It can also be used as a comfort word, where God surrounds and protects the psalmist. Both ideas of judgment and protection are also true for the second phrase: laid thine hand upon me.

Some may think that this reveals God’s absolute control of a person’s movements. A better idea is that it refers to God’s abilities to know all and be everywhere. God surrounds all our habits and even has His hand on us—either in protection or in judgment.

Taking a bird's-eye view of verses 2–5, we notice that verse 2 is related to verse 4 in the sense of God's ability to know our thoughts. Verse 3 is related to verse 5 by the common theme of God knowing our ways or our habits. If verse 1 is the theme of this section, then verse 6 (next) is a doxological (praise) conclusion as the psalmist exults on his contemplation of God's ability to know.

God's ability to know everything is too wonderful and high for the psalmist to grasp (v. 6). Even with all the extra knowledge we have today, this should still be our confession. We still have to struggle to understand even a little of what God knows.

The doxological use of wonderful is placed in the first position in the original Hebrew (literally, "wonderful knowledge above me; too high I am not able to it") to emphasize the amazement of the psalmist (see also v. 14, below). It is good to pause in wonderment over God's knowledge and ability to know. It is this attribute of God that makes possible an intimate, loving relationship with Him. The same attribute also makes God's justice absolutely fair. The righteous are comforted by that fact, while the wicked should be fearful.

3. How should we respond to the omniscience of God? How did David feel when he first thought about God's knowledge of all things (vs. 5,6)?

GOD'S FORMATION OF US (Psalm 139:13-16)

God is not only all-knowing, as we saw in the first six verses of this psalm, not only omnipresent, as is described in the next six verses, but also all-powerful, as described in these verses. As amazing as all of God's creation is, there is nothing more intricate and awesome than human beings. All of us have taken our first look at a newborn baby and commented on the amazing fact that every organ and other necessary part of the human body is present and working in that tiny being. David described the great power of God by referring to His formation of the fetus in the womb. In saying "*you created my inmost being*" (v. 13), he used a word we do not ordinarily use. The word "inmost" represents the seat of one's emotions and moral character. Since the concept is somewhat unfamiliar to us, some modern versions use the idea of "inmost being" or "inward parts." This conveys to us that while in the womb, when no one else could see us, our inner organs were individually formed by God.

When David said that God had covered him in his mother's womb, he used the verb *sakak*, which means "to hedge in." David was saying that God wove him together as He created a perfect object. What an impressive description of God's personal and individual concern about how we are made—and how different from those who try to tell us we are the result of an evolutionary process! There is nothing accidental or evolutionary in our creation. We are woven creations of almighty God!

No wonder David could no longer contain himself! He was compelled to write, "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*" (v. 14). The Liberty Bible Commentary says it this way: "The wonderfulness of the human body is so great that those who study the cells of the brain, the articulation of the limbs, or the smooth functioning of the body organs stand in awe at how wonderful this creation of God really is" (Falwell and Hindson, eds., Thomas Nelson).

4. What event from human life did David use in defining the omnipotence of God (vs. 13,14)?

The Lowly, Lovely Appendix For years, the human appendix has been under attack by evolutionists. They have called it a functionless organ, a remnant from a more complete organ of our "animal" ancestors. Today, however, most scientists agree that the appendix serves useful functions. This specialized organ contributes to a healthy immune system. At its strategic location, the appendix provides a barrier of protection as it produces antibodies that act against bacteria that would be harmful if allowed to escape into the bloodstream. The appendix helps the body recognize that certain foods, bacteria, and enzymes need to be tolerated, not attacked, during early childhood. The list goes on. Once again the arrogance of human presumption is overturned. Again, we realize how limited is human knowledge and how infinite is the wisdom of God. He carefully created even the small appendix to provide protection. How can we not marvel at the works of God? —C. J. F.

The word "frame" refers to the body and specifically to the bones of the skeleton. When David said he was made in secret, he meant that he was covered and thus unseen by human eyes.

Today, doctors and scientists are able to observe the growth of an embryo into a fully formed baby. Expectant parents can see their unborn child on ultrasound. It is wonderful to see what God has always been able to see!

“Curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth,” a poetic reference to the womb. “A great artist will often labor alone in his studio, and not suffer his work to be seen until it is finished; even so did the Lord fashion us when no eye beheld us, and the veil was not lifted till every member was complete” —Spurgeon. All of our veins, muscles, nerves” etc., were woven together by God, embroidered with great skill, before the world got its first look at us.

5. Why did David say that he was made in secret (v. 15)?

The Hebrew word that is behind the translation “substance” here is different from the Hebrew word behind substance in verse 15. The word at issue here is used only once in the Hebrew text, and it clearly means “embryo.” Thus, the beginning stages of a living and growing embryo are within the realm of God’s knowledge and sight. This says something to all who believe that life does not begin until there is a birth, which is the rationale used to support abortion. Life begins at conception, and God knows it! See also Psalm 22:9, 10.

Scripture refers to God’s book as the heavenly record of the deeds of people. This book lists the names of those who will dwell in the heavenly city. This book is the book of life (see Exodus 32:32, 33; Psalm 56:8; 69:28; Revelation 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). These images come from the fact that in the ancient world official registers are kept of citizens. When citizenship is forfeited for any reason, the name is blotted out of the register. The psalmist seems to be saying that even before his embryo is mature, his name is registered by God in His book. God knows what we will do and choose.

6. How did David describe the intricate way God registered him (v. 16)?

GOD'S SEARCH WITHIN (Psalm 139:23-24)

Verses 23, 24 directly follow the “hate” portion of the psalm (which is vs. 19–22, not in today’s text). Often these “hate texts” are left out of liturgical readings in many church groups. But they should not be. In verses 19–22, the psalmist rails against the wicked. Seen against this backdrop, verses 23, 24 is the psalmist’s request for God to see that he (the psalmist) is not one of the wicked.

Of the psalmist Spurgeon says, that “he was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good.” The psalmist could not remain neutral on the matter of those who hate God.

In that light, the psalmist cries out for vindication. Thus, the invitation for God to search the psalmist’s heart, test his life, and know his thoughts to see if there is any “*offensive way*” in him (see the next verse). The innocent person has no problem asking God to do this (see Job 7:17, 18; Psalm 11:4–7; Jeremiah 17:10). The words in verse 23 function as inclusion with verse 1 of this psalm (see the Lesson Background).

7. Why did David invite God to search and know him (v. 23)?

Whatever the charge—whether it is idolatry or some other kind of wickedness— the charge is not true of the psalmist. Thus he, asks the Lord to examine him to see if he has accurately represented his feelings toward the, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God. “See if there be any offensive way, in me.” Test for secret sins. The end result of such testing for the psalmist will be, “lead me in the way everlasting” (lit., in the way that leadeth to everlasting life). How blessed it is for a man or woman to lead such a godly life that he or she can submit themselves to divine scrutiny and be confident that they are walking in the way of God.

Sometimes God may lead us in a path we would rather not take. That can be a fearful experience, and our instinct may be to flee or hide (compare the actions of Jonah). But ultimately the way everlasting can be found only in God. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

8. Why should we submit to the leading of God? What implications does the omniscience of God have for our lives (v. 24)?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God knows us better than we know ourselves; thus, He can be trusted to lead us (Psalm 139:1).
2. We are never alone, for God's knowledge of us reaches every place and activity (vs. 2-4).
3. We should praise God and seek His wisdom, for His knowledge is exhaustive (vs. 5,6).
4. God's wonderful design of human beings is cause for praise (vs. 13,14).
5. Our creation speaks of God's immense care for and concern about each of us (vs. 15,16).
6. If we truly want to know ourselves, we will seek to know God and His Word (vs. 23,24).

CONCLUSION

God Knows!

Are you convinced that “God knows”? I hope you are. But merely acknowledging that God knows us better than we know ourselves is not enough. We should go further: part of our conviction that “God knows” should involve inviting the Holy Spirit’s examination of our hearts and actions so that we might grow in sanctification. God created us and He cares. When we are innocent, He can and will vindicate us because of His fearfully wonderful abilities—His ability of knowledge, presence, and power.

Even if we find that our hearts condemn us, “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20). For the innocent, the thought of an all-knowing God is a comfort. For the wicked the thought should bring fear—real fear of judgment, if not now, then on Judgment Day. The intimacy we seek with God is possible because He knows us better than we know ourselves.

PRAYER

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any sinful way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. It is Jesus who makes that way possible. In His name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Know that God knows.