

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms *
* Topic: God Knows Us * Psalm 139 * 6/22/25 *

MAIN POINT

We can place our full trust in God because He knows everything about us, and He is completely trustworthy and faithful.

INTRODUCTION

Think about a game such as “Hide and Seek” that you played as a child where you had to hide from your friends. What were some of the strategies you used when you hid?

How might people try to hide from God?

A great example of someone trying to hide from God was Jonah. With Nineveh to his east, he boarded a ship headed for Tarshish, which was about as far west as he could possibly go.

Today we will be looking at Psalm 139. This Psalm was written by David. He wasn't trying to flee from God; He found comfort in the fact that we will never find ourself outside of God's presence and care.

UNDERSTANDING

Psalm 139 can be broken down into four sections of six verses each. The first four verses of each section describe a thought, and the last two verses in each section describe how we should respond to these views.

1. Verses 1-6: God knows everything about us.
2. Verses 7-12: We cannot wander away from God's presence.
3. Verses 13-18: We are fearfully and wonderfully made.
4. Verses 19-26: Praying that God would judge the wicked.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 139:1-6

What point is David making about God in verses 1-4?

David begins by celebrating God's perfect knowledge of is actions, thoughts and the words he speaks. God isn't just omniscient and omnipresent in general, but He knows us intimately.

How should the fact that God is aware of everything you do, everything you say, and even everything you think affect you?

In verses 5-6, David personalizes these truths about God by saying they are too wonderful for him. What do you think he means when he says God hems him in behind and before, and places His hand on David?

David is overwhelmed by these truths. God doesn't just know everything about us, but He also cares for us and is intimately involved in our life.

How should the reality that God's love always encircles us give us comfort?

As Christians, we never have to worry about being totally alone or worry that something might happen to us that God didn't see coming.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 139:7-12

What points does David make in verses 7-10, and how do they add to the thoughts in verses 1-6?

There's nowhere we can go in the universe to hide from God. Anywhere we go, God still protects us and guides us.

In verses 11-12, how does David summarize the truths described in the previous verses?

Even if David wanted to hide from God, he wouldn't be able to do it.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 139:13-18

What point is David making about God in verses 13-16?

David realized that he was blessed by his intimate relationship with his Creator. The psalm reinforces God's careful, thoughtful work in the creation of each and every person. Because our identity is linked directly to our brilliant Creator God, we can be confident we were made exactly how He wanted us to be.

Based on these verses, how should we value our own lives and the lives of others?

Many of us have not learned to see God as David saw Him. He saw God as One who knows, cares for, and values people—even though they sin greatly against Him. By misunderstanding the greatness of God's knowledge about all things in general but about us in particular, we might miss out on the loving relationship He desires to have with us.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ GEN. 1:27, PSALM 32:8-9, PROV. 17:5 AND JAMES 1:27

How does the fact we are fearfully and wonderfully made relate to the fact we are made in God's image?

God created us in His image. God does not say this about any other animals, or even the angels. David realized he was blessed to be able to enjoy an intimate relationship with his Creator. The psalm reinforces God's careful, thoughtful work in the creation of each and every person. Because our identity is linked directly to our perfect Creator God, we can be confident in who He so masterfully created us to be.

What do these verses along with Psalm 139 teach us about the value of human life?

God teaches us that we are to help the helpless, and every human has been designed by God.

Note to study leader: As we discuss the value of human life and the Christian view of abortion guide the discussion while speaking the truth in love. Realize there may be women in your class who have had an abortion, and others who may be aggressive in their pro-life views. We as teachers in the church need to stand for truth, but this must be done in love. All of us are sinners, and all of us have needed our sins to be forgiven by God through faith in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross.

What should these truths teach us about the world's view of abortion?

People are not just smart animals. Human life is sacred, and every human being is wonderfully made.

What should these truths teach us about how we view and relate to other people?

We need to view other people humbly, in love. The only cure for sin is Jesus. The great commission is a higher priority for us than fighting for social justice. Our first priority needs to be sharing the gospel with the world, and helping other Christians grow in their walk with Jesus.

Wisdom is required while dealing with social injustice in the world, sharing the gospel with the world, and working to maintain sound doctrine inside the church. When we stand for life, we need to do this in a loving way rather than in an angry or condescending way. This can be a very difficult line to walk. If we constantly argue with non-Christians, we will tend to antagonize them, which will make it harder for us to share the good news of Jesus in an effective way with them.

And at the same time, we need to maintain sound doctrine in the church. The world is constantly pulling us in their direction. If we don't fight for sound doctrine inside the church, over time, we will cease to be a church.

"We are not fighting against people, but for people." Pastor Randy Hahn, March 19th, 2023

*"We fight for right thinking inside the church, and for sharing the gospel outside the church."
Pastor Randy Hahn, March 5th, 2023*

In Psalm 139:17-18, how does David summarize how these truths were affecting him personally?

In a very reflective passage, David considers the miracle of human life, even while in the womb, and is led to try to grasp the thoughts of God who created him. He comes to realize God's thoughts are infinite, and still God still chooses to remain with David to guide and protect him.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 139:19-24

After David acknowledged God is present everywhere, God cares for David, and human life is highly valuable, he introduced a new topic in these verses. What about verses 19-22 surprises you?

David hated the enemies of God and wished that God would slay them.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ MATTHEW 5:44-45, MATTHEW 6:14, AND ROMANS 12:14

How might we harmonize what David prayed for in Psalm 139:19-24 with these verses?

We don't know exactly who David was referring to in these verses, but he did have real enemies such as the Philistines that were an idolatrous nation trying to kill him and wipe out God's people Israel.

We have also seen in previous weeks that many of the Psalms can be read from the perspective of Christ praying to God the Father. He prayed that God would forgive those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), and in a few weeks, thousands of them would come to saving faith in Christ at Pentecost. But Christ knows those who are His, and He knows who will refuse to repent. As part of Jesus' prayer for His disciples, and for those who would come to Christ through their testimony (this includes us), He prayed, "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9).

*"If I think that I, with my mixed motives and vengeful heart, am meant to pray verses 19-22, I have made a big mistake, for on my lips these words would indeed be terrible. Only on the lips of the king—ultimately the perfect King, the Lord Jesus—can these words possibly be prayed."
Christopher Ash, Psalms for You*

In verses 23-24, how does David summarize how the thoughts he expressed in this Psalm were affecting him personally?

David, knowing that God knew everything, asked God to search him and know him. This conclusion mirrors the beginning of the psalm where David said the Lord has searched him and known him. David knew he was a sinner, and he knew God was trustworthy and faithful. And because of these things he desired that God would direct him in the way everlasting.

APPLICATION

How can we rest in the fact God's presence encircles our comings and goings this week?

Is there a situation in my life that I need to hand over to God and ask for His leading?

What are some practical ways I can value human life this week?

Where do I need to better balance loving those who do not share our concern for human life with standing up for the lives of the unborn?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, praising God that He knows everything, including our thoughts, desires, and actions. Thank Him that there is nowhere we can wander to that would be outside of from His presence. Pray that God would transform our hearts and minds to know Him more, praise Him more, and be more honest with Him. Ask Him to teach us to value life as He does, and to search us, test our thoughts, see if there are any offensive way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 139

One theme of Psalm 139 is God's presence in all places at all times, specifically related to His involvement with us. David felt blessed to enjoy an intimate relationship with his Creator. David declared that God's knowledge is total (vv. 1-6) and that His presence is everywhere (vv. 7-12). He then declared that God's creative work is awesome (vv. 13-16).

139:1. The psalm is addressed to the LORD. The convention of printing the word in all upper case type indicates the Hebrew text contains the divine name Yahweh. After the Babylonian exile, the Jews ceased to pronounce this name for fear of violating the Third Commandment. Instead, when reading the text, they simply spoke a Hebrew word for "Lord."

The Hebrew verbs can be interpreted as timeless truth: "You search me and You know me." God's attributes are not restricted to time.

David expressed amazement that God knew everything in his mind and heart. The word "search" implies the careful scrutiny involved in mining operations or exploring a new country. God had assessed David's life and nothing about him remained hidden from God. God knew everything about David.

139:2. Standing and sitting are ordinary activities. They are so universal that frequently they go unnoticed—but not by God. Thoughts, unlike speech, remain veiled from other people, but not from God. God knows every activity in our daily schedule, both extraordinary and common. The phrase from far away reflects the mystery of God's presence. As David later asserted, God always is present (vv. 7-12), yet the vast difference between Deity and humanity creates a false illusion that God is distant. Hence, although God may appear to be absent, He is aware of what we are thinking. God knows us indeed.

139:3. The file of divine knowledge continues. Whether an individual moves from one location to another or remains in the same place is irrelevant to God. He watches as the person travels and rests. The possessive pronoun my in this section implies the power of the individual. He or she controls the decision to travel or to rest.

139:4. David returned to the idea previously expressed in verse 2, God's knowledge of his thinking and speaking. Before the writer's tongue could articulate an idea, God knew it. This knowledge went beyond mere foreknowledge about the words. God understood the motivation behind the language. God knew the speaker better than the speaker knew himself.

The words "know... understand... observe and are aware" speak of God's omniscience. The word "observe" comes from the Hebrew root zarah, which means "measure." The Hebrew word for ways does not necessarily denote literal walking but daily behavior.

139:5. God's omnipresence guarantees protection. The first line is literally, "Back and front, You enclosed me." Your hand on me denotes absolute control over David, who was subject to the Lord's loving care and discipline.

The hand is a person's instrument of power. Here it suggests God controls the individual whom He encircles. The sense is clear. God directed David and exercised authority over him.

139:6. God's attributes of omniscience and omnipresence are beyond human comprehension. David's realization of God's universal knowledge was not an abstract, theoretical idea. His repeated usage of personal pronouns—first person for himself and second person for God—reveal a clear comprehension of the difference between himself and God. Yet God clearly cared about this mere human. That God knows all about all individuals signals they are precious to Him.

David's realization of God's universal knowledge was not an abstract, theoretical idea. His repeated usage of personal pronouns—first person for himself and second person for God— reveal a clear comprehension of the difference between himself and God. Yet God clearly cared about this mere human. That God knows all about all individuals signals they are precious to Him. The vast difference David felt between himself and God made him uncomfortable in the presence of such a vastly superior Being. Hence David was overwhelmed with a desire to flee. However, fleeing was impossible. Wherever he might go, God already was there. This psalm clearly spells out that God is omnipresent—God is indeed everywhere.

139:7. God was with David even before he was born. God was at work creating him before he had an opportunity to realize God's presence. Formed translates a verb sometimes used to describe God's creative activity. Inward parts refers literally to the kidneys. The Hebrews considered this area the source of the emotions, desires, and affections. God was at work forming the inward parts prior to birth. God's creative work begins prior to the birth of a baby. He is at work while the baby is being formed in the mother's womb. The development of a new person in the womb is God's sacred work. Anything that hinders the process of that work of God is considered invasive of an area that belongs to God.

David could not remove himself from the realm of God's transcendence, nor could he run from God's presence (Jer. 23:24; Amos 9:2-4; Heb. 4:13). The concept can be both frightening and comforting.

139:8. In this verse David proposed two possible destinations to which he might try to flee. Here heaven points to the sky. Sheol was the place of the dead deep in the earth. Both words suggest places that are impossibly far away. The sky appears to be endless space. And only the dead descend into Sheol. The Old Testament acknowledges God's ability to access Sheol because He is sovereign (Job 26:6; Amos 9:2), but banishment to the torment portion of Sheol removes a person from God's blessing (Ps. 6:5; Ecc. 9:10).

139:9. Living at the eastern horizon is literally "take up the wings of the dawn". The phrase, "if I lift my wings to the dawn," reinforces the concept of flying a long distance to avoid God's presence. And some verses use traveling east as a way to travel away from God's presence. The entrance to Eden (Genesis 3:24) and the entrance to the tabernacle and temple are on the east, requiring those who enter to travel west. And when Cain left God's presence, he fled to the east (Genesis 4:16).

139:10. The Lord's authority extends beyond the cosmos, and His sovereignty recognizes no limits. Every human being is under the power, protection, and authority of God.

139:11. Evildoers cannot conceal their deeds from God (Job 22:11-14; 34:22).

139:12. Light and darkness are artificial distinctions for the Lord, who transcends creation.

139:13. Humankind is the Lord's possession and His creation (Gen. 14:19,22; Deut. 32:6). Inward parts (lit "kidneys") often denote the seat of emotion or affection (16:7; 73:21; Job 19:27).

139:13. God was with David even before he was born. God was at work creating him before he had an opportunity to realize God's presence. "Formed" translates a verb sometimes used to describe God's creative activity. "Inward parts" refers literally to the kidneys. The Hebrews considered this area the source of the emotions, desires, and affections. God was at work forming the inward parts prior to birth. God's creative work begins prior to the birth of a baby. He is at work while the baby is being formed in the mother's womb. The development of a new person in the womb is God's sacred work. Anything that hinders the process of that work of God is considered invasive of an area that belongs to God.

139:14. When David considered the sacred work of God that began before his birth, he broke into praise of God. This verse takes the form of a personal testimony. David expressed awe of God's wonderful works. The poet based his gratitude on the fact that he was fearfully and wonderfully made. These words express overwhelming thoughts of awe inspired by realizing the greatness of God's creative work.

The verb praise meant to publicly celebrate one's feelings. The word fearfully means something that produces reverence and awe, whereas the term wonderfully implies being distinct or separated. As he reflected on his own human body, David developed an increased respect for his Creator. The creation of humanity was unique. So is the creation of each human being.

Fearfully conveys the idea of causing astonishment and awe. We properly marvel when we reflect on the wonders of God's design of humankind. In My soul knows it very well, the Hebrew word translated soul is nephesh—one of two terms used to describe what man became when God breathed the breath of life into him. (In Gen. 2:7 the two terms together are translated "living being.") The Hebrew word translated knows expresses personal intimacy rather than merely intellectual knowledge.

139:15. This verse continues the thought of verse 13-14. Frame literally refers to "bones." The bones form the framework of the human body. With the phrase made in secret, the poet recognized that no one saw him before he was born; yet God was aware of him and at work forming him. The Hebrew verb translated woven together describes how God was at work. The verb basically refers to weaving a garment of variously colored threads. God has skillfully and wonderfully woven the human body in the womb. The phrase depths of the earth is normally associated with death (63:9; Ezek. 26:20), but here it is figurative for the concealment of the womb. This beautiful poetic language describes a mother's womb in terms of the secret parts of the earth. What happens in the mother's womb is as much a mystery as what happens in the unreachable parts of the earth.

139:16. The Hebrew in verse 16 is difficult to translate. Some translators think it refers to the development of the fetal organs. The concept of the Lord's book that records the existence of all human beings reinforces God's sovereignty over life and death (69:28; Ex. 32:32-33). The concept of the Lord's book that records the existence of all human beings reinforces God's sovereignty over life and death.

139:17. How vast is the sum of them denotes the superiority of God's knowledge in quality and quantity.

139:18. The sum of everything God knows is immeasurable (Isaiah 55:8). When I wake up could refer to having pondered God's knowledge all night, or to the resurrection.

139:19-22. David wished to escape the influence of wicked liars. His zeal for God and righteousness gave him a single-minded determination. Such zeal is commendable (John 2:17; 2 Corinthians 7:11), but in calmer times it is directed toward love and mercy (Galatians 1:14-16).

139:23-24. Concluding with an appeal for God to search me, David submitted his thoughts and motives (concerns) to the Lord's scrutiny. He asked God to reveal any grievous way (lit "way of hardship") in him. The Scriptures speak of two opposite ways: that of the upright and that of the wicked (Proverbs 12:28; Matthew 7:13-14).