

## **Psalm 139**

**Matthew Williams**

Since the coronavirus first prevented us from gathering for Sunday worship, we've looked to the psalms to help us trust the Lord in the midst of our troubles. As long as we live in this world, there will always be reasons to fear. And there will always be better reasons to trust the Lord. If you remember nothing else from this sermon series, remember that. No matter what's going on, there are always better reasons to trust the Lord. We're going to look at a final one today.

I say "final" not because we have exhausted the list of reasons to trust the Lord in the span of 6 weeks. Reasons to trust him are as infinite as his perfections. The perfection of his sovereignty, his love, and his wisdom know no bounds. Therefore, there will always be more reasons to trust the Lord. Rather, I say final because after this Sunday, we plan on beginning a new sermon series from the book of James.

James is a delightfully practical book. It's also remarkably relevant in our present situation, especially when it comes to how we respond to suffering, how we navigate frustrated desires in our hearts, how we navigate the messiness of relationships, including relationship with those who are confined with you at home, and how we think about the priority and purpose of money, which is especially helpful given the present state of our economy. I look forward to diving in with you next Sunday.

All we need to please the Lord in the midst of our uncertain state of affairs is found in his Word, brothers and sisters. God doesn't just tell us to live in a way that glorifies him. He tells us exactly what it is about himself, about who he is, that enables and empowers us to do so. Psalm 139 does exactly that. It speaks of who God is, namely, of his intimate knowledge of us as his people, and then shows us how we should live as a result.

The Lord's intimate knowledge of his people enables us to live for his glory. That's the core message of Psalm 139. Contrary to everything you might be feeling right now, you are not invisible and you are not alone. God knows everything about you and God is always with you. Let's look at each of those points in turn in verses 1-16 and then see how we should respond to them in verse 17-24.

### **1) GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU (verses 1-6)**



The author of Psalm 139, King David, doesn't waste any time laying out the theme of the whole. Verse 1, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me!" Think about the significance of that statement. He's saying the Lord's searching knowledge of the universe as the One who created it all and sustains it all isn't a high-level only kind of knowledge. It's not like Google Maps - zoom in and things get blurry quickly. It's a very personal knowledge. "O LORD, you have searched ME and known ME!"

That's true of you too, Friend, no matter what you think or believe about God. The LORD has searched you and known you. You may feel like who you are is a mystery to other people, or even a mystery to yourself, that no one else really knows you. You are not a mystery to God. Everything there is to know about you, he knows.

He knows what you're doing - (verse 2) when you "sit down" and when you "rise up," the exact nature of your activity at every point in your day. He knows what you're thinking - (verse 2), he discerns your thoughts "from afar." He knows where you're going and where you're resting - (verse 3) the forward trajectory of your life and every point along the way. In summary (verse 3), he is "acquainted," he is familiar with all your ways.

Verse 4, "Before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether." Think about that! Have you ever been in an argument and felt like words were just pouring out of your mouth without any sort of advance warning or awareness on your part? God knew every one of them before you even spoke them. His knowledge of us isn't time limited, it's eternally comprehensive.

David recognizes he is enveloped, hemmed in as it were, by the perfect knowledge of God. The Lord has laid his "hand" upon him. It's a powerful image. How do you maneuver a young child through a large crowd of strangers as a parent? You rest their hand on them so you know exactly where they are and what they're doing at all times. That's what the Lord's perfect knowledge of David was like to him.

It was comforting. It was reassuring. He knew he wasn't hidden. He wasn't invisible. He wasn't an unknown jumble of contradictory desires waiting to be discovered and organized into some sort of cohesive personal identity. Someone already knew him. Someone was already aware of him. Not just part of him, all of him. The Lord already understood more about David than David could possibly understand about himself. Verse 6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."

What does the world tell us? If you want to find meaning, if you want to experience a sense of purpose and fulfillment in life, you have to figure out who you are. It starts with discovering the real you so you can try to become the real you. Your individual knowledge of yourself is the key to happiness. In contrast, what does David do? He isn't fixated or focused on his knowledge of himself at all. He stands in awe of God's knowledge of him. He takes comfort not in his own insight or understanding. He takes comfort in the hand of God – "The Lord knows who I am and therefore I'm secure."

In our pride, we want to think we know ourselves better than anyone else, God included. Therefore, we are in the best possible position to know and determine what is good and right for us. In reality, the exact opposite is true. The only person who thoroughly and entirely knows you is God. Therefore, you will never discover a joyful and satisfying life by starting with what you think is true about you. You must start with what God says is true about you. So what does God say?

He says he created you in his own image, which means you have incredible worth and value as a person regardless of what anyone else thinks or says about you, including yourself. He says you were made to worship and serve the One whose image you bear, which means your greatest joy will be found in delighting in God the same way God delights in himself.

He also says you're a sinner who needs a Savior and that Christ Jesus is that Savior. If you're willing to trust and follow him, Friend, all your sins will be forgiven, and you will be reconciled to God as his beloved son or daughter. Left to ourselves, God's perfect knowledge of us is a source of terror and condemnation for he is a Righteous Judge. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. Through the gospel, however, God's perfect knowledge of us becomes a wellspring of immeasurable comfort because we know that the One who knows us the best loves us the most.

What often happens in our relationships with other people? The more we discover who they "really" are after a few months or a few years, the mirage shatters and the sky-high love we felt at first comes down a few notches. Not so with the Lord.

The Father's love for you isn't the product of a mirage. He knows all of you – the good, the bad, and the ugly. And he doesn't love you because on balance you're lovely. He loves you and gave himself for you on the cross because he is lovely and because he delights to make you lovely. Romans 5:8, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."



The one who knows us the best loves us the most. For that reason, Christian, you are free – free from frantically trying to keep up a certain appearance, free from the pressure of hiding your sins and weaknesses from the Lord and his people. He already knows. And he still loves you because you have been united to his eternally beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ, God’s perfect knowledge of us becomes a joy instead of a threat. No matter how overlooked, unseen, invisible you are to other people, you are never hidden from the Father who loves you. He sees and knows you for he is with you.

## **2) GOD IS ALWAYS WITH YOU (verses 7-16)**

Verse 7, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” For most of us, it’s not hard (in a physical sense) to stay away from other people right now. Many of us are confined at home and if we do venture out for groceries, there’s tape on the floor at the store designed to keep us from getting too close to one another.

I think one of the most difficult consequences of our present health crisis is the spiritual and psychological effects of social distancing. We weren’t made to live alone. We were made to live in community in the same way the triune God enjoys community.

But as good as human companionship is and as much as we miss it, there’s something even better, friends, a greater joy that our best experiences of human community in this life ultimately reflect. It’s the gift of God’s presence.

David knew and found incredible comfort in the fact that God didn’t just know him perfectly. He was with him constantly. Verse 8, “If I ascend to heaven (if I go up) you are there! If I make my bed in the grave (if I go down) you are there! If I take the wings of the morning (go to the east) and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea (turn to the west), you’re still there.

Notice the repetition. You are there...you are there...even there. No matter where you are, no matter what is happening, no matter how isolated you are or feel from the people around you, you are never alone because the Lord is with you!

Now we need to make an important distinction here. God is everywhere present in the sense that his entire being is present and active, sustaining and working all things according to the perfection of his sovereign will, at every point in the entire

universe. That does not mean he is one with the natural world or that the natural world is somehow included or enveloped within his being. He is both gloriously distinct from the cosmos and at the same time fully present at every point within the cosmos.

That sort of omnipresence is included in what David's describing here, but his experience goes even further. Why do I say that? Because David wasn't writing as a random spiritual observer. He was part of God's covenant people, which means he enjoyed God's manifest or revealed presence in a way that other people did not. The Lord was near to David, and with the entire nation of Israel in a way he was not near to other peoples or nations at that point in redemptive history.

It's what an Israelite named Moses recognized when he said to the Lord in Exodus 33:16, "Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" God is with everyone in a general sense. But he manifests his presence to his people in a unique sense.

As Christians living on this side of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, we experience God's manifest presence in an immeasurably greater way than David ever did through the gift of the Holy Spirit. John 14:16-17, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

Through the indwelling presence of the Spirit, what the Lord accomplished through his presence with David back then, he accomplishes all the more through his presence with us today. Look at verse 10. "Even there," no matter where I am, where I go, or how many other people are present, "your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."

Christian, in whatever situation you find yourself, know this – the Lord is with you constantly and cares for you continually. Through the Spirit, his hand rests upon you immeasurably more than it rested on David. The Spirit is present to lead you. The Spirit is present to hold you. There is no hand, no arm, no power in the universe stronger than the Lord. To be "held" by him is the ultimate place of safety, refuge, protection, and deliverance.

But we doubt as much sometimes, don't we? There are times, even as Christians, we don't feel held. We don't feel seen. It doesn't even feel like God is near. It feels

like darkness has covered us (verse 11) and the light, the joy, the spiritual awareness of his presence and favor we once enjoyed is fast evaporating under the weight of suffering. The light is becoming night. David felt the same.

In that moment, we need the precious promise of verse 12. "Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with you." Situations that feel inscrutably dark to us, situations where we can't see God and it feels like he can't see us, are transparently bright for him. From your perspective, all the lights are off. From God's perspective, all the lights are on. So in your darkest moments, don't hope in your ability to see God. Rest in God's faithfulness to see you for he is always with you.

In David's day, the womb was one of the darkest places imaginable. They didn't have ultrasound machines. You could know a baby was in there, but you couldn't see it. Prenatal life was completely invisible. From a physical perspective, David was never more "hidden" or "isolated" than he was in his mother's womb.

Yet what does the Lord say in verses 13-16? Even there, God was present and active – knitting him together (verse 13), intricately weaving and fashioning him in secret. At no point in your life, Friend, from the moment of your conception onward, has your frame, physical strengths and weaknesses included, been hidden from God. And his leading and holding power in your life is so decisive, so determinative, that he ordained all of the days "formed" for you, "when as yet there was none of them."

What is true today, in the midst of all the isolation and loneliness brought on by the coronavirus, has been true from the beginning of your life. You are not alone. God is always with you. He is with us constantly and cares for us continually. You're not a fuzzy pixel on some kind of cosmic zoom screen. God knows everything about you and God is always with you.

## **CONCLUSION**

That intimate knowledge, the fact that he knows everything about us and is always with us, enables us to live for his glory. If verses 1-16 tell us who God is, David's example in verses 17-24 tells us how we should respond.

### **A) We should stand in awe of the greatness and graciousness of God**



In verse 17-18 David doubles down on the amazement he's expressed throughout the entire psalm every time he uses the word "wonderful." "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand." And this is my favorite part, "I awake, and I am still with you."

Why would a God so great, so infinite in knowledge, presence, and power, want anything to do with you and me, friends? What are we? Who are we, compared to him? We don't just fall short of playing in his league. We're not even in the game. And what finite ability we possess, we opposed him. We resist him. We run around and pretend all sorts of other people and things are god instead of him.

So what does he do? What would you do? He draws near. Not once, not twice, not just on your good days. Morning after morning. Day after day. I awake. I awake again. I awake again. And what's true of me because of Jesus? "I am still with you." Oh for spiritual humility and strength of faith to remember and rejoice every morning that the defining reality of the day isn't the kids screaming down the hall or the boss screaming on the phone. It's the Lord who is ever-present with you. Stand in awe of him, friends. Fight for mindfulness of him. Marvel at his condescension and the steadfast love that will not abandon or forsake such a little thing as you and me.

## **B) We should cry out for God to work justice in the earth**

Our knowledge of God's omniscience and omnipresence doesn't make us spiritual passive. It is not a mere salve for the confused and lonely. It emboldens us to pray like David in verses 19-22.

If you know all things and see all things, if you are everywhere present, and thus no wrong is hidden from your sight, then bring an end to injustice, Lord. Defeat those who are opposed to you and your people. Destroy those who refuse to repent of their wickedness, "men of blood" set on harming your image-bearers. Vindicate the weight of your glory. Don't stand idly by as men "speak against you with malicious intent" and your enemies "take your name in vain," mocking your infinite majesty.

Because I'm for you, I'm against them and refuse to align myself with them. I want YOUR kingdom to come. I want YOUR will to be done. I hunger and thirst for your name to be exalted. Instead of sinning against you, breaking your law as if you do not see or do not know, I choose to remain loyal to you. I choose to align the

affections of my heart with what you say is good and and right and resist and oppose all that dishonors your name.

### **C) We should ask the Lord for the daily gift of repentance**

In the last two verses of psalm, David reaches back to the very beginning. How did he begin? "O LORD, you have searched me and known me!" How does he end? Verse 23, "Search me, O God, and know my heart!"

When David talks about his heart, he's talking about the seat of his desires and affections. At the core of who I am Lord, make me holy. Show me where I'm not like you, where I'm walking and living in a "grievous" or sinful way. Grant me the gift of repentance. Enable me to walk in what is right, in the way of life and joy. Take your intimate knowledge of me and use it to reveal and purify my heart from every last vestige of wickedness.

In light of the intimate knowledge of God, every one of us has a choice. We can ignore reality, carry along with doing life our way, and pretend God doesn't see, God doesn't know, and we won't be held accountable. Or we can humble ourselves before his searching presence, ask him to cleanse our hearts, and refashion us into the spotless image of his Son. David chose the latter. May you do the same today, Friend.

You're amazing. Work justice. Make me holy. That's how we should respond. That's how the Lord's intimate knowledge of his people enables us to live for his glory. Don't try to flee from God, my friend. Flee to God. And having fled to him, rest in the promise that he knows you perfectly, is with you constantly, and cares for you continually.