

## **You Are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made**

### **Psalm 139**

**Introduction:** 1) Whenever I teach Bible interpretation I always encourage my students to ask two very important questions of the passage they are studying:

1) What does this text teach us about God? 2) What does this text teach us about humanity? When those two questions are applied to Psalm 139 the simple answer is, “a lot!” We learn a lot both about God and ourselves in a Psalm that sings the truth of Hebrews 4:13, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him who we must give account” (NIV).

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformer John Calvin (1509-64) well understood this truth and began his classic *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by saying, “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves” (p. 35).

2) Psalm 139 was penned by King David. It clearly divides into 4 stanzas of 6 verses each in our English text. It is something of a composite psalm that has elements of praise, thanksgiving, lament, confession, meditation and prayer. It has the characteristics of both the didactic (teaching) psalm and the wisdom psalm

(how to live). It teaches us how to think wisely about our God, ourselves and our lives.

Some form of the word “know” dominates the passage, occurring 7 times in vs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 14 and 23. King David boldly and joyfully declares that God knows everything (vs. 1-6), that God is everywhere (vs. 7-12), that God can do anything (vs. 13-18) and that God will deal with everyone (vs. 19-24). This structure will provide the outline of our study.

David knew, as we must know, that wrong ideas about God will inevitably lead to wrong ideas about ourselves. Wrong thinking can tragically lead to wrong decisions, leading to the wrong path, resulting in the wrong eternal destiny.

3) This Psalm, then, has a lot to say about the greatness of our God. It also has a lot to say about the importance and sanctity of every human life from the moment of conception to the moment of death! As Hassell Bullock well says, “Psalm 139 puts God’ claim on every nook and cranny of the universe” (*Psalms vol. 2, Psalms 73-150*, TTT, 511).

## **I. God Knows Everything**

**139:1-6**

The Bible teaches that the one true God is an omni God! He is omniscient (He knows everything), He is omnipresent (He is everywhere) and He is omnipotent (He can do anything). David applies these wonderful truths specifically to

himself. The pronouns “I” and “me” occur almost 50 times! Stanza 1 begins with the theme of God’s omniscience. Simply put, God knows everything about you. Notice that some form of the word “know” occurs 4 times in verses 1-6. And, what is it that God knows?

1) He knows my heart

139:1

David begins by noting that the covenant LORD (Yahweh) has an intimate and personal knowledge of him. He has “searched me and known me!” The Lord’s knowledge of me is penetrating and precise. My heart and soul are laid bare before the Lord’s x-ray vision of who I truly am. Charles Spurgeon writes: “The Lord knows us thoroughly as if He had examined us minutely, and had pried into the secret corners of our being.” He then adds, “This infallible knowledge has always existed” (*TOD*, vol. 2, 258). The LORD has always known everything about me.

2) He knows my actions

139:2-3

God know your character (v. 1). He also knows your conduct and actions. The Lord knows when you “sit down and rise up.” He knows you outside and inside (“you discern my thoughts from afar”). Distance is no hindrance or problem for our God (v. 2). Verse 3 reinforces the idea of verse 2. God knows where you go (“my path”) and when you lie down.

Indeed He is “acquainted with all my ways.” In the daytime or nighttime all that I do is before your ever-watching eyes.

3) He knows my words 139:4

God knows all our conversation. Even before you say a single word, “behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.” We may, in an unguarded moment, blurt out something foolish. We may say something we did not think we would say. God was not surprised. He saw it coming. Even before the word was formed on your tongue, God already knew exactly what you would say.

4) He knows my life 139:5-6

These verses form a fitting conclusion to the first stanza. God knows the entire course of our lives. He has you surrounded, “encircled” (*CSB*), “hemmed in” (*ESV*). You cannot escape His knowledge of you (vs. 1-6) nor can you escape his presence (vs. 7-12). Indeed, the Lord has placed His sovereign, providential hand on each and everyone one of us (v. 5). Such a reality overwhelms King David (v. 6). It is more than he can handle. This knowledge of an omniscient God is: 1) too wonderful and 2) too high. It is “full of wonder, surpassing, extra-ordinary . . . incomprehensible” (Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 822). It scares him. It amazes him. It is not human and therefore unattainable. It is other worldly.

In his classic *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer helps us to at least get an inkling concerning what David is saying. He writes,

“To say that God is omniscient is to say that He possesses perfect knowledge and therefore has no need to learn. But it is more: It is to say that God has never learned and cannot learn. The Scriptures teach that God has never learned from anyone.... From there it is only a step to the conclusion that God cannot learn. Could God at any time or in any manner receive into His mind knowledge that He did not possess and had not possessed from eternity, He would be imperfect and less than Himself. To think of a God who must sit at the feet of a teacher, even though that teacher be an archangel or seraph, is to think of someone other than the Most High God, maker of heaven and earth.... God perfectly knows Himself and, being the source and author of all things, it follows that He knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn.

God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones, and dominions, all

personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.

Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything. He is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does He seek information or ask questions” (pgs. 55-56).

## **II. God Is Everywhere**

**139:7-12**

Stanza 1 (vs. 1-6) focused on God’s omniscience. Stanza 2 (vs. 7-12) focus on God’s omnipresence. When I was a little boy I went off with some older boys down by a creek without my mother’s knowledge. As we were returning home we met a search party of men looking for me! When I returned home I found an angry, hysterical mother who quickly informed me of her unhappiness in up close and personal terms to my backside! Later, I went into my bedroom, got in bed and hid under the covers because I was heartbroken over her displeasure and spanking. I truly did not realize I had done anything wrong. However, I soon discovered I could not hide from my mom under the covers. Neither can I or you hide under the covers from God. Has it ever occurred to you that God never goes anywhere? He is

already there! He is simply inescapable. He is everywhere, even under the covers.

1) God is with me above or below

139:7-8

- Verse 7 utilizes 2 rhetorical questions that anticipate a very clear answer! They are a beautiful example of Hebrew parallelism as the two questions complement one another. “Where can I go to escape your Spirit?” Answer: no where! “Where can I flee from your presence?” Same answer: no where! If I go up to heaven you are there. If I make my bed in *Sheol*, the grave, the place of the dead, you are there (v. 8). You are up and down and everywhere in between. God comprehends space!

2) God is with me in the east or west

139:9-10

God comprehends time. If I go east (“If I live at the eastern horizon,” *CSB*), literally, “If I take up the wings of the dawn” (*ESV*, “the morning”), or if I go west (“settle at the western limits,” *CSB*), literally, “I dwell at the end (*ESV*, “uttermost parts”) of the sea, even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me.” From morning to evening, from dawn to dusk, you will direct me (“lead me”) and protect me (“hold me”). I cannot escape your presence and I cannot out run your

presence. No matter how far I go and no matter how fast I run you are already there!

3) God is with me in the dark or the light 139:11-12

- The Lord comprehends space and time. He also comprehends light. David contemplates hiding from God in the dark at night (v. 11). What a foolish thought. Darkness is not dark to the God who sees everywhere and everything. Indeed for God, “darkness is not dark!” For God, “night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike” (v. 12). Turn off the lights. Pull the drapes. Close the blinds. Retreat to your closet. You may hide from man but you cannot hide from God. Just ask Adam and Eve. Just ask Jonah.
- C. S. Lewis is spot on, “We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere in cognito.” (*Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, 75).

**III. God Can Do Anything 139:13-18**

Omniscience and omnipresence are now wed to omnipotence in stanza 3 in the most intimate and personal way: our development in the womb of our mother. In these verses a biblical perspective on the tragedy of abortion is



made crystal clear. Life is sacred from the moment of conception to our final breath. God is pro-life!

Jeremiah 1:4-5 says, “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” God saw us and loved us before He made us and as He made us. Omnipotence knits us together in the dark and secret place of our mother’s womb! Even before she knew she was pregnant, the Lord was busy shaping and forming me in my mother’s womb. Further, he was already laying out the particulars of my life. David wants each one of us to know that God cares about our beginning (vs. 13-15), and He cares about our future (vs. 16-18). Ross is exactly right, “the third strophe of the Psalm explains the first two: God knows everything about us and is always present with us because he made us” (p. 826).

1) The Lord formed my body 139:13-15

The word “for” connects stanza 3 with both stanzas 1 and 2. “You (the Lord) formed” me. “You” is emphatic. You and no other formed/created me, even my inward or inmost parts (lit. “kidneys”). All that I am inwardly, body and soul, you made. Indeed, “you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.”

God was involved in the intricate details of my conception and development. As a skilled craftsman would knit a piece of cloth or weave

a beautiful basket, this is how God made me. This is how he made you.

Did you know that a single thread of DNA from one human cell contains information equivalent to a library of 1000 volumes or 600,000 printed pages with 500 words on every page? At the moment of conception, one embryo has the equivalent of 50 times the amount of information contained in the entire Encyclopedia Britannica! (Keith Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1977, p. 1).

David rightly marvels over the mysterious process of a developing baby inside his or her mother. He can only break out in praise seeing we are fearfully and wonderfully made (v. 14). He is awestruck with wonder, amazement and reverence at God's magnificent creation. David stands amazed in His presence and so should we!

David sees the works of this great Creator God as marvelous, "wondrous." He affirms: "I know this very well." (v. 14) He has no doubts either about the greatness of the Creator of the universe or the value of the tiny creation in the mother's womb. There is human life in that womb put there and knit together by God.

The theme of God's omniscience now makes another appearance in verses 15-16 a. David says, "My bones (ESV, "frame") were not hidden from You when I was made in secret." You see everything and you

know everything. You saw me growing and developing inside my mother.

Made in the secret, hidden place within my mother, I was skillfully wrought (*ESV*, “intricately woven”). *The Message* says, “You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something.” My colleague Chip McDaniel notes that the Hebrew word could be translated “embroidered” and that the other eight times the verb is used in the Old Testament it describes the needlework in the tabernacle and clothing described in the Exodus (Ex. 26:36; 27:16; 28:39; 35:35; 36:37; 38:18, 23; 39:29).

The phrase “In the depths of the earth” is simply a poetic expression, a figure of speech. It points to the darkness, hiddenness and secrecy of the mother’s womb.

We do not know all that is going on in a mother’s womb, even with 4-D sonograms. Our knowledge of all that is unfolding and developing is so small and insignificant in comparison to what our God sees and knows.

The Lord formed your body. The Lord also foreordained your life.

## 2) The Lord foreordained my life

139:16-18

Once more omniscience and omnipotence come together working hand in hand. God saw me at the moment of conception as an unformed

substance. Even when I wasn't much, I was still something to Him! In fact He prerecorded and set out in advance all my days. God 1) wrote all the details of my life in His book and 2) He fashioned and formed all the days of my life when none of them yet existed (v. 16). God had a plan for David. God has a plan for each of us. Both in terms of the length of life and the specifics of life, God has His purposes and plans.

Once more these truths inspire David to break out in praise to His God (vs. 17-18). These two verses say something like this if I might paraphrase them: "your thinking of me down to the last detail is so very precious to me my God. The vastness and greatness of their total is so great that they are more than every grain of sand on the earth. Trying to count them all exhaust me and I fall asleep. Yet when I wake, You are there as you are every day of my life."

Some Bible teachers believe the phrase, "when I awake, I am still with You" (v. 18) may be alluding to another waking; the waking up from death in the very presence of the Lord (Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, p. 467).

Unlike the wicked who are slain by the Lord (v. 19), the believer in the resurrected Jesus has a different destiny all together. No wonder the New Testament repeatedly refers to the death of the child of God as "sleep."

He closes His eyes one moment, and wakes up in the presence of Jesus

His Creator and Savior the next. The God who made Him is the God who saved him. The God who gave him life is the same God who gives him eternal life. He is the God who will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

#### **IV. God Will Deal With Everyone**

**139:19-24**

The fourth and final stanza constitutes what could be called “a dangerous prayer.” It takes the Psalm in a new and unexpected direction. Our great God is a good God, a just God, a righteous God. Nothing is beyond His knowledge, presence or power. He is indeed an omni-competent God. Here we see His competency applied to the moral order of things. There is coming a day when God will make all things right (cf. Gen. 18:25). David notes in stark contrast the heart and mind of those who oppose God and are his enemies (vs. 19-22), with those who seek God and are His children (vs. 23-24). Our Lord knows everything that is going on with each and every one of us, both the good and the bad. He will deal justly with us all.

In an imprecatory psalm, a psalm that vividly calls on God to judge the wicked who do great evil, David asks God to slay the wicked. But, at the same time, He pleads with the Lord to search His own heart knowing the utter depravity of man apart from God’s saving grace in Christ. He is not

looking down his nose at others. He knows his own sin too. Thus he commits all action to God. God must act. David will not take things into his own hands.

1) God will deal with the wicked who hate Him 139:19-22

David's description of the wicked is striking and unnerving. These men are wicked murderers ("bloodthirsty men") who rightly deserve God's judgment (v. 19). David does not want to have anything to do with them ("stay away from me"). They are evil in their actions.

These men also were evil with their words (v. 20). They use religion in their evil schemes. They use the name of God for false and deceptive purposes, i.e. "they invoke you deceitfully and swear by you falsely!" They are religious liars and hypocrites.

These men were evil in their agenda (v. 21). Simply put: "they hate the Lord." Their plans and goals are not His. They "rebel" against the Lord.

These men were the enemy of David because they were the enemy of God. As a result, David "hates them with complete or extreme hatred" (v. 22). Now, just what are we to do with this idea of hatred in verses 21-22? Didn't Jesus tell us to love our enemies in Matthew 5: 44? Let me give it my best effort.

Hate in this context means to reject and oppose. Emotions are involved to be sure, but this is a reasoned volitional response on David's part. David asks God to deal with the wicked whom he rejects and opposes. I like the insights of John Piper at this point: "there is a kind of hate for the sinner that may coexist with pity and even a desire for their salvation. You may hate spinach without opposing its good use. But there may come a point when wickedness is so persistent and high-handed and God-despising that the time of redemption is past and there only remain irremediable wickedness and judgment. (Matthew 12:32; 1 John 5:16; 1 Corinthians 16:22). Therefore, we will grant to the psalmist (usually David), who speaks, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the foreshadowed Messiah and Judge, the right to call down judgment on the enemies of God. This is not personal vindictiveness. It is a prophetic execution of what will happen at the last day when God casts all his enemies into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). We would do well to leave such final assessments to God, and realize our own corrupt inability to hate as we ought. Let us tremble and trust God, lest we fail, and find ourselves on the other side of the curse" ("Do I Not Hate Those Who Hate You, O Lord? The Verses We Skipped," 10-3-2000).

2) God will lead the humble who trust Him

139:23-24

David concludes this Psalm in a prayer of humility and introspection. He knows very well the truth of Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?” He knows in light of his passionate words in verses 19-22 that he needs his own heart examined; not by himself, but by the Lord. Thus he pleads with the Lord to search (same word as in v. 1) me, know me, try me and lead me.

Examine my God my heart, my thoughts and my way. See if you find anything grievous, offensive, that will bring pain to me or others. Lord, give me a completely honest examination and evaluation. Hold nothing back. “Tell it like it is!” Tell me exactly what you see. Then, lead me, guide me, in a different and better direction.” Lead me in the everlasting way, the way that pleases you and the way that will endure forever.

Five Take Aways from Psalm 139

- 1) Even before you were conceived in your mother’s womb, the Lord had planned your size, shape, and the specific makeup of your body and soul. With the precision of a skilled artisan, He made you exactly as you are for His purposes and glory.



- 2) From the moment of conception and throughout the entirety of your life, each and every day was ordained and planned by Him and written down in His “book” for each of us. This is how the Father planned the life of his Son. This is how He planned the life of each of us.
- 3) From the moment we are conceived to the last breath of life, there is no such thing as fate, fortune, luck or coincidence. The sovereign God who made us is the sovereign God who planned out our life for us. He planned our beginning and our end and everything in between.
- 4) The fact we have been made and ordained by this omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God should remind us that nothing we do is hidden from Him and nothing we do can ultimately thwart His plan.
- 5) We are fearfully and wonderfully made by an awesome and wonderful God. He made me, knows me, and is with me. Unlike the wicked who are His enemies and hate Him, I am his friend and I will worship Him.

2000 years ago a mother named Mary conceived a baby in her womb knit together wonderfully by the Holy Spirit of God. That baby came into the world to live and die as God planned exactly to the last detail. You see Jesus is so pro-life He was willing to give His life that we might have life. His death proves that every life is valuable from the womb to the tomb and beyond into eternity!