

God's Greatness

BECAUSE GOD HAS MADE US, HE KNOWS US PERSONALLY AND IS WITH US ALWAYS. PSALM 139:1-4,7-16

Anyone who has given instruction to teenagers has likely been asked some form of this question: "Why do I need to know this?" They want to know its purpose for their lives. Having a sense of purpose is fundamental to all human beings. The reason for this is that God made us for His purposes—that we might love, serve, and glorify Him. In Psalm 139, David expressed his amazement over this wonderful truth.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Psalm 139 was written by David, but details are lacking concerning its historical context. What is apparent in verses 19-22 is that David was being threatened by "blood-thirsty men" who were also enemies of God. David contemplated God's omniscience, omnipresence, His creation, and judgment of humanity. He was amazed at how these truths revealed the Lord's personal interest in him. In response, David praised the Lord and wanted to have a right relationship with God.

In the first section (vv. 1-6), David acknowledged how God demonstrated His care for David. He was amazed that God intimately knew and understood everything about David—not only what David did but even what David would say or think before he spoke the words or the thoughts entered his mind. Second, David recognized that the Lord was always with him (vv. 7-12). David rejoiced in the reality that there was no place where he could go and escape God's presence. David enjoyed God's constant care and vigilant attention.

Next, David professed that before he was even born, the Lord had personally created and intricately formed him (vv. 13-16). What's more, God created David with a purpose in mind before David breathed his first breath. David was no accident. Before he was born, the Lord already knew David and had a plan for his life. In light of all of these truths, David expressed his amazement at God's continual care for him (vv. 17-18).

Finally, David declared his loyalty to God by rejecting those who are God's enemies, asking God to exact His righteous judgment on them (vv. 19-24). David concluded this section requesting that the Lord, who intimately knew his heart and thoughts, would root out any sin in his own life. David's greatest desire was to fulfill God's purpose for his life.

Key Words

1 LORD, you have **searched me** ^A and **known me**. ^B **2** You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. **3** You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. **4** Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD. (...)

7 Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in **Sheol**, D you are there. **9** If I fly on the wings of the dawn and settle down on the **western horizon**, **E** 10 even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night"—12 even the darkness is not dark to you. The night shines like the day; Fdarkness and light are alike to you. 13 For it was you who created my inward parts; G you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise you because I have been **remarkably and wondrously** H made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well. 15 My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. **16** Your eyes saw me when I was **formless**; I all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.

- **A.** To explore or to examine. The wording implies a thorough investigation of the situation.
- **B.** The Hebrew term suggests complete, intimate knowledge.
- **C.** God's Spirit was active in the Old Testament. While He did not reside in believers, He did represent God's presence among His people.
- **D.** A poetic parallel of rising to the heights of heaven. Sheol was the place of the dead, the underworld. One would descend into Sheol.
- E. "Uttermost parts of the sea" (KJV; ESV). The Mediterranean Sea was Israel's western horizon. While individuals could try crossing the sea to escape God (like Jonah), their efforts would be useless because God is there.
- **F.** God is light (1 John 1:5). Darkness cannot reside where He is. He brings the power of light to even the darkest situations.
- **G.** The Hebrew refers to the kidneys; but, poetically, it referred to the deepest part of a person's being.
- **H.** God does all things perfectly and never misses a detail. Our physical composition as humans should elicit praise and adoration.
- I. Humanity in its embryonic state. God knew us before we had the appearance of being human, which gives us particular value and worth.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. His Knowledge

(Psalm 139:1-4)

Believers can praise God for His knowledge of them.

 What do these verses reveal about God's care for us?

2. His Presence

(Psalm 139:7-12)

Believers can be comforted by God's presence.

- Where do you think people today go to escape God's presence?
- When has God's presence provided comfort or peace for you?

3. His Power

(Psalm 139:13-16)

Believers can be encouraged that God has purposefully created them to serve Him.

- What do these verses say about the value of human life? How should we respond to that truth?
- How can you allow God to use your gifts and abilities for His kingdom this week?

Apply the Text

Be prepared to discuss with your group how God's presence has comforted you.

- Are there times when knowledge that God knows you intimately has brought discomfort to you? Explain.
- Why should God's intimate knowledge of us elicit praise?

KEY DOCTRINE:

Man

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. (See Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:3-6.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Theologians speak of God as being omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (present everywhere), and omniscient (all-knowing). Read the following Bible passages to gain more insight into these aspects of God's nature. God's omnipotence: Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:37; Ephesians 3:20. God's omnipresence: Genesis 1:1; Luke 2:30-32; Hebrews 1:3. God's omniscience: Psalm 147:5; Matthew 6:4-8; 1 John 3:20. How do these Scripture passages encourage you in your walk with the Lord?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Psalm 139:1. What does it mean that God searches us and knows us?

David began Psalm 139 with the recognition that God searches our lives and knows all about us. The entire psalm points to God's omniscience—His all-knowing nature. The Hebrew word translated "searched" primarily refers to a deep investigative examination intended to uncover hidden truths. In this case, it is God searching the human heart.

Should we be concerned or comforted that God searches us and knows us?

In Mark 7:20-23, Jesus said that it's what's in our heart that makes us unclean. The Hebrew word for "known" in Psalm 139:1 refers to a deep, intimate, relational knowledge. It's more than just acknowledging someone's presence. For believers, we can take great comfort in the fact that God has an intimate knowledge of us. That's a good thing.

How can Psalm 139:1 be a basis for praise?

Recite Psalm 139:1 each morning this week as a reminder of God's love and care.

Prayer Requests

DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Psalm 139:1-4

Underline each form of the word "know."

In this first section of Psalm 139, David emphasized the personal relationship he had with God and how the Lord knew him completely and intimately. Certainly, God is omniscient. But what was amazing to David was that God "searched" him. This word indicates intention. In the Old Testament, it is used to describe the activity of spies scouting out a land to become knowledgeable of the terrain, or to describe the search of miners for ore. David used figurative language to declare that the Lord's knowledge of him was comparable to what results after one has engaged in purposeful, prolonged, extensive investigation of a matter.

To say "when I sit down and when I stand up" is a way to describe everything David did every day of his life. So when David said, "you know" these things, he was essentially saying to God, "You know everything about me," or "There is nothing You don't know about me." God not only knew all of his activities but also knew all his "thoughts." God knew his deepest desires, disappointments, concerns, and motivations.

"All my ways" means everything David did. God is aware of every detail of our lives. Nothing in the past, present, or future has ever been hidden from the eternal, all-knowing God.

How does it make you feel that God is aware of the details of your life?

Day 2: Psalm 139:7

Compare this verse to Jonah 1:3-10.

Verse 7 begins the second section of Psalm 139. The first section emphasized God's personal knowledge of David. In this section, David focused on the Lord's omnipresence. Not only does the Lord know everything about us, but He is also everywhere.

The psalmist began his consideration of God's omnipresence with two questions that both have the implied answer of "nowhere." These questions both point to a human inclination that goes all the way back to the garden of Eden in Genesis 3, which is to "escape" from God's Spirit and "flee" from His presence when we sin.

However, David was not expressing a desire to flee from God. Instead, he was praising God that, even if in his weaker moments when he wanted to flee from God, it would be impossible for him to do so. When Jonah attempted to "flee to Tarshish from the LORD's presence" (Jonah 1:3), God's gracious, disciplinary actions caused Jonah to realize it was impossible for him to flee from the Lord. When God rescued Jonah, the prophet came to his senses and praised Him for having done so (2:6-9). When God established His covenant with Israel, He promised His people that He would never leave them (Deut. 31:8). God's omnipresence comforts those who trust Him but is ominous for those rebelling against Him.

Express your thanks to God that He never leaves you.

Day 3: Psalm 139:8-10

Pay attention to how opposite words and phrases are used together to express totality.

David used "if" to demonstrate there was no place, condition, or situation he could conceive of that could separate him from God's presence. David used merisms to make his point. Merisms are polar opposites used together in words or phrases in order to express totality, completeness, or the whole. He began in verse 8 with the merism of the vertical axis. If he could go up to "heaven," God would be there, and if he could go down to "Sheol"—the place of the dead under the earth—God would still be there. In other words, no matter how high or how low he could go, David would discover God is there.

In verse 9, David looked to the horizontal axis of east and west. David's point was that no matter how far east he could go toward the horizon or how far west he could go in the opposite direction beyond the Mediterranean, God would be there.

God would not only be there, He would be there guiding him and holding on to him with His right hand to keep him safe. The expression "right hand" is idiomatic for "strength." David knew that the Lord led him and that the Lord would not let go of him. Paul wrote in a similarly dimensional way concerning God's love, praying for believers to "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love" (Eph. 3:18).

Pray that you would live with greater awareness of God's presence in your life.

Day 4: Psalm 139:11-12

Highlight the phrase "the darkness is not dark to you."

David recognized he could not hide from God even if he had the ability to turn the light into darkness. If David attempted to turn the light into darkness to hide from God, it would be like children putting their hands over their eyes thinking they are hidden from those standing in front of them.

God is light (Ps. 27:1; John 1:5). Darkness is the direct opposite of light. Within its context in the Bible, darkness can mean one of several things. Darkness often refers to living in rebellion against God (Prov. 4:19; Acts 26:18). It can indicate uncertainty, difficulty, or danger (Pss. 23:4; 35:6). It may describe God's judgment (Amos 5:20), or it can denote a time of sorrow or suffering (Job 19:8; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 3:2). David was saying that whatever the darkness was, it could not keep God from seeing him. God always has His eyes on His children—even in the darkest times of life.

Furthermore, this truth means those in rebellion against God cannot conceal their wickedness from Him. In Jeremiah 23:23-24, the Lord said, "Am I a God who is only near'—this is the Lord's declaration—'and not a God who is far away? Can a person hide in secret places where I cannot see him?'-the Lord's declaration. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?'—the LORD's declaration."

Pray for someone who is in need of the comfort and peace of God's presence. If possible, share this psalm with that person.

Day 5: Psalm 139:13-16

Compare these verses to Ephesians 2:10.

David recognized that from the time of his conception, the Lord was fashioning every elaborate part of him. The language in verse 13 depicts intricate care, attentiveness, and precision. While we have many similarities to others, God made each of us genetically unique.

Recognizing he had been "remarkably and wondrously made," David erupted into praise in verse 14. "Remarkably" and "wondrously" mean that God created us particularly and uniquely in a way that should produce awe and worship. God's creation of humanity in this way and for this purpose gives meaning and significance to every person, highlighting the sanctity of human life.

From the moment we were conceived God has had His eyes on us. In the last fifty years, recent technological advances have allowed us to peek inside the womb, but no baby in a mother's womb has ever been hidden from God (Heb. 4:13).

The conclusion of verse 16 indicates God made every single human life for a purpose. No one is an accident. David indicated that God knows the end of one's life before it ever begins. We did not control when we would be born, we don't know what our future holds, and only God does.

Do you think science has increased or decreased the mystery of life? Why?

APPLY THE TEXT

How should knowing that God purposely created you to serve Him impact the way you live this week?

