

God's Greatness

SESSION 12

Psalm 139:1-4,7-16

Memory Verse: Psalm 139:1

Because God has made us, He knows us personally and is with us always.

Loneliness strikes people everywhere. We expect folks who live in remote corners of the world to say that they get lonely; but the truth is, individuals who live in crowded apartment complexes struggle with loneliness as well. Even though we have people all around us, we can still suffer with the ache of feeling alone. While everyone may know us, nobody knows us well.

The Lord gives hope when we wrestle with loneliness. He created us, so He knows us perfectly. Furthermore, He is with us wherever we go, and He nudges us to give ourselves to Him so we can know Him better. As you dig into these verses from Psalm 139, take some time to thank God for always being there and for knowing you better than you know yourself. Also, pray for the adults in your Bible study who may struggle with loneliness. Ask God to use this session to give them peace and the assurance of His presence in their lives.



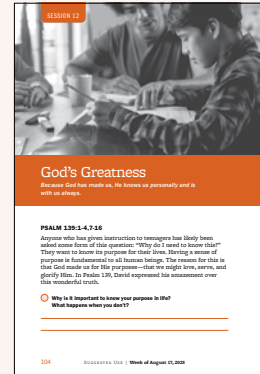
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Anyone who has given instruction to teenagers has likely been asked some form of this question: “Why do I need to know this?” They want to know its purpose for their lives. Having a sense of purpose is fundamental to all human beings. The reason for 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. (PSG, p. 104)

**Why is it important to know your purpose in life?
What happens when you don’t?**



Understand the Context (Psalm 139)

Psalm 139 provides us with a robust testimony of gratitude to the Lord. The testimony highlights the phenomenal blessing of His intimate presence and hands-on involvement in the lives of believers. For that reason, it belongs in the category of thanksgiving psalms.

The psalm has been credited to David, whose poetry served the kingdom well. With Psalm 139, he contributed a valuable resource for both public and personal worship. The introduction—or superscription—of the psalm indicates that he wanted the worship leader to put it to music for the choir. The theme of celebrating God’s greatness made it an excellent choice for a worship song.

At the outset of the psalm, David shared his personal testimony about how well the Lord actually knew him. God was aware of absolutely every detail of David’s daily activities. Nothing escaped His notice. The Lord observed what the king was doing, where he was going, and even what he was thinking. The reach of His awareness left David overwhelmed with amazement (139:1-6).

Next, David pondered how far he would need to go if he wanted to escape the Lord’s reach. His reflections took him to the realm of extremes. And, in the end, he concluded that the Lord would be with him no matter where he went or how far he traveled (139:7-12).

David then connected the Lord’s faithful presence with His intimate involvement in preparing him for God’s mission, even before he was born.

He asserted that the Lord formed him into infancy during his mother’s pregnancy. In the seclusion of her womb, the Lord worked meticulously and lovingly to fashion his body and to bring him into the world (139:13-16).

After David shared his testimony about the Lord’s presence, he asked God for His continued help and made an appeal regarding wicked people. The king opposed evildoers because they detested the Lord, and their behavior proved it. Their disdain for God came out in what they said about Him and how they rebelled against Him. David also despised them because of their murderous hatred. For that reason, he asked the Lord to do away with them for good.

However, David didn’t ask for the Lord’s help in retaliating against them. Instead, he asked Him to keep looking into *his* heart and revealing anything that would put him on the path of wickedness. In particular, he asked the Lord to scrutinize his thoughts. After all, God knew David’s thoughts better than he knew them himself.

With the Lord guiding his heart and mind, David could avoid taking the path of wickedness. Instead, he would stay on the positive path that would make an eternal difference in his life.

As you read Psalm 139:1-4,7-16, identify what the verses reveal about God. Then identify what these verses reveal about you. (PSG, p. 105)



PREPARE: Prior to the session, make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Organizing the Psalms*). Hang **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: The Nature of God*) on a focal wall.

ASK:

Why is it important to know your purpose in life? What happens when you don't? (PSG, p. 104)

READ:

Direct a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 104 of the PSG as the group considers the purpose God has for their lives.

SHARE:

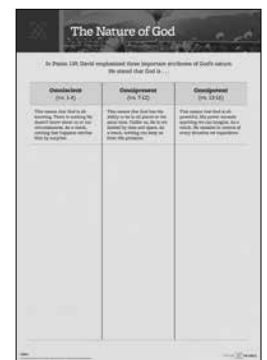
Command the digital voice assistant on your phone to find the answer to a question or to tell a joke. Point out that technology makes it easy to uncover some information or to get answers to certain questions. But questions of “why?” often require more than our phones can provide.

CONTEXT:

Note that David had questions, and Psalm 139 offers a testimony of what God taught him as he sought answers. Direct attention to **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Organizing the Psalms*) and point out that this is a psalm of thanksgiving.

TRANSITION:

David found a lot to be thankful when it came to God's work in his life. The first thing he identified related to God's character, especially the fact that He knew him so well.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Secure a copy of the lyrics “How Great is Our God” by Chris Tomlin (*Baptist Hymnal*, 2008, No. 5). Enlist someone to read each stanza and someone else to lead the group in singing the chorus. Lead the group to spend a few minutes considering the wonderful attributes of our God. Ask: **How does knowing how amazing God is make a difference in your life each day?**

His Knowledge (Ps. 139:1-4)

1 LORD, you have searched me and known me. **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.

(v. 1) Searched . . . known: The Hebrew word for **searched** (*haqar*) carries the idea of a tireless examination. It was used in court settings to describe a thorough investigation (Prov. 18:17). Similarly, the Hebrew word for **known** (*yadah*) indicates an intimate level of knowledge that results in a personal understanding of an individual.

David's friends may have known him personally, and his enemies may have considered themselves experts at discerning his plans. However, only God could look into the deepest recesses of his soul and know him absolutely.

(v. 2) You know: David moved from past tense to present tense as he continued to write this psalm. The track record of God's intimate involvement in his life gave way to a testimony of His ongoing devotion that never wavers. As growing believers, we can identify with this part of David's testimony because we can attest to the reality of God's non-stop watchfulness over us.

Because He sees us perfectly, He doesn't miss even the seemingly insignificant details in our daily lives. Whether we **sit down** or **stand up**, God knows us and is present with us. That should provide a degree of comfort to believers who might be tempted to wonder if God really knows or cares about them and their struggles.

Key Doctrine

Man

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

(v. 2) My thoughts: Along with perfect eyesight, God has faultless insight. The public as well as the private features of our day get His attention. Even more astonishing, He understands what we're thinking. The ministry of Jesus toward His critics and even His disciples validates that He perceives our **thoughts** (Matt. 9:4; Luke 9:47). Even though

He has a heavenly perspective that appears to be remote, He knows us well enough to discern our undisclosed intentions (John 2:24-25).

(v. 3) You observe: In the Hebrew language, the word for **observe** (*zarah*) suggests that the Lord sifts through the details of our daily routines in order to separate the good from the bad (Matt. 3:12). In other words, He scrutinizes the path that we take each day (Job 31:4). He watches us as we work and as we rest. Working customarily takes place during the day, while resting ordinarily happens at night. Consequently, not a moment of our existence slips beyond His notice.

(v. 3) All my ways: Since the Lord understands everything we think, we can rest assured that He's also aware of everything we do. He is familiar with our **ways**. The Hebrew wording suggests a road being traveled or a journey being made.

The Bible provides examples of God's awareness of what we're doing even when we think we're concealing them from everyone. According to 2 Samuel 12:9-12, He knew that David tried to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba. Similarly, Jesus knew perfectly the secret steps that Judas had taken to betray Him (John 13:2).

(v. 4) Before a word: While God's awareness of our ways can leave us with a troubling sense of conviction, His discernment regarding our actions can also give us a calming sense of comfort and assurance. Our thoughts can be difficult to express verbally, but He does not need a **word** from us to untangle our minds. We might get frustrated when our words fall short of expressing what we're actually thinking (Matt. 12:35-37). But we can be grateful that the Lord still knows our thoughts completely (Heb. 4:12-13).

EXPLORE Psalm 139:1-4



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can praise God for His knowledge of them.

- CONTEXT:** Use Understand the Context (PSG, p. 105) to provide an overview of Psalm 139. Highlight God’s care and personal interest in each believer.
- READ:** Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 139:1-4** as the group listens for how many times the word “know” appears in some form.
- LIST:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *The Nature of God*) for a definition of omniscient. Under the “Omniscient” column write: *thoughts, words, actions*. Direct adults to read through the verses again silently and to consider how they reveal God’s omniscience. Allow time for volunteers to share. Record their responses on the poster.
- DISCUSS:** Lead the group to turn to a neighbor and discuss how realizing that God knows all our thoughts, words, and actions might make us feel.
- ASK:** **What do these verses reveal about God’s care for us?** (PSG, p. 107)
- TRANSITION:** *Recognizing how God is all-knowing and still cares about each believer is sometimes overwhelming. It should lead us to praise Him for His omniscience.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Do Not Enter Sign
Display a sign that says “Private: Do Not Enter.” Allow adults to suggest places that might have such a “keep out” sign. Share that sometimes we might like to put a sign like that on our lives to keep God at arm’s length. Explain that Psalm 139 makes it clear there is nothing that God doesn’t know about our lives. Share that while we can keep other people away at times, God always knows our words and our actions. Discuss how God’s omniscience should affect our everyday lives.

His Presence (Ps. 139:7-12)

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, you are there. **9** If I fly on the wings of the dawn and settle down on the western horizon, **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; darkness and light are alike to you.

(v. 7) *Where can I go:* David asked the same question in two separate but similar ways: **Where can I go?** and **Where can I flee?** The parallelism emphasized the fact that it is impossible to **escape** God’s presence. God’s Spirit, as well as His presence, represented His intensely personal involvement in the lives of His people.

The prophet Jonah learned the only appropriate answer to the question raised in this verse. He tried to run away from God, but his attempt failed completely (Jonah 1:3-10).

Key Words

Heaven . . . Sheol

David speculated on where he possibly could go to escape the Lord’s presence. The use of **if** suggests two extreme destinations. Going to **heaven** meant traveling to God’s dwelling place. Jesus also referred to heaven as His Father’s home (John 14:2), while the writer of Hebrews associated it with the priestly ministry of Jesus (Heb. 4:13).

In contrast, making one’s bed in **Sheol** implied entering the dwelling place of the dead. The Hebrew word can be translated hell and typically refers to the final state of the wicked. Even in such a desperate place, the Lord holds full power and sovereign authority (Amos 9:2).

(v. 9) *Wings of the dawn . . . western horizon:* As he continued to speculate, David raised the possibility of visiting the most extreme locations imaginable to the ancient Jewish mind. From Israel, going east suggested heading toward the sunrise at **dawn**. Anyone planning to go in that direction would never reach their destination. Similarly, going toward the **western horizon** would meet the sea. The depths of the Mediterranean inevitably would halt their progress.

(v. 10) *Even there:* The reality of the Lord’s presence made David’s speculation entirely unreasonable. God would be present in even the most extreme locations. In fact, He would be waiting for the arrival of anyone who would have considered themselves to be out of His reach.

Not only would He be present when they arrived, but He also would be there to help them (Isa. 41:13). He would **lead** them so they would take the wise path and go in the right direction. In those days, a person’s **right hand** was seen as a symbol of strength and power. The Lord would use His right hand to protect those who came to Him.

(v. 11) *If I say:* Another **if** statement ushered in speculation pertaining to **darkness** and **light**. If anyone could have escaped the light, they would have wondered if they were beyond the Lord’s reach. Of course, light always drives darkness away. Therefore, hiding in the darkness was wishful thinking at best. Beyond the reach of light, a person could use the darkness as something like a blanket. In turn, the darkness would obscure the light. Covered in darkness, eventually day would become like night. But, as David would reveal, this was just a hypothetical argument rather than a real-life possibility.

(v. 12) *Alike to you:* Such speculation failed to factor in a couple of critical realities. First, the **light** of the Lord would never be limited. His light would always drive **darkness** away completely. Second, the distinction between light and darkness would never present a challenge for God. He created both (Gen. 1:4-5), and He used both within the scope of His perfect wisdom and eternal plans. From His perspective, they are **alike**. As a result, no one can cover themselves with darkness in an attempt to hide from Him (Job 34:22).

EXPLORE Psalm 139:7-12



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can be comforted by God’s presence.

READ: Read aloud Psalm 139:7 as the group considers how they would answer David’s questions.

ASK: Would your answer be the same for both questions? Where do you think people today go to escape God’s presence?

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 139:8-12 as the group listens for David’s description of the places God would be with him.

RECAP: Summarize these sentences from page 108 of the PSG to explain the format David used to emphasize God’s omnipresence: “David uses merisms to make his point. Merisms are polar opposites used together in words or phrases in order to express totality, completeness, or the whole.”

LIST: Direct the group to **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: The Nature of God*) and examine the definition for omnipresent. Encourage adults to list the merisms that highlight God’s omnipresence. Remind adults that David’s point was that it is impossible to hide from God or escape His presence. Note that while God’s consistent presence might terrify those trying to hide from Him, it offers genuine comfort for those who trust Him.

ASK: When has God’s presence provided comfort or peace for you? (PSG, p. 110)



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Comparing Verses

Divide the group into three teams, assigning each team one of the following Scriptures to read. Direct the teams to analyze how Psalm 139 relates to each of the passages: Genesis 3:8-13; Jonah 1:1-4; and Acts 5:1-6. After a few minutes, allow each team to share. Point out that in each situation, people tried to hide from God or lie to God. Discuss: *How do people today try to hide from God? Why does God’s omnipresence create fear for some people?*

His Power (Ps. 139:13-16)

13 For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. **14** I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously 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; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.

(v. 13) *It was you:* Turning from the reaches of the Lord's knowledge and presence, David gave his attention to God's power, His omnipotence. The Lord alone **created** him, including the details of his **inward parts**. The Hebrew wording used here (*kilya*) literally means "kidneys." In the ancient mind, it served as a symbol of the vital organs in a person's body. God brought David into the world and was orchestrating a plan for his life.

Key Truth

Sanctity of Human Life

Because God Himself gave David life and purpose, He alone deserved the credit for the growth and formation of David's unborn body inside his **mother's womb**. God honors life from conception to the grave, and He holds authority over every aspect of our lives. We are created in His image (Gen. 1:27), and He expects us to follow His example. As the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) states, we are called to "speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death" (Article XV, "The Christian and the Social Order").

(v. 14) *Remarkably and wondrously:* As David reflected on the miracle of his conception and birth, he responded with sincere worship rooted in humble adoration. He recognized that he was **remarkably and wondrously** created by the powerful hand of God; and the artistic, as well as technical, precision that went into his formation filled his heart with wonder. David's reflection on the mysterious perfection of the Lord's work gave way to wholehearted praise.

(v. 14) *Your works:* Like David, we should respond with awestruck praise when we contemplate the Lord's omnipotence in creating us. We marvel at His extremely personal investment in His strangely **wondrous** work that went into forming our bodies before our birth.

We're much more than nameless mammals who entered the world by chance. We're precious to the God who wove us into being. We are "his workmanship" (Eph. 2:10).

(v. 15) *Not hidden from you:* David suggested that the most secluded place in the world happened to be a mother's womb. Nobody would be able to see the bones of an unborn child as they developed. Still, even there, nothing was **hidden** from God. As our all-powerful Creator, He can see the formation of a baby's body. In fact, each baby's growing body rests in God's hands (Job 10:9-11).

(v. 16) *All my days were written:* As David continued to reflect on the mysteries that swirled around the formation of a baby's body, he noted that the Lord had a **book**. In this book, God has details of each person's life that have been **written**. Before a baby comes into the world, the Lord knows how long that individual will live and everything he or she will experience. Job also echoed David's observation, explaining that the Lord numbers our days (Job 14:5).

(v. 16) *Planned:* Like David, we're wise to acknowledge how God has authority over every aspect of our lives. Because of His initiative, the purpose of our lives has been **planned** according to His will and for His glory. In the Hebrew language, *yasar* suggests the work of an expert craftsman who created something that would serve a useful purpose. It was also used to describe God's creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7.

EXPLORE Psalm 139:13-16



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can be encouraged that God has purposely created them to serve Him.

READ: Read aloud **Psalm 139:13-16** as the group identifies how God is the God of creation and nothing is hidden from Him.

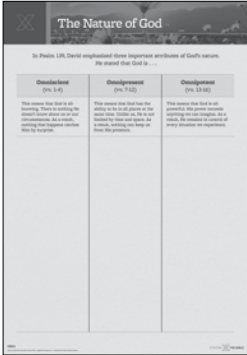
RELATE: David’s recognition that God had intricately created him for his purposes led David to praise God.

EXAMINE: Direct the group to **Pack Item 6 (Poster: The Nature of God)**. Read the definition for “omnipotent.” Encourage adults to read the verses again and to identify how David’s words reveal God’s omnipotence. Record their responses on the poster.

ASK: What do these verses say about the value of human life? How should we respond to that truth?

RECAP: To emphasize the sanctity of human life, share this passage from page 110 of the PSG: *God uniquely made us in His image to glorify Him, that is, to magnify His goodness and to reflect His beauty. God created human beings in this remarkable and wondrous way in order to fulfill this noble cause. Consequently, 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.*

ASK: How can you allow God to use your gifts and abilities for His kingdom this week? (PSG, p. 111)



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Note that theologians speak of God as being omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (present everywhere), and omniscient (all-knowing). Direct adults to number off as 1, 2, or 3. Assign the 1s to read the verses on God’s omnipotence from the Bible Skill activity on page 111 of the PSG. Instruct the 2s to do the same with God’s omnipresence, while the 3s examine God’s omniscience. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to report. Encourage adults to respond to the question at the end of the activity.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 112 of the *Personal Study Guide*:
- *Believers can praise God for His knowledge of them.*
 - *Believers can be comforted by God's presence.*
 - *Believers can be encouraged that God has purposely created them to serve Him.*
- DISCUSS:** Direct attention to the first set of questions on page 112 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion on how God's presence might make someone uncomfortable. Emphasize the peace the guarantee of His presence can provide for those who trust Him.
- REFLECT:** Encourage adults to reflect on the second set of questions on page 112 of the PSG during the week. Challenge them to embrace God's intimate knowledge of them and His ongoing presence in their lives.
- PRAY:** Direct attention back to the responses on **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: The Nature of God*). Guide the group to pray silently about their response to God's omniscience, God's omnipresence, and God's omnipotence. Close the session by reading Psalm 139:24 as a prayer.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by texting or emailing the group. Remind them to look for opportunities to reflect the sanctity of life toward others. Encourage each person to consider how they are using their gifts and talents to serve others. Include Psalm 139:1 and challenge the group to memorize it during the week. Urge them to take comfort in the truth that God knows them and is always present with them.

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