



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.

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

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


PSALM 139

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 “bloodthirsty 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.



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

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

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**.

VERSE 1

It is fitting that verse 1 begins with **LORD**. This is God's personal name to His people, Israel. It is fitting because 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, to describe the search of miners for ore, to describe an investigation into a delicate matter, and to describe scribes examining God's law. So even though God need not make any effort, 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 examination and investigation of a matter.

VERSE 2

In verse 2, David emphasized God's continued knowledge of him. To say **when I sit down and when I stand up** is a way to describe everything David did everyday of his life—both in his private life and public 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."

David accentuated this truth by stating that God not only knew all of his activities but also knew all his thoughts. God knew and understood his deepest desires, disappointments, concerns, and motivations. From the **far away** distance of eternity past and from far away above all of creation, the Lord intimately knew everything there was to know about David, inside and out.

VERSE 3

David continued the idea of the Lord's intimate knowledge of him. The Hebrew word translated **observe** is found only here in the Old Testament and carries with it the idea of measuring something. David was saying that God paid attention to and knew the exact distance David traveled each day. Additionally, God's watchful eye observed exactly how long David slept at night. **All my ways** means everything David did, his daily and nightly routines as well as anything out of the ordinary. Twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, God is aware of every detail of our lives.

God is aware of every detail of our lives.

VERSE 4

David recognized the Lord's foreknowledge. Before David spoke a word, God already knew what he was going to say and what David would mean by it. Others may not fully understand what we mean when we speak, but God does. If this is true about what we are about to say, it is also certainly true about whatever we are about to do. David's declaration in verse 4 recognizes the Lord's omniscience. Nothing in the past, present, or future has ever been hidden from the eternal, all-knowing God.



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

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

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

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.

VERSE 7

Verse 7 begins the second section of Psalm 139. The first section of the psalm emphasized the Lord’s personal knowledge of David. In this section, David focused on the Lord’s omnipresence and its effect on David. 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, David 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 presence of the Lord. When God rescued Jonah, the prophet came to his senses and praised God for having done so (2:6-9). When God established His covenant with Israel, He promised His people that He would never leave them or abandon them (Deut. 31:8). God’s omnipresence comforts those who trust Him but is ominous for those rebelling against Him.

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VERSES 8-10

David used the word **if** to demonstrate there was no place, condition, or situation he could conceive of that could separate him from God’s presence. 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. David 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. The **dawn** of each day comes with the rising of the sun in the east, and Israel's **western** boundary was the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It made up their western limits, which literally in Hebrew is "the end of the sea." 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).

**God always has His eyes on His children—
even in the darkest times of life.**

VERSES 11-12

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.”

 **When has God’s presence provided comfort or peace for you?**

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.**

VERSES 13-14

Inward parts, literally “kidneys” in Hebrew, often denote the most secret parts of a person, the seat of emotion or affection (Pss. 16:7; 73:21; Job 19:27). David recognized that from the time of his conception, the Lord was fashioning every elaborate part of him. The language here depicts intricate care, attentiveness, and precision, such as those who made thread and then wove it into fabrics. 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* means that God created us particularly and uniquely in way that should produce awe and worship. 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.

VERSES 15-16

Not only has God always known us, but from the moment we were conceived He has had His eyes on us. Just as the depths of the earth were hidden from people in ancient times, so was what was happening inside the womb. 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 knows when we will die and how we will die. God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). This also means the seasons of our lives are ordained by God (Eccl. 3:1-8,10-14). As we go through our daily routines and experience the seasons of life, we must remember Paul’s instruction: “whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

 **How can you allow God to use your gifts and abilities for His kingdom this week?**

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?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can praise God for His knowledge of them.
- + Believers can be comforted by God’s presence.
- + Believers can be encouraged that God has purposefully created them to serve Him.

○ 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?

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

○ Memorize Psalm 139:1.

Prayer Needs
