

## Fearfully And Wonderfully Made

### Psalm 139

**Introduction:** 1) Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? These are just a few of what we call “the ultimate questions of life,” questions that run through our minds and haunt us all of our lives. Do I really matter? Does my life have a purpose? If God exists, does He know I exist? And if He does, does He even care that I exist? To these very important questions Psalm 139 responds with a resounding YES! This psalm links us with God as do few other texts in the Bible. This God who is omniscient (vs. 1-6), omnipresent (vs.7-12), omnipotent (vs. 13-18) and omni-compotent (vs. 19-24) has fearfully and wonderfully made us (v. 14), fashioning all our days before we were even formed in our mother’s womb (v.16).

- 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 made up of a hymn, praise, thanksgiving, lament, confession, meditation and prayer. It has the characteristics of both the didactic psalm and the wisdom psalm.
  - Some form of the word “know” dominates the passage, occurring 6 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).
  - David knew, as we must know, that wrong ideas about God will inevitably lead to wrong ideas about who we are. Such wrong thinking can tragically lead to wrong decisions, leading to the wrong path, resulting in the wrong destiny.

3) David wants us to know our God so that we may ourselves. John Calvin wrote in book 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1 in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “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.” (35). What then does Psalm 139 teach us about our God and ourselves that we must know and never forget?

**I. We are made by an omniscient God.**

**139:1-6**

- Stanza 1 affirms a simple and basic truth: God knows all about you. With spiritual x-ray vision God peers into your soul and sees you for who you really are. No detail escapes His watching eyes. God is never surprised or caught off guard. He never says, “Wow! I didn’t see that one coming!”
- Note the powerful verb action of this stanza.
  - You have searched and known (v.1).
  - You know... You understand (v. 2).
  - You comprehend (winnow) and are acquainted (v.3).
  - You know altogether (v. 4).
  - You have hemmed (*ESV*) me in (v. 5).
- David moves to address 4 specific or particular ways in which the omniscient God knows us. I believe he would testify, “God knows me until it hurts.”

1) God knows my heart.

139:1

- God knows your character. “O Yahweh, you have searched me and known me. This is both convicting and comforting. God knows me inside out. He has exhaustive knowledge of my soul.

- Many of us have “soul secrets” that we keep hidden from others, even those close to us. We are relieved to know that no one knows some of the things we have thought and some of the emotions we have felt. However, someone does know. The Lord has searched you and He knows it all.
- Charles Spurgeon wrote, “The Lord knows us thoroughly as if He had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being” (3:258).
- Our heart, our soul, is an open book to God.

2) God knows my action. 139:2-3

- God knows your conduct. The “you” here is emphatic. The opposites “my sitting down and my rising up” denote all of our actions. (v.2).
- Our daily activities are completely familiar to our God. You 1) comprehend (lit. winnow) my path, 2) comprehend my lying down and 3) are acquainted with all my ways. (v. 3).
- Indeed even my attitudes and motives behind my actions are known by you: You understand (discern) my thoughts afar off. Distance is no hindrance or barrier to your microscopic knowledge, in full, of each and every human being (v. 2). You not only know what I do, you even know why I do it, something I may not even know at times. You see, the heart that deceives you (Jeremiah 17:9) can never fool God.

3) God knows my words. 139:4

- God knows your conversation. Even before you say it, He knows. And, He knows them exhaustively and completely (“altogether”).

- You and I, in an unguarded or angry moment, blurt out something foolish or hurtful. “I had not planned to say that. I surprised myself.” God wasn’t surprised. He was not caught off guard in the least.”

4) God knows my destiny. 139:5-6

- God knows your course. In fact He has you surrounded and “hemmed in” (*ESV*). We are enveloped, “enclosed” (*NASV*) by His love and care.
- How do I know He loves me and cares for me? Because He has “laid His hand upon me.” The child of God is clearly in view here. He guides me and he comforts me. I cannot escape Him but then, why would I want to?
- The word “wonderful” (v. 6) is in an emphatic position at the beginning of the sentence strengthened its force. It has the idea of “extraordinary” or “surpassing.”
- Divine omniscience is simply too high for us to “get it.” Try as we might, we can’t “go there!” It goes beyond my wildest imagination.

**II. We are made by an omnipresent God. 139:7-12**

- When I was a little boy I went off with some older boys without my mother’s knowledge. As we were returning home we met a search party of men looking for me! When I returned 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. He is simply inescapable. He is everywhere, even under the covers.

1) God is with me wherever I go.

139:7-10

- Verse 7 utilizes 2 rhetorical questions that anticipate the answer: nowhere! They are a beautiful example of semantic parallelism as the two questions complement one another.
- Verses 8 & 9 use 2 pairs of hypothetical opposites which include everything in between them.

— Go up to heaven you are there. If I make my resting place in *Sheol*, the grave, the place of the dead, you are there (v. 8). You are up and down and everywhere in between.

— If I take the wings of the morning (and go east at the speed of light) and if I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea (west/ the Mediterranean) ... you are there too (v. 9).

- Verse 10 provides the conclusion of the whole matter: 1) even there Your hand shall lead me (direction); 2) And Your right hand shall hold me (protection).
- Anywhere and everywhere I might go You are there with what is best for me in Your sight!

2) God is with me wherever I am.

139:11-12

- Distance cannot separate me from the omnipresent God. Darkness cannot hide me from His presence either. Turn off the lights. Pull the drapes. Close the blinds. Pull those covers over your head. Darkness may conceal one man from another, but it can never hide a man from God.

- What is dark to me literally and spiritually is light to Jehovah! Addressing the omnipresence of God, Stephen Charnock, who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was a Puritan preacher wrote, “How terrible should the thoughts of this attribute be to sinners! How foolish is it to imagine any hiding-place from the incomprehensible God, who fills and contains all things, and is present in every point of the world. When men have shut the door, and made all darkness within, to meditate or commit a crime, they cannot in the most intricate recesses be sheltered from the presence of God. If they could separate themselves from their own shadows, they could not avoid his company, or be obscured from his sight...Hypocrites cannot disguise their sentiments from him; he is in the most secret nook of their hearts. No thought is hid, no lust is secret, but the eye of God beholds this, and that, and the other. He is present with our heart when we imagine, with our hands when we act. We may exclude the sun from peeping into our solitudes, but not the eyes of God from beholding our actions” (174).

### **III. We are made by an omnipotent God.**

**139:13-18**

- 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).

1) The Lord formed my body.

139:13-15

- For connects stanza 3 with both stanzas 1 and 2.
- You formed –“You” is emphatic again. 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 it.
- Covered – wove, knitted. God was involved in the intricate details. As a skilled craftsman would knit a piece of cloth or weave a beautiful basket, this is how God made us.
- David 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). We are awestruck with wonder, amazement and reverence at God’s magnificent creation. We stand amazed in His presence!
- David sees the works of this great Creator God as marvelous (*ESV*, “wonderful”). He affirms: “my soul knows it very well.” (v. 14) He has no doubts either about the Creator or the tiny creation in view! There is human life in there put there by God.
- The theme of God’s omniscience now makes another appearance. My frame (lit. “bones”) was not hidden from You. You see everything and you know everything.
- Made in the secret, hidden place within my mother, I was skillfully wrought (*ESV*, “intricately woven”, *The Message*, “You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something”). Chip McDaniel notes the Hebrew word could be translated “embroidered” and that the other eight times the

verb is used 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).

- “In the lower parts of the earth” is simply a poetic expression, a figure of speech, that points to the darkness, hiddenness and secrecy of the mother’s womb.
- We may not know all that is going on. Even with 4-D sonograms our knowledge of all that is unfolding and developing inside a mother’s womb is so small and insignificant in comparison to what our God sees and knows.

**Transition:** You see He not only formed your body. He 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 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 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 scholars believe the phrase, “when I awake, I am still with You” may be alluding to another waking; the waking up from death in the very presence of the Lord. 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 awakens in the presence of Jesus His Maker and Savior the next. The God who made Him is the God who saved. The God who gave him life is the God who gives him eternal life.

**IV. We are made by an omni-competent God.                      139:19-24**

- The fourth and final stanza constitutes what could be called “a dangerous prayer.”
- 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. David notes in stark contrast the heart and mind of those who oppose God, and are his enemies (v. 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.
- In a psalm of imprecation, a psalm that vividly calls on God to judge the wicked who do great evil, David asks God to slay the wicked, and 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. He is not looking down his nose at others. He knows his own sin too.

1) **Our God will deal with the wicked.                      139:19-22**

- These men were evil in action (v. 19).

- These men were evil with their words (v. 20).
- These men were evil in their agenda (v. 21).
- These men were enemies of David because they were the enemy of God (v. 22).
- Hate 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. I like the insight 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; 1Corinthians 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."

2) Our God will lead the humble. 139: 23-24

- Four verbs catch our eye as David comes before the Lord in humility:
  - Search me/ try me (v. 23).
  - See me/lead me (v. 24).
- Search (v. 23) is the same word as in v. 1.

Try (v. 23) means to test as a refiner would test metal. Anxieties or “anxious thoughts” (*NIV*) speaks of motives and attitudes of the heart.

- Wicked way is better “grievous way” (*ESV*), lit. “way of pain.” It is pain resulting from wrong attitudes and actions. Such a way leads to suffering and death. David wants God to take charge of his life and lead him in the way everlasting, the way of life with God.
- I believe David grew to understand God will often use greatly those He wounds deeply. And, he knew such wounds were necessary to bring life and healing to his soul.

### **Conclusion:**

What can we take away from this magnificent psalm that can gladden our hearts and give us a divine perspective on who we are?

- 1) Even before you were conceived in your mother’s womb, your Lord had designed 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) At birth and throughout all of life, there are no surprises or accidents in God’s eyes. Each and every day was ordained and planned by Him and written down in His “day planner” for each of us. Again, all of this was designed for our ultimate good and His great glory.
- 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 overcome His plan.
- 5) We are fearfully and wonderfully made by an awesome and wonderful God. He knows me, He is with me and He made me. Unlike the wicked who are His enemies, I will worship Him and be His friend. Even better, I will devote my life to Him and become His child!