

The Perfect Knowledge of Our God – Psalm 139

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Introduction

This morning we will consider and meditate upon Psalm 139. Here we will see one of God's many attributes which is His perfect knowledge.

This is a psalm of wonder, joy, and comfort. David glories in the fact that God knows all things, especially him in an intimate way.

We read beginning in verse 1:

139 O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

*²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.*

*³You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.*

*⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

*⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.*

*⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.*

In Experience (v 1)

The psalmist David begins in verse 1 stating his experience thus far with God. God had already searched and known him completely. As we know from the OT narratives, David possessed the Holy Spirit and was a man after God's own heart. He sought to please and exalt God throughout His life. And by the Spirit and through a steady stream of testings and trials, David concluded that God had examined him inside and out with painstaking care. This had been his experience with God.

Of Man's Activity (v 2-6)

David recounts in verses 2-6 how God knew him perfectly and completely in every activity of his life. In verse two, God knew everything about the day-to-day activity of David – his sitting down and rising up – his every thought. God knew his schedule and knew what was on his mind. God was not simply gathering "David-data" on his activity but had perfect insight into David and how he thought. In Ezekiel 11:5 God says, "I know the things that come into your mind"

God also knew his ways in verse three. He discerned the path David's life was on and how he approached life. David was faced with dilemmas, questions, and decisions and God knew how David handled each one.

And in verse 4, God even knew David's words before they were said. Such words would be consistent with his character and the condition of his heart. We often do not know what we will say in a situation until it occurs but God knows, because He knows us far better than we do.

So God knew all the activities of David. Hebrews 4:13 says, "*And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.*"

Such knowledge of his activity is complete in verse five – it "*hemmed David in*". It was not only complete in the moment but true for the past and would be for the future as well... "*behind and before*". And such knowledge gave David assurance for it was active upon his life and not distant. God's knowledge of him influenced his life – for David, knowing that God knew everything about him was more than sobering, and altered and corrected his life's day-to-day, his ways, and his words. God's perfect knowledge of him gave him a sense of protection – His all-knowing hand was laid upon David. He was constantly being guarded, steadied, and directed.

Such truth causes David to confess overwhelming wonder in verse six. David could relate his experience with God but could not comprehend it. David's limited knowledge was no match for God's.

And this truth is even more astounding when we consider God's perfect knowledge concerning David and all people; His knowledge towards us is never mistaken, never changes, and never overlooks anything.¹ God never comes back and says "I was wrong about that". God is not improving in knowledge – he does not seek to learn more about a subject nor does he have to take a refresher course.

Nothing escapes His perfect and comprehensive gaze and never will.

Notice God's unlimited and perfect knowledge of his activity did not discourage David. Rather it caused him to joyfully express awe and wonder. God's knowledge of him was wonderful and indescribable.

Just like He did with David, He never takes His eye off of His people. This is probably not a new truth for you today but what are you doing today? Are you confident God knows about it?

Of Man's Location (v 7-12)

According to David this knowledge goes beyond just our activity. It extends to our location. For we might ask, "is there a place where we can go or be that God loses His ability to know everything about us?" This seems to be a weak question but not when we consider our mindset in times of trouble or hardship. When things are hard, we easily find ourselves asking if God really knows where we are. Or how about when we are tempted to sin? Perhaps we are in a place God will not notice – a place where we can run and hide.

Verses 7-12 reads:

⁷ *Where shall I go from your Spirit?*

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*

¹ A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1975), p. 17

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning*
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ *even there your hand shall lead me,*
and your right hand shall hold me.
¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,*
and the light about me be night,"
¹² *even the darkness is not dark to you;*
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

David asks rhetorically, "is there any place God that I can get away from God?" The answer is clearly "no". It is clear that God knows where David is regardless of where he is. Now David does not want to escape from God's presence but is simply proving a point – a point using the most extreme limits of where a person could be located in two realms:

The first involves places beyond this earthly life – heaven or Sheol. Sheol is the opposite of heaven and signifies the grave with its darkness, gloom, and misery. So whether he descends to the grave or ascends to the heights of heaven, the psalmist says there is no place beyond this life where God does not have knowledge of himself or His people.

The second represents maximum earthly distance – as far as the east is from the west. The "*wings of the morning*" is speaking of the farther point east, where the sun rises. The "*uttermost parts of the sea*" speaks of the farthest end of the Mediterranean Sea west of Israel. In his understanding of the earth, these represented the two extremes of distance. Even with our satellite and aviation capabilities today, we cannot explain it any better today.

And God knows everything there is to know about creation and all its elements. Job 37:16 says,

¹⁶ *Do you know the balancings^[a] of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge."*

Now the elements of creation are a splendid thing; from the wonders of the heavenly bodies, to the oceans, mountains, and forests, to the multi-varied trees, flowers, and animals, to the human body and its amazing features (give example of the human eye). And these are just the things we can readily see – what about what is going on in the molecular or atomic level? For those of you who work in the sciences or medical fields, you can especially appreciate. Do you take moments to notice the wonders of creation and the One who created it?

So as we ponder the creation, realize that if God knows all of it perfectly and completely and manages it moment by moment, then would He not know every place His prized creation man would be, especially those whom He calls His people?

No matter where David could find himself in this world or beyond, God knows perfectly where he is. And even better than that, verse 10 tells us that regardless of location, God is still with him and has His hand upon him – leading him, holding him. What a comfort! The Lord not always knows what I am doing and where I am but is actively engaged in my life.

David goes on to further establish the extent of the perfect knowledge of God. But certainly darkness can obscure God's view of me, right? I surely can hide from God there. Again, the answer is "no." Whether in darkness or light God sees and knows perfectly. It makes no difference – day or night – it does not matter. Far better than the technology of night vision, is God's vision. God sees equally well in darkness or light.

Before Man's Birth (v 13-16)

In verses 13-16, David then gives an example of God's knowledge in darkness versus light but in the process leads us to a far deeper truth. We read:

¹³ *For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*
¹⁴ *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.^[a]
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.*
¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*
¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.*

The psalmist describes an intimate view of a particular place of darkness - inside the womb and before birth. Even hidden there, God could see him perfectly. For it was God doing the work; delicately forming every part of the psalmist's body and weaving him together with divine skill.

In meditating on this process, David praises the Lord, "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*". The sense of the phrase, "*wonderfully made*" is "*I am fearfully set apart*" – set apart to do His will. Intricate care is taken by God when weaving together each person He has created. And this brings special meaning to those whom He has named as His.

This creating process of people is a wonderful work says David in verse 14. His own sense of being confirms it. This gives the abortion debate a whole new perspective, does it not?

David says that even in the secret darkness of the womb, he was not hidden from the Lord. Even his own mother did not know or understand completely what was happening during that time. But the Lord did, since David was always on display before God there as He formed and grew him over that 40+ week process. Such is God's ever present attention to the baby in the womb.

But if God's knowledge of David was perfect while in the womb, verse 16 takes us even further back in time. You see God had perfect knowledge of the psalmist even before he was formed in the womb – back in eternity past. So God is not limited in His knowledge of a man or woman in the area of time – it stretches from before time to eternity future. And God's knowledge is seamless from eternity past to

eternity future. His knowledge is not divided into parts.² But rather He is fully aware of all things at all times and knows all things at once. Psalm 90:4 says,

*“For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.”*

And unlike us, God has instant recall. All elements of His knowledge are perfectly and instantaneously available. Whereas we have to work at times to remember a past event or recall something we used to know so well, God’s perfect knowledge is ever present and ever available to Him. There is no element of God’s knowledge that fades into non-conscious memory or grows dim.³ People possess knowledge that they carry in our minds but do not use for months or years...when is the last time you recalled something from a class in high school or a friend from your childhood?

So long before we were formed in our mother’s womb, we were on God’s mind. We have never been out of His view.

But it is critical to point out that God is not simply a possessor of all knowledge. He is not the “seer” character of the comic books who sees all that has happened, is happening, and will happen but can only inform and warn others - powerless to shape or intervene in these affairs. Rather God knows each human being because He is the author, designer, and creator of each human being. He is the master engineer with perfect plans before time began. He is sovereign and has ordained the creation of every person. Their names are written in the book He has written. This is how He knows David – not because He simply knows him but as the One who intentionally designed and brought about his existence. He made David and all people for a purpose.

You see God knows everything about time and the future because it depends entirely on Him. The future is unalterably connected to His purpose. Therefore it is impossible for God not to bring about His purposes in time. Nor are His future purposes dependent on the actions of who and what He has created or any other causes. His decrees are certain. Nothing has ever come to pass because God simply knew it – rather the cause of all future things is His will. Jesus death upon the cross was no accident nor an action to stop God’s will through Him but rather it was God’s definite plan from before time.

In Its Precious Vastness (v 17-18)

And these “before time” thoughts plus all of God’s thoughts towards David were precious to him as we pickup in verses 17-18.

¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!*

¹⁸ *If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.*

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994), p. 192

³ *Ibid.*, p. 192

At this point David gives up. He no longer has words left to describe God's knowledge. He can only break out in praise to God – praise for the sheer magnitude of God's perfect and total knowledge. God simply knows everything! He not only knows people, every element of creation, and every event in history but also knows Himself. Only the infinite can know the infinite.⁴

God knows everything and that includes Himself. In 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 Paul, in speaking of the Spirit imparted wisdom given to His people, writes:

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Since God is infinite and unlimited in His being, this is an amazing fact to us finite and limited creatures. How can anyone know every detail about God? Do you even know every detail about yourself? No, but God knows Himself perfectly and completely. And through the Spirit, God reveals Himself to us through His Word!

But do not lose sight of the personal and intimate knowledge God revealed here. David tells God that His infinite thoughts are precious to him. They are reassuring to him. God's thoughts and presence are a constant reality whether sleeping or awake in verse 18. God's knowledge and comfort encourage him in the moment.

As Resisted by the Wicked (v 19-22)

Such comfort and encouragement was of special importance to David when He saw that God's perfect knowledge was not precious to everyone, namely the wicked around him. We read in verses 19-22:

¹⁹ *Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!
O men of blood, depart from me!*
²⁰ *They speak against you with malicious intent;
your enemies take your name in vain.^[b]*
²¹ *Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?*
²² *I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.*

Here we are shown the context in which this psalm was written. David is pondering God's perfect knowledge in his life and praising Him in the midst of many enemies - enemies who wanted to bring him down. He was surrounded by them. The wicked oppose God and His people. And David grieving in his heart passionately says, "God remove them, slay them – take them away!"

And why? Well, they oppose God in action and deed. They are murderers in verse 19 - murderers of the righteous as we know from the OT narratives of David's life. And they speak against God in verse 20 – misusing His name with a deep seated hatred. They blaspheme God. Their purpose is to destroy God and since they cannot, they take it out on God's people such as David.

⁴ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1961), p. 93

Not everyone receives God and His gracious posture towards them. Many could care less about God and His things and some even actively oppose Him. And they often come from a surprising direction – the religious world. In David’s day, it was the evil priests who schemed to harm David and other righteous kings as well as God’s prophets. In the New Testament, we see the Pharisees and Sadducees doing the same thing.

David knew about them and he seems here to be pointing to them and saying, “Lord, you certainly know about them, right? – you can see their evil schemes. Should I not hate those who hate you and actively oppose you. They hate you and therefore, I hate them too! They are your enemies and my enemies. Is this not how I should look at them?”

We can appreciate David’s zeal for the Lord and His reputation. And in his day that was how you dealt with enemies. So let’s not be too hard on him especially since our hearts often want to do the same thing to our enemies. But God has revealed much more to us on this side of the cross; the life of Christ and the gospel - His death, burial, and resurrection and the people He calls us to be. We leave judgment to God – He will take care of it. Rather in this life we are ambassadors for Christ – pleading to an unbelieving world to repent of sins and to believe and bow before Christ while there is still time. We are to suffer like Christ did – groaning in our Spirits as we live in a perverted world, groaning that we ourselves have not been perfected before God. Leave the “*slaying*” to God..

We know from other Scriptures that God himself grieves over those who oppose Him and who are lost in their sin. And He grieves far more than we do. So perhaps we need to concern ourselves more with grieving over and dealing with our own sin.

As Welcomed by the Righteous (v 23-24)

And David seems to understand this in verses 23-24:

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

*²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*

David, led by the Spirit humbly welcomes His all-knowing God to search him and to know him even more. He says in effect, “If you have perfect knowledge of me in the past and in the present, then by all means search me more and more – know my heart! Test the areas of my life where I am anxious in my thoughts! Root out those things in my heart that need to change – lead me forever in your ways!

This is the response of a child of God – the God who has perfect knowledge of all things.

So what do we do with this part of the Bible – a psalm written 3,000 years ago – a psalm written by a king who is glorying in the perfect knowledge of his God? What does it mean to us to today?

The Perfect Knowledge of God in Jesus Christ

Before we can answer that question, we need to make another stop. All of the Bible points to Christ and this is how we must view this psalm. Moved by the Spirit, David wrote of what he knew from his life's experience and his experience with God. He understood God's perfect knowledge in anticipation of the coming Messiah but he only knew in part – he could only see things dimly. By possessing the New Testament and living in the New Covenant, we can see this psalm through the cross of Christ.

So here in Psalm 139, we see the Christ:

- Who before time began was perfectly known by His Father in heaven and gloried in this relationship with His Father. Who was known perfectly by His Father as He walked this earth (John 17:4-5)
- Who was surrounded by His enemies who opposed Him and were seeking to kill Him just as they sought to kill the psalmist (Ps 22)
- Who did not retaliate but silently and intentionally submitted Himself to His Father's will – to allow His enemies to put Him on the cross to shed His innocent blood and receive the punishment for the sins of His people, those who believed. And unlike David, He had every right to *"slay the wicked"* in verse 19 but did not.
- Who invited His Father to search and know Him – only He can make such an invitation without fear or hesitation for He was the perfect, sinless One – David could not
- Whose Father after searching Him, found no fault in the Christ – but only a perfect sacrifice for those He set apart to be His people before time began. He said, *"this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt 3:17) And the Father knew the cost of sending His only Son.
- Who knew us perfectly and yet did not turn away. Romans 5:8 says, *"but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* {Dentist example}
- Instead He knew our need and *"though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8).* He knew the Father's will for Him and was faithful to fulfill it.
- Whose all-sufficient death and resurrection has given us new life in Him to walk with Him and to serve Him and most importantly to know Him (John 17:3)

Reflect and Respond

And given this Old Testament text and seeing it through the cross of Christ, how does it apply to us today?

As a child of God, do you understand and consider how precious God's perfect knowledge is of you? His thoughts are always upon you. He knows your every activity and location and is intimately involved in your life. And when He examines you, what does He see? Your sin and rebellion? No, He sees Christ and His righteousness. He knows you and you are secure in Christ.

So grow in this truth:

- Meditate upon it.
- Worship in adoration and amazement.
- Give thanks and praise God for Christ who was fully known and found perfect (it was certainly not David or one of us!) – who was sinless and gave His life for you
- Be willing to invite Him to continually examine your heart for sin and grievous ways. Regularly read His Word which does the searching. He wants us to grow and to change in our walk with Him – open yourself to His gaze and pray that He reveals those things not pleasing to Him. This comes through a regular intake of His Word and in serving in and among this church community.
- In this process you will know Him better and better

Perhaps though as a Christian you are uncomfortable today – uncomfortable because your walk with Christ is not what it ought to be. Fellowship with Him and His people around you is not so sweet right now. If so, remember Christian, your salvation is secure. We are not condemned for what God sees in His piercing search of our being. Christ paid for these sins in full and now God chooses only to see the righteousness of Christ on your account. This will never change.

But do you have sin to confess and repent from? He sees all – come for grace and mercy according to the gospel. Perhaps your heart is hard right now towards your brother and you need to seek forgiveness or even grant forgiveness. This is what God requires. Not doing so, makes us uneasy before our God who has perfect knowledge.

Perhaps you are struggling today; perplexed or even overwhelmed with the troubles and decisions of life or weary and weak in this life. Maybe you have tried and failed at something recently. Be assured that God knows these things and knows we are frail. He will give grace and strength to persevere in this life. And be assured He hears your prayers – even prayers where words fail us. For we have a great High Priest able to sympathize with our weaknesses, Jesus Christ, who has already walked this dusty trail of life and understands. He knows what you face.

My friend, does God's perfect knowledge of you frighten you? Maybe you do not know this Jesus Christ and have not received and bowed to Him? Today come to Him by faith and with an attitude of repentance from sin and be saved! He gives salvation freely – receive and bow.

Join those who in Christ, glory and take joy in the perfect knowledge of their God.

Let's pray..

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