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Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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SEARCH ME AND KNOW ME Psalm 139

The other day I saw an advertisement for an investment firm. It claimed that you and I should invest with this particular company because, over the past ten years, their clients have realized an average increase of 7% on their investments. Stating a reason why the consumer should invest with a particular company, eat a particular cereal, or drive a particular brand of car is normal and expected in a capitalistic society. It's how we do business and applies to everything from toothpaste to condominiums.

In fact, giving good reasons why you and I should make a commitment to any particular product or organization is just human nature. Businesses must address the request to "Give me a reason." We even see this same kind of advertising, as it were, in religion. Why should I commit to Mormonism? Their argument is the promise that everyone who commits to that religion will in the end become gods just like the true God. The Muslims, on the other hand, argue that especially men should commit to Islam because of the promise of 72 virgins or wives when he enters paradise (this according to one of the major commentaries on the life of Mohammed).

But isn't it also true that Protestant Churches have been in the advertising business for a long time? You certainly hear arguments like, "You ought to come to our church because we have a light show that rivals many rock concerts." Or as one church leader was quoted in the news recently, "We are bringing Hollywood to Greenville." Or one of my favorite reasons given by a woman I was talking to many years ago, "You should visit our church—we have two sets of drums now." And to be perfectly honest, when you invite someone to visit Community Baptist Church, don't you give a reason?

This psalm gives us a very good reason to praise the LORD. Throughout the psalm we are taught many of God's attributes, particularly that He knows everything about us, is always present, and is responsible for every detail of our creation and existence. Because these things are true, we should conclude with the psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!* (v.23). The LORD who can do that and still love us is worthy of all praise.

Praise the LORD Because He is . . . (vv.1-12).

First, we should praise the LORD because He is omniscient (vv.1-6). That is the attribute David referred to when he wrote that the LORD has searched and known me. *O LORD, you have searched me and known me!* (v.1)! This is not a matter of God simply knowing details about us. It is true that the essence of omniscience is complete knowledge of all things. However, God is not like a camera that simply picks up every action of every person. He is not like Big Brother who is always spying, wire tapping, and eavesdropping.

According to the Hebrew word used in this verse, to search is to engage in diligent, difficult probing in order to learn or discover. It is like attorneys investigating a legal case in order to find out what really happened. Or it is like a miner or treasure hunter who searches, leaving no stone unturned in order to find treasure. Those pictures help explain what the LORD does toward us. However, this word often speaks of probing a person's character or feelings as when Jonathan searched his father Saul's heart about his feelings toward David.

God does heart-searching in order to know us intimately. Sure He knows what we are doing. But more important is the fact that He knows how we feel about Him. He knows all the facts about us, but more importantly, He knows us intimately in a matter of relationship.

Therefore, it only stands to reason that the LORD knows my path. *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways* (vv.2-3). This verse reveals the truth we already stated, that God knows the details of our lives. When you sit down and rise up is about as basic as life can get. But God knows

why you sit down and rise up because He discerns our thoughts. Sometimes even we cannot remember why we got up out of our comfortable seat and went into the kitchen. Surely it was to get something to eat, but you can't remember what you were going to get.

God does not have to be standing right beside you talking to you in order to sort out your thoughts. He can know from far off, even though He is always present (as we will see in verses 7-12). But even if we were a long way off, He could discern why we think what we think. And God knows why we go where we go, and do what we do, and why we are tired.

God knows because He is like a steward of all our ways. The English translation, *are acquainted with all my ways*, is an odd translation in that the Hebrew word describes the work of a steward who is fully aware of everything that is in the storehouse. It is a picture of our lives being a storehouse and God being completely familiar with everything that is in storage. What David acknowledged here is true for every single person who will ever live. That God could know such detail about each person is mind-boggling. That is what makes God worthy of praise.

The LORD also reveals His omniscience in that He knows why I say what I say. *Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether (v.4)*. James gives us divinely inspired warning about our tongues:

For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by

mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so (James 3:2-10).

This teaching came from God who knows why these things are so. The first step in learning to control the tongue is to acknowledge that God already knows why you say what you say. Commit the "why" to the LORD for safe keeping. Commit your motives, your heart to the LORD.

Another evidence of God's omniscience is that God guides me. David wrote, *You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me (v.5)*. This is simply an example of God's sovereign control of His creation. The human will is free only within God's boundaries. God's hand especially directs the path of His children. His hand on me is not fatalism, but the wonderful love of God worked out in my life according to His perfect knowledge.

We must conclude with David that God's omniscience is an amazing truth. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it (v.6)*. We should also conclude with David that God's intimate knowledge about us is beyond our comprehension. Often theologians love to discuss truths that are beyond them. We need to reach the point where we gladly conclude, "Lord, I don't understand, but I do trust."

More often our response to God's amazing intimate knowledge of us is to seek to run away and hide. That is difficult to do because not only is the LORD omniscient (knowing all things) but He is also omnipresent (everywhere at the same time). To that end, verse seven contains an interesting question. *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence (v.7)!* Is this an expected response to the conclusion that God knows every detail about us? We by nature do not wish to be this well known by anyone, especially our Eternal Judge. Therefore, many people try to escape God by denying His existence or at least denying that He knows as much and as well as Scripture says He does.

David's conclusions prove that no one is able to escape the all-seeing eye of the LORD. Verses eight through twelve establish

somewhat of a hypothetical proposal and then answers it. For example, what *If I ascend to heaven, you are there (v.8a)*! In your imaginations ascend to outer space or even beyond that to the “third heaven” as Paul called it, and there you will find God.

Or *If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there (v.8b)*! The meaning of the word *Sheol* is not hell as it appears in some English translations. Rather it speaks of death in rather broad terms. David said that even in death he will find God. That is especially true for believers for whom to die is to be ushered into the presence of God. Paul was very confident as he faced death, believing, *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8)*.

But still, everyone who dies still must deal with God the eternal Judge. That is the reality according to verses nine and ten where we read, *If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me (vv.9-10)*. The idea here is that even if we could jump on the first rays of the sun coming up in the east and ride them to the Mediterranean Sea in the west (that body of water was the picture of the sea for David in Israel), still we can't escape God.

Find the darkest dark and you will discover that God is still light. *If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you (vv.11-12)*. Picture yourself in the Luray Caverns near Harrisonburg, Virginia. If you have ever toured those caverns, you might remember the experience of the tour guide showing you how dark dark can be when the lights go out. It is darkness you can feel. But that darkness doesn't effect God or His presence. He who is the light of the New Jerusalem, the eternal light of heaven is not dimmed by what we call darkness. His light exposes all that is in the darkness of our most secret places of the heart. The light of God's presence is everywhere making Him worthy of our best praise.

And beyond His omniscience and omnipresence, the LORD is worthy of praise because He is Creator (vv.13-16). That is the reality so how should we respond? The reality is that God made me. *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb (v.13)*. Some people take the words of this section to be

symbolic. I think it is literal in that God is involved in the creation of each individual. God is as personally involved in the creation of each body in the mother's womb as He was when He created Adam from dust and Eve from Adam's rib. This is why abortion is such a horrible tragedy. Abortion is to reject God as Creator. Abortion is to devalue God's creative work. Abortion is to destroy what God ordained to live.

Rather than despise life, rather than criticize what God does, we should praise Him. Agree with David: *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well (v.14)*. Medical science, far from affirming the “accidental” evolution of humanity, affirms God's astonishing work of creation. Often the body's healing of itself amazes doctors who are committed to healing the body. Even an elementary study of the heart or the eye or the nervous system will astonish us. And every time we hold a new born baby in our arms, we are reduced to awe and wonder. In our consciences, in our souls, we know very well that God has wonderfully made us.

And we can rest assured that the Creator knows what He made. But can the text be accurate when it says that we were made in the depths of the earth? *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth (v.15)*. This is not a reference to evolution according to which theory life accidentally evolved from muck. Nor does it point back to God making Adam out of dirt. It is a picture of something that takes place deep in the earth (maybe picture the Luray Caverns again) but not hidden from God's sight. Indeed, verbs *being made* and *intricately woven* speak of God's work.

The Creator has recorded every detail about my physical makeup. *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 were none of them (v.16)*. The phrase, *my unformed substance* is about our beginning embryonic form. Therefore, at no point in the pregnancy does abortion NOT destroy God's creation. Even more amazing is that God recorded every detail about us.

Think about our folks who have so-called disabilities. None of those are accidents to God. They are all part of the days God has formed for us. We do not always understand why our Creator

determines what He determines, but every single person is formed wonderfully and fearfully according to God's design. And when we lie in a hospital bed suffering from a disease or an organ failure, it is no surprise to God. He formed each detailed part of me, even my appendix which became inflamed and had to be removed. No surprise to God.

We should stand in awe of God's omniscience, His perfect knowledge of all things at all time, and God's omnipresence, His presence in all places at all times, and His creative genius. These traits ought to make us praise Him.

Be Authentic With the LORD (vv.17-24).

We should embrace the LORD's mind because the LORD's thoughts are precious (vv.17-18). *How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand (vv.17-18a).* Yeah but how do we share those amazing thoughts? God shares His thoughts with us in the Bible. He did not record all of His thoughts in the Bible because He retains some secret things (Deut. 29:29). But God has revealed so much about Himself in creation and in the Bible.

The important question is, "Are these thoughts of God precious to us?" The more the child of God learns about God from the Bible, the more precious God is. We hold precious things closely, guard them, love them. If we highly value God's thoughts we will desire to know more and more about the Bible.

The glory of the LORD's thoughts is that they are eternal. *I awake, and I am still with you (v.18b).* It is true that each morning, God's truths are fresh to us. That is why Moses requested, "*Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days*" (Psalm 90:14). In light of this truth, we should open the Bible every morning and find like Jeremiah did that God's faithfulness is new each morning. Even in the face of desperate circumstances, Jeremiah concluded, *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23).*

Yet at the same time, we can say with David that we know that when we wake up in glory, we will still be with the LORD forever.

How does that make me feel? How do I feel when I am full of God's thoughts? Does it make me hateful? Our immediate response is, "Of course not!" Thinking like God makes me loving. Indeed it does. God's thoughts make us love what He loves. But they always cause us to hate what the LORD hates (vv.19-23). That is because God's holy nature does not endure wickedness.

David prayed, *Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain (vv.19-20)!* Why would David, the man after God's own heart, pray that God would slay the wicked? If we consider how David describes these people whoever they are, we will better understand why he was so opposed to them. First, he said that they are wicked. The wicked are simply people who are guilty of doing wrong. That is not wrong according to your or my opinion, but wrong according to God's standard of righteousness. In a sense, we are all born doing wickedness. Here the word seems to apply to those who aggressively seek to break both God's law and society's law.

For example, notice the next description. They are men of blood. They are people who shed innocent blood like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and Kim. They are people whose wicked ways result in the death of the innocent. In short, some of the wicked are murderers.

Third, David described the wicked as people who speak against God maliciously. The word means to make wicked plans, to scheme against God. Maybe this is scheming with full knowledge or intent. Or, maybe this is planning that denies God, rejects God, devalues God, such as all false religions. Either way, to scheme against God is to manifest wickedness.

Fourth, these people are God's enemies. They set themselves up against God. "Enemy of God" is what Paul called Elymas the magician who tried to dissuade people from trusting Christ. But then again, "enemy" is a fair description of all of us in our sinful nature. James warned us, *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4).*

Fifth, David said the people he hates take God's name in vain. To take God's name vainly means to use it with no purpose or intent. Isn't this the American way? You can't watch television without hearing it. Everyone at work says, "Oh God" in response to almost anything, don't they? To take God's name in vain is to use it falsely, which means to attribute to God that which He does not say or do. Taking God's name vainly is the essence of false religion.

Now let's review. David prayed that God would destroy all people who do wickedness, shed innocent blood, act like His enemies, and who treat God and His name as valueless. Granted those are not nice people, but to hate them seems pretty extreme to most people. Yes, but when we know the mind of the Lord, we know how He hates all that is contrary to His righteousness. This is what love for God really looks like. When we love God more than life, His righteous character means everything to us, and we are willing to defend it.

Therefore, we conclude with David that to be like God is to hate sin. *Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies (vv.21-22).* With these words, David is not expressing anger or frustration. Rather he has drawn the only conclusion possible when we truly embrace God by faith. God's enemies become our enemies, and typically that means because we are God's friend we are perceived by the world to be their enemies.

While such ideas strike us as harsh, these are actually pure and holy thoughts. That must be the case because the person who expressed them is more than willing to submit to the LORD'S examination (vv.23-24). Regardless of how we feel toward others, and especially when we become agitated at God's enemies, we need to ask God to put us to the test. *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts (v.23)!* Notice that this psalm closes with the same word with which it began – "search." David began the psalm by admitting that God has searched him. Now He requests that God will continue the practice.

The need for all of us is for God to thoroughly exam us in order to know intimately our heart, the real us. We should feel free to ask God to test us like the heat that proves the purity of gold in order to know our thoughts. The only way we will ever truly know ourselves

is when we submit to God's thorough testing which brings to the surface all that God knows is in our hearts. It can be a painful or scary situation. But it is always profitable.

It is always good for us to ask God to expose the error and lead in righteousness. David put it like this: *And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (v.24)!* We would be delighted to have God put us to the test only to reveal that we are pretty righteous. Sadly, that is typically not the case. God's testing generally reveals that there are areas of our lives that need to be corrected and conformed to His character.

The thought of being laid bare, laid wide open before God can be a bit unnerving. The reality is that we are all an open book to God. The challenge of this psalm is for us to acknowledge that God knows us, to request that He will test us, with the desire that we can become more and more like Him. We will realize our growth in God's character when the world of sin takes on the form of the enemy to God and to us. The God who so purifies us through His intimate knowledge of us deserves our praise.