

O The Wonder Of It All

Psalm 139

Pastor John Miller

A story is told that one Sunday a simple farmer was on his way to church when he was met by a sophisticated, free-thinking agnostic. The agnostic asked the farmer where he was going. He said, "I'm going to church to worship God."

The agnostic man asked, "Is your God a great God, or is He a little God?" It was kind of a snide question.

Then the humble farmer said, "He's both, sir."

The agnostic asked, "Well, how can He be both great and little?"

The farmer said, wisely, "He's so great that the heavens of heaven cannot contain Him. And He's so little that He can dwell in my heart."

I love that. That's Psalm 139 in summary. God is so great that the heavens of heaven cannot contain Him. Yet He's so personal and so intimate with me that He can dwell in my heart.

Psalm 139 has been called "the crown of the psalms." It is a mini-theology. We would call it theology proper, the study of the nature, attributes and character of God. When we say "attributes of God," we talk about that which can be attributed to God. We'll see some of those attributes. It's not exhaustive, but it's important that we think right about God.

I like what A.W. Tozer said in his excellent book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." What we think about God determines our foundation for belief and behavior in our lives. Christianity has to be based on the right knowledge of God. If your knowledge of God or view of God is wrong, then all of your life will be tainted by that false view and false comprehension of who God is.

Psalm 139 is about the greatness of God, but it's also about the God who loves us, knows us and cares for us. Psalm 139 has 24 verses. There are almost 50 personal pronouns in this psalm. I knew that, but I was overwhelmed when I marked them in my Bible. In the first six verses alone, you have about 13 personal pronouns. So David talks about the greatness of God in His relationship to himself. The psalmist is David, and he knew the greatness of God, but he also knew the intimacy and the care of God. God knows us intimately and lovingly.

David shares three assurances about God and His relationship to us. First, God knows me intimately, verses 1-6. David said, "O Lord..."—Whenever you have "Lord" in all capitals, it means "Yahweh" or "Jehovah," the covenant name of God—"...You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is

not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.” Then verse 6 is a kind of doxology; David starts praising God. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.”

Do you know that God knows you intimately? God knows your name. God knows your nature. God knows your needs. The Bible says that God has the very hairs of your head numbered. Some of you old-timers lose your hair, so it's not so much work for God to number them. I had a friend here this week from Calvary Houston. We're good friends. He has no hair at all. I have lots of hair. We were walking around and he said, “I used to have waves like you, but now all I have is the beach, and the tide went out—low tide.” Every time a hair drops from your head, God takes out His calculator and changes the number, because He loves you and He knows you.

Jesus said that a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground without your Father in heaven knowing it. Someone said, “God attends the funeral of every sparrow.” But you are of more value than a bird. God loves you, and He's your Father in heaven. He cares for you. To think that God loves me is a marvelous wonder.

Theologians call this the “omniscience of God”; God knows everything. He knows everything perfectly and completely; He never learns anything new. God never says, “Wow! That's awesome!” He knows everything already, before it can be known.

I've met people who think they know everything. Have you ever met a know-it-all? They actually know very little. But God knows everything totally, completely and perfectly. He even knows me. How marvelous.

Notice verse 1—it's the theme—“O Lord, You have searched me and known me.” The word “searched” in the Hebrew means that He “digs down deep into me” or He “sees through me” or He “digs me.” That would be a great Hippie word. Remember they said, “You dig me”? If I were doing a 1966 Hippie paraphrase of the Bible, it would say, “God, you dig me,” and it would be correct with the Hebrew. God really digs you and is into you. God can see you deeply, and He knows you.

So right off the bat in verse one, we have two personal pronouns, “me.” Notice those as we go through this text.

Then David points out five facts about His knowledge of him—and of us. First, God knows what I do. If God is omniscient, He knows everything I'm doing. Verse 2 says, “You know my sitting down and my rising up.” Some believe that it means my times of discouragement and my times when I'm up, but generally it's believed that this is talking about when I go to bed at night and when I get up in the morning. God knows what we do.

In 2 Kings 5, there is a story that makes it clear that God knows where we go and what we do. It's the story of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the prophet. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, came to Elisha with leprosy. Naaman was healed of his leprosy, so he wanted to

give Elisha a reward of gold, silver and clothes, because Elisha had prayed for him and he was healed. But the prophet, rightly being a man of God, said, "No. God healed you, so I won't take a reward" and then sent Naaman on his way. But Gehazi, Elisha's servant, decided to follow Naaman and say to him, "My master changed his mind; he really does want the gold, silver and clothes." So Gehazi carried out this deceptive plan. Then Naaman said to Gehazi, "Great! I'm glad to give them to him." So Naaman gave the gold, silver and clothes to Gehazi, and Gehazi took them and secretly hid them in his house.

But God knows where we go and what we do; God sees everything. So God spoke to the prophet, who spoke to his servant and asked him, "Where have you been?"

Gehazi said, "Oh, nowhere. I've been hangin' out."

Then Elisha said to him, "Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you." And Gehazi was struck with leprosy. Remember that God knows where you go.

That's not meant to scare you, but it matters where you are with God. This can either delight you, or it can distress you. "God knows where I go?! Oh, no! I didn't think anyone knew where I went last night." God knows where you go. God is omniscient; He knows all things.

Students were taking more apples than they should from the cafeteria at their school and taking them back to their dormitories. So someone posted a sign by the apples that said, "Please take only one apple; God is watching you." Then someone saw that and made another sign that they posted by the cookies. It said, "Take all the cookies you want; God is watching the apples." Why is it that we get the idea that when God is watching the apples, He can't see us stealing the cookies?

I love this psalm, because it tells me that God knows when I get up, when I go down. He knows what I do.

Secondly, in verse 2, God knows what I think. "You understand my thought afar off." In the Hebrew, that "afar off" concept means "in their origin." He knows what I'm going to think even before I think it. So God knows what I do, and He knows what I think. Let that soak in. He knows what thoughts are in my mind even before I think them.

Now I don't know why I think what I think when I think it. Have you ever had a thought and then think, What in the world am I thinking?! Where did that come from?! God knows where it came from. He knows what you're thinking.

Let me remind you that Jesus said that if you look with lust after someone, you commit adultery in your heart. You don't have to do it; you just have to think about it. Sometimes we get the idea that "I'm not doing anything bad, but I'm sure thinking about it a lot!" Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that if you have hatred or anger toward anyone, you've already committed murder. God's not only concerned about your actions, but He's also concerned

about your attitude.

There are sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. Pride is a sin. God knows your heart, and God sees your sins.

So God knows what I do, God knows what I think and thirdly, God knows where I go. Verse 3 says, "You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways." So He knows "my path" in the daytime, "my lying down" in the nighttime and "all my ways." He knows everywhere I go.

Fourthly, God knows what I say, verse 4. "For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether." I don't know about you, but I'm thinking, Oh, no! I am so busted. God knows what I do, He knows what I think, He sees where I go and He knows what I say. God understands the words of my heart. That's why the psalmist says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

Notice, fifthly, that God knows what I need, verse 5. This brings comfort to my heart. "You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me." In this verse, some see the past—"You have hedged me behind"—and you look back in your life and see the hand of God. Some say that "before" is the future; God has a plan and a purpose for you. And some say "Laid Your hand upon me" is the present.

I love to look back in my life and see the hand of God and the goodness of God. It's so humbling to me. I don't deserve it, but God has been good to me. God has watched over me and taken care of me. I think of the times I should have been dead or wiped out in a horrible automobile accident and the dangerous places I've gotten into where God has watched over me, preserved me and kept me. You can tell the same stories.

How wonderful then to know that God, who has brought me thus far, will take me all the way home. So I remind myself that God hasn't brought me this far to just give up on me, to abandon me; God's going to take me safely home. Right now in the present, God is holding me by His hand and watching out for me.

This idea, in verses 1-6, that God knows me intimately can either be a thing of delight or of dread; it all depends on where I am with God. If you love the Lord and are seeking to live for the Lord, then it's a delight to know that God knows all about me, He is with me, He sees me, and is watching over me. But it is a dread to realize that I cannot fool God. If you're trying to deceive God and fool God, it won't work; there is no deceiving God or fooling God.

The psalmist gives a doxology in verse 6: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it." It is really a doxology of praise.

The second thing that the psalmist says about God and himself is that God is with me constantly, verses 7-12. So God knows me intimately, and God is with me constantly. "Where

can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. 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. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You."

I want you to note, in verse 7, that David asks two questions. He asks not because he needs the answer, but because he knows it's an impossibility to be lost from God. John R.W. Stott said it like this: "This question expresses not the desire to escape but the joyful astonishment that escape is impossible and that God's hand is everywhere to guide and to hold him." I like that.

The psalmist knew that he couldn't get away from God. So God not only knows everything perfectly and completely, but God is everywhere all the time. There is nowhere—heaven, hell, earth, the farthest galaxy—that God is not there.

A woman who didn't know what to do about her two wayward sons—they were getting into trouble and causing her problems—said, "I'm not a Catholic, and I'm not religious, but I'm going to take my sons to talk to a priest." So she took them to a Catholic church and sat out in the foyer with the younger boy. The older boy went in to meet the priest. The priest looked at the boy and asked, "Son, where is God?" The boy was freakin' out; he didn't know. The priest asked him again, "Son, where is God?" The boy didn't answer a word, so the priest asked, "Son, where is God?"

Then the son jumped up, ran out of the room, grabbed his brother and said, "Let's run for our lives! They've lost God, and they're trying to pin it on us!"

But that's a good question. The priest was trying to convey the idea that God is watching you, God sees you and is with you and God knows you.

David names in this passage three spheres where it is impossible to escape from God. The first is space. Verse 8 says, "If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there." So if I go out as far as I can go into space, through billions of galaxies and billions of stars, God is there.

Years ago when some Russian astronauts went out into space, they said, "We looked around, and we didn't find God." The Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God....Day unto day utters speech." There is nowhere where you can't find God.

So space isn't a problem. Nor is speed, verses 9-10. "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." So I can go as fast as I want; notice "the wings of the morning." The psalms are Hebrew poetry, and this is a Hebrew figure of speech for traveling at the speed of light. When the sun comes up in the morning and you see those first light rays come over the horizon, the

light travels 186,000 miles per second. That's bookin'; that's fast. So David says, "If I can travel as fast as the speed of light, and take 'the wings of the morning' to the ends of the earth, God's there." If I turn around in the other direction and go the speed of light, God's there.

So if you think you can fool God, you're mistaken. If you think you can flee from God, you're mistaken. There's nowhere you can go; you can't run from God.

You can't flee from God in darkness either, verses 11-12. "If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me...'—I'm just going to hide in the closet, and God won't know—"...even the night shall be light about me." Have you ever noticed that when sinners like to sin, they do it in the dark? Turn down the lights. You can hide in the darkness, but God still sees and God still knows. "Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You." There is nowhere to hide from God.

This is a comfort for the believer. This psalm either distresses you or delights you to know that God is with you, that God is with you when you're facing temptations. The Bible says that "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." In other words, if you fall prey to temptation, you have no one to blame but yourself. You can't blame someone else. God will provide the way through it, because God is with you.

Some of you are facing temptations right now; it might be to lie, to steal some money or something that doesn't belong to you, to bail out on your marriage or to have an adulterous affair. But when you are tempted, God is with you. He will give you the strength and the ability to resist that temptation.

God is also with us in times of fear. When you're afraid of what the future holds, when you're afraid of your past coming back to haunt you, God is with you.

We all deal with times of loneliness, when we feel lonely and isolated, when no one knows and no one cares. "Does anyone really love me? Do I really matter? If I just disappeared, would anyone notice?" Yes; God is with us. He never forsakes us.

In times of bereavement God is with us. I think about that. All you have to do is live long enough, and someone you love will die. I've been a pastor for many years, and I've officiated at hundreds, if not thousands, of funerals, including my mom and dad's. You watch your grandparents pass away and other family members. The first funeral I ever officiated at was that of a little child. The parents were broken hearted, and they looked to me through their tears and said, "Pastor, it's not supposed to be this way; parents aren't supposed to bury their children. Children are supposed to bury their parents."

Life doesn't always go the way we want it to go, but God is with us. So in those times of lose or bereavement, He is with us. Someone said, "In every pain that rends the heart, the Man of Sorrows has a part." He understands, He knows, He empathizes and sympathizes.

Remember when Jesus was at the grave of Lazarus? The Bible says, "Jesus wept." The word "wept" means that a tear formed in His eye and trickled down His cheek. He didn't sob, but He felt the pain, the sorrow and the loss.

So when you are burying someone you love and your heart is broken, does Jesus care? Yes, He does, and He sympathizes with your sorrow.

How about in times of sickness? As I read this, I'm so glad that as I age and my body gets weaker and my time is shorter—there is more time behind me than there is ahead of me—I realize that God is with me. It takes a lot of courage to get old. Your eyes go out. Your ears go out. Your teeth fall out. You're more artificial than you are real; you have to get new knees and hips. When the resurrection takes place, there won't be much to go up. I've noticed lately that when I get together with friends, all we talk about is what doesn't work in our bodies. It's like an organ recital.

It's hard to get old, but knowing that you're walking with the Lord, every day brings you closer to seeing Jesus face to face. How glorious that is! So if the Lord tarries, it just means that we get to go first. What a blessing that is! We know that the Lord is with us, even in our weaknesses and in our sicknesses.

In Hebrews 13:5, we have something that Jesus said there that is the only place where He said it; it's not found in the Gospels. The writer of Hebrews said, "Be content with such things as you have." Good advice. "For He Himself..."—referring to Jesus—"...has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So wherever we go, God is with us. If we're in the hospital, in the fun times, in the bad times, God is always with us. We cannot escape.

But if you are an unbeliever, this psalm is a warning that you cannot escape from God. Remember when Adam sinned in the garden with Eve? God came to Adam and asked, "Adam, where are you?" Think about that. The omniscient, omnipresent God asked a question. Obviously, God knew where Adam was. God wanted Adam to know where Adam was. It wasn't God saying, "Oh, no; I just made him and now I lost him!"

Adam had sinned and felt guilty, and his conscience bothered him. So he and Eve sewed together fig leaves to cover their nakedness and were trying to hide from God. Sin separates us from God. So don't run from God; run to God. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-29, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

So the three things the psalmist says about God and himself is, number one, God knows me intimately; number two, God is with me personally; and, number three, God made me wonderfully, verses 13-18. God made me and formed me, even in my mother's womb. "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.

My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance—or “my unformed body”—“...being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!” God is thinking about you. “How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You.”

These verses make it clear that God is the author of life and that He is personally concerned with the conception, development, birth and life of each human being. The life of the unborn in the womb is sacred. I like that we call today Right to Life Sunday, because life is sacred. God creates human beings in the womb in His image and in His likeness. We are unlike any other of God's creation.

Now that's not a physical likeness; that's a moral likeness or an intellectual likeness. It's the fact that we can communicate, that we're moral beings, that we are eternal and we have eternal souls, that we have the capacity to think abstractly, to reason and to communicate. We're made in the image and likeness of God, we're made for God and we're made to commune with God. So the child created in the womb is created in the image and likeness of God.

I believe that abortion is the breaking of the sixth Commandment. I don't address this issue because I want to offend anyone or hurt anyone or divide people. But I believe that if anyone is going to believe in the sacredness of life in the womb, we Christians should believe in it. We should pray toward that, vote toward that and be active toward that. I'm fine with saving whales, saving our planet and all of those efforts, but we care more about the creation than we do about human beings. I believe that from the moment of conception, there is a human being capable of developing and growing. And it doesn't matter in what stage of development, God is involved in that stage of development of human life.

In Exodus 20:13, God says in the sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder” or “kill.” The “murder” or “kill” here is a reference to homicide. I believe abortion is the killing of a human being in the womb.

Now I want to go back over verses 13-18. David says, in verse 13, “You covered me in my mother's womb.” “Covered” or “possessed” here means that God “formed” me or “created” me. He has covered me or protected me in my mother's womb. Verse 15 says, “My frame...”—That's a reference to my body—“...was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought...” That means to “embroider,” to “sew” or to “knit together.” So God sews or knits together this young child in the womb. “...in the lowest parts of the earth” is Hebrew poetry. Verse 16, “Your eyes saw my substance...”—or “body”—“...being yet unformed.”

One of the arguments that it is okay to abort a fetus in the womb at an early stage—and sadly, today babies are aborted almost up until the time they're ready to be born and fully developed—is that they're in a mother's womb, they're not fully developed, so that they're not really taking the life of a person. We're even talking about killing children after they're born, because the

quality of life is not what it should be.

Is an amputee a human being because they don't have an arm, leg or a hand? If a soldier goes off to war and comes back without his legs, isn't he still a human being, a person? Is someone who can't see or hear still a human being? Yes, and they have a right to life just like anyone else. Who is to determine the quality of life or whether someone lives or dies? Life is a gift from God.

Some women will say, "Well, it's my body, and no one can tell me what to do with my body." But those aren't your hands. Those aren't your feet. That isn't your little heart beating in that child. It is a whole, separate human being created in the image of God. That human being has a right to life.

I picked this text today so I could read these verses; it's Sanctity of Life Sunday. Now we are headed into an election year. We're not here to be political, but as a pastor, I can tell you that you ought to vote Biblically, for the candidate who will protect life in the womb, who will protect the sanctity of life. It's a dangerous road that we're headed down. A very dangerous road. God have mercy on us, as a nation, in light of the abortions that we perform every year in America.

So the psalmist says that even when my body was yet unformed and imperfect, "God numbered all my days." I like what the end of verse 16 says in the Hebrew, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." Think about that. God had your whole life charted out. Verses 17-18 say, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them." God is actually thinking about you. "If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You." All the grains of sand on the seashore represent God's thoughts of you. God thinks about you when you go to bed, God thinks about you when you're asleep and God thinks about you when you wake up; God thinks about you constantly, because He loves you. How marvelous and glorious is that!

In light of that and of the fact that God formed us and redeemed us, Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies..."—meaning your whole body, soul and spirit; your whole being—"...a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Have you dedicated your life to God? You can't fool God. You can't run from God. You can't ignore God. He created you, He gave you life; you were made by God for God. Until you come to that place of surrendering to God, you'll never know what life is all about. Jesus said, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

So number one, He knows me intimately—I can't fool Him; number two, He's with me constantly—I cannot escape Him; and number three, He's made me wonderfully—I cannot ignore Him.

How does the psalm end? Verses 23-24 end with a prayer: "Search me, O God..."—It's interesting that verse 1 opens with "searched me" and the psalm ends with "search me"—"...and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties..."—or "thoughts"—"...and see if there is

any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Notice these three things: “search me,” “try me” and “lead me.” That’s the prayer. In light of the fact that God knows me, He is with me and He made me, we say, “God, search me, dig deep into me. Try me and know my thoughts and my heart.” The word “thoughts” or “anxieties” in verse 23 means “worries” or “fears.” Then the prayer is, “God lead me and guide me ‘in the way everlasting.’”

So you can’t deceive God, you can’t escape from God and you can’t ignore God, so it only makes sense that you surrender your life to God.

I like the hymn written by Isaac Watts so many years ago called When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. The fourth stanza of that hymn are the words,

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small;

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Amen. Let’s pray.