

God's Promised Presence

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 139

Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:1-12

Key Verse: O Lord, you have searched me and known me. Psalm 139:1

PSALM 139:1-12 (NRSV UE)

- 1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.
- 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
- 7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
- 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
- 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,"
- 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

PSALM 139:1-12 (KJV)

- 1 O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
- 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.
- 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
- 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.
- 7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
- 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
- 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
- 11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
- 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

KEY TERMS

- **Omniscience** – The divine trait of knowing all things; perfect (complete) always.
- **Attested** – Serves as clear evidence.
- **Consecutive** – Following one after the other.

INTRODUCTION

As adults, we cherish a certain degree of privacy. We find it difficult to disclose intimate heart secrets to even our closest relatives and friends. The idea that God knows us through and through is both comforting and intimidating. Such knowledge demands that we always be honest with God. It also demands that we have confidence in God's love for us, and how the Lord balances judgment with mercy and grace.

In the text, see how the psalmist acknowledges God's omniscience and its implications. Consider the psalmist's conclusions and the extent to which you agree with them. If indeed you agree with them, think about how you can align your life with those implications. Also, consider how you express in your prayers this

delightful insight about the all-knowing God.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

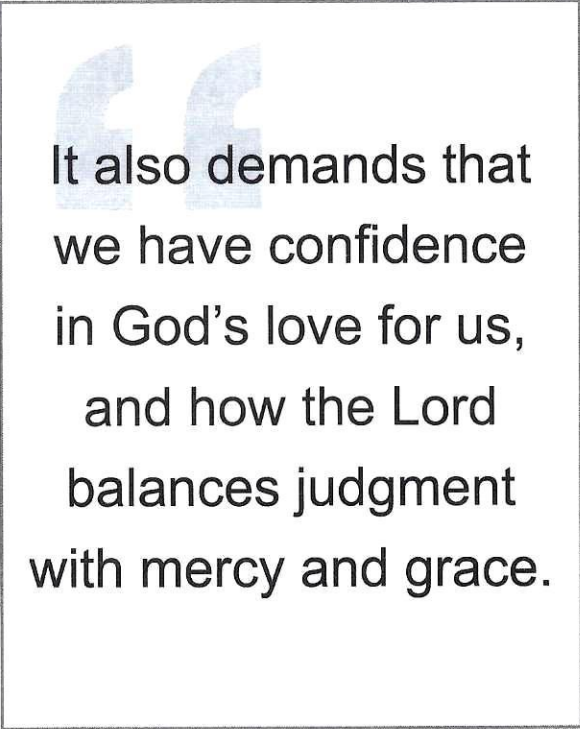
The entire Psalm revolves around God's complete (perfect) knowledge of David (humanity). The Hebrew root for *know* as used in Psalm 139 is *yada*. This indicates intimate knowledge, an acquaintance that is above casual observation. It suggests a close familiarity with all the finer details about the subject.

That is the familiarity Adam and his wife had which produced children.

David's declaration that God knew everything about him may not refer to special revelation. It was common in the ancient world to claim that gods and kings knew everything, without limits. But note that in Psalm 139, Yahweh's infinite knowledge has a

judicial context. It makes God the perfect judge who has all the information for judging the psalmist's case wisely and fairly.

The Hebrew root for *wonderfully* in verse 14 is *pala* which means *to be different, or remarkable*. We must see this word in the context of the whole Psalm.



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It goes beyond physical features. This wonderfulness strikes at all the details of life: the design of the body, the way it works, personal desires, and attitudes toward God. The Hebrews also used *pala* to describe the benevolent acts of God (cf. Psalms 9:1-2; 40:5; 78:4; 105:5).

Psalm 139 is something of an exception in the Old Testament. Rather than focusing on God's majesty and praises to the Lord, it focuses strongly and positively on the individual, King David. But note that the Psalm shows that the individual (David representing humanity) has no privacy from God. Yahweh is aware of everything about the individual: his whereabouts, thoughts, attitudes, and disposition towards God. This is both comforting and frightening.

It is comforting because we know that God is aware of every aspect of our lives and therefore is qualified to deal with our every need. God can take care of us. The frightening aspect stems from the understanding that we can hide nothing from God. Therefore, when we know we have offended God, we must go clean before God, repent, and seek his mercy/grace.

SANKOFA

In the **Introduction**, we noted that it was common in the ancient world to claim that gods and kings knew everything, without limits. That was a statement excited citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines made jokingly about a former prime minister, Sir James Mitchell KCMG PC. Sir James led the nation for over 17 years and was loved by his people as his consecutive election victories showed. He had a reputation for knowing the details of whatever was happening in the small island state. And if you took a walk with him through the city, you were easily convinced the assertion was true.

The prime minister greeted most people on a first-name basis and started conversations which showed he knew

what was happening in their lives. He knew what stages new government projects had reached and what problems they were having. He understood the challenges individual businesspeople faced. He asked people about their families by names and occupations. It was a remarkable experience to walk about St. Vincent with him and watch and listen as he talked about people's concerns with alarming detail.

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The people of St. Vincent did not believe that their “king” (prime minister) knew every detail about them without limit. However, there was no doubt they were aware that Sir James knew about them and cared for them. Apparently, this belief was the reason the people returned him to the seat of power in consecutive elections.

CASE STUDY

Psalm 139 goes to the heart of the doctrine of divine omniscience – the all-knowing God. This means that God always has full (perfect) knowledge of everyone and everything and what is happening around them. The all-knowing God, because he has perfect knowledge, can see all aspects of any situation. Accordingly, he can likewise devise perfect solutions. Thus, we can have total trust in the solutions that God provides.


We must note that this doctrine is common among most major religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. It is a key, base doctrine and Christianity (among others) will unravel if this doctrine collapses. The omniscience doctrine governs how we relate to God. For instance, by this doctrine, we always accept that God sees us and all

the situations we face. He knows our problems from the past, the ones we presently face, and the situations we will face in the future. God is therefore not waiting for us to tell him our problems. God knows them before we pray. But what is more important and inspiring, is the Lord knows the perfect solutions.

Further, note that several New Testament scriptures speak to the omniscience of God. Among them

are Matthew 10:30, Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 3:20, and Matthew 6:8. So here is the question that naturally arises whenever we teach this doctrine. “If God knows everything, why do we have to pray to him, tell him our problems, and ask for solutions?” It is a reasonable question, and the answer is simple.

First, when we pray, we are not informing God: we are not telling the Lord something God does not know. But our prayers demonstrate our confidence in God’s almighty ability to give us perfect solutions. Our prayers are a demonstration of confidence in God’s love for us and God’s ability to take care of us. Last, we must let our requests be known unto God so we can get the peace that comes when we cast our burdens



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on him, knowing that God cares for us. Simply put, we pray to an all-knowing God because God told us that is the way to stay connected with him.

On the other side of the coin, we give God praise because we accept that the all-knowing God is giving us all we need for godly living: living that pleases God and brings us into God's blessings.

LIFE APPLICATION

In your private devotions, reflect on Psalm 139 and the doctrine of God's omniscience. What does the thought that God is seeing you when you do wrong say to you? Consider what you can do to modify your approach to life to reflect this knowledge.

How do you see your gifts and talents? One view is that our gifts and talents are clues to God's calling in our lives. Under this view, consider how well you are fulfilling your calling, and what changes you may need to make.

Listen to Harry Chapin's song, "Someone Keeps Calling My Name." Compare the longing of the song with the promise of Psalm 139:1-12. What do you feel?

Verse 14 speaks of how fearfully, wonderfully, and marvelously God made

us. Consider this as you think of yourself. Apply the adverbs not only to physical characteristics but to the way your body functions, your emotional makeup, and your spiritual tendencies. Do you see yourself as God's handiwork? Consider the basis you use to assess yourself. Is it the models in the magazine or movies, or the scriptures' view?

QUESTIONS

1. In what respects is the doctrine of God's omniscience comforting?
2. How does understanding that God knows everything affect the way we pray?
3. Since God knows about injustice before it happens, why does he not prevent it?

How do you see your gifts and talents? One view is that our gifts and talents are clues to God's calling in our lives.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn:

"Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise,"
AMECH #71

Closing Prayer: Dear all-knowing Creator, I accept that you know me better than I know myself. I know your eyes are on me every second. Remind me of this in those times when I feel threatened and scared by the storm winds of life. My prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 25–December 1

Monday	Luke 3:23-38 (We Belong to Christ's Family)
Tuesday	Psalm 128 (A Household Built by God)
Wednesday	Ruth 1:1, 3, 6-18 (Determined Loyalty)
Thursday	Ruth 2:1-3, 17-23 (An Act of Kindness)
Friday	Matthew 12:46-50 (Bound Together by More Than DNA)
Saturday	Ruth 3:1-13 (Daring Faith)
Sunday	Ruth 4:9-17 (God Has Not Abandoned You)