

OUR INFINITE, INTIMATE GOD
Psalm 139

Loneliness is a common affliction. While living in an increasingly connected world, many feel increasingly disconnected relationally. As one secular writer noted a few years ago, “...if you’re an average American, you’re not nearly as connected to the people around you as your parents or grandparents were...You don’t vote as regularly. You don’t join clubs as much. You don’t entertain at home as often. Chances are, you spend more time each week watching Friends than making them.”

And it’s likely that this sense of disconnection is even greater today than it has ever been, because of the Coronavirus. We not only “feel” alone, but we are alone — and the government wants us that way for a significant amount of time. We are created for fellowship and relationship, and we are recreated as believers into the body of Christ for even greater fellowship. And this social distancing requirement is attacking the heart of what we are as people *and* what we are as believers. Now, we feel alone, and we *are* alone. And that likely has made many question whether they are not only alone in their houses, but whether they are also alone in the universe, separated from God. *Has He also abandoned us?*

To answer that question, I want to turn this morning to a psalm that I hope will be familiar to you — **Psalm 139**. One commentator has called this psalm one of the most beautiful and profound hymns in the psalms. And he also suggests that it might be one of the most intimate psalms. He says this psalm uses a profound theology of God “to form a powerful message for those who trust in the sovereign LORD God — it is applied theology, and so always relevant.” In this psalm we are plumbing the depths of God’s character, and also finding that His character is an immense provision of His personal care of us. He is a grand and transcendent God, beyond our comprehension; but He is also a loving and personal God, intimately acquainted with us and caring for our burdens and needs.

The truth that God is all-knowing, ever-present, and all-powerful should be a rich encouragement to us; sometimes it seems (as it did to David partway thru this psalm) to be a damper on our desires. His omni-attributes are only a hindrance to us because we have failed to understand their significance and purpose.

LET THE CHARACTER OF GOD STIMULATE YOUR LOYALTY TO GOD AND YOUR TRUST OF GOD.

This psalm reveals **three aspects** of God’s character and then provides **one set of responses**:

1. Three Truths of God’s OMNISCIENCE (vv. 1-6)

- ✓ God’s knowledge includes everything we **DO** (vv. 1-3)
- ✓ God knowledge includes everything we **SAY** (v. 4)

✓ God's knowledge is **OVERWHELMING** (vv. 5-6)

2. Three Truths of God's **OMNIPRESENCE (vv. 7-12)**

✓ No **PLACE** can separate us from God's omnipresence (vv. 7-8)

✓ No **DISTANCE** can separate us from God's omnipresence (vv. 9-10)

✓ No **TIME** can separate us from God's omnipresence (vv. 11-12)

3. Two Truths of God's **OMNIPOTENCE (vv. 13-18)**

✓ God's power is over man's **CREATION** (vv. 13-15)

✓ God's power is over man's **DURATION** (v. 16-18)

4. Three Responses to God's Omni- Attributes (vv. 17-24)

✓ **MEDITATE** on God's Character (vv. 17-18)

✓ Trust God will be **JUST** (vv. 19-22)

✓ Seek God's **RIGHTEOUS EXAMINATION** (vv. 23-24)

1. Three Truths of God's OMNISCIENCE (vv. 1-6)

- God's knowledge includes everything we DO (vv. 1-3)

- ✓ Verse 1 is something like a summary statement of God's omniscience. God is YHWH — the transcendent and powerful God who is also the covenant God of Israel. In His greatness, He has still sought out Israel and He is intimately acquainted with David (and us).
- ✓ What does God know about David (and us)? Everything — past and present. He knows everything because He has **searched** us out. That doesn't mean He went looking as if He didn't know. It's a word of examination — "to explore, spy out, to dig deeply into, to explore a country." He not only has observed our actions, but He has examined the depths of our hearts. He knows us inside out.
- ✓ David also says that you have **known me**. Because God has examined David, God knows him personally and completely — He knows everything there is to know about David.
- ✓ God knows every activity of every man — nothing escapes His notice (vv. 2-3):
 - God knows when he **sits down** and when he **risers up** — He knows every movement of David, from morning to night. There is nothing that escapes God's notice.
 - David already alluded to it, but he says explicitly in v. 2 that God knows all His **thoughts**. Distance does not inhibit God's knowledge of David's inner man — though God is **afar**, He still knows even the inner most thought and motive of David. He doesn't just know our thoughts, though. The word **understand** has the idea of discerning and evaluating. God is testing our motives and thoughts that drive all our activities. Are they consistent with Him? This is similar to what Paul affirms in **1 Cor. 4:4-5**. God not only cares about what we do, but He is also interested in why we do it (which is a good reminder for us when we are buying food this week).
 - God also examines all his journeys every day — whatever **path** he walks and wherever he sleeps (**lie down**). That God **scrutinizes** it means again that God is "sifting" (like wheat) through his life to evaluate what is good or valuable and what is not. Every act in his daily life, from morning to night is being observed and evaluated by God. His entire routine is being observed and tested.
 - No action of any man is unobserved by God and no action is unevaluated by God.
- ✓ The psalmist, David, then gives another example of what God observes:

- God knowledge includes everything we SAY (v. 4)

- ✓ He not only knows every word we speak, but He also knows every future word (and thought; v. 4)
- ✓ You know when a word is on the "tip of your tongue" but you haven't yet decided whether or not to say it? God knows that word (and all the possibilities of words) before you ever utter them.
- ✓ David's point is that if God knows even our potential words, then He knows everything.

- God's knowledge is **OVERWHELMING** (vv. 5-6)

- ✓ God knows David as if to surround him — he is **enclosed** (v. 5). In the parallel statement, the phrase **hand is upon me** means that God has "cupped" His hand over David, confining him and hemming him in — God has surrounded him and is even controlling David. There is nothing about David that God does not know and that seems to make David feel "claustrophobic," even trapped.
- ✓ So let's summarize what David has revealed about God's omniscience:
 - God knows every detail of David's life — past, present, and potential. Nothing escapes His eyes.
 - God knows every individual in that same way: "God sees you as much as if there were nobody else in the world for Him to look at...the infinite mind of God is able to grasp a million objects at once and yet focus as much on one as if there were nothing else but that one." [Spurgeon]
- ✓ So David says that the omniscience of God is **too wonderful** — it is "extraordinary," "surpassing," and "incomprehensible." David is amazed as he contemplates God's person.
- ✓ There is debate about whether the omniscience of God is a comfort or a threat for David.
 - In the next verse David attempts to flee from God and His knowledge, so it seems that God's knowledge is a threat to David — David is exposed by God and unraveled by God. He can't hide.
 - But by the end of the psalm, David not only affirms that God knows him, but David invites God to examine him and expose the reality of David's condition to him (vv. 23-24).
 - So it seems that that both aspects could be true — depending on one's spiritual condition; if God's knowledge of us is threatening, that tells us something about our hearts.
- ✓ What should we be thinking about God's omniscience (in relation to Covid-19)?
 - We should think that there is no government official and no medical worker that is acting without the knowledge of God. In fact, God has hemmed them in for His purposes and plan (v. 5).
 - We should think that there is not one Covid-19 virus molecule that is running renegade from God. We don't know where they are. But He knows where every single one is and where they all eventually will be. They are all acting according to His plan and knowledge.
 - We should think that God knows everything about our circumstance and is always watching us:

"How utterly sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely. No talebearer can inform on us; no enemy can make an accusation stick; no forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of the closet to abash us and expose our past; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us." [Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 57]

- ✓ For those of us in Christ, the knowledge of God is overwhelming, but it is also comforting. He is not ever surprised or caught off guard. He is fully aware at all times of all things. He is watching all things. He sees and evaluates all things. He cares about all things and all events.
- ✓ If you are afraid, this truth should bring you comfort and peace. God sees all.

2. Three Truths of God's OMNIPRESENCE (vv. 7-12)

- No PLACE can separate us from God's omnipresence (vv. 7-8). We cannot run from God — escaping God's presence is not a matter of needing more speed or a different location. Notice what David says:
 - ✓ *where can I go...flee?* I.e., "if I attempted to get away from God's knowledge, where...?"
 - **Flee** is used frequently in the OT; generally it refers to fleeing from others in fear (Hagar from Sarah; Jacob from Esau to Laban, and from Laban to Esau; David from Saul, Absalom, & others; Absalom after killing Amnon; Jonah running to Tarshish). The word means "get away from..."
 - While David seems to be tempted to run from God, the way he asks the question indicates he has an implicit understanding that he couldn't outrun God, even though he is tempted to try.
 - ✓ David then offers two extremes of where he might travel to escape God:
 - **If I ascend to Heaven, You are there** — Heaven is the dwelling place of God, so of course He will be inescapable there. He fills Heaven with His presence. But the opposite is also true...
 - **If I make my bed in Sheol...You are there...** Even in Hell, God is there. Is God really present in Hell? Yes, but in a specific manner only —
 - ... **Sheol** may mean "death," but most often it has the connotation of God's wrath and judgment (which is how the NT usually translates it — **Hell**). Other passages clearly refer to His presence in Sheol (**Prov. 15:11**; Jer. 23:24ff).
 - ... **Rev. 14:9-11** indicates that one of the great torments of Hell is the utter inescapability of sinners from God — they spend all their life on earth attempting to escape Him and cannot; nor will they be able to escape Him and His judgment in Hell.
 - ... David's point: whether in the heights of **Heaven**, or the depths of **Sheol** (death or hell), God is there; in life or death, in blessing or wrath, God is always there.
 - ✓ A young child about to move with his family to a distant city; night before they left, he prayed, "I guess this is good-bye, God, because tomorrow we're moving to Cleveland..." His theology needs repair.

"Man, [David] says, is always in God's presence; you can cut yourself off from your fellow-men, but you cannot get away from your Creator." [J. I. Packer, Knowing God.]

- ✓ You cannot escape (run away) from the presence of God; no matter where we go, He will be there.

- **No DISTANCE can separate us from God's omnipresence (vv. 9-10)** — getting away from God is not a matter of finding new location that is further away from God. You can't go far enough away to escape the infinite God. So David gives us some examples —
 - ✓ Whether riding the **wings of the dawn** (in the East) or going to the remotest part of the **Sea** (the furthest western point in the Mediterranean Sea), God is already there. East to West, God is present.
 - ✓ With reference to East and West, David might also be referring to infinite distance from East to West and that the infinite God is able to span that distance.
 - ✓ Wherever one goes, he not only finds God already present, but finds God's guidance — **Your hand will lead me (v. 10)** God led Israel through the wilderness (Exodus) and He leads individuals (Ps. 23:3; Prov. 6:22), God will lead and hold David (Ps. 73:23).

- *Ps. 23:3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.*
- *Prov. 6:22 When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you.*
- *Ps. 73:23-24 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory.*

- ✓ God is present in different ways in different places, but in every place, He is present —
 - In some places, God is present in order to bless (which is how Scripture views His presence with His people; Ps. 16:11; Heb. 13:5; 1 Sam. 4:4; Rev. 21:3).
 - In some places, God is present in order to sustain (Heb. 1:3; **Col. 1:17**)
 - In some places, God is present in order to judge pour out His wrath (Amos 9:1-4)
- **No TIME can separate us from God's omnipresence (vv. 11-12)** — escaping God's presence is not a matter of eyesight, as if we could get out of God's line of sight or hide in the darkness.
 - ✓ When the girls were little, we played hide and seek; after they would check a location, I'd sneak out of my spot and hide there...("not fair!"). We may think, "if I could just do that with God..."
 - ✓ Even if David could find **darkness** so oppressive as to **crush** (overwhelm) Him, God would see him.
 - ✓ The infinite God who is not dependent on any part of creation, transcends night and day just as much as He transcends time and eternity. There is no time of day/night that He is not present.
 - ✓ **Verse 12** makes clear that for God neither darkness nor light inhibit or help Him. He is as observant in one as He is in the other. He sees all at all times in every circumstance. No time of day and no time of night inhibits God from seeing us and being with us. Night is not a barrier to God.
 - ✓ **Q** — Do you view the omnipresence of God as merely an eternal and infinite watchdog over your life, or do you see it is the gift of One who comforts, guides, protects, keeps, and helps His own?
 - ✓ God's presence is a comfort, blessing, and gift to His people.

“When you wish to do something evil, you retire from the public into your house where no enemy may see you; from those places of your house which are open and visible to the eyes of men you remove yourself into your room; then in your room you fear some witness from another quarter; you retire into your heart, there you meditate: he is more inward than your heart. Wherever, therefore, you shall have fled, there he is. From yourself, whither will you flee? Shall you not follow yourself wherever you shall flee? But since there is One more inward even than yourself, there is no place where you may flee from God...There is no place at all whither you may flee. Will you flee from him? Flee unto him.” [Bavinck]

- ✓ Since God is everywhere, where should we go when we are hurting, suffering, and troubled? To Him!
- ✓ God is not only all-knowing and ever-present; He is also all-powerful...

3. Two Truths of God's OMNIPOTENCE (vv. 13-18)

- God's power is over man's CREATION (vv. 13-15)

- ✓ Scripture repeatedly affirms the creative power of God. Quite regularly, man is seen as the crown of that creation (cf. Ps. 8:3-6 — the Heavens and all the rest of creation are less significant than man).
- ✓ Here the psalmist reminds us exactly how God has made us and put us together:
 - While there is a natural explanation for how babies are born, in v. 13 David reminds us that every birth is a supernatural work of God. He has **knit** that body and life together — **weaving** all the parts of the individual's life and being exactly the way He wants to make that one.
 - This creation is **fearful** (v. 14) — that is, the creation of every individual should make us to fear God (and we know it in our soul — i.e., our conscience tells us that is right).
 - The psalmist details in v. 15 how God makes mankind — He puts together our **frame**, our bodily and skeletal structure and He **skillfully wrought** (weaves) our inner parts together (our muscles and blood vessels, etc.). And He does all this **in secret** — where no one else can see, God sees easily to do His work. This speaks to both His omnipresence and omnipotence.
 - God's power is over every aspect of creation of every man. Again, this points to the intimacy and care of God and His personal relationship to every man. He has not made creation and He has not made people “generally.” He has made them particularly. He has made each one exactly as He wants him, and He makes all people to know Him and be known by Him. That's His power.

- God's power is over man's DURATION (v. 16-18)

- ✓ God not only makes mankind, but He also ordains every person's life. God has written **the days** of all man's lives **in Your book** (v. 16). He has planned every person's activities and He has planned every day that individual will have.
- ✓ This is also a comforting truth — God has had infinite **thoughts** (vv. 17-18a) of every man!

- ✓ David meditates on that truth and then notes that even when he falls asleep, he is still in the presence of God when he awakens (v. 18b) — ***I am still with You***. David is with God and God is with David. He has not been abandoned. He is safe.
- ✓ In my office I have a small pair of wood plaques that were carved for me by a family friend. They hang on a bookshelf where I can see them easily from my desk. They simply say, “I am His” and “He is mine.” I belong to Him. He belongs to me. He will never leave me. I look at those plaques and I am encouraged because of the truth of them, and I am encouraged because of the truth of the man who carved them that served the Lord faithfully until he died at age 99. For 99 years the Lord was faithful to my mentor; since the beginning of time, God has been faithful to His people. He is ever-present and always watching. Wherever we are, God is watching over us and with us. We are His.
- ✓ David would have us to be comforted by the fact that the exact number of days of our life are numbered by God; we will never be short-changed one second of our lives. He has ordered our days and He will give us exactly what He has planned for us. People can’t change that and Covid-19 can’t change that. I don’t need to fear my departure from this life, because God will see me through to the full number of days He has allotted to me.
- ✓ Friend, I know some of you are particularly afraid. You and I do not need to fear. We can put our heads on our pillows at night and know that one of two things will happen:
 - We will wake up in the morning, and we will still be with Him and He will still be guarding.
 - We will wake up in Glory (having died), and we will be more with Him than we ever have been.
 - We are safe with Him. Trust that.
 - Notice also what God would have us to do with these truths:

4. Three Responses to God’s Omni- Attributes (vv. 17-24)

- **MEDITATE on God’s Character (vv. 17-18)**. This is another way to say, “Know God.”
 - ✓ In v. 1, David notes in general terms that God knows him; now he recognizes the magnitude of thoughts that God has toward him and about Him —
 - God has ***thoughts*** about David — He knows everything internally and externally about all men and also evaluates (righteously and perfectly) all things about all men.
 - These thoughts and this knowledge is uncountable (***outnumber the sand***).
 - This knowledge is *particular* for David from concern for David — ***to me*** (v. 17).
 - ✓ What seemingly was a point of distress to David (vv. 6-7) has now become a joy — ***precious!***
 - ✓ Not only did God know David, but God became ***precious*** to David and he sought to know God
 - He considered how God’s attributes related to *him* — note the 1p pronouns (***me, I***) in the psalm.
 - He considered God’s vastness (v. 17-18a), yet God’s thoughts about *David* were innumerable.

- One of our weaknesses is that we look too closely at the hill-like circumstances of our lives, and we forget to look at the mountain of a God who stands behind those circumstances. We look so closely at the hills, our view of the mountain of God is obscured. We need to back up, refocus our eyes, and look at and meditate on the truth of the nature of God and His character.
- ✓ How can we contemplate God and meditate on Him? Just a couple of examples:
 - You may say, “I don’t ever have enough time to read my Bible regularly.” Well, even if the only time you have gained is your commute to work time, that is giving you 30-60 more minutes a day to read your Bible. And that is likely enough time to keep up with your plan.
 - Take five minutes of your reading time and think about what that truth is revealing to you about God and how that truth is designed to make you trust God more fully.
 - Use the added time with your family to read the Bible, pray, or memorize Scripture together. It’s ok to have a movie night, but wouldn’t this season be better invested if we could look back and say, “That was the time when we started a new family spiritual discipline?”
 - Or how about reading that spiritual life book, or biography, or theology? Or doing that study?
 - We all get news far too fast these days, and I suspect that too many of us are using far too much time thinking about Coronavirus and the stock market and things that we cannot change and not doing enough thinking and meditating on the things we can change — our understanding of and delight in God. Be intentional about using this added time to feed your delight in God.
- **Trust God will be JUST (vv. 19-22).**
 - ✓ David is asking God to be just against sinners and sin. “How can David claim to love God and yet hate people made in the image of God?”
 - ✓ Notice that David’s wish is not born from personal vengeance, but from understanding that they are enemies of God. And if they are enemies of God, they are also his enemies (**vv. 21-22**).
 - In asking for these sinners to be judged, he is simply asking for God’s judgment to be just.
 - He is not carrying out his own vindication. In fact, the Psalmist had at times attempted to personally help these sinners, but they had rejected his efforts (e.g., Ps. 35:12-14; 109:4-5). He is simply praying for these sinners to receive the same judgment they had made against innocent people (Ps. 109:16-20).
 - ✓ Whether with Coronavirus or anything else, we don’t need to be anxious that things won’t be fair. God will be just and right. My job is not to fret for justice to happen; it is to ask God to be just and then trust that God will be just (**Rom. 12:19ff**).
- **Seek God’s RIGHTEOUS EXAMINATION (vv. 23-24)** These vv. parallel **v. 1 (19:13-14)**. Two requests:
 - ✓ **search me** = David sees in his enemies the same danger that threatens his own soul and asks God to reveal to him the true state of his own soul, so he would not be self-deluded.

- ✓ David not only acknowledges that God knows him (v. 1); he invites God's examination — he is not attempting to hide anything from God. [He's different than those in vv. 19-22.]
- ✓ **lead me** = Having had his ***anxious thoughts*** (lack of full commitment to God) revealed (assumption seems to be that something will be found), David then asks for God to guide him:
 - his desire is to know the old and ancient paths (***everlasting way***) that produce righteousness
 - he desires to live in a way that imitates his eternal life.
 - The questions in this verse reflect the truth that “we can never distrust ourselves too much.” [Packer, *Knowing God*, 216.]

Our prayer should be: “Lord, ‘I gladly open all the closets of my life...every room and every corner. Show me what needs attention. Reveal to me what brings pain to You in my life.’” [Swindoll, p. 377.]

- ✓ The Covid-19 situations is a good opportunity for us to ask the Lord to reveal areas of our hearts that need transformation and change. God has examined both our actions and motives (vv. 1-3); He knows what we are. Do we know what we are inwardly? This situation is not just revealing the hearts of unbelievers, but it is also revealing our own hearts.
- ✓ Can we be wise enough and brave enough to ask Him:
 - “Will you reveal what my heart is like to me?”
 - “Will you reveal what I am wanting so badly that I am willing to sin with anxiousness, ungodly fear, greed, covetousness, anger, discontentment, and grumbling and complaining?”
 - When He reveals what we are to us, then we will be able to follow him in the ***everlasting way*** — the pathway of righteous living. If this Coronavirus became an opportunity for us to examine our hearts and begin changing lifelong ungodly habits, wouldn't that be a productive way to redeem something that is uncomfortable for all of us?

CONCLUSION: One pastor has outlined this Psalm as a series of questions that remind us of God's nature:

- I. How well does God know me? (vv. 1-6)
- II. How close is God to me? (vv. 7-12)
- III. How carefully has God made me? (vv. 13-18)
- IV. How much does God protect/help me? (vv. 19-24)” That's helpful.

God is everything we need. He is *all*. He is all-knowing, He is ever-present, and He is all-powerful. These truths of His *omni*- powers are given to stimulate us to great trust in Him, great loyalty to Him, and great comfort from Him. He is infinite and transcendent. And He is intimate and close. Be strengthened and comforted.

BENEDICTION: Romans 8:35-39