

Our God _____ Every _____

Psalm 139

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Before the summer began we ironed out our Psalms teaching series, what Psalm went with each weekend. Summer schedules had to be worked out with who was preaching what weekend, at what campus. It took a lot of coordination.

This is what makes it so powerful to see the timing of this psalm this weekend. We had no idea back in the spring that this week in our country would be what it has been. We had no idea that there would be a protest and counterprotest in Charlottesville, Virginia. We didn't know that people would be injured and die. We didn't know it would spark a national debate, or better said, feud. And we certainly didn't know when we picked Psalm 139 for this weekend that it would be perhaps the perfect biblical answer to the national divide over hate and love, race and bigotry, and the value of human life and dignity.

Even the Women's Center presenting today was unknown back then. This psalm explains how God can and does orchestrate these providences and we are experiencing one together here at Bethel Church this weekend.

We are going to get to those front page issues but we are led there by the words of the psalm itself. Psalm 139 is a psalm attributed to David. It is beautiful, insightful, and a worthy expression of the artistic skill of the sweet singer of Israel. Like Psalm 23, it pushes the envelope of how poetry can express theology in a way that appeals not just to the mind but also to the heart.

Please remember this is a song. It was written to be sung more than explicated. I remember taking an art appreciation class in college. I was bored to tears because the art was excruciatingly analyzed. Death by analysis. Art is inherently more than the sum of its parts. Psalm 139 is incredibly beautiful art AND deeply theological. We see the heart of David in all its depth, breadth, and beauty. Is it no wonder artists always have girlfriends?

You'll notice that my sermon title and outline are in a fill-in-the-blank format. Just so you OCD types can come off the ledge I'm going to tell you now all the blanks. Verses 1-6: Our God *Knows* Everything. Verses 7-12: Our God *is* Everywhere. Verses 13-24: Our God *Made* Everyone.

Our God Knows Everything

- 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 afar.*
- 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,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*
- ⁵ *You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.*
- ⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:1-6 ESV)*

In addition to being poetic, the language here is highly personal. Notice the pronouns, *me, me, I, I, my, my, my, my* and so on. This is someone for whom God's character is not merely philosophical or theological. He does what God wants us to do; he personalizes who God is into his own daily life and reality.

Look at the extent! *"You know when I sit down and rise up."* (v. 2) We don't think about sitting and standing much, but God does. Verse 3, *"my lying down."* We may or may not think of God with a bedtime prayer but God is thinking about us. Watching over us right down to our sleep schedule. The summary is in verse 3, *"you are acquainted with all my ways."* God knows everything about our lives.

He even knows our thoughts – verse 2, *"you discern my thoughts from afar."* Really, he's reading our mind? Not only does he know our thoughts, he knows what we are going to say even before we say it. *"Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether."* (v. 4)

How can God know something before it occurs? This is the doctrine of God's *omniscience*. *Omni* means all. *Scient* means to know. He knows all that there is to know. That knowledge is not merely all that there is to know *now*, it is all that there is to know *forever*. This ties in to his eternal nature. God transcends time. We live in the present moment of now but God created time and is above time. He knows yesterday as fully as every future tomorrow.

*"God...knows everything; everything possible, everything actual; all events, all creatures, of the past, the present, and the future. He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in heaven, in earth, and in hell...Nothing escapes his notice, nothing can be hidden from him, nothing is forgotten by him... He never errs, never changes, never overlooks anything."*¹

David celebrates this. His song does what all of us should do with this truth, he personalizes it. God's all-knowing is wonderful to David. David meditates on God's watch care over every detail of his life. *"You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me."* (v. 5) Behind, before, and over. The word for *"lay your hand"* means, you cup your hand. My Facebook feed pulled a picture from a few years ago and it reminded me of this verse. It's Kiralee when she was a month old:



¹ A.W. Pink, as quoted by James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Psalms 107-150*, p. 1202.

God holds us in the palm of his hand. God's all-knowing nature is personal, creating a relationship of security with him. Nothing has happened in our yesterdays that keeps us from him and nothing will happen in our tomorrows that he does not already know. His eye is on us and his hand is upon us.

Our God Is Everywhere

- 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!
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. (Psalm 139:7-12)*

Verse 7 introduces the second characteristic of God. "*Where shall I flee from your presence?*" God is all-present. Theologians call this the *omnipresence* of God. Here is where we must draw careful lines or we slip into pantheism. Pantheism doesn't say God is everywhere, it says God is everything.

Christian orthodox theology maintains a distinction between the Creator and the creation. He is not the creation but he is present everywhere in his creation. How? "*Where shall I go from your Spirit?*" The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is the actual person and presence of God everywhere. We don't have many glimpses of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, but this is certainly one of them. David meditates on what it means that God is everywhere.

He extends to the extremes. "*If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*" Heaven represents the highest extreme. Yet God is there. "*If I make my bed in Sheol.*" Sheol is the place of the dead—the lowest place—yet God is there.

"*The wings of the morning*" – where does the sun rise? In the east. "*The uttermost parts of the sea.*" In Israel, the Mediterranean Sea was and is their western border. *If I go as far east as the morning sun or as far west as the ocean will take me.* See what he is doing? East to west, even in those extreme places, your hand is there to guide me. What comfort! In verses 11-12, how about day and night? In light and in darkness. Yep, God is there too.

Do you remember a prophet in the Old Testament who didn't get this? Remember Jonah? He thought he could get away from God. He thought if he went in the opposite direction of Nineveh, as far west as the boat would take him, then God couldn't or wouldn't intervene. You should read Jonah; it's a whale of a story.

It is both a wonderful comfort and a terror to realize that God is always wherever we are. A comfort to know that life will never take us away from his presence. He is with us in the good places: home, church, with family and friends. On the highways and byways. The icy road and the blizzard nights. But he is also there when we are out of his will. In the places of

sin. In the darkness when no one else sees, God is also there and we cannot escape his presence. *"I may leave thy path but thou never leavest mine."*²

Our God Made Everyone

These are some of the most magnificent words ever composed....

- 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.
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.*
- 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."* (Psalm 139:13-18)

David reflects on God's care over him his whole life, even when he was in the womb. Get that? Even when he was an embryo in his mother's womb. Suddenly Psalm 139 has profound ethical implications. Before we get to those, let's just marvel at the language here.

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." Realize David is writing this 3,000 years ago. What did they know about how a baby formed in the womb? Yet, isn't this insightful poetic language? Formed inward parts. Knit together in the womb. Intricately woven. Stitched by the hand of God.

I have personally witnessed two births now and while science has explained so much, there is so much about reproduction, life, and prenatal personhood that remains mysterious. How does life begin? How does personhood and personality from DNA to fingerprints to gifts and talents form over those nine months? Further, modern technology has shown us the frailty and beauty of a baby forming in the womb. Perhaps you've seen these, but let the wonder hit you again.



² C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, p. 259.

David never had these insights, but inspired by the Holy Spirit, his description is as poetically accurate as anything we could write today. David's wonder is that even in those delicate days in his mother's womb, God was there. Watching. Forming. Creating him. His summary is so true; *"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."*

If God is there in the womb, that forming child is more than simply a clump of cells; more than simply a part of the mother's body like her knee or toe. God himself is forming the child. Every child. Every unborn child is a human being. God bestows the highest honor on human personhood.

*"So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:27)

Unborn children fully bear the image of God. They are unique and separate from the mother. They have personal DNA, personal blood type, and they are in the mother but separate from her. They are dependent on her but independent of her personhood. They bear the image of God while being formed by the power and presence of God.

Therefore, to destroy an unborn child is to do violence against an image bearer. It is to undo what God is doing, to destroy what God is creating. The Bible calls taking the life of an image bearer murder. This is why Christians must stand for life in the womb and protect the sanctity of that life. An unborn child is being fearfully and wonderfully made by God himself.

Let me ask this question. Is God only forming White children? Is God only making Asian children? Indian children? Black children? Hispanic children? If God forms them in his image in the womb, how should we treat them outside the womb?

It is complete hypocrisy to say we stand for the sanctity of life and then be a racist. The same God that gives the unborn child inherent worth and value in the womb gives born child, teenager, adult or senior citizen the value outside the womb no matter their ethnicity.

This brings us to Charlottesville, Virginia. So much has been said and written since then. When our culture is embroiled in controversy, the church and leaders had better speak or we become irrelevant to the culture we are trying to reach.

Here is where Psalm 139 is so helpful and clear and reinforces the teaching of Scripture. Human personhood is a God-thing from the beginning of our existence. God grants us status as his image bearers. God forms our bodies. God makes us how we are and who we are. Every one of us is absolutely unique and different from any other human being that has ever lived.

So where does racism and bigotry and the impulse to drive your car into a crowd of people come from? Do you remember the temptation Satan gave Eve? *If you eat of it, you will be like God.* (Genesis 3:5) The deification of "me" and the exaltation of self are at the root of what sin is. We all fall short of the glory of God. How? By seeking the glory of me.

So this feud in our country is not ultimately about White supremacy or Black supremacy or Purple supremacy. It's not ultimately about the civil war or statues or flags. What happened in Charlottesville is what happens when sinners worship themselves. We deny God by denying the worth of a fellow image bearer.

It is a functional atheism hiding behind a political ideology.

Hear clearly, we condemn it and we must condemn it but we must condemn it for the right reasons. The right reason isn't because of where I land in my personal political position. The right reason isn't because of what color my skin happens to be. The right reason to condemn it is because of the glory of God bequeathed to every human in every womb, every ethnicity, every age and stage, male and female, all valued because of whose image they bear.

Charlottesville was humanity once again acting according to God-denying self-supremacy. Violence and murder is the result. Cain murdered Abel because Abel's sacrifice was accepted. Cain was a supremacist, he had to be supreme. This isn't a skin issue this is a sin issue.

Christianity isn't alt-right or alt-left; it is alt-cross. These moments are great opportunities for the gospel because Jesus doesn't take sides, Jesus takes over. But he does so with an offer of peace that begins vertically. Peace with God. Peace with this all-knowing, all-present, Creator of all.

"And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:20) This is the alternate or "alt" that Jesus offers. Peace with God through repentance and faith in Jesus and his work on the cross dying in our place. That vertical peace creates an alternate path to peace with others, even those ethnically and socially different from me.

"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:14) Racism denies the will of God to populate heaven with people from every tribe, language, skin color, background and ethnicity. So while we condemn every form of self-supremacy and self-exaltation we also promote and point to a Savior who reconciles us to God and one another.

Finally, we must feel profound personal sadness at all hatred among people but do so humbly knowing that the same seeds of racism, bigotry, and hatred are in all our hearts. This makes the ending of Psalm 139 so fitting.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23-24)

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