

Search Me O God and Know My Heart

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is Psalm 139 as printed in the liturgy.

A Psalter reading to the choir master, a Psalm of David. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. 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.

Even before the word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed and shield, you are there.

[1 : 18] 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 cover me and the light above me, 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. For you form my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 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. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

If I would count them, that you are more than the sand, I awake and I am still with you. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, apart from me!

[2 : 24] They speak against you with malicious intent. Your enemies take your name in vain. 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. 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 of everlasting. The grass withers and the flowers fall. But the word of our God stands forever. You may be seated.

Before we get started, would you join me in prayer one more time? Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your words of hope and comfort.

We thank you that it has the power to change and to transform lives. And so, Lord, may the words of my mouth now and the meditation of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, our rock and our redeemer.

[3 : 21] In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well, good morning. My name is John. As mentioned, I'm the RUF campus minister at UC Berkeley. It's such a privilege to be with you all this morning.

Thank you for having me. I just finished my first year as the campus minister at UC Berkeley, and I've really enjoyed working with college students. And one of the things I have learned working with college students is that college students love movies.

And they specifically really like superhero movies. I don't know if you guys enjoy superhero movies, but we're in the middle of summer. And summer blockbusters are coming out. And a lot of superhero movies have come out recently.

Last month, I don't know if you guys are into it, but the new Spider-Man, I think, animation movie came out. Later this month, the new Captain Marvel movie comes out. I think the Flash movie came out a couple weeks ago.

If you have no idea what I'm talking about, it's because there's too many superhero movies to keep track of that sometimes it's hard for me as well. But my college students love them, and I love watching it with them, talking about it with them.

[4 : 22] But one of the things that always happens when I watch a movie with family or friends or even by myself, and afterwards we have conversations about the movies, I always end up asking myself the same question.

And maybe you've asked yourself this as well. And the question is, if you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be? And after many debates with friends and family and now with a lot of college students, my answer always ends up being the same.

My answer to the question, if I could have any superpower in the world, I would want the power of infinite knowledge. I don't know what that says about me.

I'll let you draw your own conclusions. But I want to know everything about everything. I would love to know what's going to happen later. I want to know what people are thinking. I want to know everything.

And I think given everything that's happened in the first six months of this year, which I don't know if you guys realize, we're halfway done with 2023 already. We're already in July. But given everything that's happened, I think the power to know everything would have come in pretty handy, wouldn't it?

[5 : 30] If you think back to the beginning of the year, maybe right around Christmas time and the new year, if any of you were traveling, maybe some of you hit some of the travel disruptions that happened. It would have been nice to know about those if you were traveling.

Or just a couple of weeks ago, I think there were new travel disruptions, right? Some of you might have been caught up in that. But in between early this year till now, a lot of other things have happened, right?

We've still had to deal with nationwide inflation. If you're in the tech industry, there are still continue to be layoffs. We've dealt with school shootings. We've dealt with a lot of difficulties.

And those are all just the macro news items that we've heard about or seen or experienced. Those don't even include some of the personal difficulties that you've had to face the first half of this year.

For some of you, 2023 so far, you've had to deal with maybe health scares. For some of you, maybe the loss of loved ones. For some of you, relationship conflicts in the home, at work, maybe at school.

[6 : 33] Right? It would be nice to know that these things were going to happen. And it would be even nicer to know how those things would work out, wouldn't it? Well, obviously, none of us have the superpower to know everything.

But David here in our psalm this morning reminds us of someone who does have that power. All right. Psalm 139 is a beautiful psalm that expounds so many beautiful truths about God.

But one truth that comes across crystal clear is the truth that God is omniscient. That he knows everything about everything. And specifically, he knows everything about you.

Right? He knows everything you're going through. He knows everything you are struggling with. And he knows how he will work those things out. Maybe for some of you, you are going through a difficult time right now.

Maybe you're experiencing a time in the valley of darkness. And you don't know why. And you can't comprehend or understand why you are experiencing it. But even though that may be the case, I want you to know this morning that you can trust in a God who knows what you're going through.

[7 : 39] And especially in a God who knows how he will work those things out for you. All right. David needed to be reminded of that truth himself. And you and I need a reminder of that truth this morning.

And so what I hope to share today is that because God fully knows everything about you, you can fully trust in him. All right. Because God fully knows everything about you, you can fully trust in him.

And we're going to look at three ways in which God knows things about us. And the first is God knows what your situation is. Second is he knows where your story began.

And third is he knows what you're searching for. What your situation is, where your story began, and what you're searching for. All right. So first, God knows what your situation is.

David starts off this psalm by painting a pretty clear picture that God knows all about you and all about your circumstances. Right. In verse two, David says, God knows when you sit down and rise up, he discerns your thoughts.

[8 : 39] Verse three, God knows your path and your lying down. He's acquainted with all your ways. Verse four, God knows what you will say even before you say it. All right.

David is describing how comprehensive God's knowledge is of you and what you're going through. There's not one aspect of your life he doesn't know about. Right. God knows when you are resting at home, when you're relaxing, maybe at a vacation by the beach.

I don't know where Jonathan and Andrew are, but maybe they're vacationing somewhere. And God knows that they're relaxing. But God also knows when you're struggling to drag yourself out of bed on a Monday morning to go to work or go to school.

Right. God knows when you've accomplished something great like graduating college or high school or getting married. And he knows when you're struggling potentially to find a new job and make, to make ends meet or you're going to the doctor's office for a scary diagnosis.

And God doesn't just know what your situation is. God also knows how you will respond to those situations. Right. He knows your opinions about what is going on in the world.

[9 : 43] He knows what you think about what is going on at work or at school. He knows how you feel about what is going on in your family. God doesn't just know what you're going to post on social media or tweet before you do it.

God even knows the things you decide not to post. Right. And not to tweet on social media. My parents came to visit me. Like last year around this time, my parents came to visit me.

They live in Taiwan. At the time, I was in San Diego as a youth pastor at a church there at the time. And it had been three years since I had seen them in person. Because of the pandemic, I had not been able to see them in person.

So when they came and finally I was able to see them after three years, it was a wonderful time to spend with them and hang out with them. But what was uncanny to me was how well my mom knew me, even after three years of not being physically present together.

There was one morning I was taking them for breakfast and they were staying with my brother at the time. And so I went up, got up this morning, or that morning, drove her to my brother's place, knocked on the door, and my mom opens the door.

[10 : 47] And the first thing she says to me when she sees me is she says, John, you did not brush your teeth this morning. And I was shocked. I was like, Mom, how could you?

How did you know? Right. And just to dislamour, I do brush my teeth. I brush my teeth this morning. But that day I had just got back from a youth retreat.

It was a three-day, two-night youth retreat. We got back late. I was so tired I crashed. And then I slept in. So I woke up late to breakfast. So I just rushed out of the house. So she was correct. I had not brushed my teeth that morning.

And I still, to this day, don't know how she knew. But my point in telling that story is if that is how well my earthly mother knew me, how much more does our heavenly father know us?

Right. And David here, he gives us at least two reasons why God knows all these things about us. And one is because God is actively and specially interested in you.

[11 : 44] Sorry. Does my mic not work? Sorry. I hope you guys could hear all that first part. But David gives us at least two reasons why God knows all these things about you.

One is he's actively and specially interested in you. And if you look at verse one with me, David says, God has searched me and known me. Right.

That word search there, it has the idea of like a treasure hunter digging for treasure. It has the idea of a lawyer pouring through piles of evidence, preparing for a trial.

The word is also used in the Old Testament when spies are spying out of land and being thorough in their findings. Right. David is describing God who takes a special interest and effort to seek you out and to know you.

Right. From knowing your biggest dreams and aspirations down to the smallest detail, like what color socks you chose to wear this morning. Right. And David isn't saying that God has to do such a thorough search in order to find out and know these things about you.

[12 : 53] We know God's knowledge is infinite. God's knowledge is immediate. But what David is doing is he's using vivid language to describe how much God knows you. And the second reason why God knows what your situation is, is because God is everywhere.

Right. There's no place you can go where God isn't. And David asked that rhetorically in verses seven through 10. If there was, he asked if there was somewhere he could go that God was not present. If he went to heaven, God would be there.

If he went down to Sheol, which is the place of the dead, God would be there. Verse nine talks about if he takes the wings of the morning, which is the east, right? Sun rises in the east, God would be there. And if he goes and dwells in the uttermost part of the sea and the sea was west for Israel.

So if he goes west, God would be there. No matter where David goes in this universe, God is there. You might initially hear that and you might think to yourself, well, that actually sounds a little bit smothering.

To our American ears, we definitely don't like it when people know everything about us. And we for sure don't like it when they follow us everywhere. But David here is not describing God so much like Google or Amazon in your house, listening to your conversations and then giving you the ads that he thinks you want to buy.

[14:08] But David here is more describing God like a loving parent, right? Someone who is lovingly and carefully watching over their children. God is everywhere with us so that he can hold us and lead us and guide us, like David says there in verse 10.

God knows our situation and our circumstances not to be nosy, but to help us through them. And that's probably the most encouraging truth about God knowing what your situation is.

God doesn't just know about your present trials and tribulations, but I mentioned before, he knows how he's going to bring them to an end. Look at verse 16 with me or the second part of verse 16.

David says there, David there is getting at the truth that God has a plan for you, that he knows your future, that he has numbered your days.

And I know that initially when you hear that, we might think that sounds like a threat, right? In English, we have an idiom, right? Our days being numbered. And that sounds like a threat to us. But actually here, it should be extremely comforting.

[15:19] If you are nervous and scared and you're going to the doctor and you're nervous for a diagnosis that the doctor is going to give you, you can be confident that there is nothing the doctor can say that will change how many days you have to live.

Right? The doctor can tell you what's going on with your body. They can tell you what is going on with your health. But there is nothing a doctor can say that will shorten a day of your life because your days rest in the hands of a sovereign God.

My brothers and sisters, trust in that God who fully knows your situation. Right? Amidst all the difficult and distressing news that swirls around us from war still going on between Ukraine and Russia to school shootings that still happen across our country to political uncertainty and economic unrest, live not in fear but in faith that your heavenly father has already determined your days and nothing this world throws at you can change that.

And so first, God knows what your situation is. But second, he also knows where your story began. And as David is reflecting on how much God knows him, he naturally goes all the way back to the beginning when God formed him and created him.

God knows all of us fully because he was the one who created us in the first place. God knows the beginning of our story. When we talk about God the creator, oftentimes we think about God the creator in very general terms, that he's the creator of the universe, that he's the creator of the heavens and the earth.

[16:55] And less often do we take time to reflect on God being our personal creator. Right? But that's what David does here, especially in verses 13 through 16. David describes God as knitting you in your mother's womb, that he intricately wove you together.

It's not dissimilar to what Isaiah says in Isaiah 64, that God was the potter and that you were the clay. And David is not just saying that God has only created your physical body, but he has also created your emotions, your desires, your passions as well.

Right there in verse 13, when David says, God formed my inward parts, that word inward parts literally could be translated to inner organs, which is a Hebrew idiom of saying your entire inner being.

Right? God knows you so well because he created everything about you, from how many hairs there are on your head, to why you are an extrovert, or to why you're an introvert. And that just shows us how much God cares about us.

Right? God was meticulous when he made you. He formed you with painstaking detail. One commentator put it this way, which I really liked. We, you and I, we don't come into existence just because of some biological reaction, but we are the product of divine artistry.

[18 : 15] Right? God knew you when you were in your mother's womb. He was forming you. He was, he knew you when you were an unformed substance. When nobody knew you, he was making you in secret. And if that is who our God is, a God who cares us so much that he carefully designed you, every last detail about you, then you know you can trust in him because he created you for a reason.

Right? God puts you on earth for a purpose. There is a reason why God made you the way you are. And that's what David praises God for there in verse 14, where he says, I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Right? And that phrase fearfully and wonderfully made initially can be confusing. Right? What does it mean to be fearfully made? But that phrase there has the idea of being distinct, right? Of being set apart.

David is praising God for creating him to be part of God's plan. Right? Similar to what the prophet Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 29, when he says, I know the plans I have for you, right?

Plans to give you a hope and a future to prosper you and not to harm you. We can trust God because God knows the beginning of your story. He has already written your story with a plot laid out, a plot that ends with your hope and with your future.

[19 : 33] But part of knowing our story is also knowing our faults and our failures. And God knows those too.

Right? Look at verse 11. It's part of the section in the Psalm where David has been asking God, where might he flee from his presence? David has already acknowledged there's nowhere he can go to escape God.

So he asks about a scenario in which darkness would cover him, where he'd be surrounded by darkness. Well, why would David want to hide from God? Why would he want darkness to surround him?

It's because David knows that he is a sinner. And David knows that God knows that full well. Right? We've seen this before in scripture when Adam and Eve sinned, right?

In Genesis, when they ate from the tree that God commanded them not to eat, they tried to hide themselves from God. Right? They didn't want God knowing what they did. And that's in the very beginning of scripture. If you go all the way to the end in Revelation, chapter 6, the apostle John, he has a vision of people on earth who are rebelling against God.

[20 : 39] And when God comes to hold them accountable, they call out, those people call out to the mountains and to the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the wrath of God. Right?

From the beginning of mankind to the end of humanity, nobody can stand it. When God comes to hold you accountable for your sins, our default reaction is to hide. And David knew that only too well.

Right? David was a man after God's own heart, but he was also a man that sinned miserably. And his most famous sin, we probably know is when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then later murdered her husband, Uriah.

Well, can you imagine what David felt like when he was being confronted by Nathan, the prophet? My secret, my deepest, darkest, most heinous crime is about to be, is about to come to light.

What is God going to do to me? Is God going to remove me as King of Israel? Is God going to forsake me and my family?

[21 : 43] Is God going to kill me? Right? Those might've all been thoughts that were running through David's head. And so naturally he might've wanted to run and hide from God.

He might've wanted to hide in the darkness, to hide in his sins so that the light would not shine on it. And so you can imagine the relief then when Nathan tells David, the Lord has put away your sin.

You shall not die. David still had to suffer the consequences of his sin, but the Lord did not forsake him. The Lord did not kill him.

Right? God knew how heinous David's sin was, and yet he still loved David. Well, friends, the same is true for you. God knows your sin.

He knows what you try to hide from everybody else, from your friends, from your coworkers, from your family. He knows the deepest, darkest secret that you will not want anyone to ever find out.

[22 : 47] And despite knowing all those things, he still loves you. And the question is why? Why does God still love you despite all your sin?

And the answer is because of David's greater son, Jesus. I look at verse 12 with me. David says, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day for darkness is as night, is as light with you.

Right? The darkest moment in the history of humanity was when Jesus Christ, the son of God, was crucified on a Roman cross for your sins and for my sins.

When God was knitting you together in your mother's womb, he knew that his only son was going to be torn apart on the cross for you. Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself and experience the ultimate darkness for you and for me.

But praise God, even the ultimate darkness was not too dark for God. God knew what he was doing. As David says in this psalm, truly darkness is as light with God.

[23 : 57] Jesus turned the darkest night in the history of humanity, also into our brightest day. His death washed our sins away. And then three days later, he rose from the grave, conquering sin and death so that you and I will one day also be guaranteed to rise with him.

Jesus went through that ultimate darkness so that you and I would never have to experience it. That's why even though God knows all your sins, even though he knows all the shame and guilt and dark secrets that you don't want, anybody else to know, despite all that, he still loves you.

He loves you because of what his son Jesus has done for you. Right? That's what, that's what's most amazing to me about this truth, that God knew all the sins you were going to commit. He knew all the wickedness that was in your heart, and yet he still sent Jesus to die for you.

That's how much God loves you. That's how much he cares for you. That's how much he treasures you. How can we not help but trust in a God who loves us that much?

Right? Who knew how sinful you and I were from the beginning and still sent his son to save us. And that leads me to my last point. God knows what you're searching for.

[25 : 14] Right? Knowing everything Jesus did for us, how he turned our darkest night into also our brightest day, how should we respond? What should be your heart's desire and my heart's desire?

Well, David tells us at least two things that we should desire and search for, and both those things are things that God knows, and he will provide them. And the first, David tells us we should look and ask for deliverance from sin and wickedness.

Verses 19 through 22 in the Psalm, David now shifts from praising God to asking God to deliver him from evil. To bring his righteous judgment on those who are against God.

Right? David has been reflecting on how much God knows him and cares for him, how God who formed him and knows all of his shortcomings still loves him and is there for him. And so David's response is one of loyalty to God and hatred for those who are against the Lord.

Well, what about you? What is your attitude towards sin? Does knowing how much Jesus sacrificed in order to save you, inspire you to hate your own personal sin?

[26 : 29] Do you have the same posture Isaiah did in Isaiah 6? When he encounters a vision of God, seated on a throne, high and lifted up, and Isaiah realizes that he is a man of unclean lips, because he has such a sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness.

Right? The truth here in Psalm 139 should spur us to want to be killing our own sin and not let our sin be killing us. But as you heard verses 19 to 22 read, or as you read them yourself, maybe you might feel a little bit uncomfortable saying the same things David says there.

Right? How can we pray what David prays, asking God to slay the wicked and to hate those who hate God? Well, you and I can pray those things in the same way that Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer.

Right? When you and I pray the words, thy kingdom come and thy will be done, that we are praying at the same time that the kingdom of Satan be destroyed, the enemies of God be eliminated.

Right? And after everything Jesus has done for us, we want his kingdom to come. We want his justice to reign. We want to be his loyal subjects. And the second thing, at least the second thing David tells us we should search for, and that is the way everlasting.

[27 : 51] Right? Not only should we be searching out our own sin and killing it, but we should be searching out how to live our lives in a way that glorifies God, that signals to the world that he has saved us, that we are his.

And that's how David ends this Psalm in verses 23 through 24. Right? Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

David wants God to fully know him. To know his worries, his hopes, his doubts, his aspirations. And he is looking to God to show him how to live amidst all those feelings.

Well, God knew that's what David was looking for, and he led David in the way everlasting. Is that also your heart's desire? Is that also what you're searching for?

My hope is that you will also make verses 23 through 24 your prayer. Right? And you can pray them even more confidently, and even more boldly than David, because you know already what Jesus has accomplished for you.

[29 : 04] Right? You can boldly ask God to search you, and know you, because you know that God fully loves you based on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Let me close with a personal story. When I was in high school, I had a Bible teacher who I really, really enjoyed because he was not only knowledgeable about his subject, but he also really cared about his students.

So I really enjoyed taking his class, but one time in the middle of the semester, there was a test or a midterm, and I didn't study well for it. I pretty much didn't study at all for it. And so on the day of the test, I cheated in order to get a better grade.

Now, the first couple days, I felt nervous. I felt ashamed. But after a week went by, and nothing happened, and so I knew he didn't catch me. But unbeknownst to me, one of my friends in the class saw me cheat, and she actually went and told my teacher.

And so a week later, I get a text from him, and he says, hey, would love to take you out for lunch. And in my head, I thought he wanted to catch up on how life was. I was a senior at the time.

[30 : 08] I thought he wanted to ask me about my college applications and how they were going. Naively, I thought that he was going to tell me how well I was doing in that class. I had no idea what was coming.

But so we got to lunch, and we sat down, and he said two words to me that I still remember to this day that shook me to my very core. When we sat down, he said the words to me, I know.

When I heard those two words, I froze. My heart was beating so fast. I thought those two words were going to be my condemnation. I thought I was going to get kicked out of school.

I thought I was going to get rejected by all the colleges I applied to. I thought I was going to bring shame on my family. I thought I was going to be rejected and forsaken by all my friends. But those two words, instead of being my condemnation, restored me and gave me life.

I still had to suffer the consequences of my sin. I still failed that test, but I was not kicked out of school. My teacher did not forsake me. Instead, what he did was he prayed with me.

[31 : 14] He cried with me. He forgave me for what I did. He loved that dumb 17-year-old boy who thought his world was crashing down.

Brothers and sisters, you have a God who is saying to you, I know. You have a God who knows your circumstances, who knows your sin, who knows that you long to be fully known and fully loved, and the good news is he does.

God fully knows you and he fully loves you because of his son, Jesus. So may we entrust our lives fully to him, knowing that he will lead us in the way everlasting.

Amen? Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who knows us. We thank you that you are the God who formed us in our mother's womb, that you are the God who has numbered our days, that you are the God who knows us and cares for us from womb to tomb, and that you are always with us.

We praise you that even the darkness is not dark to you, and that you sent your son, Jesus Christ, to suffer the ultimate darkness for us, and in doing so, turn that darkness into light.

[32 : 30] May we live our lives echoing David's prayer in this psalm, search us, O God, and know our hearts. Try us and know our thoughts. See if there is any grievous way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.