

# AM Psalm 139 The Infinite and Intimate God

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 16 January 2022

Preacher: Mr John Wilson

[ 0 : 00 ] Psalm 139. Psalm 139. It's a wonderful psalm. We're going to read the whole thing.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down, 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 a 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 send to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, 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.

[ 1 : 23 ] If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light 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 formed my inward parts. You knit 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 were none of them.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I were to count them, they are more than the sand.

[ 2 : 25 ] I awake, and I am still with you. O that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! 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. 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.

And we trust that God will bless that reading of his holy and inspired word to us on this Lord's day.

Seated. Let's ask for God's help as we unpack his word together.

Heavenly Father, we come this morning recognizing that in your word are all the treasures of wisdom. We ask, Lord, that you would speak through it this morning.

[ 3 : 28 ] Nobody comes to church just to listen to a man or to a preacher, but they come to hear the living word of God. And so, Lord, I ask that any carelessness this morning would fall to the wayside.

And what you have to communicate to the hearts of your people would be heard loud and clear. We ask this in Jesus' precious name for your glory. Amen. Amen. I want to begin this morning with a premise.

And it's this, that theology is really important. Theology is very important. Now, theology, after all, is the study of God.

It literally means God-knowledge. Theo, meaning God. Ology, meaning branch of knowledge. And the reason that theology really matters, the reason that theology is so important, is because God's people are called to know God.

And we're called to make God known to others. Your knowledge of God, or your lack of knowledge of God, will directly inform your life.

[ 4 : 41 ] It will inform the course of your life. Now, there are different kinds of knowledge in life, aren't there?

And there are whole branches of philosophy that are dedicated to the study of knowledge. But if we were just to take this at a very simple level, we might say there are three kinds of knowledge. There is empirical knowledge. That is fact-based knowledge. There is theoretical knowledge. Empirical knowledge tells us that a tomato, scientifically speaking, is actually a fruit, not a vegetable, as many people assume. Theoretical knowledge might lead us to assume, therefore, that we could include the tomato in our fruit salad.

But experiential knowledge would tell us it's probably not the best idea. And the idea is that the more advanced in years you get in life, the more experiential knowledge you acquire, and the wiser you should become, or at least in how to live in this world.

[ 5 : 56 ] Now, good theology, good knowledge about God, is always practical. So it doesn't just remain in the intellectual sphere, but it actually has an impact on how we live.

It shapes how we are. It shapes our worship. And so, if you're at a Bible study, or a midweek meeting, or something like that, and you go home and say, oh, we had a really good theological discussion tonight, but you fail to take away or think about how what you've learned actually impacts your life, and acted upon it, then actually it probably wasn't that great of a discussion after all, at least not theologically speaking, because true knowledge of God is always transformative. It affects how you live. Now, the reason I say all that at the beginning is because in this amazing psalm that we've just read, David, the king of Israel, the shepherd of Israel in Old Testament times, he engages in some amazing theology.

He's pondering both the infinite and the intimate attributes of God. And David's reason for doing theology is twofold.

Firstly, he doesn't want to be among the wicked that he calls out at the end of this psalm, those who he describes as murderous and blasphemous and bloodthirsty.

[ 7 : 28 ] He doesn't want to be like those evil doers. But secondly, he wants God to examine him. He wants God to search him out so that he might walk in the way everlasting.

He wants to find life. He wants eternal life. He wants to live forever. And as Boyce once said, it is hard to think of any more good reasons for doing theology than those.

But what we need to understand about this psalm is that David isn't just a theologian giving us kind of raw facts about God. He's actually a poet. He's somewhat of a songwriter.

He's a songsmith. And he's telling us about how his heart beats and responds to the facts about God. And it's why this psalm feels so emotionally charged at times.

Because it is actually an emotional psalm. His contemplation of God, which we might call an exercise in theology, has real practical implications for his life.

[ 8 : 35 ] And it packs a sobering punch. And he feels it right to its core. So this morning as we look at this psalm together, along with David, we're going to consider God's infinite and intimate attributes.

Now I'm going to use some big words here. I don't want you to freak out. Because I'm going to explain them and what they mean as we go along. Okay. So what we're going to look at firstly is God's omniscience.

Then we're going to look at his omnipresence. And thirdly and finally his omnipotence. But as I said, we'll explain what those things are as we go. And the aim this morning really is that you go away from here comprehending something of the God in which we worship that affects your life.

I want you to get stirred up by the knowledge of God a little bit. Because we're living in difficult days. And you need to know who God is. And what God is like. So God willing, if the Holy Spirit allows, that's what we'll accomplish this morning.

Firstly, verses 1 to 6. God's omniscience. Now, omni simply means all. Science from the Latin *scientia* meaning knowledge.

[ 9 : 50 ] In other words, when we talk about God's omniscience, we're talking about how God has all knowledge. And remember that, boys and girls?

God knows everything. And you might be thinking, everything? He knows everything. The psalmist says, you have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

You know when I sit, when I rise, and you perceive my thoughts from afar. So what does it mean that God has searched the psalmist?

The Hebrew word that is used here is *hakat*. And there's another place where it's used quite specifically in the Bible. And it's in the book of Numbers. Where Caleb and Joshua are spying out

the promised land.

They're doing a survey on the promised land. They're searching it out. And they're bringing back a report to Moses and the Israelites. This is the same word that is used here.

[10:56] And in other words, what David is saying is that God has gone deep down into the hidden places of David's heart. And he's spied him out.

He's searched him out. He's drawn up a report. And he knows David's true condition. Now just before the pandemic hit in 2020, I was buying a new car.

I was getting an upgrade because we had a wee girl on the way. And I was telling an elder at the church about this. And he said, you always know you're getting ripped off when you're buying a new car. It's just a question of how much.

Now when I go to look at a car, I'm looking at the outside. I'm looking at the car and saying, is it in a nice color that I like?

Are its wheels nice and shiny? Does it look a bit sporty? Could I see myself driving this cool car?

But my friend Wilden at our church, when he goes to look at a car, he sees it differently because he is a trained mechanic.

[12:00] And Wilden would be able to, if he was allowed to, he'd be able to flip up the bonnet. He'd be able to assess the engine. And being a mechanic, he could probably actually strip a car down to its components.

And he could assess the inward condition of the car and give it a health check and tell you what kind of state the car is in. Now similarly, God being omniscient with all knowledge can see right into the heart of a person.

And he knows our inward condition. Spurgeon, a famous Baptist preacher, a few centuries ago, he paraphrases this passage like this.

You have searched me as if you were looking for contraband goods. You have ransacked me. You have gone down into my heart and have spread out every secret part of my being.

The most intricate labyrinths of my soul are all observed by you. Your search has been an effective one. You have read the secrets of my soul.

[13:13] Now, being Spurgeon, he has an amazing way with words. But the point is, is that when our friends see us, they see the outside. They see the externals.

And we can put on a good show for our friends. We can put on a good show even for our family members and the people that know us best and more intimately than anyone. But when God looks at us, he sees into the heart.

He sees into the secret corners. And here's the thing. We can't hide from him. We can't deceive him. What's interesting is, David refers to him as his Lord.

Now, Lord in capital letters, as you read it in the Bible, is the English representation of the divine name of God. Yahweh or Jehovah.

And this is how God revealed himself to his people, Israel. It's the personal, intimate name of God.

[14:17] So David's telling us, this God who is infinite in his knowledge, in his omniscience, is also really intimate and personal at the same time.

He's near and he wants to be known. He's not distant, but is always present with his own people.

And so David can then say in verses 2 to 4, going into the intimate details, we might even say they're trivial, but he says, you know when I sit.

You know when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out, my lying down. You're familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you already know it, Lord. Completely. So the Lord's all-powerful knowledge is absolutely complete. It's absolutely whole. It's not lacking in any single area.

[15:18] There's nothing to know that God does not already know. David is saying he's acquainted with even the trivial, small things about us.

Our standing, our sitting, our yawning, our rising up, our going out. When you think about it, it's incredible. God knew what you were going to do today before even you did.

He knows our actions, our locations, our thoughts, our words, our ways. And Hebrews chapter 4 verse 13 says, concerning this all-knowing God, nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

The word perceive in verse 2 means to distinguish and to discern with insight.

And so it's not just that God has knowledge about David, that God has facts about David. But God knows the motivations of David's heart.

[16:26] He knows why David does what David does. And he knows the secret motivations of your heart and my heart this morning. And you might be thinking, I don't even know why I do the things I do sometimes.

But God does. He's familiar with all my ways, says David. And he's familiar with all your ways. So, the question then that we really need to ask when we think about God's omniscience, because remember, good theology is always transformative, is how does that make you feel? That there is someone, and not just someone, but there is someone who has that kind of knowledge about you.

because how this makes you feel, the knowledge of God's knowledge, will actually colour how you interpret the rest of this psalm.

[17:32] And you'll either read the next few passages in a positive way or a negative way. And most likely, that is deliberate on David's part. It really is a poem of literary genius.

It's fascinating to see how different authors interpret these next few passages. But David says in verse 5, you hem me in behind and before and you lay your hand upon me.

I beg your pardon, I'm reading the NIV there. But have you ever heard the expression that knowledge is power?

That if you have knowledge, you have a measure of power. Well, David says here, you place your hand over me. It's as if God has complete power over him.

Think of it like this cupping image of like an insect on a table and God's hand is over David. Now, that could be interpreted as God lovingly setting boundaries for David.

[18:44] A picture of God's divine protection protection. For those who walk with God, whose delight is in the law of God, as Psalm 1 says, and not in the counsel of the wicked, this could be seen as God's protection and God's caring and God's setting of boundaries.

But, if evil lurks in our hearts, and we know that when we take the whole counsel of God together, the whole Bible together, that evil actually, since the time of the fall, lurks in every single human heart.

Right from the cutest, adorable, tiny little baby to the sweetest old grandma. Evil lurks in every human heart.

And if that is the case, then actually the more you think about it, the knowledge of God's incomprehensible omniscience will actually it can be quite threatening.

It can be slightly unnerving. And we're told by Alan Ross that the word which is translated wonderful here, awe-inspiring, wonderful, does not necessarily express a pleasing and a happy response.

[20:06] Because what the psalmist is saying is that God's knowledge is wonderful in almost this dreadful, weighty, incomprehensible sense.

It's too high, he says. I can't prevail over it. It's too lofty. I can't attain it. It's like standing before a fortress or a castle whose walls are so high that you could never climb over them even if you tried. And bearing in mind this is a powerful man. This is the king of Israel here. And he's saying before these walls I stand absolutely powerless.

God's knowledge is wonderful. And because of this, because he is unnerved a little by this knowledge, he's looking for a way to escape.

He's looking to run away. He's looking for a way to flee, a way out which takes us to our next attribute. which is God's omnipresence.

[21:13] Verse 7 down to verse 12. Now to explain what omnipresence is, omni, again, means everything. And presence simply means that God is everywhere.

There is nowhere where God is not. Now, for those of you theologically minded in here, that is not to deny that God sometimes manifests his presence in a very special way.

Like in the incarnation, the person of Jesus Christ, like in the tabernacle in the Old Testament, and we're told that God sits on a throne in the heavens, yet even the heavens of heavens cannot contain him.

God is everywhere. And so David asks in verse 7 to 12, knowing this, where can I go from your spirit? Where can I go?

Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths or sheol, you are there. If I rise in the wings of the dawn or settle on the far side of the

sea, even there your hand will guide me.

[ 22 : 23 ] Your right hand will hold me fast. Now in Jewish thinking, typically, heaven was spatially located above. We talk about the heavens.

Sheol, or the realm of the dead, was thought as being somehow beneath our feet. And so you have a picture here of as far up as you could go or as far down as you could go and then David says, if I rise up on the wings of the dawn, the wings of the dawn, it's a way of saying, if I travel to the east at the speed of light, even there I can't get away from you.

Or he says, or if I settle on the far side of the sea, which would have been the west in that geography, he says, I can't shake you. I can't get away from your spirit.

Now, if like the prophet Jonah, you're seeking to run away from God, and actually, I think Jonah sings one of David's psalms when he's in the belly of the great fish, then that's a problem.

Because you can't shake off God, you can't run away from God. It's like when you watch the films or read the comics and Superman is there and he's trying to, the bad guys are trying to run away from Superman.

[ 23 : 48 ] Well, they can't hide because Superman's got x-ray vision. He knows where you are. He can see you. But if in the place that you've run away to, running from God, you find yourself in trouble, a place of darkness, and you need some help, and you need some guidance, then actually, suddenly, the idea of a loving God, whom you can't seem to lose or shake, even if you wanted to, will actually become an invaluable asset if you find yourself in trouble with nowhere to turn.

David says in verse 10, speaking of the ends of the sea, now, bearing in mind the sea in the Psalms is kind of thematic. It's always a picture of chaos. He says, even there your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. And he goes on to say in verse 11, if I say surely darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Now, in the Psalms, darkness is always associated with sickness, suffering, grief, even the possibility possibility of looming death and violence.

That's what darkness means in the Psalms. And as David was reflecting further on God's omnipresence, it's no longer a threat to him.

[ 25 : 36 ] It's no longer intimidating to him, but it becomes a comfort to him in times of darkness. Having a God who relentlessly pursues him to the ends of the earth means that wherever David encounters darkness in this life, he knows that his Lord is with him.

David realizes that if God has him by the hand, then even the darkness that he encounters will become as if it was light. And even if he or you or me should die, if that's how bad things get, if that is how dark things get, then it will become resurrection.

Because the people of God cannot lose the presence of God. We cannot lose God. And so what does David do now?

He's been thinking about God's complete knowledge. He's been thinking about God's presence which goes with him everywhere. Finally, he turns to a third attribute of God.

In fact, he doesn't just talk, he sings it. And it's God's omnipotence. This is a song after all. God's omnipotence verses 13 to 18.

[ 27 : 09 ] Now, we should define this again. Omni, once more meaning all or everything or complete. Potence meaning powerful. Okay? So, boys and girls, God has all power.

He's completely powerful. If we say that, wow, that soup was powerful or potent, we're saying it packs a powerful punch. Okay? God is all powerful. Remember that good theology is always practical.

David isn't just concerned with the facts, but reveals what it means to his life. Because David knows, and this is really important, that his life, however it came about, isn't just the result of random processes, that he is in fact fearfully and wonderfully made and constructed, made in such a way that it inspires reverential awe in David.

He says in verse 13 to 16, it's very intimate, for you created my inmost being. You knit 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 the secret place, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

[ 28 : 46 ] 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.

David is practically saying here, you knew me before I was born. You knew me when I was still in the womb. You saw my unformed substance.

It's mind boggling. But perhaps there's someone here this morning and you need to hear this. Perhaps you don't have very much esteem or self-esteem, which is what the culture tends to talk about.

You need to know what the Bible says about you. That you're not a mistake, that you're not just molecules in motion, that you've been made intricately by God and he loves you and he has a purpose for you and that purpose is to bring him glory.

And not to minimize the circumstances that brought you into this world or anything like that, but it was God who determined the time and the place and the history that you would be born, so that you would reach out to him even though he's not far from any one of us, the Bible would teach us.

[ 30 : 19 ] So, it doesn't really matter whether you're young or old or how you see yourself, whether you're abled or disabled or all these things, you have a glorious purpose.

Whatever your circumstance is to bring God glory and that you would find your joy and your happiness in that purpose. And this is what David knows.

And this God who created you and made you for his own purposes is actually always thinking about you. God has thoughts, David proclaims.

Now, it doesn't put you at the center of the universe, the fact that God is always thinking about you. But God is mindful of you because he wants to rescue you from your sin.

And he wants to redeem you and reconcile you to himself because our relationship, we're told, with him is broken. That's why he sent Jesus into the world.

[ 31 : 41 ] But nonetheless, he's always thinking of you. David says in verse 17 to 18, How precious to me are your thoughts, God. How vast is the sum of them.

Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. In other words, we go to bed at night. You know, and if we're not burned out with stress and anxiety, we go to bed at night and we should be able to switch off from our thoughts.

But God doesn't slumber. God doesn't sleep. God thinks about his children often. And that's important for someone here this morning who maybe thinks that, well, God couldn't possibly take the time to care about little old me.

You know, he's got the universe to run, he's got coronavirus to deal with, he's got lots on the go. That's what David says. God thinks about us often.

You know, my grandma has a picture of the day the queen shook the hand of my granddad and it was for architectural work he did up at Stirling Castle.

[ 33 : 03 ] And she's ever so proud of that photo because it was the day that the monarch took notice of my granddad. But in the scheme of things that's nothing compared to this.

Because the king of kings, the lord of lords, the almighty God and creator of all that exists actually thinks about us often because we have the capacity to glorify and honour him in a way that the rest of creation never even could.

Not even the stars in heaven with all their brilliance because we have been made in his image and in his likeness. And you know when we sing to God's psalms on Sunday, do we ever think of God singing with us as well?

It's right that our worship is vertical and we should sing to one another. Perhaps we don't do that enough. I don't know what it's like in this church. But God sings over his children often.

Zephaniah 3.17 The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you. In his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing.

[ 34 : 22 ] Now there's a context there of course but the point is that God sings over his children. Ever wonder what the voice of God, the singing voice of God must be like?

Amazing. Okay so we've considered all these attributes of God. His omniscience, his omnipresence, his omnipotence but we also need to ask what these things mean for God's enemies.

And I'm aware we're maybe running out of time a little bit so I'll not spend too long on this but it is important because people often don't finish this psalm and it's important that we read it in context.

David says if only you God would slay the wicked away from me you who are bloodthirsty they speak of you with evil intent your adversaries misuse your name do I not hate those who hate you Lord and abhor those who are in rebellion against you I have nothing but hatred for them I count them my enemies.

What David has to say here is a curse on the enemies of God and he does this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It's important for us to remember is that we're not David okay he was in a somewhat unique position as the king and shepherd of Israel and as went with the king so went with the nation very often but in his zeal he wants God to know that he hates God's enemies presumably because he understands that God's omniscience must compel God to hate evil.

[ 35 : 57 ] When I was a kid my dad followed Sir Alex Ferguson from Aberdeen to Manchester United I wasn't really that bothered about football to be honest I was a shinty boy but because my dad hated Arsenal I hated Arsenal what my dad loved I loved what my dad hated I hated.

Now there may be an element of that going on here I don't want to speculate too much on the word of God but there may be an element of this here. David hates what he sees God hating but we need to deal with that question does God actually hate the wicked?

We need to be delicate with it because there's nuance to this. On one hand the answer is clear in the scriptures that yes it's declared in a number of places because God is perfect love he must hate and abhor murderous evil.

but we also have to be really careful when talking about God's holy hatred because what we do is we take our experience of hating something of hatred which is often tinged with vengefulness and sinfulness and ugliness and we project those experiences onto God forgetting that God is not like us.

He has complete knowledge of the situation he has complete power and understanding and so when God does hate in his holy hatred he does so with perfect equity with perfect righteousness with perfect justice having all knowledge knowing and seeing all the angles and it's important to understand that although God hating wickedness does not actually delight in the destruction of the wicked it's proclaimed in a number of places Ezekiel 18 do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked declares the Lord rather am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live now what we have to do and we must do is talk about Jesus we haven't mentioned Jesus thus far and the reason it's so important is because Jesus revealed to us the love of God towards his enemies in his life and his death and in his resurrection and he left his followers a command he said you have heard that it was said now bearing in mind this is a

[ 38 : 40 ] Jewish audience in Matthew familiar with the Psalms you have heard that it was said love your neighbor hate your enemy but I tell you I'm telling you love your enemies agapeo them pray for those who persecute you and so for the Christian that rules out hating and cursing and Jesus gives his reasons he says because he causes the sun to rise on the wicked and the righteous and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous and he asks that we would do this so that you would be like your father in heaven that you would reflect God now why are we to love our enemies and not hate them it's because while we were God's enemies with our backs turned against God like sheep wandering our own way that Christ died for the ungodly we're told very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die but God demonstrates his love for us in this that while we were still sinners that means while we were still enemies enemies of

God Christ died for the ungodly and so when we read a psalm like this with a precatory element that's what it's called an imprecatory psalm we always must read it through the lens of our relationship with Jesus he's the only one that can pronounce a curse like that and as we pray in that way we may pray for justice to be done in parts of the world where wickedness seems to reign supreme it's okay to do that but we must come with a certain humility through the lens of Christ understanding that we were once enemies of God ourself but blessed be God that we've been now reconciled in Jesus Christ David described God's enemies as murderous but actually David stole another man's wife and then he had her husband murdered to cover things up and you wonder it's hard to know when this psalm was written exactly but you wonder if he wrote it before psalm 51 when he says against you only you have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight that you may be justified when you judge surely I was sinful from birth so to wrap up what is to be our response to the attributes of God well David says in verse 23 to 24 search me

God know my heart test me know my anxious thoughts see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting David David knew his shortcomings he knew all that he wasn't and yet he still asked God to search him to examine him so that he might find eternal life and that brings it to our application we can't hide our sin from God he's omniscient he knows everything we can't run away from him he's omnipresent he's everywhere we can't outwit him or outmaneuver him he's omnipotent he will overpower us but what we can do and what we're encouraged to do and told to do is throw ourselves at the mercy of Jesus the one whom God has provided for us as our saviour and we can do what the psalmist does trust in God's provision and our sins will be forgiven by the one who loves us and pursues us endlessly let's pray before we bring our service to a close and sing our final psalm