

# Before the face of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] 1-3-9, Psalm 1-3-9. I know this is quite a lot of people's, one of their favourite Psalms, but let's read through before Ray comes to talk and preach to us. Psalm 1-3-9.

Okay.

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord.

You hem me in behind and before. You have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

[ 1 : 15 ] Where can I go from your spirit? 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, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn. If I settle on the far side of the sea. Even there, your hand will guide me. Your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say surely the 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 as you. For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

[ 2 : 18 ] My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O 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. If only you would slay the wicked, O God.

Away from me, you bloodthirsty men. They speak of you with evil intent. Your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them. I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

[ 3 : 26 ] Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting.

May God bless that reading to us. Thank you, Paul. Hello, everyone. My name is Ray Burbank. And I'm an elder at Charlotte Chapel here in Edinburgh.

And it's good to be with you again. I was here back in the spring. And so if I haven't met you yet, we'd love to get to say hi to you before you head out this evening. So as Paul read, we're in Psalm 139 this evening.

We're going to look into God's word. And before we do that, let me say a prayer and ask for God's help. Father, as we open now your precious word, that God, we just ask that you give us ears to hear what you have to say to us.

Lord, help us by your spirit, we pray, to understand rightly. Lord, that we wouldn't take scripture and to mean what we want it to mean.

[ 4 : 32 ] But, Lord, that we would understand what you are communicating here. Lord, not just that we would fill our minds with truth and good things, but that we would be changed.

That we would respond in obedience to your word. That, God, through your word, you would make us more and more like Jesus. So, Lord, help us. Now we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, you know, the smartphone has really changed a lot of things, hasn't it? Many of you probably have some sort of kind of device that knows a lot about us, right?

Our smartphones have changed not only the way we can communicate, but we can know a lot about our daily routine and even our health and our travel patterns and spending patterns.

You know, on the iPhone, they have this feature called Screen Time. If you go on there, it can be very kind of troubling when you see how much time you might spend on certain apps, right?

[ 5 : 37 ] And, you know, they have health apps that tell you how many steps that you've taken. Which I have to say, after moving to Scotland, I take way more steps, which I'm very thankful for. Americans, we never walk anywhere, actually.

We will drive even if it's just down the road. We have to drive, you know. But they have features like this. There are apps that show you your spending habits, your saving habits.

Probably the scariest of all are the location trackers, right? I'm pretty sure my Google Maps app knows where I want to go before I know where I want to go.

You know, it has these suggestions that pop up. So our phones know a lot about us. Sometimes better than we know ourselves in some ways. Well, what we see here this evening in Psalm 139 is that God knows all about us.

All about you and me. We are never hidden from Him. But God is not like a smartphone. He knows us personally.

[ 6 : 49 ] He's a personal God. He doesn't just, you know, know facts about us and compute facts about us. He knows us intimately because He made us.

Now, if we are without Jesus Christ, if we don't have faith in Christ, then this should be actually a troubling thought.

That God knows everything about us and what we have done. Without the forgiveness and the renewal that we find in the gospel of Jesus, we stand exposed to God in a terrifying way because we know that we will receive His righteous condemnation.

But the good news, though, for us is that if you are in Christ, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, God's knowledge of us is a precious thing.

We want Him to know us, to search us, to root out the ways that we are not trusting Him and to turn our will to His will.

[ 7 : 55 ] This is how the psalmist here sings to God in Psalm 139. So what I want us to see this evening is three ways that God knows us personally.

So three ways that God knows us, and then a fourth point on our response to that. The proper response to God's knowledge. You know, when you look at the psalms, if you look down, you'll see sometimes they have these little headings at the beginning.

Sometimes they're in italic font or sort of an all-caps font in your Bible. So for example, in Psalm 139, it says, To the choir master, or yours might say, To the director of music, something like that. A psalm of David. That's actually original to the old Hebrew script. Those little identifiers. It reminds us that who wrote this one.

So David, King David. This is, you know, 2000 BC, long ago. But it also shows us to the choir master, the director of music, the psalms were like songs that the people of Israel would sing in their gathered worship.

[ 9 : 02 ] Like how we just got done singing some songs. These psalms that we have in our Bible, they would not just read them like we do, they would actually be put to a tune and you could sing them.

And some, many Christians still do that to this day. You might do that here in Westerhales sometimes. So it's a beautiful thing that we get to read about in this psalm and to think about how David would have sung this to the Lord and how we can sing it.

Maybe metaphorically, if you don't like singing out loud. But how can we respond to God from what we see here in Psalm 139? Well, let me consider, let's consider first, the first way that the Lord knows us.

The Lord knows you, number one, in all you think and do. He knows you in all you think and do.

This is what we see in verses one to six.

Look at verse one with me. David sings, Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You have known me. David immediately makes it personal, doesn't he?

[10:10] He doesn't just say, Lord, you know all things. No, he says, Lord, you know me. He takes this truth about God that could be kind of up in the clouds, right?

God is all-knowing, but he makes it personal. He applies it to himself personally. He says, Lord, you have searched me. Search me.

This idea of examining, inspecting. Not that God doesn't know something already. It's not that he's looking for something that he doesn't already know, but it gives this idea that God does not just know about David from a distance in some general sense.

The Lord has looked around inside David. He's seen all the details of him as an individual. He says, Lord, you know me.

He knows David. Not just facts about David. Not just who he is, but personally knows who he is. So those two kind of phrases, right?

[11:22] Searched me and known me. Those are the key ideas here, right? So as you look through the rest there in verses 2 through 6, the Lord has searched David on the inside, discerned his thoughts.

He's familiar with all his ways, all his words. The Lord knows David. He knows when David sits down, when he gets up, where he walks, where he goes to bed.

And finally in verse 5, the Lord hems David in, or he encircles David. David can't help but see the Lord at every turn.

He can't turn anywhere without the Lord seeing him. And so that's why in verse 6, there's this expression of awe, this moment where he has to praise God and say, such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

It's too amazing. Have you ever had a moment like that on anything? Have you ever discovered something that you just say, whoa, whoa, whoa. That is too high for me.

[12:35] It's beyond me. It's something that I can't even relate to. I was watching a video the other day about the only time that the United States tested a hydrogen bomb.

A hydrogen bomb. Now, this was way back in the 1950s, way out in the desert. And they have footage of this. You can find it on YouTube. And you might be familiar with, during the Second World War, that two atom bombs were dropped on cities in Japan.

Well, a hydrogen bomb is many times more powerful than an atom bomb. Think about that. So when I saw this, it was one of those moments that, I couldn't even compare it to anything I've ever witnessed before.

It was just one of those whoa moments. When you're watching something so massive, so powerful, so engulfing. When we spend time thinking about God's knowledge of us, we should recognize how incredible it really is.

It should lead us to two sort of positions, right? One, humility. Because we recognize that our knowledge is so much smaller than God's.

[13:53] God sees every thought, every word, every action we do, whether good or bad. And God doesn't just see our, you know, social media account, where we look perfect, right?

We have the filter on, or, you know, you have that great quote or something you want to say that's really sharp and really good. No, God sees us all the time. This should lead us to a position of humility to recognize how fallen we are from who God's own character is.

But secondly, it leads us to worship. It leads us to humility. It also leads us to worship like David does. You know, David says in Psalm 8, What is mankind that you are mindful of them?

Human beings that you care for them. God, who is all-knowing and almighty, chooses to look at me, at you.

He searches us, knows us, in all this creation, all the universe, He looks down at you. And if you've come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, think of how, in spite of how God knows all your sin, He still offered up His Son for you.

[15:21] He's adopted you as His child. God, His knowledge of you is complete. He knows you completely. And His salvation in Christ covers you completely.

That's an amazing thing. It leads us to worship. So this is the first way that God knows us, right? The Lord knows you in all that you think and do.

And then secondly, the Lord knows you no matter where you go. No matter where you go. Verses 7 to 12. That's what we see here. This section begins with two rhetorical questions.

David asks, Where should I go from your spirit? Or where should I flee from your presence? And then he lists, you know, several kind of scenarios that he could put himself in.

You know, if I ascend up to heaven, you're there. If I make my bed down in the depths in Sheol, the old Hebrew word for the underworld, well, even there you are there.

[16:25] Even in darkness. In darkness, when you could feel completely hidden, He's not hidden to the Lord. Everything lies uncovered and exposed before the eyes of the Lord.

We are never hidden from the Lord. We can never escape His presence. Now, does this mean that David wants to flee from the Lord?

Does he want to flee from God? It's possible. That could be kind of the desire here. I mean, it could be a natural response, right? To what we saw in verses 1 to 6.

It's how exposed we are to God. The natural response would be to want to run and hide like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, right? But look at verse 10.

He says, Even there, even there, your hand shall lead me. Your right hand shall hold me. So we can also read this as David's assurance.

[17:29] Assurance that the Lord will always be there to guide him. Even when David is in remote places. You might remember from David's own life.

There was a time when he had to hide in caves because there were men out to kill him. There were times when he had to work in the pasture fields as a shepherd boy while his older brothers got to go meet with the prophet Samuel to get possibly picked to be the next king, you know.

But David was forgotten about. He's the youngest. His father didn't even bring him in. No matter where David is, no matter how hidden and dark things may seem, the Lord is always there.

Let me ask you a question. When do you feel the closest to God? Let me put it another way.

You know, in what place do you feel like you are kind of nearest to God? Where is that? Maybe many would say, well, when I gather with the church family on Sunday.

[18:39] Or maybe you would say, you know, in your morning kind of devotional time. Or maybe, you know, if you've participated in some kind of event that, you know, evangelistic outreach event or something like that.

Well, what this psalm shows us is that the Lord is always present. He's always knowing you. Now, I hope this doesn't put you off coming to church.

You know, the elders may not invite me back if that's the case. But what the point is, is that the Lord is always there. If you're a believer in Christ, this is especially true because He has made His Holy Spirit to dwell inside of you.

What did Jesus say to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4? He said, A time is coming when you will worship the Father, neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

A time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. You're not near to the Lord in the church building or even in your private devotions.

[19:40] The Lord is not simply with you on those few times in the week or more distant from you in the rest of your daily life. When you go to your workplace, when you take your children to school, when you talk with the grocery worker, when you stay in a hotel alone, when you're admitted to the hospital, when you watch a movie at home, you're never hidden from the Lord.

You, Christian, are His child. His Spirit dwells within you and He will be there to guide you, to hold you fast. But here's the question.

Are we staying alert to His presence in those times? Are we abiding in Him?

Or are we compartmentalizing our relationship with God? So the Lord knows you in all you say and do, and no matter where you go.

And this leads us to the third way that God knows us that we see here. And that is that He knows us because we are His own workmanship. The Lord knows you as His own workmanship.

[21:00] We see that in verses 13 to 18. Look at verse 13. David says, For you formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb.

David says that the Lord not only knows everything about me today, He knew me at my beginning. He uses this incredible imagery, right, to describe how God knit him together in his mother's womb. He was woven together. This reminds me of these handmade rugs that I used to see in a market in India. So my wife and I lived over in South Asia for a while and we would see these markets where you'd have these incredible handmade rugs.

and they would take months of just close work. People would get arthritis and go blind almost after a career of doing this because it was so intricate.

The details of it would take so much time and it was amazing. These kinds of rugs you could find. And that's the imagery that we see here, the intentionality, the precise, intimate work that God was doing in creating each one of us.

[ 22 : 08 ] So verse 4, you know, is a commonly quoted passage. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Fearfully made, you know, means that God created humans in a special way out of all of His creation.

He made us to be in relationship with Him, to have capacity to know and relate with God. That we are moral and accountable beings.

That we were made for eternity. And David says, we are wonderfully made. He even says that humans are part of God's works in the world.

Wonderful works. Do you ever see people that way? Do you ever view people that way? Do you ever just spend time in a busy area here in Edinburgh and just watch a crowd and just think, wow, wonderful works of God.

God knows us now. So not only does God know us now, He knows our past, but verse 16, He knows our future.

[ 23 : 16 ] The days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them, the Lord knew them all. You know, this point is not to delve into kind of the details of God's future knowledge and human free will.

The point is really is to show how deep God's knowledge of us is and how involved He is in each of our lives. And David can't help but pause again for worship in verses 17 and 18.

Much like in verse 6, you know, this is another moment for David to stand in awe of God's knowledge of Him. And he says, How precious to me are your thoughts, God.

God's many thoughts concerning David in his beginning, in his activities today, and in his future. The thoughts of God are precious to the child of God.

So the Lord knows you because He made you. God is committed to watching over His creation.

[ 24 : 24 ] You know, He won't abandon the works of His hands. We've seen in this psalm three ways that the Lord knows each one of us intimately. And all we do and say, no matter where we go, and He knows us as His own workmanship.

So how does David respond to such wonderful truths? And how should we respond? Well, that's what we see in the final section of the psalm here in verses 19 to 24.

Therefore, flee the evil way and follow the everlasting way. That's the final point that we see here.

Flee the evil way and follow the everlasting way. So that praise that He gives in verses 17 and 18, right, it's kind of like a transition now to start saying like, wow, look how amazing God is.

Now, look how messed up the world is. Look how messed up these other ways that I could take that would take me away from the Lord. He goes from seeing the majesty of God to seeing how, more sharply, how evil, the evil that exists in the world and the proneness to evil that exists even in His own heart.

[ 25 : 43 ] Now, you know, He seems to say some harsh things here, doesn't He? He says, oh, that you would slay the wicked. You know, David's not seeking personal vengeance here.

He's making the right conclusion that if God sees all, He must be seeing all the terrible things that evil people are doing all around David.

We know what this feels like, don't we? When we hear of terrible acts of crime or selfish acts of theft or abuse, we know what a right desire for justice feels like.

And this is what David is expressing. He's calling out to God knowing that God will not let evil go unpunished. David also says that he hates those who hate God and abhors those who are in rebellion against God.

Now, we shouldn't take this to mean that we should be cruel or abusive towards those who are not Christians, who do not believe in the God of the Bible. Jesus commands us to love our enemies and bless them even.

[ 26 : 52 ] But what this psalm shows us is that we should not associate with the things of evil, the purposes of evil and the people who pursue them. We should be associated with God and His purposes in the world.

We should love the things that God loves and hate the influence of sin in our lives. The ways of the Lord are precious and wondrous, but the ways of the wicked are detestable.

You know, one of my, probably my most favorite psalm is Psalm 1. Great, great psalm that brings out this contrast. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of mockers, but his delight is on the law of the Lord.

And on His law He meditates day and night. He's like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

in everything He does He prospers. But the wicked are not so. They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

[ 28 : 06 ] Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

That's that contrast that David is making here at the end of Psalm 139 as well. So David began the psalm by saying, Lord, You have searched me and known me.

And then, look there in verse 23 and 24. How does he end it? He says, Lord, search me. Know my heart.

Try me. Know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Friends, that's what gospel-based integrity looks like.

It's about receiving the searching eyes of God in our lives. Bringing out into the light of his presence and saying, Help me.

[ 29 : 14 ] Help me, God. Root out any offensive way in me. Please lead me in your everlasting way. The way of eternal life in Christ. This is our application tonight, friends.

This is the main application that we see from this psalm. Living before the face of God in gospel-based integrity. You can go to the next slide there. Living before the face of God in gospel-based integrity.

that everything we do would be for God's honor and glory because we know that he is watching.

There's this great Latin phrase you could remember just, Coram Deo.

Coram Deo just means before the face of God. Living Coram Deo. You can make a cool t-shirt out of that. Even the things we do in public or in secret, we would do them to honor the Lord.

I think we can recommit ourselves to this kind of integrity in three ways. Number one, reject the lie of secrecy. Don't believe the lie that you can do something in complete secret.

[ 30 : 29 ] You know, this is how habitual sin can begin in our lives. Nothing you and I do is ever secret. Nothing is ever truly done in secret.

We actually deceive ourselves when we think that we are alone. That's what we want to tell ourselves sometimes. When we're tempted to do something we know we shouldn't do or when we should do the right thing but we don't do it, we don't want to do it, it's often in those times when we are alone and we think no one would know.

And that's actually a lie. We're never alone. There's always someone who knows and in the end his is the only opinion that matters.

So brothers and sisters guard yourselves from sin. Let's guard ourselves from sin by remembering that the Lord knows us all the time. And number two, be honest.

God's knowledge leads us to be honest. Honest with God. Honest with each other. James 5.16 says to confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed.

[ 31 : 48 ] Friends, will you be honest with God? Will you come alongside your brothers and sisters in this church, find someone that you can talk to and be honest with them, ask for help, confess your sins and love each other.

Number three, take comfort in God's knowledge. Take comfort in God's knowledge of your situation. It gives us comfort that one, we're never alone, but number two, when we do the right thing, when we do good deeds and no one notices, that can be disappointing, right, sometimes? We don't want to be selfish, but it is hard when we seek to do the right thing, but it's like we never can kind of be recognized for it, but God knows.

That's Jesus' whole sermon on the mount. So many times, if you go back and read that in the Gospel of Matthew, he's saying over and over again, and when you do these acts of obedience, your Father in heaven who sees will reward you.

So let's remember the greater reward is not in the approval of others. It's in our Father in heaven who sees. So God's knowledge of us motivates us toward integrity.

[ 33 : 16 ] It reassures us in times when we believe we're alone. And finally, notice that I said Gospel-based integrity, because we see clearly the Gospel here in Psalm 139.

God knows us completely even the things we're ashamed of, and yet He still chose to provide the way for us to be made clean, to be forgiven.

Here's the good news, friends. Through Jesus Christ, even though God sees all the ways that we rebel against Him, Jesus Christ has come to provide the way to be made right with God, to be forgiven of all those things that we're ashamed of, to bring us into a right relationship with God, no longer as a rebel and an outcast to Him, but as a child.

Perhaps you're hearing this and it struck you for the first time. Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, or maybe you would call yourself a Christian, but somehow this is clicking like it never has before, and you realize you need to come clean before God.

You need to be honest with God. Well, friend, I would tell you, look to the Lord Jesus Christ. He died on the cross in our place, bearing God's righteous wrath against sin, so that we wouldn't have to bear it.

[ 34 : 49 ] And He rose again three days later, and will give eternal life to any who look to Him. Don't look to yourself, turn from yourself, and turn to Jesus in faith.

1 John 1 7, I'll close with this, He says, in 1 John 1 7, He says, But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So you see, friends, the believer in Christ doesn't try to hide from God anymore. We ask God to reveal how we are grieving Him. We ask Him to show us how we are not trusting Him completely. We want God to root out and renew our trust in Him, in His ways, that His way is best, not this way of evil in the world.

[ 36 : 01 ] That's how the believer can end the psalm like these final verses. Let's put the final two verses on the screen. Maybe you need to memorize these verses for yourself.

Make this a prayer each day for the next month. It would be wonderful, wouldn't it? the Lord knows you and me.

What a delight. Let's commit ourselves to the Lord's everlasting way, friends. I'm going to take a moment here and just there in your chairs, silently, why don't you take a moment and reflect on what we've seen here in this psalm.

Silently pray back to the Lord these verses. Then I'll close this in prayer and we'll close with our final psalm. Just take a moment. Lord, we pray with the psalmist David, search me.

Search me, God. Know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. God, we want to receive your sight.

[ 37 : 42 ] We want to receive your knowledge. We want you to look and to search and to help us see how we have grieved you, Lord. How we have ignored you, Lord.

How we have failed to uphold what you've called us to as your children, Lord. As your people. As believers in Christ. And Lord, we do this because we know that through Jesus Christ, Lord, we can come to your throne knowing that it is a throne of grace.

We can come with confidence, with an assurance, not a confidence in our own righteousness in ourselves. We come with a confidence in the Lord Jesus who paid the price for our sin.

And through Jesus now, Lord, we pray that you would help us, Lord, to see how we need to root out the things in our life that are keeping us from you and from obedience to you.

[ 38 : 56 ] And Lord, we ask with your help by the Holy Spirit that you would lead us in obedience on the way of eternal life. Lord, that we would be able to worship you as this psalm reflects.

Lord, thank you for all these things you've shown us tonight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're going to close with a final song. He will be