



My God and I

(Psalm 139)

Have you ever felt all alone? Have you ever thought that no one cares? Have you found it hard to live as you ought to live? Have you found it hard to have *the motivation* to be what you should be, to do as you should do? Have you ever needed greater strength in your life?

One of the wonderful characteristics of the Bible is that it tells of real flesh-and-blood individuals, people who felt as I feel, who laughed as I laugh, who cried as I cry. This lesson is about one such person, a favorite of so many, the great King David.¹ When we want to know about the heart and feelings of David, we go to the Book of Psalms. We will now look at a psalm that tells us much about David, one of the greatest of David's psalms, Psalm 139. "It is a psalm of encouragement, inspiration, and instruction; it is as practical as Tuesday nights, as lofty as the sun."²

This is not just a lesson about David and one of his psalms. It is a lesson about you and me and our God. It will help answer the questions we asked a moment ago. If we feel all alone, if we need help living as we ought to live, if we need strength, if we need a clearer concept of God, Psalm 139 can help.

MY GOD IS WONDERFUL!

(Vv. 1–16)

In verses 1 through 16, David began the psalm by saying, in effect, "My God is so wonderful!" This is probably the greatest passage in the Bible on the omniscience, omnipresence, and

omnipotence of God, but it is more. It is about a *personal* God whose omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence *bless* the lives of His own.

My God Knows and Understands Me!

(vv. 1–6)

In the first six verses, David spoke of the omniscience (all-knowing character) of God, but he said much more than that. He said, in effect, "My God knows and understands *me*."

David began by borrowing from the language of those who dig deep into the earth to recover precious gems. "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me" (v. 1). As the miner searches the earth by stripping it away layer by layer to expose its contents, so God had searched the heart of David. As a result, God knew all there was to know about David.

"Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up" (v. 2a). David used extremes here to express the idea of "everything." We might say, "God, You know me from A to Z." David said, "You know me when I am sitting and when I am standing." In other words, "You know me all the time. You know me regardless of what I am doing."

Next, David said, "Thou dost understand my thought from afar" (v. 2b). Often we do not understand ourselves, but God knows our thoughts and motives—why we do the things we do. The writer of Hebrews said that God is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And

there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12, 13).

Verse 3 continues the thought: “Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways.” The word “scrutinize” is from the Hebrew word for “to winnow or sift.” It indicates the thoroughness of God’s knowledge of us. The word “path” refers to the way we go, the active parts of our lives. “Lying down” can refer to rest. David was saying, “You know me when I’m engaged in activities; You know me when I’m at rest.” (“Path” can also refer to the public moments of life, while “lying down” can refer to the private part of life.³ If the words mean this, David was saying, “You know me when I am before the people—when I am on my throne, when I am leading the army—but You also know me in my private life, in my most intimate moments.”)

David said that God knows our deeds and our thoughts; then he said that God knows our words. His next statement was stronger yet: “*Even before* there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all” (v. 4; emphasis mine). David said, “Even before I say anything, Lord, You know what I am going to say and why I am going to say it.”

“Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me” (v. 5). The NKJV has “You have hedged me behind and before.” God had *surrounded* him. David knew what it was like to surround a city with an army. This, however, was not surrounding to destroy, but surrounding to protect. God’s hand of protection and care is laid upon us!

As David considered God’s encompassing care, he exclaimed: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it” (v. 6). The “knowledge” spoken of here is God’s knowledge of us. I cannot understand how God knows what He knows. I cannot comprehend the omniscience of my God—but I thank Him for it! “For He Himself *knows* our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust” (Psalm 103:14; emphasis mine). “Your heavenly Father *knows* that you need all these things” (Matthew 6:32; emphasis mine).

If one is not living right, there can be no more terrifying thought than this: “God knows every-

thing about me, everything!” “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). On the other hand, if one’s heart is stayed on God, there can be no more comforting thought than this: “My God, who loves me and cares for me, knows my every need!”

My God Is Always Near! (vv. 7–12)

In the next six verses, David spoke on the omnipresence of God, the fact that God is everywhere at once. David was specific; he said, in effect, “My God is always near *me!*”

The language David used is so beautiful: “Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?” (v. 7). In other words, “Lord, if I wanted to get away from Your presence, where could I possibly go?” Jonah found out the hard way that no one can flee from God’s presence.

“If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there” (v. 8a). If I were able to go as high as heaven, You would still be there. “Heaven” here probably refers to the abode of God, but I am reminded of the Russian cosmonaut who first went into space and reported, “I have been in space and I did not see God.” Someone remarked, “If he had taken off his spacesuit and stepped outside his space capsule, he would have seen God soon enough!” This unbeliever could not see God with his naked eyes, but David said, “He is there!”

“If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there” (v. 8b). “Sheol” refers to the abode of the dead. David now imagined traveling in the opposite direction. He said, in other words, “If I could go deep as to even enter the abode of the dead, even there I would not escape Your presence. You would be there also!”

David next pictured moving horizontally: “If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me” (vv. 9, 10). In other words, “If I were able to fly with the sun from the east to the west to the far side of the Mediterranean Sea, I could not escape Your presence.”

What about the darkness? Many apparently believe that they can do whatever they want as long as it is dark. They seem to think, “No one will ever know.” The police tell us that most crimes committed in large cities are committed

at night. Listen to David:

If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,
And the light around me will be night,"
Even the darkness is not dark to Thee,
And the night is as bright as the day.
Darkness and light are alike to Thee (vv. 11, 12).

Darkness may be fearful to me, but it is not to God. I may not be able to see in the dark, but my God can. Prentice Meador has suggested:

Parents, in order to really get this across to our children, we can take them into one of the rooms of our house, maybe a large bedroom, after dark, and close the door, so that it is completely dark. Then when they can't see us because of the darkness, we rub our nose, raise our hand, or kick our leg, and ask them if they know what we've done, if they can see us. Then we are careful to tell them that darkness doesn't make any difference to God. He saw us rub our nose, raise our hand, kick our leg.⁴

Was David telling about God's omnipresence to make us fear God? These truths *should* make us afraid if we have done things we are ashamed of, but that was not David's primary purpose for stressing God's omnipresence. Let us go back to verse 10: "Even there Thy hand will *lead* me, and Thy right hand will *lay hold* of me." (Emphasis mine.) David was saying that no matter *where* he was, his God was right there with him. Whether he was at home or away, whether it was night or day, wherever he was and whatever the circumstances, God was with him. God would lead him, uphold him, and strengthen him! John Greenleaf Whittier wrote in "Eternal Goodness,"

I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

My God Made Me and Has a Plan For My Life! (vv. 13–16)

In the next few verses, David was obviously thinking of the omnipotence of God, the fact that God is all-powerful—as illustrated by creation. As the psalm has progressed, it has become more and more personal. David, therefore, did not speak of creation in general. Rather, he spoke of his own creation.

He began this thought with these words: "For Thou didst form my inward parts" (v. 13a).

The NIV has "For you created my inmost being." In the original language, this means, "You gave me my desires and feelings. You formed my emotional structure." David continued: "Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb" (v. 13b). David used the language of the craftsman. In his day, no more intricate work was done than the detailed work of one who created a masterpiece in wool or flax. If David were writing today, he might speak of the electronic engineer working with his intricate circuitry. Like a skilled craftsman, God formed David in his mother's womb!

God is the source of "the miracle of life." Men speak glibly of "life formed in a test tube," but all scientists can do is put together the components God supplies. We are made by *God*. (Incidentally, does this not say something about the aborting of that creation of God?)

As David thought about God's creating his body and his personality, he praised God and said, "I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (v. 14a). We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" physically. Consider our bone structure. Even a specialist in orthopedics does not know or understand all there is to know about our bones. Consider our muscular structure. We have about 446 muscles—some connected, some separate, some crossing others, some going through others—but all working together. Take a deep breath. You just used at least one hundred of those muscles without even realizing it!

Consider the circulatory system, specifically the heart. The heart beats about 100,000 times every twenty-four hours. It does this for a lifetime, whether that lifetime is two years or one hundred and two years. Each ventricle holds about an ounce of blood, and the heart contracts about four thousand times an hour. That means about 250 pounds of blood pass through the heart each hour. Since each of us has twenty-five pounds of blood in our bodies, this means that once every six minutes all the blood in our bodies circulates through the entire body! (If we could see half of what is happening in our bodies at any given time, we would probably sit down immediately and be afraid to move!)

How marvelous the human body is—always operative but always under repair, always open for business but always in a state of change! Indeed, "I *am* fearfully and wonderfully made"!

More important, I am “fearfully and wonderfully made” emotionally and spiritually, for I am made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). No wonder David concluded verse 14 with these words: “Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well.” My soul may not understand *how* God works, but at least my soul knows it is wonderful. How could I fail to praise Him?

“My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth” (v. 15). “Skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth” is a poetic way of saying that God continued the work spoken of in verse 13: “Thou didst weave me in my mother’s womb.” “The depths of the earth” refers to the place deep inside the mother where the baby is formed. In the original, “skillfully wrought” again uses words for weaving which suggest “wrought with a variety of beautiful threads.” What a beautiful way to speak of the tiny, unborn baby as the various members of his body begin to take shape! God works “in secret,” in cooperation with the mother and the father, to bring this new life into existence.

“Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they⁵ were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (v. 16). David said, in effect, “All that happens in the womb does not happen by accident. The design was written down in God’s book before I was ever conceived [this may have reference to the genetic code], and then God supervised the whole arrangement. Further, God’s design for my life did not end at birth. He continues to have a plan for my life!”

David was not teaching predestination, but he was saying that God is vitally interested in each of us from conception to death. Further, He has a *plan* for your life. He does not force you to go the way He desires, but the only real and lasting happiness is found in conforming to God’s will for your life!

THEREFORE, I MUST MAKE HIS THOUGHTS AND WAYS MY OWN! (Vv. 17–24)

David spoke of how wonderful his God (and our God) is. As he considered these truths, he closed the psalm with this conclusion: “I must, therefore, make His thoughts my thoughts and His ways my ways.”

Let Me Become Like God (vv. 17–22)

First, let me become like God *in thought*.

Verses 17 and 18 could easily belong to the previous section on how wonderful God is: How wonderful are God’s thoughts! I prefer, however, to make them part of this closing section:

How precious also are Thy thoughts to me,
O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would outnumber
the sand (vv. 17, 18a).

Have you ever considered the thoughts of God? David did. Consider the thoughts of God regarding the world around us. Everything we see originated with a thought of God. Everything we know was first a thought of God. Everything we shall discover has already been a thought of God.

Ponder the knowledge explosion of the past few decades. No building can contain the books that record all this knowledge, so we resort to microfilm. In any given field of knowledge, no individuals can comprehend the entire field, so experts are forced to specialize. Each fragment of this massive body of knowledge was first a thought of God! No wonder David wrote, “How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the [grains of] sand [on the seashore]”!

More wonderful still, consider God’s thoughts concerning man and his salvation: the sending of Jesus, the death of Jesus on the cross, the provisions made for us to benefit from His death through faith and obedience, the spiritual provision of the church, and God’s plans for eternity. Further, consider the fact that most of the thoughts of God are not revealed in nature or in the Bible (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 5:8, 9). As we consider all this—much of which was unknown to David—we can say with even greater intensity, “How precious also are Thy thoughts to me, O God!”

God’s thoughts *should* be precious to us—and we should strive to make His thoughts our thoughts. Verse 18 closes with the words “When I awake, I am still with Thee.” Whether sleeping or awake, David’s thoughts were stayed on God.

Let us also become like God *in attitude*.

The next four verses are startling when we first read them, especially when we read them

from a Christian viewpoint. They seem out of character with the high and lofty thoughts David had been expounding. However, truth can be gleaned from them.

David had been thinking about the holy God. As he turned his thoughts to mankind, in contrast with a holy God, he saw men as unholy.

O that Thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God;
Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.
For they speak against Thee wickedly,
And Thine enemies take Thy name in vain.
Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against
Thee?
I hate them with the utmost hatred;
They have become my enemies (vv. 19–22).

Several facts need to be observed in these verses: (1) The most important is that the Book of Psalms is part of the Old Testament, not the New Testament. The new way had not yet come. Jesus had not yet said, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). (2) In the Old Testament, God’s arrangements were tied with a nation of people and an area of land. Anything that threatened that nation or that land had to be destroyed by physical war. Matters are in a different perspective today. (3) Notice that though David spoke in a heated fashion, he did not take it on himself to slay the enemies of God; he left that in the hands of the Lord.

Having said all that, let us not miss the heart of David’s words. He was saying, in effect, “I am identified with Your interests, Lord! Those You hate, I hate. Those You love, I love. I am Your man, dedicated to You and Your cause!” David was eager to have the attitude of the Lord. We, too, must strive to make God’s attitudes our own!

Let Me Ask God’s Help (vv. 17–22)

David concluded with a prayer for *heavenly examination*:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me
(vv. 23, 34a).

He began, “Search me, . . . and know my heart.” This is the key thought. God looks on the heart. In David’s prayer of penitence after his sin with Bathsheba, he prayed, “Create in me a clean

heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Then David said, “Try me [or test me] and know my *anxious thoughts*.” The NKJV has “know my anxieties.” What we are concerned about tells a great deal about us!

Finally, David prayed, “And see if there be any hurtful way in me.” In other words, “Lord, see if there is anything in me that would hurt You, that would break Your heart. I want to know what it is so I can change!”

The prayer closes with an appeal for *guidance*: “And lead me in the everlasting way” (v. 24b). “Lead me,” David prayed, “in the way that is right, the way that leads to everlasting life.”

CONCLUSION

We all need to realize how great and how marvelous our God really is. He is the One who knows and understands us, the One who is always near us, the One who made us and has a plan for our lives.

I hope that each of us will desire to make His thoughts and His ways our own, and that we can and will pray the prayer of the last two verses: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

As we close, consider this question: As God searches your heart . . . and thoughts . . . and ways, what does He see? Does He see one whose every thought is stayed on Him? Or does He perhaps see one who has still not totally submitted to His will? Does He see someone who has not been baptized after the New Testament order (Mark 16:16)? Does He see someone who is an erring child of God and needs to be restored to Him (James 5:16)? Does He see someone who needs to become active in His service (Revelation 2:10)?

NOTES

¹The starting place of this lesson was a sermon on “Create a New Heart in Me, O God” by Prentice Meador from *Sermons for Today, Vol. 2* (Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1981), 170–76.

²Meador, 170.

³These private moments would include sexual relationships.

⁴Meador, 172.

⁵The Hebrew is unclear. See different translations for possible variations in meaning. □