

November 24, 2024

“A Song of Thanksgiving”  
Lesson 4

Psalms 139:1-12

### **Intro**

David was a man who sought after God’s own heart, one example of which was shown when by faith he faced Goliath. He chose to trust God when presented an opportunity to kill Saul in a cave, showing his integrity. Even after conquering his enemies and receiving the promise that his kingdom would be established forever, David remained humble.

In today’s psalm, there is no reference to any particular historical event. Context helps us in interpreting a psalm, so the ideas presented below reflect to some degree the lack of context known. Also, the structure of the psalm is complex, complicating a straightforward interpretation of David’s intentions. The psalm appears to break up in a section of praise (vs. 1-18) and one of lamentation (19-24). This prevents it from fitting neatly into groups that are of praise or into groups of lamentation alone.

### **Read Psalm 139:1-12**

1. vs. 1: This verse introduces the central theme; the verse is nearly repeated exactly in vs. 23  
God’s complete knowledge, usually called his omniscience, is the theme here  
He is entirely aware of all things  
David isn’t trying here to catalogue God’s attributes  
He states this idea as a fact, a quality to be marveled at, awed at, and feared  
The Hebrew word of “searched” is the same expression for a courtroom cross-examination  
God has carefully and fully looked at and comprehended all the things in David’s heart
2. vs. 2: The idea of sitting and rising indicates the whole day, all that a person does  
God knows the entirety of a person’s daily actions  
Nothing is left out  
Jesus’ knowledge of people’s inner lives was one proof of his divinity  
See Matt. 12:25, Luke 5:22, and John 4:16-19
3. vs. 3: This verse shows that God knows the personal and the public aspects of our lives  
“my going out” and “my lying down”  
The Hebrew word for “discern” is about sifting grains to separate grain from chaff  
Used here, this word implies that God is “sifting” David’s life for the good and the bad
4. vs. 4: God knows our words before we even speak them  
Communication can be tricky with other people  
Their words or ours can vary in meaning, especially with how they are used or phrased  
Body language can help, but can also be misunderstood  
With text messages, there is no change to hear the tone or mood of the words  
Some people are purposefully untrue in their communications with others—they lie  
Yet God cuts through all this to know exactly what our words’ intentions in our speaking

5. vs. 5: The idea here of God “hemming” David in can be taken in two opposite ways  
 Negatively, it suggests besieging, like hemming in a city when attacking it  
 Positively, it suggests God’s protection of someone from harm or danger  
 Knowing David’s relationship with God, his experience seems the second kind  
 God presence “behind and before” seems like a preventative guidance  
 David says, “You lay Your hand upon me.”  
 God doesn’t have actual hands; this tries to explain something hard to explain  
 It seems that God’s nearness to David is something he delights in  
 This seems especially true given the next verse
6. vs. 6: David says knowing this about God is “too wonderful for me”  
 He doesn’t view God as treating him negatively, or being closer than David would like  
 God’s knowing what David does at all times is seen positively by David  
 God is protecting David, staying near him and guiding him all the time  
 David says knowing this it “wonderful” and hard to understand  
 It’s “too lofty for me to attain”—something David can’t do; only God can
7. vs. 7: This verse marks the change into another type of expression  
 The two questions can be seen as an escape attempt or admitting of sin  
 OR, they can be seen as praise and adoration for God’s constant presence  
 Based on vs. 5-6, and the verses that come after, it seems like the second one  
 The idea of God’s omnipresence (present everywhere) is unique to other religions  
 Most others have deities that have a limited geographic sphere of influence  
 Gods of rivers, or of crops, or of the mountains, etc  
 They weren’t expected to show up anywhere except where they reigned  
 This highlights a key difference between the Lord and these other “gods”  
 God reigns over and is present in all places  
 This expression shows again David’s deeply personal understanding of God  
 Judaism isn’t based on general religious concepts of its nearby cultures
8. vs. 8: David uses the word “if” five times in vs. 8-11  
 He is indicating a hypothetical situation, not one which can actually occur  
 He can’t actually go to the *heavens*; that is God’s abode, not man’s  
 David can’t get there by foot (or on any animal either)  
 David also mentions the depths; this is like the sitting and rising of vs. 2  
 These indicate the entirety of what is being talked about  
 Here, David says that God is everywhere  
 There is no place David could God and not have God there
9. vs. 9: David shifts here from horizontal to vertical images  
 “Wings of the dawn” is a poetic reference to sunrise  
 The sea here likely refers to the Mediterranean, which lies to Israel’s west  
 David is saying from east to west, as far as you can go, God is still there

10. vs. 10: Because David understands that God is everywhere, he knows what this means for him  
God will guide David no matter where he is  
God's protection and salvation of David are with David everywhere he goes  
A person is never in a place where God cannot be; He is always available

11. vs. 11-12: The idea begins in vs. 11, and concludes in vs. 12  
David now brings up light and darkness  
Thinking that the dark will hide a person is incorrect  
Thinks that the light will somehow hide a person is also incorrect  
It is futile to try to hide anything from God  
No physical space or reality is unavailable to God—He made them all!

Application: To those who trust in Him, God's omniscience and omnipresence offer a sense of security and salvation. God did not create the universe only to abandon it to its own devices. Rather, He is actively involved and present in every aspect of creation all the time. Like David, we might find ourselves in a situation where God's presence and knowledge make us uneasy. Or we might wholeheartedly embrace those attributes as comforts in our present circumstances. In either case, we can strive to know God better and to praise Him, offer up to Him our confusion and anxieties, and ask Him for help against all the evil we confront.

Prayer: Father God, You are all-knowing and all-present. Because of this, we take comfort, knowing You are always with us, and are never unaware of anything we think, say, or do. Help us to glorify You in all things so that Your presence and knowledge are a comfort and not a warning to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.