

God is...

Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent

Psalm 139

Mark Vroegop

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. ¹⁹ Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! ²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? ²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Psalm 139 (ESV)

I think it is fitting on this Father's Day for us to talk about three attributes of God: His omnipotence, His omniscience, and His omnipresence. Now, if you are not familiar with these terms, we are talking about the way in which God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and present everywhere at once.

This connects to Father's Day. What father wouldn't want to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere at once. One of the joys of having young children is the way that they are very impressed with a Dad's strength. Maybe they see him swing a sledgehammer or drive a car, or they feel his strong arms and they think, "my dad is strong!" Or maybe they ask him questions about life or they hear him talk about something and they think, "my dad is smart!" Or perhaps they see everything he manages – fixing the car, researching a purchase, playing an instrument, advancing in his career, and they think, "my dad is awesome." And what dad wouldn't want to be viewed this way?

But even on his best day (and this becomes clear in the teen years), we soon learn that dads are not all-powerful, all-knowing, and present everywhere. Several years ago, I remember having breakfast with

one of our boys, and we were talking about parenting. After he asked a number of thoughtful questions and after I kept saying, “yeah, I’m not sure,” he had this funny look on his face. I said, “I think you are just now realizing that we really don’t know what we’re doing.” All dads are limited.

For some of you, that’s a no-brainer because your experience of a dad was really hurtful. He may have abused his power, acted condescending with his knowledge, or maybe just wasn’t around at all. He wasn’t everywhere. He was nowhere to be found. So, this is a painful day.

However, here is what I know. God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence humble the best dad’s by reminding them that they are not God. And God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence bring comfort and hope to those who have been terribly disappointed in their earthly fathers. In other words, whether you had a great dad or a bad dad, God is not like your dad.

God Is...

In case you are joining us for the first time, we are in the middle of a nine-week summer series on the attributes of God. We are wrestling with what the Bible tells us that God is like, and then trying to determine what the implications are for our lives. We are discovering that how we think about God affects much more of our lives than what we realize.

Underneath every aspect of life is this question: “Who is God and what is He like?”

Two weeks ago, we started by looking at the triune nature of God – that He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one essence and three in person. Last week, I was away due to the wedding of our son, and Nate delivered a great message on God’s holiness.

Today, we continue by looking at Psalm 139 and discovering the spiritual significance that God knows you, God is with you, and God can save you. God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. Let’s see what this means and how it applies to our lives.

God Knows You

This psalm begins and ends with the theme of God knowing us. We find this in the first verse, “...you have searched me and known me.” And we find it in the final verse, “...search me...and know my heart.” So, the main focus of this psalm is on the knowledge of God.

But this knowledge of God is not mentioned here as fact to merely be studied; it is an attribute that should lead to worship and wonder. The omniscience of God pushes the boundaries of what we can think about God, show us how different God is than us, and demonstrates His love and compassion for us.

Verse one serves as the theme for the entire psalm. It manages to marvel at God’s knowledge while at the same time reveling in God’s care for us. It is a prayer of praise. It is a moment of worship. A statement of personal intimacy with God.

To say that God has searched us is to say that God looks deeply into our lives. We'll see this more in a moment, but suffice it to say here that God knows us better than we know ourselves. There is nothing about us that isn't plain to God. And yet, this intimate knowledge and this deep level gazing upon God result in being known and loved by God.

In this context, this kind of knowledge is personal, caring, and even intimate. The Hebrew word here can even refer to the unique affection of a man and a woman in their expression of sexuality. This is one of the most important aspects of God's attributes for you to understand. God's knowledge of us leads to His relationship with us.

Here is how Jesus said it in John 10:14: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." So, as we marvel at the knowledge of God, we must also stand in awe at the grace of God.

In verses 2-5, the Psalmist puts more color on God's knowledge. Here's what we find:

- v. 2a - God knows the details of our days: "when I sit down and when I rise up."
- v. 2b - God knows our thoughts. God knows what we are thinking, no matter where we are.
- v. 3 - God knows the path of our lives. He knows where you've been, where you are going, and what the future holds. God knows every direction of our lives.
- v. 4 - God knows the words we form in our heads even before we say them. Just think about how many words you've said, and what about the words you decided not to say? God knows those too.
- v. 5 - God's knowledge of us means that He knows the past, the present, and the future.

The psalmist personalizes the knowledge of God. He connects it to his life in a very meaningful way, but this is only one application or focal point of God's knowledge. There is a bigger definition to consider.

To say that God is all-knowing means that there is no limit to what God knows, and there is nothing he needs to learn.¹ And God knows all of this right now. Past, present, and future are categories that are the constructs of our knowledge, but not God's. "He knows all things in and of and by himself...his knowledge is undivided, simple, unchangeable, eternal...he knows all things instantaneously, simultaneously, from eternity; all things are eternally present to his mind's eye."² That is how big, broad, deep, and glorious God's knowledge is.

The prophet Isaiah said this:

¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴ Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from

¹ Mark Jones, *God Is – A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 77.

² Mark Jones, 77 quoting Herman Bavick, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 196.

a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust (Isaiah 40:13–15).

The apostle Paul said this:

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:33–34)

This kind of divine knowledge is central to God’s otherness. God’s omniscience makes Him so different from us that our minds can hardly comprehend it. Just consider how amazing it is when you encounter someone who is an expert on a particular subject. Perhaps it is a person who can play an instrument with incredible skill, paint a beautiful picture, explain how an engine or a computer works, cut open the human body in order to heal it. And that is nothing compared the knowledge of God. He is not only more knowledgeable, He is the source of that knowledge.

But now let’s take this back to a personal level. God’s omniscience means he knows the inner workings of the human heart (John 21:17), He knows the hidden facts of our lives (John 4:17-18), and He knows everything about the future (John 18:4; Matt. 26:34).³ How does that make you feel?

Some of you probably feel a bit fearful. And I would understand. In fact, you are probably right to be afraid. If you are the wrong side of an all-knowing God, it would be a frightening moment. Imagine standing before a God who is your creator, who knows you better than you know yourself, and who knows every motive, every action, every look, every thought, and every word you’ve ever said. That’s scary.

But there’s another side to this story. Because of the atonement of Christ, God knows all of what we’ve done and who we are, and yet He forgives those who trust in Christ. God still knows, but He also forgives.

An all-knowing God knows everything about you, and He also knows the plans for your life. You may not be able to make sense of the circumstances or the pain in your life, but rest assured, God knows what He is doing. He’s got the plan in the place. He knows the future, and you can trust Him. You may not know what is going on, but God does.

And that is why Psalm 139:6 bursts forth in praise: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it” (Ps. 139:6).

The omniscience of God makes us put a hand over our mouths as we rest in the truth that a sovereign God knows everything and He knows me. God knows you.

³ Mark Jones, 82.

God Is with You

The second “omni” that we need to consider is God’s omnipresence. This attribute of God means that God is present in every part and aspect of the creation which He has made. God is not bound by time or space, and He fills all space as God.⁴ He is infinite. He is everywhere. No place is inaccessible to Him, and there is no location outside of God’s presence. Time, space, travel, place, and activity are all contained within the essence of God. He is beyond them all, and he “dwells” in all places in His created order.⁵ “God is everywhere here, close to everything, next to everyone.”⁶

The omnipresence of God means that God is near. It means that He is always with you.

In Psalm 139, we see this truth emerge in verses 7-12. There are some amazing statements for us to consider. The omniscience of God leads the psalmist to ponder the infinite presence of God. He not only knows everything, but God is present in every place.

In verse 7, he asks two rhetorical questions: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” Now, when you read this question, it is important to determine the posture or the motivation of the author. Is he celebrating God’s presence or is he bemoaning it as he looks to avoid or run from God?

Given the fact that he has just praised God in verse 6 – “such knowledge is too wonderful for me...” – and the fact that this theme of worship will continue, it seems more likely that the Psalmist is celebrating the presence of God, not wrestling with it. The point is more about the hope which comes from knowing that God is always with us.

To expand on this, he makes four “if” statements. These are designed to illustrate the scope of God’s omnipresence.

High or Low. Verse 8 tells us there is no place too high or too low where God is not present. There is no place outside of God’s rule. He governs over the realm above, and He rules over the grave. Neither heaven or hell is outside of His omnipresence.

Some of you might ask, “is God present in hell?” The answer is “yes” as it relates to the presence of His rule, and “no” as it relates to fellowship with Him. Hell is separation from God, but even the place of final judgment is not outside of God’s control and presence.

There is no place – high or low – outside of God’s presence.

East or West. As far as one could consider traveling, God is still there. The Psalmist considers the rising of the sun to the east or the vast Mediterranean Sea to the west. No matter where he traveled, God was there. But notice how he personalizes it in verses 10, “...your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me.”

⁴ Mark Jones, 72.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A.W. Tozer, 74.

I would imagine that for some of you, verse 10 is exactly what you needed today. Maybe you are in the middle of some major transitions or some significant uncertainties. This text reminds us and promises us that God will lead you. He is leading you right now. And through all the challenges, His right-hand holds us. The presence of God holds us fast.

One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament is from Joshua 1:9. I don't know how many times I've quoted it to my own heart:

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 (ESV)

Darkness or Light. In verse 11, the psalmist talks about the presence of darkness. Some commentators think that the psalmist talks about darkness because he is trying to hide. But I think it is more about the fearful and foreboding nature of the dark. There is something about the evening and "pitch darkness" that is scary. The NASB translates this as "the darkness will overwhelm me..."

If you've ever walked through a deep season of grief or a time of uncertainty, you know the overwhelming sense of isolation. Or maybe you are listening to this sermon and you struggle with an aching sense of loneliness. Verse 12 tells us that God not only knows about our struggles, but He is right there with you.

Life may be hard, but God is still there. Sorrow may feel overwhelming, but God is with you. There is nothing in this world that is outside of God's presence. For the follower of Jesus, nothing is able to remove us from the presence of God.

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38–39 (ESV)

God is everywhere, in every place, present in every pain, at work in every circumstance. Because of Jesus, nothing can separate you from His love. He is with you.

God Can Save You

The final "omni" attribute is God's omnipotence. There is no one or no thing more powerful than God. He has the divine authority and the strength to accomplish His purposes.⁷ He possesses absolute power, and He acts in accordance with His sovereign will.

The psalmist turns to the womb to make this point personal and clear. In verses 13-16, he references his own formation as an unseen child developing inside a mother. Because of technology and advances in science, we know much more about the development of a baby. We even have the ability to take pictures and have 3D images. But imagine the unique mystery and wonder for an Old Testament person. That's why we find phrases like: "formed by inward parts" (v. 13), "knit me together"

⁷ Mark Jones, 86.

(v. 13), “fearfully and wonderfully made” (v. 14), “my frame was not hidden from you” (v. 15), “was made in secret” (v. 15), “woven in the depths of the earth,” and “saw my unformed substance” (v. 16).

The psalmist is marveling at God’s creative power. And he is pointing out how personal this power really is for him. And is it not the same for you? God has orchestrated all the events of your life, starting with the formation of you in your mother’s womb. But His powerful direction of your life has not stopped there. It has continued! Which is why he breaks out in praise in verse 17, “how precious are your thoughts, O God!” He reflects on all the ways that God has powerfully acted in his life. He considers how God has acted to save him.

His love for God’s power doesn’t stop with his own experience, however. When you love the rule, reign, and sovereignty of God, it makes the rejection of His rule all the more painful. When you have deep affections for the powerful reign of God, it grieves you when you see rebellion against God’s rule.

That is why this psalm talks about the judgment of God in verses 19-22. He longs for the end of wickedness, and he desires to be separated from those who rebel against the Lord’s rule. He uses strong words to describe the emotions connected to this tension: “hate,” “loath,” and “enemies.” In other words, the psalmist is going to side with God. He knows God’s power, and he knows the danger of being God’s enemy.

And that is why the Psalm ends with a heartfelt request:

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Psalm 139:23–24 (ESV)

God is all-knowing, always with us, and all-powerful. And if you understand this, it should lead you to turn toward Him. The omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God should lead you to run to Him for grace, mercy, and help.

If you are not yet a Christian, these attributes can become the motivation for you to turn to Christ. God knows what we’ve all done, and yet He offers a path for forgiveness through receiving Jesus as your Savior. God has made the payment for our sins possible through the powerful offering of His Son.

If you are a follower of Christ, could you invite the Lord’s searching of your heart right now? Would you invite His inquiry into the state of your heart? Would you humbly consider that He knows everything about you? And would you turn from those things that do not fit with godliness and righteousness? Ask Him to lead you in the way everlasting.

Talk with Him about your heart. Tell Him about your doubts. Open your heart to Him about your fears. He already knows it’s there, and yet He still loves you. This message today is part of His divine plan for your life. God knows you, He’s with you, and He can rescue you. He’s greater than any father-figure in your life. There’s no one like Him in all the universe.

God’s omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence give us hope. The God who knows you better than you know yourself is also the God who loves you with a sovereign love.

Here is what A.W. Tozer said:

"And to us who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us in the gospel, how unutterably sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely. No talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make an accusation stick, no forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to abash us and expose our past; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since he knew us utterly before we knew him and called us to himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us."⁸

God knows you. God is with you. God can save you.

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⁸ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 57.