

What is the Best Thought You Can Ever Think? (hint: GOD!)

Psalm 139

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*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and 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 all together.
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 ascend 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.
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 knitted 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 was none
of them.*

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How
vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.*

*Oh 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, and 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. (Psalm 139, ESV)*

Introduction—

What kinds of thoughts cause your mind to be delighted and full and fulfilled? What do you love to think about? The answer for some may include the Colts, or the Rocky Mountains, or a sunset over the ocean, or a wonderful marriage, or the joy of children and grandchildren. Here is another perspective of delightful thinking in a reflection from a famous pastor in the 1800s:

*The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the works, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. . . . But while the subject **humbles** the mind, it also **expands** it. HE who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. . . . And whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently **consolatory**. Oh, there is, in the contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares: Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul: so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.¹*

This is from a sermon delivered in London by the preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon when he was 20 years old. The fact is that there is nothing that will be more delightful for a creature of God than the thoughts of God. He is the highest and greatest person that you could ever think of and wonder about. His actions supersede any other actions in the universe. The challenge for us, as humans, is to come to the point where we want to think more of God than we think of ourselves. We need to make Him the center of all of life, all the time. This week marks the 7th annual THINK weekend at College Park Church. We dedicate a weekend annually to the study of theology, which is simply the study of God. We believe that theology matters greatly -- not merely the academic pursuit of knowledge, but the knowledge of our great God. This year Dr. D.A. Carson will be coming to talk about God as revealed in the writing of Jeremiah the prophet and helping us to see the relevance of that book to our current world. We need to know God.

The sermon this morning will be an opening to the week of THINK15. I want to look at one of my favorite Psalms; I memorized it in the 4th grade and still remember most of it. It is the delightful 139th Psalm. It is beautiful Hebrew poetry with parallel lines and rhythm. David is the writer, and he wrote it with four stanzas of six verses each. The Psalm extols the greatness and wonders of God and also shows the wonder of this glorious God relating to and loving His people.

In Psalm 139 we will study three great attributes of God and see how He relates to us.

¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 13-14.

I. #1 Attribute of God: He is HIGH (transcendent, not like us)—139:1-12

“God is not like us, but He likes us.” I think that is a quote from our own Pastor Mark. We are His image, but He is not like us. It is both wonderful, and for our best interest, that He not be like us. This half of the psalm gazes at the glory of the transcendent God. He is described as the God who is all-knowing (omniscient) in verses 1-6 and present everywhere (omnipresent). Let’s look at these wonders of the supernatural. It appears that these attributes of God describe Him well and make Him high (transcendent). These perfections of God apply to all creation and humans, but there is a unique benefit to believers in God that make these attributes precious and wonderful as the psalmist records.

a. The all knowing God (omniscient)—vv.1-6

Verse 1 calls out to the LORD. When using this name for God, it is intended to be a cry to a personal God, not merely to a distant deity. It is the name for God that was used in covenantal ceremonies. This Yahweh is Israel’s God and is committed to them. The name LORD (or Yahweh) is used to open Psalms 138-144.

David identifies God as His LORD and then makes a profound statement: “. . . You have searched me and you know me!” He affirms that God knows him exhaustively. It is also interesting that the psalm ends with a call from David for the Lord to “search me” (v 23). He does not want God to stop knowing him; he would shudder to think that God would ignore him.

Verse 2—“You know when I sit down and when I rise up.” This is a good poetic technique called a *merism*, citing two extreme situations which represent all in between. The term heaven and earth, used in Gen. 1:1, means those extremes and all in between. Here the psalmist says that God knows every aspect of his life and even “discerns his thoughts from afar.” He knows what we will think before we think it. That is supernatural knowledge.

Verses 3 and 4 continue the description of the omniscience of God. God sees our path (better than Google Maps), and even before we say a word, He knows it totally. That is both sobering and wonderful. To have a God with those capabilities who uses them for His people is amazing. He is not caught by surprise. He knows what is coming around the bend of life. He knows your tomorrows and all of your todays. You are not absent from God.

Verses 5-6 concludes this brief section of the all-knowing God. In verse 5 we find that God hems us all around and lays His hand upon us. This could be referring to the discipline of God. When the hand of God is used in the Old Testament, it often is a hand of discipline. It is the way that a loving God keeps His people close to Him. The all-knowing God keeps His people from straying too far. The conclusion for the Psalmist in verse 6 is that it is too lofty and high for him. He cannot really grasp a God like this. That is a good response on some level. God is not like us. We should not try to tame God and make Him in our image. He is GOD! He knows all. We do not. We can glory in Him and his excellence and bow our knees in gratitude for His knowledge.

b. The all present God (omnipresent)—vv.7-12

The next group of six verses (they seemed to be coupled with two verses together) demonstrates the glory of God in His transcendence above time and space. He is not bound by space like we are. He is everywhere present—or everything is always in His presence. The verses use the poetic technique of a *merism* again to describe God's presence. Heaven, Sheol, uttermost parts of the sea, darkness and light—none of these realities are boundaries for God. He is above them all and none of them can bind Him.

Verses 7-8 begin with the rhetorical question concerning how one can get away from the presence of God. There may be times we wish we could escape His presence, but in reality, we never want God to be absent. Even in our sin, we need His saving grace. He takes the extreme of heaven and Sheol (the grave) to state that He cannot escape God. The reference to the grave may even have the implications of a hope that will be realized in Jesus, that the grave will be conquered because it is not a barrier to God. He will conquer death.

Verses 9-10 deal with the wings of the morning (like a sunrise, or maybe even a sunset, when the sun that starts in morning goes into the sea for the night). No matter where the sun goes—God's hand is right there with His people.

Verses 11-12 concludes this section with the contrast of light and darkness. God is not limited by any darkness (this could even refer to evil). He cannot be stopped in His desire to be with His people. He is Emmanuel (God with us), and nothing can stop Him.

God's incredible transcendence is so wonderful and exalted that it blows the best of minds. Behold your God. He is all knowing, everywhere present and so much more, and He loves His people who benefit from His glorious realities. Never be satisfied until God is exalted high. He is GOD, and no one is like Him.

APPLICATION

1. Theology: **HIGH (transcendent)**. God is limitless in His attributes. We are most satisfied as His creation when we are created to be naked (shameless) before Him. We need God to see us fully, and we need Him to be everywhere present. He knows and is there. Praise his highness for His highness.

2. Negative: We are "cover-up people." We are like Adam and Eve and want to run and hide. We do not want people or God to know us fully because of our sin. We put up defenses and fences to keep from being fully known. We struggle with open relationships with God and others. Jesus came to break down the barriers of sin so we could be fully exposed. Jesus offers to make us clean and righteous in his righteousness. A commentator said it well: *"Impenetrable defenses are developed to protect our knowledge from unwanted intruders. People retreat from relationships, mask their true reality; talk in anonymity or in disguise. We vigorously guard ourselves against divulging too much. We entrust ourselves to no one but ourselves. Each home in an enclave, each self, an island."*

3. Positive: **SECURITY**--When we are able to have an intimate relationship with God because of His Son, Jesus, we will delight that He knows us fully. When we are in the darkest times of life, He

has not deserted us. When we feel the loneliest, we are not alone, because He is with us. When others forsake us, He will not. He who spared not His own Son, how will He not freely give us all things? When we fear the unknown in families, work, health, etc, we know that God is there. He does not desert His own. Thank God for His transcendence which He uses to be most intimately in love with us. Even in our sin, God does not desert us. We are secure in Him because he is GOD supreme!

II. # 2 Attribute of God: He is HERE (creator and sustainer-He likes us)—139:13-18

This is one of the most intimate and delightful sections of this Psalm. In six short verses, we can see the tenderness and wonder of the LORD's interest and care for His people. He cares dearly for His people before we were known by anyone. He does not create us and leave; He is with us from first to last! This section again seems to group two verses together to come to make the point.

Verses 13-14 speak of conception and uterine existence. The LORD not only knows what happens in the womb, but He is involved in that action. He is the master "knitter." The psalmist cannot help but utter "I praise you, for I am fearfully (amazingly) made, and your works are wonderful." What a true reality for the ones who think like God. He made you and me as He knew was best. I would have done it differently. I would have added about six inches to my height. I would have not allowed for birth defects to happen (and they will all be gone in the final new heaven and earth). For now, God does not make mistakes. He saves us from mistakes and does so even in our mother's womb.

Verses 15-16 go into the depth of the womb again and use the weaving theme again. Even when we are not visible to the human eye, the Creator is knitting us into being with precision. Verse 16 says that God saw us before we even existed. He is interested in us beyond belief. We are not accidents but real important aspects of the creation and gaze of God.

Verses 17-18 end in high praise to God who is here with us now. He was with us in our beginnings and before our beginning and will never leave us. David marvels at the volume and quality of the thoughts of the LORD toward us. They are innumerable. When trying to count them, forget it. Then he makes a challenging statement: "I awake, and I am still with you." That may mean that the God who is there in our conception is also there in our death. He is WITH us!!

APPLICATION

1. Theology: **God is HERE—Creator of us all**--God is so intimately involved with His creation that He engages with us even before we are conceived. He is the creator who stays with His creation. He has wonderful thoughts about us. He cherishes His creation. Believe that God likes (loves) you.
2. Negative: Those who do not think like God can see human life very differently. They can abuse the weak; they can abort inconvenience; they can distort human sexuality for their own interest; they can be racists; they can neglect the needy. The list could go on and on. The problem with that aspect of society is that they do not know God, and the "they" could be "us" unless we see God for who he is.

3. Positive: **SIGNIFICANCE**--Human life is precious to God! God does not make mistakes with babies. Human value is not based on human production or what we do. The value is placed by God who proclaims humans as His image bearers. Thank God for how He made you. Even with the flaws we have because of a sinful world, God made us in the way that is best for His kingdom and by extension for us. Enjoy human life in our babies, in our mature people, in our singles, in our families. We need to dedicate all of us to God for His keeping and for Him to use us for His glory. Let's start with babies and continue on to all of life. This should also motivate us to evangelism of God's creatures.

III. #3 Attribute of God—He is HOLY —139:19-24

This final stanza of six verses is a bit peculiar to western ears. It seems to be a bit of a downer after so much positivity. The psalmist is speaking about how intensely he wants to defend the glory of God and His holiness. The technique of an imprecatory psalm is used in the first four verses, where the psalmist calls judgment on those who resist the holy God. He takes up the honor of God and opposes His enemies. Again, this section seems to be coupled in groups of two verses.

Verses 19-20 is a call to remove wickedness from the earth. Wicked people will be judged, and the call is for the judgment to come. He asks God to give them what they deserve since they are wicked and in rebellion against the very name of Yahweh.

Verses 21-22 adds emotion to the call for judgment. It is as if to say that whoever hates God, the people of God should hate. The point is for the ones who glories in God to hate what God hates. They should love righteousness. They should want to be "holy as He is holy."

Verses 23-24 concludes the psalm with a prayer of total exposure. When the psalmist sees the transcendence of God and the creation of God and sees how committed the LORD is to him, he begs God to take the search light and expose him, even his inner thoughts. He asks for God to reveal any sin that would separate him from his God. He asks to think about first and to follow that rather than thinking of himself and following that path.

This prayer reminds me of the 16th century astronomer Copernicus. He informed the scientific world that the earth was not the center of the universe, but that the sun was. That was so revolutionary and mind-blowing to the intelligentsia. They had the wrong center. The prayer of the redeemed must be "LORD, re-center my mind to see you at the center. Search me to see where I am at the center. Lead me to you."

Conclusion: What do we do with this?

1. Thank God for who He is. Commit to becoming a student of God. Read the Psalms and underline every use of God, LORD, including pronouns for God. Pray to know God better. Get around people who want to talk about God.

2. Find your **security, significance and sainthood** in God, not in yourself. He is transcendent, and therefore you can be secure. He is intimately involved with you from your conception, and

therefore you can see your significance. He is holy, and you must be as well. Our mission in life is to be what He wants us to be. We should not want Him to be what we want Him to be.

3. Confess sin which is replacing God with us. Ask God to reveal both your sin and His beauty. It is a process, but it is totally worth it to live life with God as the center. We find there, fullness of joy.

God is	Therefore we can be:	Psalm 139	Romans 8
High (transcendent)	Secure	vv. 1-12--He sees all and is everywhere—great security system	vv. 31-34—If God is for us—who can be against us??
Here (creator and sustainer)	Significant	vv. 13-18—How precious are His thoughts to us	vv. 35-30—Nothing can separate us from the love of God
Holy (total perfection)	Saints	vv. 19-24	vv. 1—there is no condemnation

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, has a character called Eustace who was a precocious boy who had become a dragon. As time went on, he desired to cease the dragon existence and to be a boy again. There is a section where the Aslan the Lion speaks to him and says,

“You will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling off the skin, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. . . . Well he peeled the beastly stuff right off. . . . and there it was lying on the grass. . . . And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been . . . I had turned into a boy again.

I pray that we will see the LORD for who He is. I pray that we will beg to be searched by Him so we can follow Him to everlasting life. **THEOLOGY MATTERS!**

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