

LESSON 13

November 24, 2024

Unit III: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise Wonderfully Marvelous!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Exodus 33:12-23

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 139

PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 139:1-12

KEY VERSE

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. (Psalm 139:1, KJV)

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You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. (Psalm 139:1, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Compare the psalmist's conviction that God knows persons intimately with your own experience of God.
- Nurture a confident awareness of being known and valued by God.
- Design a practice of gratitude that could cultivate an intimate and trusting relationship with God.

*Key Terms

Compassest (verse 3)—Hebrew: *zarab* (zaw-raw'): to scatter, disperse, measure, scrutinize; "discern" (NIV). *Matthew Poole's Commentary* suggests that God watches on every side and discerns every step taken. It is a metaphor for huntsmen watching all the motions and lurking places of wild beasts so that they may catch them or for soldiers besieging their enemies in a city and setting watches around them.

Downsitting (verse 2)—Hebrew: *yashab* (yaw-shab'): the act of sitting down; reposing; a position of rest; refers to the whole of daily life—business and rest; "sit" (NIV).

Know(est) (verse 2)—Hebrew: *yada* (yaw-dah'): to know, learn to know; to perceive, perceive and see, find out and discern; clearly understand.

Uprising (verse 2)—Hebrew: *qum* (koom): the act of rising up; the beginning of one's day; "rise" (NIV).

Uttermost (verse 9)—Hebrew: *'achāriyth* (akh-ar-eeth'): extreme; being in the furthest, greatest, or highest degree; "far side" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Psalm 139 is an integral part of worship dedicated to the “director of music,” which suggests its use in the Temple.

The Hubble Space Telescope has made a fascinating discovery of a galaxy situated at a distance of thirteen billion light-years from Earth. It is almost impossible to comprehend that it would take a nonstop speed of five hundred miles per hour for twenty quadrillion years to reach that galaxy. However, the words of Paul in Romans 8:38-39 reassure us that nothing can separate us from God’s love that is in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 139:1-12 further explores this truth through its captivating verses. It allows us to compare the psalmist’s conviction that God knows us intimately with our own experiences of God. The passage also encourages us to have a confident awareness of being known and valued by God and to practice gratitude, which can help us build an intimate and trusting relationship with God. In this process, we cannot overlook Psalm 139, which highlights the vastness and omnipresence of God. It denotes that God is present everywhere, and this knowledge is beyond human comprehension. As we continue to learn about the vastness of the universe, we should also strive to understand and appreciate the vastness of God’s presence.

Introduction

In a busy city with towering skyscrapers and vibrant neon lights lay a hidden gem—a small coffee shop on a side street. Sarah, a barista with a warm heart, knew her regular customers very well. She remembered their names, their favorite drinks, and, sometimes, even their stories. However, one customer had stood out from the rest—Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson was an elderly man whose time and life’s struggles had weathered him. He shuffled into the coffee shop every morning, ordered a simple black coffee, and sat by the window. Although his eyes were tired, they held a depth that intrigued Sarah.

One day, Sarah’s curiosity got the best of her, and she approached Mr. Thompson, asking, “Sir, forgive me if this is too personal, but why do you come here every day? What’s on your mind?” Mr. Thompson responded with a smile, revealing a lifetime of memories. “Sarah,” he said, “I lost my wife last year. We were married for sixty-three years. This coffee shop was our secret place to share our dreams, fears, and laughter.”

Sarah listened to Mr. Thompson’s story, captivated. She asked, “But why continue coming alone?” Mr. Thompson’s eyes twinkled as he explained, “Because, my dear, I believe God still meets me here. Just like He met us when she was alive. You see, this coffee shop is my modern-day Psalm 139.”

Psalm 139:1-12 reminds us that God knows our hidden corners—the joys we celebrate and the grief we carry. He meets us in the ordinary, whispering His love. This psalm also reminds us that God’s presence transcends time and space, as He surrounds us, hems us in, and knows our thoughts, just as Sarah knew her customers.

Mr. Thompson’s love for his late wife echoes God’s love for us. Sixty-three years of shared moments—laughter, tears, and dreams—reflect the eternal bond between our souls and our Creator. As we reflect on Psalm 139:1-12, let us remember that God is our cosmic whisperer—the one who knows us better than anyone else. His love spans galaxies and coffee shops alike.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

God Knows Us Intimately (*Psalm 139:1-6*)

KJV

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

NIV

YOU HAVE searched me, LORD, and you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

5 You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

The term “search” refers to a careful examination of something, which the Jewish people used to describe exploring a land, investigating a legal case, and digging deep into a mine (**verse 1**). While our friends may only see the surface, God knows our hearts and we cannot deceive Him. Many characters in the Bible, including Adam and Eve, Cain, and David, attempted to conceal their true selves from God, but they all soon discovered that God knew everything about them. In **verse 2**, “understand” means distinguishing and discerning with insight rather than just gathering raw data. In **verse 3**, “compass” depicts winnowing grain, while in Psalm 139:23, “try” refers to testing metal. Throughout verses 1, 2, 4, 14, and 23, the Bible confirms that God knows us intimately and exhaustively, including our actions, locations, thoughts and words, ways, and motives (**verse 4**). Hebrews 4:13 states that “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (NKJV). Additionally, God knows what is best for us and guides us in that direction. He protects us by hemming us in behind and before and putting His hand on us to steady and guide us (**verse 5**). God safeguards a valuable object, demonstrating how His knowledge and guidance protect us. When we recognize the extent of God’s knowledge (**verse 6**), we should be grateful and overwhelmed that He knows us so well. As David once exclaimed, “I am not equal to it!”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why does the psalmist declare God’s knowledge of him to be “too wonderful” for human comprehension? How does this humility affect our relationship with God?

God Is with Us Constantly (*Psalms 139:7-12*)

KJV

7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

NIV

7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Verse 7 raises the question of whether a person can be outside God's presence. However, **verses 8-12** answer this question with a resounding no! These verses use merisms to describe the inescapable presence of God. A merism combines two opposite ideas to express the whole. On the vertical axis, **verse 8** states that going neither up to heaven nor to the grave can remove a person from God's presence. On the horizontal axis, **verses 9-10** state that going neither to the farthest east nor the farthest west can remove a person from God's guiding and supportive presence. These merisms cover the extremes of both axes to show that God's presence is everywhere. **Verses 11-12** talk about darkness and light—suggesting that if there were no light and a person was engulfed in darkness, he or she could be hidden from God's presence. But this is not the case because God's presence transcends the categories of darkness and light. A person can be anywhere without being in God's presence. Just as with God's knowledge, His presence could strike fear in a person's heart, as it did in the hearts of Adam and Eve after they sinned. But in Christ, people can know God's presence as that of a shepherd who guides and supports them wherever they are. It is comforting to know that our whole lives are enveloped by the presence of God, who is always there for us.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Reflect on the imagery of God's being everywhere—whether in the heights or depths. How does this truth shape your daily life and decisions?

A Closing Thought

In the psalm, the author expresses his awe at the depth of God's intimacy with humanity. Despite the vastness of creation, God knows every aspect of our being, including our thoughts, our actions, and even our unspoken desires. This profound knowledge is meant to inspire us to pursue a deeper relationship with our Creator, recognizing God's boundless care for and attention to us.

Your Life

Recognize that God knows every aspect of you, including your thoughts, your actions, and even the hidden corners of your heart. This truth can help deepen your relationship with Him. Spend time in prayer, pouring out your innermost thoughts, knowing that God listens and understands.

Your World!

As the psalmist acknowledges God's omnipresence, you must cultivate awareness of God's nearness throughout your day. Invite God into each moment, whether at work, at home, or in transit. Acknowledge His presence as you interact with others, face challenges, or experience joy.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, let us love ourselves and others unashamedly, knowing that Your love knows no bounds. May our hearts resonate with the psalmist's words as we go forth: "Search me, O God, and know my heart." Transform us, lead us, and draw us closer to You. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson will consider the significance of King David's family in relation to Jesus' ancestry (see Ruth 4:9-17; Luke 3:23-38). So, in preparation, think about the faith of your ancestors (either personally or as a congregation) by constructing a spiritual family tree.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, November 25	"We Belong to Christ's Family"	(Luke 3:23-38)
TUESDAY, November 26	"A Household Built by God"	(Psalm 128)
WEDNESDAY, November 27	"Determined Loyalty"	(Ruth 1:1, 3, 6-18)
THURSDAY, November 28	"An Act of Kindness"	(Ruth 2:1-3, 17-23)
FRIDAY, November 29	"Bound Together by More than DNA"	(Matthew 12:46-50)
SATURDAY, November 30	"Daring Faith"	(Ruth 3:1-13)
SUNDAY, December 1	"God Has Not Abandoned You"	(Ruth 4:9-17)