

Psalm 139 – A Song of You
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Psalm 139 (CEB)

- 1 Lord, you have examined me.
You know me.
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up.
Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.
- 3 You study my traveling and resting.
You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.
- 4 There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord,
that you don't already know completely.
- 5 You surround me—front and back.
You put your hand on me.
- 6 That kind of knowledge is too much for me;
it's so high above me that I can't reach it.
- 7 Where could I go to get away from your spirit?
Where could I go to escape your presence?
- 8 If I went up to heaven, you would be there.
If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!
- 9 If I could fly on the wings of dawn,
stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—
- 10 even there your hand would guide me;
even there your strong hand would hold me tight!
- 11 If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me;
the light will become night around me,"
- 12 even then the darkness isn't too dark for you!
Nighttime would shine bright as day,
because darkness is the same as light to you!
- 13 You are the one who created my innermost parts;
you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.
- 14 I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.
Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.
- 15 My bones weren't hidden from you
when I was being put together in a secret place,
when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes saw my embryo,
and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me,
before any one of them had yet happened.
- 17 God, your plans are incomprehensible to me!
Their total number is countless!

18 If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand!
If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you.
19 If only, God, you would kill the wicked!
If only murderers would get away from me—
20 the people who talk about you, but only for wicked schemes;
the people who are your enemies,
who use your name as if it were of no significance.
21 Don't I hate everyone who hates you?
Don't I despise those who attack you?
22 Yes, I hate them—through and through!
They've become my enemies too.
23 Examine me, God! Look at my heart!
Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!
24 Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me,
then lead me on the eternal path!

I don't think we really appreciate the Psalms like we should. There are Psalms that express love, peace, hope, strength, healing, anxiety, anger and even hatred. The Psalms are great because they cover the extremes and truth of our humanity – how we are made in the image of God, who we are, who God is, as well as how we are in relationship with God.

Psalms 139 covers all of this. In Psalm 139, first and foremost, we are reminded that the Lord KNOWS ... everything ... because God searches us.

* you are so unique

* you are so special ... that the one and only ALL-KNOWING CREATOR searches you – everything about you.

The big things: like your thoughts – everything you think...

The little things: like when you sit down or get up. Near or far – the Lord knows!

Despite knowing everything - the LORD STILL **studies** you. Is that fascinating? God cares about the words that you will say **even though** the Lord already KNOWS what you're going to say. Doesn't God have better things to do? Especially if God **already knows**, right? But no. God is so interested in you – *enamored* with you, that God still surrounds you – putting a hand upon you, embracing you. The author of Hebrews tells us in 4:13, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

"God's omniscience is too much for our minds to grasp. We can hardly imagine God knowing utterly everything – hearing and answering all the prayers being raised throughout the world, many of them unwise, conflicting with other people's prayers, many from good and honest but

misguided hearts but over which higher wisdom must prevail.”¹ In the midst of all of that – God still studies you.

So how do you feel about God knowing this much about you? Being this intimate with you?

We can’t escape this or run away from God. In the height of the air, in the depths of the ocean - in darkness, in light, - in Heaven or “not heaven,” in life or death... Whether we like it or not – we ARE in relationship with God.

So do you see this relationships as ...

* God is snooping, and you don’t like it – it’s an invasion of your privacy... OR

* God’s absolute knowledge is comforting and welcomed?

You see, we either don’t realize or we often forget, that in this inevitable relationship with God, even though God is omniscient, we are omnipotent, we get to accept or reject God. It is without a doubt that God KNOWS everything about us **and still wants to be in relationship with us**. Yes, God gives us all the power – the free will to choose.

I believe that this is reinforced in versus 19-22 of Psalm 139.

19 If only, God, you would kill the wicked!

If only murderers would get away from me—

20 the people who talk about you, but only for wicked schemes;
the people who are your enemies,
who use your name as if it were of no significance.

21 Don’t I hate everyone who hates you?

Don’t I despise those who attack you?

22 Yes, I hate them—through and through!
They’ve become my enemies too.

I’m sure you know or will remember that I’ve talked about the lectionary before – it’s the 3-year cycle of the Bible used by many pastors and churches for worship. If one reads all of the scriptures listed in the lectionary, it would cover approximately 85% of the Bible. Psalm 139 appears twice in the lectionary, **without versus 19-22**. Those verses are not part of the standard lectionary. The creators of the lectionary chose to exclude them.

“It is not hard to see why these verses might be judged somewhat less than palatable for Sunday morning worship. But if we simply follow the readings [in the lectionary] as assigned for Sunday worship, we will never really come to grips with this Psalm. We will be spared the difficult, but potentially fruitful challenge, of having to wrestle with the complexities of this piece of biblical poetry in its entirety as it has been passed down to us over the centuries.”²

¹ McCormick, Sam. **Psalm 139**.

² Page, Christopher. **Psalm 139 – A Preaching Challenge ¼**. In a Spacious Place. 1/10/18.

Psalm 139 speaks so much about a closeness, an intimacy between God and us. We hear words that are loving, awe-inspiring and joyful – until we get to verse 19. Then it changes to talk of murder, wickedness and hatred.

Eliminating these verses from our lectionary (i.e. not reading them in worship), is a disservice to us, robbing us of the opportunity to reflect on the fullness of who we are and our relationship with God.

We can't not consider, nor explore feelings of anger and hatred that we may encounter within us and that we most assuredly witness in the world around us. We may not be murderers, but murder is there before us. We may not want enemies, but the reality is that we may have enemies. We know that God certainly has enemies. How do we engage them? Is it through hatred? Do I hate – *should I hate*? **Is that REALLY how God wants me to feel and respond?**

When we first read verses 19-22, we might answer, "Yes. The Psalmist hated those who hated God. So those feelings are right and justified."

I would counter with this...

Having these feelings may be real – *THAT* we acknowledge and strive to understand. We are human, so feelings of anger and hatred may arise in us. Realizing that and working through those feelings *WITH GOD*, is the intimacy and support we have in our relationship with God. It's all those feelings discussed in verses 1-18. BUT, I'm not sure that the Psalmist HATED or that we should take from these verses that **we should hate**.

We don't like murder. We don't like the wicked or wickedness. BUT we don't hate.

If the Psalmist here is David, he "knows first-hand about blood and wickedness. So, we should not be quick to apply these verses to self-justification. [The final verses of this prayer, are] a recognition of hidden faults. The [Psalmist's] conversation with God is of a consummation of hatred. [As part of our relationship with God, we] must consume such hatred so that the enemy is not made its object."³

In other words, these challenging verses remind us that

* we can tell our ugly thoughts to God. In addition to the happy, "pie-in-the-sky" feelings we readily share with God and the glory we give God in verses 1-18, we can (and should) also be vulnerable and real with the darker and harder feelings. AND...

* God ***IS*** omniscient. We reflect on the gracious and merciful truth that God's "work is perfect, for all God's ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is God" (Deut. 32:4).

³ Ibid

Psalm 139 is a wonderful Psalm in that it can TRULY be a framework for us. We can use it to document our thoughts and feelings about our relationship TO and WITH God.

I want to share with you an adaption of Psalm 139, written by the Rev. Maren Tirabassi, an author and pastor in the UCC.

*O God, you have searched me –
cancer in remission,
addiction in recovery,
incest survivor –
and known me – and you know
the not-remission, not-recovery, victim-me, too.*

*You know when I sit down and I rise up ...
when I sit down because I'm dizzy or my knees ache,
and when I rise up too many times in the night.*

*You know my thoughts,
and the way forgetting makes me afraid.
You search out my marathon ambitions
and my chronic fatigue syndrome.
You are acquainted with my T-cell count.
Even when I refuse a hearing aid,
you listen to me completely.*

*You hem me in when I wear this new diagnosis –
autism, Parkinson's, bi-polar, MS --
and stitch for me with a calm hand.
When everybody seems to know
more about my body than I do ...
such knowledge is not too wonderful for you,
nor for me when your right hand is there.*

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
High on a drink you are there.
Binging and purging you are there.*

*If I take insomnia's wings
and settle in my cutting, my secret eating –
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.*

*If I say – surely Internet pornography shall cover me
and work and home and self-respect be lost --
even that lostness is not lost to you,*

*for hope is sure as your love
and despair becomes hope in you.*

*For it was you who formed me as a body –
not just a psyche, a mind, a spirit.
You knit and purled the neo-natal me,
and then all my years
you made the other kind of pearl
around the little wounds in my life.*

*You know the intricate and hidden weaving
of transgender, and the beautiful warp
cast on a new loom which is transition.*

*You know the kidney I gave away
and the breast I didn't want to lose.*

*Your thoughts are weighty –
you rejoice when I lose pounds I want to lose
and you rejoice, when I celebrate
a full feisty, unfashionable figure.*

You are the fashion-er of me.

*O God, take from me the fashion bullies,
parents who give their kids drugs,
schoolyard cigarette sellers ...*

*surgeons whose frozen faces protect themselves,
and the so-called friends who act like
Alzheimer's is contagious ...*

*sex offenders who are sociopaths,
and the self-righteous
who treat all sex offenders as sociopaths ...*

*the killers with baby formula,
and the killers who liposuction without license.*

Am I not angry with those who rise up against you?

*Search me, O God, and know my heart,
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any hurtful way in me
and lead me in the way everlasting.⁴*

⁴ <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com>

I want to encourage you to sit down with Psalm 139 and write yourself into it... see how it's not only a first-person narrative, but also a reflection on how YOUR story and relationship with God, knit you together with the rest of humanity.

Amen.