

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Magnifying My Maker

Psalm 139:1–12

As you are being seated, go ahead and take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 139 in the Book of Psalms. Psalm 139! In a few weeks, we'll be looking at the book of Song of Solomon. But this week and next week I want to look at Psalm 139.

A few months back, the Preacher's Guild preached through an assortment of psalms in our series, "The Five Books of Psalms." You can take a look at that series on our website. The first message in that series overviewed the Book of Psalms as a whole and the five collections of the Psalter.

And as part of that series, we preached through several psalms in the Psalter, but unfortunately, we didn't look at Psalm 139. I want to do that this morning. In fact, I'm going to preach this psalm over the next two weeks—verses 1–12 today and verses 13–24 next week.

Today I'm preaching the favorite psalm of Derek Flowers. No pressure! Today I'm preaching my wife's favorite psalm too. When I told her a few weeks ago that I was preaching through Psalm 139, she gave me that "you-better-not-mess-this-up" look.¹

Psalm 139. What's this Psalm about? Well, it's a Psalm about God's all-knowing nature. David meditates on the truth that there's nowhere to hide from God's ever-present gaze. And you get the sense that David would, at times, like to escape that gaze. But he can't. There's nowhere to run. There's nowhere to hide. God is everywhere and he sees everything. Is that a good thing? Is that good?

I heard a pastor say once that when he first got married, he and his wife decided to tell each other everything. Every little sin in their hearts! Every little anger, every little lust, every little peccadillo that they committed against each other, they would confess to one another! But then after several months of this, they started to make each other crazy. And they decided, "If we're going to make it in this marriage, we've got to stop doing this!" And they decided to confess their sins to one another in generalities versus specifics.

And here's what that pastor concluded. He concluded that it's impossible in a marriage situation to be absolutely known and absolutely loved. 100% known and 100% loved; it's impossible. That's just not feasible in this life, and that's an unbearable burden in marriage.

And yet we have this longing in our hearts to be fully known and fully loved. Marriage is about as close as you can get humanly speaking to that. But the problem is that there are so many little wickednesses in the human heart that if you share everything with your spouse, you'll make her crazy, or him crazy. Nevertheless, we still have this longing inside of us to be fully known and fully loved. We want that.²

Do you know what Psalm 139 is about? Can I tell you what this is about? It's about this. It's about a God who knows everything about you... every single thing! Every dirty deed! Every hidden desire in your heart! Every wicked thought in your mind. There's no hiding from him. Even if you want to hide from him, you can't.³

¹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 816: "[S]tudents of the Bible are drawn to this passage when studying the omniscience and omnipresence of the sovereign God, the creator and redeemer. The psalm however is far more than a theological study; it uses the theological ideas to form a powerful message for those who trust in the sovereign LORD God—it is applied theology, and so always relevant."

² Sermon: "Death and the Christian Hope." 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. Preached 04.04.04. *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

³ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 815: "Psalm 139 is surely one of the most beautifully written psalms in the collection, and one of the most profound as well. Moreover, we have here perhaps the most intimate psalm in the collection."

Psalm 139 is about a God who fully knows you, and yet at the same time, fully loves you. The deepest desire of the human heart—to be fully known and fully loved—is dealt with right here. David addresses this God in this psalm, this hymn. And he worships him.

I'm entitling this message today, "Magnifying My Maker (Part 1)." And I want to say four things about this psalm from verses 1–12. I want to give you four reasons to magnify your maker. Go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes. Magnify him because of...

1) His **Omniscience** (139:1–4)

Here's how David describes God's omniscience in **verse 1**.⁴

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

¹ O LORD,⁵ you have searched me and known⁶ me!² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;⁷ you discern my thoughts from afar.⁸

In other words, you know everything about me, Lord. Nothing surprises you about me. And nothing escapes your omniscient grasp.⁹

By the way *omni* is the Latin word for "all." And *scientia* is the Latin word for "knowledge." Therefore, omniscience means "all-knowing" or "all-knowledgeable." **Believe it or not, I actually had some sweet, little old ladies teach me about that word in VBS when I was about 8 years old. They walked us through the etymology of this word, and told us about how God, our creator, is an all-knowing God who at the same time loves us and died for us. You've got to love those VBS teachers.**

And those teachers taught me the goodness of this concept. The goodness of God's all-knowing-ness. But I confess, it didn't always seem good to me. Not at 8 years old or even later. Because I don't like God being all up in my business. I like my privacy. I like to compartmentalize my life. **"God, you can be in charge of this, this, and this. But this, over here, is my thing! It's secret."** Well God doesn't work that way. God doesn't allow for compartmentalizing. He knows everything!¹⁰

And besides that, he's a personal God. **He's not just some big cosmic computer in the sky crunching numbers.** Look how David describes that in **verse 1**. "You have searched me!" This Hebrew word, חָקַר, means to "explore" or "search out" or even "probe."¹¹ This word is used in **Judges 18:2** to describe spies who go to "explore" the land. This is a very active and personal thing that God has done. He has probed David's heart. **This is not the impersonal God of the deists like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. This is not the**

⁴ "For most of our commentators, this psalm elicits meditations on the comforts we can find in God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. As several Reformation interpreters note, God's providential knowledge and control over all aspects of creation lead us to find our security beyond ourselves." Selderhuis and George, eds., *Psalms 73–150*, RCS, 351.

⁵ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 819: "The use of the personal, covenant name 'Yahweh' ('LORD') is appropriate, for it harmonizes with the emphasis on God's intimate knowledge and superintendence of the life of the psalmist as well as his protecting presence."

⁶ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 545: "Hyponyms of the semantic field 'to know'/'knowledge' (*yd'*, vv. 1b, 2a, 4b, 6a, 6b) multiply in the stanza's first strophe (vv. 1–4): 'consider' (*byn l*, v. 2b), 'discern' (*zrh*, 3a), 'familiar with' (*skn*)."

⁷ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 820: "The object of the verb is formed with two infinitives with pronoun suffixes, 'my sitting down and my rising up' (שֹׁכְבִי וְקוּמִי). The two forms together form a unified idea (a merism), expressing the totality of his movement: God knows every move he makes (including sitting down and rising up, but much more than those two movements)."

⁸ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 547: "'[A]far' refers to God's local enthronement in the heavens, which symbolizes his transcendent rule (Ps. 11:4f. [5f.]). In sum, verse 2b combines God's transcendent knowledge with his transcendence in space."

⁹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 546: "Knowledge is power, and transcendent knowledge is owned exclusively by Israel's faithful, merciful King."

¹⁰ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 549: "Incredibly, adherents of 'Open Theology,' who are consistent Pelagian theologians, deny that Scripture teaches God's personal omniscience."

¹¹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 819: "Divine knowledge, of course, does not require that God engage in such a search, and so the expression is figurative (an implied comparison)—it is as if God has made such a search of him and discovered all there was to know."

divine clockmaker who just winds up the clock and then goes away to leave humans to figure things out on their own. No, this is an active, probing, personal God who is near to us.

Let me just relay some theological terms to you this morning. I want to do for you what those sweet, little old ladies did for me in VBS 40 years ago. The Bible conveys to us a God who is both wholly other and yet he is also near to us. Theologians refer to this as God's immanence and his transcendence. Immanence means nearness or closeness. Transcendence means wholly other. It means otherworldliness. God is both. He is both immanent and transcendent. The Bible says that God exists in unapproachable light. He is great and powerful and inaccessible to us. Yet he is also immanent. He's near. He's close. He's personal.¹² David says here, **"he searches me out."** He knows us better than we know ourselves.¹³

And in **verse 3**, David says,

³ *You search out my path and my lying down.*¹⁴

Now this is a different Hebrew word for "search out" than in **verse 1**. This is the Hebrew word זָרַח which means "to winnow" or "to scatter."¹⁵ David says literally here, **"God, you winnow out my path."** This language reinforces the idea of God's sovereignty. God is omniscient. He knows everything. But he's also sovereign over our paths.

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.*

Does that description of God make you feel a little claustrophobic? Does that feel smothering to you?

⁴ *Even before a word is on my tongue,*¹⁶ *behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*¹⁷

Are you feeling like Daniel Boone right now? Like you could use some elbowroom? David says, "I can't even get the words out of my mouth before you know them."

How does God know what we are going to say? How does he have this great power over us? Well, first of all, he's timeless. That helps. He sees the beginning from the end. And because he knows the beginning from the end, he knows what you are going to say before you even say it. He's not bound by time.

But also—and I think this is what David is getting at here—God knows what's in the depths of David's heart. So even before David's heart forms those words... and even before his brain brings together letters that form words that form sentences that form paragraphs... even before the actual words he's going to speak travel from his brain to his tongue and are enunciated aloud through his lips... God already knows what he's going to say. **How do you feel about that, church? God knows your words before you speak them. God knows your thoughts even before you articulate them.**¹⁸

Now let's just stop and think about this for a second. Is David describing this as a good thing? Is he okay? Or is he frustrated with a God who knows everything about him? A God who knows him better than he knows himself? This is the question that commentators often bring up for this Psalm. Is this a praise song,

¹² VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 959: "The knowledge of God is relational. He knows his own (see 1:6), as he discerns the righteous from the wicked (cf. vv. 19–20)."

¹³ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 532: "With reference to Psalm 139, [John Owen] comments: 'Men may have a general persuasion that they are under the eye of God' which they obtain by a general apprehension of God's omniscience and presence, as 'all things are naked and open before him' (Heb. 4:12). Powerfully it is expressed by the psalmist that God 'knows all things—that his understanding is infinite—that nothing can be hid from him—and that there is no flying out of his presence, Ps. 139:7, nor hiding from him, the darkness being light to him.'"

¹⁴ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 821: "The focus of this activity is expressed in another merism, the opposite ideas of 'journeying forth' and 'lying down on a bed' meaning one's entire daily routine."

¹⁵ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 820–1: "The verb 'winnow, sift' (זָרַח) compares God's evaluating, penetrating knowledge to the process of winnowing grain—separating what is worthless from what is valuable."

¹⁶ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 530: "God's foreknowledge is the focus Calvin would give us, so that whether we affirm that God knows already what we are about to communicate with the tongue, or whether Psalm 139:4 means that God needs no human language from us since he can read our hearts, independent of human language, it all means the same thing: God 'knows' as we do not."

¹⁷ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 821: "The way these two verses have been translated, one can easily take them in a positive sense. But in fact they do not have that emphasis. The psalmist feels trapped and overwhelmed by God's knowledge, so much so that his next thoughts will be to escape from it."

¹⁸ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 821: "The point of the illustration is that if God knows this much about this detail of life, he certainly knows all the activities and intentions we have."

Psalm 139? Or is this a lament?¹⁹ Is David praising God for his awesomeness and omniscient, sovereign power? Or is he lamenting the fact that he can't escape God's presence and God's power?

Here's my answer to that question. I think David's doing a little bit of both. And here's why I think that. Forgive me if I read my own experiences into this. I think David's doing a little bit of both, because I do a little bit of both. There are times when I praise God that he is sovereign and knows me better than I know myself. It brings comfort to me to know that nothing surprises God. Nothing catches him off-guard. He's so much more powerful than me. And that's comforting.

But there are other times when I wish God wasn't so God-like! I wish I could get away with a few things without him knowing. **Anyone else feel like that from time to time?**

By the way, you know what else those sweet, little old ladies told me at VBS? Can I tell you something else about my VBS experience? Those little old ladies told me that God is always watching me. And even if they don't see what I'm doing, and even if my pastor doesn't see what I'm doing, even if my parents don't see what I'm doing, God knows what I'm doing all the time. "Thanks a lot, VBS teachers!" "You just made sin a lot less enjoyable for me."

Can I tell you something else about my childhood? I had a very traumatic childhood, as you can tell. Here's something else that happened. When I was just a little guy, probably 3 years old or younger, my parents told me that Santa Claus didn't exist. He was a hoax. Can you believe that? The nerve of my parents! I want you guys to give them grief the next time they're in town for that.

And of course, we all sing these silly little songs at Christmastime, "He knows when you are sleeping! He knows when you're awake! He knows when you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake." And you know what my mom said about that. She said, "That's not true, kids. There's no Santa Claus. That song is dumb!" Thanks a lot, mom and dad!

And then my parents would tell us this. They basically told us what David says in Psalm 139. They said, "Listen kids, there is someone who knows when you are sleeping. There is someone who knows when you've been bad or good. There is someone who knows everything about you. And it's not us. And it ain't Santa Claus! It's the Lord."

And they didn't present that as a bad thing or an invasive thing. Sure, I'm sure they told us that so that we would behave even when they weren't looking. But they told us that as a good thing... as a comforting thing. God is omniscient. He knows everything about us.

And they also told us that in an effort to steer us towards this God who knows everything, so that we would embrace the God of grace who forgives everything. More on that later.

Go ahead and write this down as #2 in your notes. David is magnifying the Lord for his omniscience. Here's a second reason he gives for magnifying the Lord.

2) His **Omnipotence** (139:5-6)

By the way, this psalm is a song to be sung. And that's made clear in the superscription before verse one. I skipped by that pretty quickly. David writes,

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

That superscription was part of the original Hebrew. It's a title of sorts for this psalm. And the statement about a choirmaster and the word "psalm" itself indicates that this was something musical that was sung before the Lord.

And just by way of application, we should sing songs like this to the Lord. We should sing of his omniscience. We should sing of his omnipotence. If you want to sing silly songs about Santa Claus, go right ahead. I'll probably join in with you. But I'm much more partial to songs like this that magnify the Lord... songs that testify to his omniscience... and songs that testify to his omnipotence.

Once again, the word *omni* means "all." And the word *potens* means "powerful." God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. If you have spent any time in the Christian church or reading the Bible, you know that this is an essential part of God's being. He is an "all-powerful" being. He is not a graven image made by human hands. He is not a limited, deified being like those whom the Greeks and Romans worshiped as gods. The God of the

¹⁹ VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 958: "The various components—hymn, thanksgiving, lament—of this psalm expose us to the intensely personal relationship between the psalmist and his God."

Israelites is God and God alone. And he is an all-powerful God!²⁰ **Do you believe that, church? Can you amen that for me?**

And by the way, just a *nota bene* about King David for you. David was required, as the king of Israel, to read the Book of the Law daily. In fact, **Deuteronomy 17** says this about the King: “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them...” (17:18–19).

And assuming David was obedient to that command, David would have known all about the sovereign, all-powerful God of the Israelites from the Book of the Law (i.e., the Pentateuch). He knew all about the Yahweh who created the entire world in six days (**Gen 1–2**). He knew all about the Yahweh who brought the flood and wiped all of humanity except for Noah and his small family (**Gen 6–8**). He knew all about the Yahweh who had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and settled them in the Promised Land, the place where even now David was writing **Psalms 139** as the King over the Promised Land. And David would have been very familiar with the *Shema* text of **Deuteronomy 6:4**: “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one!”

And the reason I point that out is to let you know that David’s good theology in **Psalms 139** wasn’t plucked out of thin air. It’s based upon his reading of the truth in **Genesis – Deuteronomy**. **Similarly, your good theology, church... my good theology (or lack thereof), just like David, is going to be based on your reading and believing of God’s Word. Do you read it? Do you believe it? David read and believed God’s Word in the Torah. That’s why he writes with such clarity and good theology in Psalms 139.**

Speaking of good theology, David says in **verse 5**.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand [literally “palm”]²¹ upon me.

The Hebrew word for “hem in” here is the word צוּר. It means to “besiege” or “encircle.” It’s military language. David is saying here, **“You, O Yahweh, have conquered me. You have overpowered me.”** You lay your palm upon me. **Bruce Waltke** says this about this expression: **“When one rests his hand on another, the object is decisively under the subject’s control, not his own... the gesture of laying one’s hand on another exhibits full authority.”**²²

Now again, is this a good thing for David or a bad thing? Once again, I think it’s both. David cannot escape God’s sovereign control of his life. Maybe at times, he doesn’t like that. But at other times, it’s comforting. God is in control of your life and your death, and nobody can supplant God’s sovereign plan for your life, not even you. That should ultimately be comforting!

The great Baptist missionary to China, Lottie Moon, said it this way. She wasn’t the first person to say this, but she said it often. She said, “I have a firm conviction that I am immortal till my work is done.”²³ **In other words, she’s saying I’m not going to die until God determines that it’s my time to die. I’m immortal until then. And this was an important thing for her, because she was surrounded sometimes by danger and hostilities in China that constantly threatened her life. But in the midst of that, she had an absolute confidence in God’s sovereignty and omnipotence. “I am immortal until my work is done.” Until God calls me home!**

If you’re confused about that... if you are struggling to understand how God’s sovereignty intersects with human choice and decision-making, you’re not alone. David says in **verse 6**.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.²⁴

²⁰ JOHANNES BUGENHAGEN: “How pleasant and how full of comfort it is to know and believe that all things are in the hand of God, and that all things are disposed by God.” Quoted in Selderhuis and George, eds., *Psalms 73–150*, RCS, 352.

²¹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 821–2: “The word for ‘hand’ here is not the ordinary word (יָד) that would express the power of God; rather, it is the ‘palm’ (כַּף) of the hand. The bold figure (an anthropomorphism) of ‘you place your hand over me’ gives the picture of ‘cupping’ something with the hand, like a bug on the table. This image fits the parallelism and expresses the uneasiness the psalmist has about the controlling and evaluating knowledge of the LORD.”

²² Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 549: “When one rests his hand on another, the object is decisively under the subject’s control, not his own. On the one hand, God’s hand can shelter a person (Exod. 33:22) or graciously impart power and benefit (Ezra 7:6; Neh. 2:8). On the other hand, more often the figure signifies the imposition of a will opposed in some way to another’s own.”

²³ Quoted in Daniel Akin, *10 Who Changed the World* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2012), 64

In other words, **“I don’t understand how your sovereignty works, God. It’s beyond my comprehension.” Anyone else ever said that to the Lord before? I have!** “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” **“I don’t know how divine sovereignty and human responsibility come together. It is too high for me. I cannot attain it.”**

Also, I’ll just add, I don’t know how God can be both immanent and transcendent. I don’t know how those things come together. But they are in the Bible, and I believe it. They are in the Bible, and I’ve learned to trust God even when my mind can’t comprehend his majesty.

Charles Spurgeon said once about divine sovereignty and human responsibility that they are two parallel lines, **“but they do converge, and they will meet in eternity, close to the throne of God.”**²⁵ I’m so glad to know that both King David and Charles Spurgeon struggled to make sense of God’s sovereignty in our world.

Write this down under #3. Here’s another reason for us to magnify the name of the Lord.

3) His **Omnipresence** (139:7–10)

David writes in verse 7,

⁷ *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?*²⁶

In other words, **“You’re everywhere, God. You’re omnipresent. There’s no escaping your presence.”**²⁷

Most of you, I imagine, are familiar with the prophet Jonah. You guys remember him? Well, this same phraseology was used of Jonah in chapter 1 of that book. Because when God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and prophesy in that city, Jonah got in a boat and went as far away from Nineveh as humanly possible—Tarshish.

Why? Well, according to Jonah 1:3, it was in order to flee from the presence of the Lord. Well, Jonah wasn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer. He should have spent more time reading his Bible, namely Psalm 139, where David said 250 years before Jonah, “where shall I flee from your presence?” You can’t escape the presence of the Lord, Jonah! Jonah had to learn that the hard way after being thrown into the sea and swallowed by a fish.

David says in verse 8.

⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*²⁸

Sheol, by the way, is the abode of the dead. It’s sometimes translated “hell” in our English Bibles. But more often than not the reference is to “the grave” or the “abode of the dead.” And David is hyperbolizing here. David can’t make his bed in Sheol. **Dead people don’t make their beds.** But this is poetry. This is extreme

²⁴ AUGUSTINE: “Do we, whose minds are so feeble, believe that we can comprehend whether God’s foresight is the same as his memory and understanding, who do not behold individual things by thought but embraces all that he knows in one eternal, unchangeable and ineffable vision? In this difficulty and distress, therefore, we may indeed cry aloud to the living God, ‘Your knowledge is become wonderful to me; it is sublime, and I cannot reach it.’ For I understand from myself how wonderful and how incomprehensible your knowledge is, by which you have made me, when I consider that I cannot even comprehend myself whom you have made.” Quoted in Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, ACCS, 384.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records*, comp. Susannah Spurgeon and W. J. Harrauld, vol. 1, 1834–1854 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 177.

²⁶ AUGUSTINE: “You conceal your heart from people; conceal it from God if you can. How will you conceal it from him to whom it was said by a certain sinner, ‘Where shall I go from your spirit, and from your face where shall I flee?’ He was asking where he might flee to escape the judgment of God and did not find [an answer]. For where is God not?” Quoted in Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, ACCS, 386.

²⁷ VanGemenen, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 961: “Unlike the pagan deities, whose authority was conceived as confined to certain areas of operation, the Lord’s authority extends to ‘the heavens ... the depths ... the wings of the dawn ... the sea’ (vv. 8–9).”

²⁸ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 824: “‘Heavens’ above and ‘she’ol’ below form a merism, meaning everything from one place to the other.”

language.²⁹ This is David's way of saying, **"I can't escape you, God. Wherever I go, you are there. Wherever I turn, you are there!"**³⁰

And here's the question for us again. Is David presenting this as a good thing or a bad thing? Does David want God to be with him at every turn? Sometimes we want to escape from God. Sometimes we want to make our bed in a place where God can't find us!

But listen to me. Listen, church. It may sound like David begrudges the Lord here for his omnipresence. Maybe he does at some points in this song. But ultimately, and David eventually gets to this conclusion, it's a good thing that we can't escape God's presence. It's a good thing that we can't outrun God or hide from him. That should be a comfort to you, Christian.

By the way, there's a parallel here with Adam and Eve in the Garden. Do you remember what Adam and Eve tried to do after they ate from the tree? They tried to "hide" from God. It's really kind of adorable. How do you hide from God? They were so ashamed of their sin and their guilt and their failure, they didn't want to be seen by God. They tried to cover themselves up with fig leaves. That must have been really, really painful. And what did God do for them? He clothed them with garments purchased by blood. That's what God did.

There's no hiding from God, church. There's no hiding your sin from him! But there is a covering. There are garments of righteousness that Jesus Christ has provided for us.³¹

David says in **verse 9**.

⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning³² and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*³³

The "uttermost parts of the sea" might as well have been the dark side of the moon for the Israelites. **The Israelites didn't have a Navy that circumnavigated the globe like the Spanish did in the sixteenth century or the British did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.** The sea was, for the Israelites, the great unknown. If you can't escape God in the uttermost parts of the sea, you can't escape God anywhere.³⁴

And notice what David says in **verse 10**. This is the first instance in which you start to think, **"maybe this isn't a bad thing that we can't escape God."** **"Maybe David thinks of this as a good thing."**

¹⁰ *even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*

"Even on the dark side of the moon, God, you are leading me. God, you are protecting me. God, you are holding me up."³⁵ This is a turning point in the Psalm.³⁶ This is where David stops begrudging God's

²⁹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 553: "Its three other uses the verb refers to making one's bed in degraded circumstances: the grave (Ps. 139:8; Isa. 14:11) and dust and ashes (Isa. 58:5; Esther 4:3)."

³⁰ CHRYSOSTOM: "To prove to you that he is speaking of God's omnipresence, listen to what follows: 'If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to hell, you are present.' Do you see how God is everywhere present? The prophet did not know how this was true but he shudders, he is upset, he is at a loss when he so much as thinks about it." Quoted in Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, ACCS, 385.

³¹ AUGUSTINE: "Do you wish to listen to advice? If you wish to flee from him, flee to him! Flee to him by confessing, not by hiding from him. For you cannot hide, but you can confess. Say to him, 'You are my refuge,' and let love be nurtured in you, which alone leads to life. Let your conscience bear testimony to you because it is of God." Quoted in Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, ACCS, 385.

³² Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 824: "The psalmist is here raising the hypothetical idea that he might mount up in flight at dawn and streak across the sky with the speed of light from east to west. Even if he could do that, he could not escape the presence of God."

³³ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 550: "This aspect of the psalm has been fittingly entitled 'The Hound of Heaven' by *The Grail Psalms*."

³⁴ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 554: "Although it can be spoken of neutrally as a part of the cosmos (Gen. 1:2), normally sea represents chaotic power hostile to God and the world (Job 26:12f.; 38:8–10; Pss. 46:2f. [3f.]; 104:6f.)."

³⁵ VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 961: "People cannot hide from the all-seeing eye of the Lord, whether in the highest heavens, the deepest recesses of the earth, or the depths of the sea."

³⁶ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 825: "The tone of the psalm now changes completely... The verb 'lead, guide' (הָנִיחַ) is the word used in Psalm 23 (s.v. Ps. 23:3); it is definitely favorable and comforting... God is not only present with him everywhere, but holding him and guiding him with loving intentions."

sovereignty over his life and he says, **“This is good! You are leading me, God!” “You are protecting me, even, God!”**

Jesus says something similar in the NT. He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28). **Is that you? Does that describe you? Are you one of Jesus’s sheep?**

Paul says something similar in Romans 8 about those who belong to God. He says, “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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” (8:38–39).

What do you think about that, Christian? Some of you might even think back to a time in your life when you tried to escape the Lord, when you tried to run away. And yet God in his mercy retained you and sustained you. There’s no escaping the God of the Universe. He’s omnipresent. And for those of you who belong to him, his hand is leading you and guiding you and protecting you.³⁷

Finally write this down as #4. We should magnify our maker because of his omniscience, his omnipotence, his omnipresence. Here’s a final reason. We should magnify him also because of...

4) His **Purity** (139:11–12)

David writes in verse 11.

¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover³⁸ me, and the light about me be night,”³⁹

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.⁴⁰

In other words, **“God, you are unaffected by darkness.” “Your goodness and your light illuminate the evil inside of me.” “I may be dark. I may have evil inside of me. But you are untouched by that. And your light illuminates my darkness.”**⁴¹

This sounds an awful lot like the **Gospel of John** to me. This sounds an awful lot like, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4–5). Who was the light in John 1? Who was the Word who became flesh and lived among us? It’s Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

There was a worship chorus that came out a few decades ago that went like this. This is good:

*Light of the World, You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You,
Hope of a life spent with Thee.
And here I am to worship; here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that You’re my God!*

God is light. There’s no darkness in him. These are moral categories, not physical or natural or astronomical categories!

³⁷ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 520–1: “Origen (185–253), the apologist *par excellence*, knows how offensive Psalm 139 is to pagan philosophers such as Celsus, with whom he debates... This unification of God’s ineffability with his intimacy is the primary cause of offense to the pagan philosophers; for them these two realities of God’s persona proclaimed in Psalm 139 are incompatible. These two aspects of God meet in the Person of Jesus Christ... Psalm 139 holds these two aspects in remarkable tension: ineffability and intimacy.”

³⁸ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 556: “šûp is well known from Genesis 3:15: ‘The Seed of the woman will crush/bruise [šûp] your head, and the Serpent will crush/bruise [šûp] his heel.’”

³⁹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 557: “Light is the time of salvation (Isa. 30:26), prosperity, well-being, and success (Job 17:12; 18:5f.; 22:28; Prov. 13:9; Lam. 3:2; Esther 8:16). *Night* (*laylâ*) here is not merely a temporal period (as in Ps. 1:2; 16:7), but a conceptual equivalent of ‘darkness’—the time when darkness with all its negativity rules.”

⁴⁰ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 545: “The first two stanzas, composing half of the psalm, are linked by merisms: ‘sit and rise’ (v. 2), ‘go out and lie down’ (v. 3), ‘behind and before’ (v. 4); ‘go and flee’ (v. 7); ‘heavens’ ... ‘Grave’ (v. 8); ‘rise and settle,’ ‘dawn [east] and sea [west]’ (v. 9); and ‘darkness’/‘night’ and ‘light’/‘day’ (vv. 11–12). God’s intimate omniscience and omnipresence are inseparable.”

⁴¹ VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 961: “The Lord’s hand will protect God’s child wherever he or she may be (v. 10), even in ‘darkness’ (vv. 11–12). There is only light with God, and his light brightens up the darkness.”

I know I've mentioned a lot of technical terms in this sermon already but let me just mention one more. Because this one is really important. And it'll help you think through application for this message.

Theologians will often categorize God's attributes as either communicable or incommunicable. Incommunicable attributes are those attributes of God that humans, no matter how hard we try, can't imitate. It's like an incommunicable disease. We're not going to catch it, no matter how much time we spend with God.

And I've given you today three examples of God's incommunicable attributes: his omniscience, his omnipotence, and his omnipresence. **So, let me be clear about this—you and I will never, ever be omnipotent like God is omnipotent. I hope that doesn't hurt your feelings. God is God, and we are not. And we won't be omnipotent like him, or omniscient like him, or omnipresent like him, even in eternity.**

But many of God's attributes are communicable. We can catch them by spending time with him. We can in some way appropriate them, not perfectly but partially. A great example of this is God's holiness. We cannot be perfectly holy like God is holy, but we can be increasingly holy like him, as we surrender our lives to him. As a matter of fact, God tells us in his Word, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16; cf. Lev 11:44).

Another example of a communicable attribute is God's goodness. We can be good like God is good; not perfectly but partially. Also, God's love. We can love like God loves. Also, there is God's kindness. We can be kind like God is kind. In fact, it's a fruit of the Spirit. God put his Spirit into us so that we can experience even to a greater degree God's attributes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Now here's why I mention this. I gave you four reasons to magnify your maker this morning. Essentially, I gave you four characteristics of God: omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and purity. **But only one of those four characteristics is communicable. Only one of those four can you, as a follower of Jesus, catch. And it's the fourth one, purity. It's light-bearing, if you will. You can be pure like God is pure. You can be light to the darkness of this world, like God is light to this world.**

Jesus Christ said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). But you know what else Jesus said? He said to us, his followers, his disciples: "You are the light of the world...let your light [let your purity, your goodness in the midst of darkness] shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:14-16).

C.S. Lewis says this in his book *Mere Christianity*, "If we let him... he will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into... a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) his own boundless power and delight and goodness.... that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what he said."⁴²

You want to worship God, church? You want to magnify his Name? Then praise him for his omnipotence. Praise him for his omniscience. Praise him for his omnipresence. And praise him for his purity.

But also imitate that purity. Let God work on you to grow your purity and your righteousness and your light-bearing, so that you can be a light to the dark places of this world.

I've heard a lot of negativity recently from "Christians" who decry "purity culture." For them purity has become a buzzword for something twisted or misguided. And let me just say publicly that I think that's a mistake. The pursuit of purity is not the problem. The pursuit of purity without grace is the problem. God wants us to pursue purity. God wants us to be light in the dark places of this world. God wants us to imitate his purity.

Let me say it stronger than that... let me say it suffused with grace... God wants to purify us through the gospel, so that we might show off God's glory and God's character as we strive to imitate his purity.

I'll close with this. I want to go back to where I started with Psalm 139. If you remember, I told you that a pastor and his wife decided early on in their marriage to not share every little detail of their hearts with one another, because that was an impossible burden in their marriage.

⁴² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 205-6.

And yet that pastor admits there is still this persistent longing in the human heart to be fully known. We want to be fully known and fully loved. The human heart desperately wants that. But our marriages can't deliver that. Our friendships can't deliver that. Our children can't deliver that.

Here's what that pastor said, "There are people who think you're great [but that's] because they don't [really] know you." Because if they really knew everything about you, even your own children, they'd have a hard time loving you. And here's the truth of the matter: "There's nobody on the face of the earth who would know you to the bottom who could love you to the skies. When someone likes you but doesn't know you, that's not that satisfying. When someone knows you and doesn't like you, that's certainly not very satisfying. What we want is to be utterly known and utterly loved."⁴³

And who can do that? Who knows the deepest, darkest parts of your heart and still loves you? Who is that person according to David in Psalm 139 who is acquainted with all my ways, and even before a word is on my tongue, he knows what I'm going to say? He knows you completely, and yet at the same time, he loves you completely.

Only God can be that for you. Only God loves you like that. That's what Psalm 139 is about. Receive it. Believe it. Let's bow together in a word of prayer before we take communion.

⁴³ Timothy J. Keller, Sermon: "Death and the Christian Hope."