

Key:

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

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Magnifying My Maker (Part 2)

Psalms 139:13–24

As you are being seated, go ahead and take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 139 in the Book of Psalms. Today we're going to look at the back half of that psalm, verses 13–24.

I read a story once about the church father, Augustine. He came to church prepared to preach a message on Psalm 138. But before he got up to preach, the reader who preceded him mistakenly read Psalm 139. So rather than preach his prepared message on Psalm 138, he went ahead and preached an unprepared message on Psalm 139.¹

All that to say that I'm very glad that Joseph read the right psalm today, because unlike Augustine, I wouldn't be able to preach an unprepared sermon... not a very good one anyway.

So let's talk Psalm 139. Last week, I gave you four reasons to magnify your Maker from the first half of this psalm: 1) His Omniscience, 2) His Omnipotence, 3) His Omnipresence, and 4) His Purity. Today, from Psalm 139:13–24, I want to give you...

Four Reasons to Submit to Your Maker:

Write these down. Here's the first reason. Very simply, because...

1. He **created** you (139:13–16)

David, addressing Yahweh in verse 13, says,

¹³ For² you formed my inward parts;³

Literally “my kidneys” in Hebrew. David says, “**You formed my kidneys, Lord!**”⁴

The kidneys are functioning here as a metaphor for both our physical and our metaphysical properties.⁵ “**You created my body, Lord, but you also created my soul,**” says David. “**I am made in the image of God. I am a masterpiece, and you are my master craftsman, Lord!**”

you knitted me⁶ together in my mother's womb.

That word “knitted” could be translated “intertwined” or “plaited.” **And obviously David is not communicating something here that applies only to him, as the king of Israel. This is true of all humans including you and me.**

God wove us together in our mothers' wombs. God knitted us together like an embroidered quilt. Think about the intricacies of the human body for just a moment. Think about the elaborate ways in which your nervous system and skeletal system and circulatory system come together in your body. God put all of that together inside of you.

¹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 523.

² Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 557: “The stanza represents God as a skillful weaver of embroidered cloth dedicated to creating his magnum opus. His studio is the dark chamber of a mother's womb. Introductory *for (ki)* logically connects the third stanza with the first two; God's personal omnificence, ‘*I AM* created me,’ lays faith's foundation for God's active omnicompetence (cf. Ps. 33:15).”

³ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 557 links this verse with the previous verse (139:12) about God lighting up the darkness: “With God the womb's darkness is light, and its hiddenness lies open.”

⁴ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 826–7: “‘Kidneys’ is used commonly (a metonymy of subject) for the internal emotional being, the soul or spirit.”

⁵ VanGemenen, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 962: “The Lord has formed the individual as a spiritual and a physical being. All beings owe their existence to the Creator-God. How much more the individual who walks with God, who knows that the Lord has formed him or her for a purpose.”

⁶ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 827: “The verb ‘to weave together, knit’ is figurative (an implied comparison), picturing the formation of the body as the weaving of a beautiful tapestry. The body truly is a work of art.”

Did you know, Christian, that your circulatory system has 60,000 miles of track in your body? That includes arteries, capillaries, and veins. The only time we think about that is when we have a problem with one of those arteries, because we have too much cholesterol in our diet.

God created that system inside you. **God laid that track. God knitted that together inside of you while you were in your mother's womb.** And yet—here's what should grieve all of us—an abortionist pretending to be a medical profession can come and vacuum that up out of a womb and dispose of it like it was medical waste. And people in this world call it “reproductive healthcare.” Has there ever been a more pernicious use of euphemism than that?

Some of you may have wondered when **Psalms 139** was read earlier whether Pastor Tony is going to address the topic of abortion in this message. Yes, I am. And I'm not done.

Look at **verse 14.**

¹⁴ *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*⁷

In other words, we are made in an awe-inspiring way. We are made fearsomely by an awe-inspiring God. David says, **“I praise you for this!”**

Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

How does David's soul know this? He knows it just like you know it. We didn't create ourselves. We didn't make ourselves. Someone had to make us. There has to be an unmoved mover. God has set eternity in our hearts. To be an atheist is to be delusional and intellectually dishonest.

We know... deep inside of us, we know... we know that we know that we know... in our souls, in our guts... that we were made by God. In fact, we were fearfully and wonderfully made by God. God has made everything wonderful, but there's something special about humanity that elevates above everything else. We are *imago Dei*.

Look at **verse 15.**

¹⁵ *My frame [Literally “my bones” or my “skeleton”] was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*⁸

I know that moms and dads have been saying for years now to their children, “I brought you into this world...” Technically speaking... that's not true. God brought us into this world.

And I know, I know... parents had something to do with that—bringing children into this world. We'll talk more about that next week when we look at **Song of Solomon**. But no parent did this... **verse 15.** No parent intricately wove their children together. Not consciously, anyway. God does that mysterious work in women's wombs.

I remember laying my hand on my wife's stomach twenty years ago and imagining, “What mysterious thing is God doing with my son right now? What body part is being formed? What limbs are being strengthened? What features of mine or his mother's is he going to have when he comes out of this womb?”

I did all of this while God was knitting my son together in his mama's womb. God did the same thing for me when I was in my mother's womb. God did the same thing for David when David was in his mother's womb.

Look at the end of **verse 15.**

when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

That reference to “the depths of the earth” is a metaphor for the womb of a woman. It's a secret place that only God knows. It might as well be in the depths of the earth, because nobody has access to it except for God.

But also, the reference to “earth” is a reminder of where we came from. God made us from the dust of the ground. God took dirt... God took earth... and he formed it into a human being and he called him “Adam.” Adam means “dirt.” It means “ground.” It means “earth.” God took earth, and he made something beautiful out of it. And he still does that, in our day, in the wombs of mothers all around the world.

⁷ VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 962: “All God's ‘works’ are ‘wonderful,’ but the believer, more than any other part of God's creation, senses that he is ‘fearfully and wonderfully made.’”

⁸ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 828: “In the psalmist's day inside the womb would have been as remote to the human eye and knowledge as any region in the netherworld.”

Our God, church, is a creative God! Do you think about him that way? He's creative! **Last week I mentioned those three great words that I learned in VBS many years ago: omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. My gracious and long-suffering VBS teachers taught me those words. And they taught me about how the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God of the universe loved me and sent his son to die on the cross for my sins.**

But here's a word that they didn't teach me. God is also *omnificent*. God is the creator of all things. Once again the word *omni* means "all." The Latin *faciens* means "creating" or "making." You're probably familiar with the word maleficent. Maleficent means "creating evil." God is not maleficent. God is omnificent. He is the creator of all. God is unlimited in his creative power.

Some of you have this insatiable desire to build or to fashion or to create something. I know that about many of you. You have this instinctive, creative compulsion. That's because you are made in the image of God. That aspect of God's being has been transferred to you.

You are not omnificent like God is omnificent. But you have this desire to create things, because God created you in his image. My wife is this way. She has this insatiable desire to create stuff. That's the image of God being reflected in her.

Look at **verse 16**.

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed substance*⁹

The Hebrew word here that is translated "unformed substance" in the ESV is the rare word גֵּלֶם, which could be—probably should be—translated "embryo" or "fetus." God knew David when he was a pre-born embryo or fetus.

Notice also David has already said, "You knitted me together in my mother's womb" (139:13). When you take all of this together, **Psalm 139:13–16** is without a doubt the most pro-life and anti-abortion passage in the Bible!

But it's not the only one. **Job 31:15** says, "Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" **Isaiah 44:2** says, "Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you..." In **Jeremiah 1:5**, **Yahweh** tells Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."¹⁰

If you are curious about my view on abortion, let me tell you now. I am pro-life through and through. I believe that abortion is murder; it stops a beating heart after six weeks' gestation. Abortion kills a pre-born child made in the image of God. I believe life begins at conception, so abortion or any use of abortifacients is sinful and should be illegal.

I've heard Christians—even sometimes well-meaning Christians—refuse to take a stand against abortion by saying, "**Well, it's complicated.**" Actually, no it's not complicated. Abortion is the murder of a pre-born person. **Psalm 139** makes this clear. Why am I pro-life? **Psalm 139** is a big reason why.

Some people might object to this by saying, "Pastor Tony, you can't say that. That's political. You can't preach politics from the pulpit." Actually, no it's not political to say that abortion is murder. It's ethical! It's moral! It's theological!

Way, way, way before politics there is something called theology and ethics. And the Bible is not silent on ethical issues. And the reason that people label abortion strictly political is because they live in a world where everything is political. But God's Word precedes politics. It will outlast politics. And it is supreme and authoritative over politics. And so, I'm pro-life, not because of political considerations; I'm pro-life and against abortion, because that is what the Bible teaches.

Now let me say this too. I want you to hear my heart in this. I also want to address this issue by acknowledging God's grace and God's forgiveness. Is abortion an unforgivable sin? No! No, it's not. Can

⁹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 560: "Gōlem is a hapax, but its Aramaic cognate may refer to a 'formless mass' or an 'incomplete vessel'; in this context it refers to the embryo, not to his unfinished spiritual state... Scientists who now better understand the immediate cause of embryonic development through stem cell research rarely praise the Ultimate Creator of the stem cell because God has no place in their epistemology."

¹⁰ For other passages that support a pro-life position, see Genesis 1:26–27; Genesis 5:1–2; Genesis 9:6; Job 31:15; Psalm 22:9–10; Psalm 139:13–16; Isaiah 44:2, 24; Isaiah 49:1, 5; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15, 41–44; James 3:9.

God redeem and save those who have had an abortion or performed abortions? Absolutely, he can. And he does.

And those of us who are in the pro-life camp need to always acknowledge that and never forget it. God's offer of grace is not limited to those who commit "acceptable sins," if there were such a thing. God's grace is for sinners, and there are only sinners in this room right now.

By the way, King David, the author of **Psalm 139**, was a sinner. King David was an adulterer; King David was a murderer. His sins have been publicized in the Scriptures for 3,000 years. He orchestrated a plot to get Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed on the battlefield. David was an adulterer and a murderer, and the prophet Nathan rebuked David and called his actions evil in the sight of the Lord (**2 Sam 12:9**).

Did David commit an unforgivable sin? No! Was David beyond redemption? Absolutely not! In fact, God still referred to David as a "man after his own heart" centuries after David's death (cf. **1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22**).

So, let's keep that in mind as we oppose the culture of death in our country. We aren't just pro-life; we are also pro-grace.

Let's get back to David's message here in **Psalm 139**. David says in **verse 16**,

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed substance ["my embryo"];*

That's invasive! Does that sound invasive to you? Does that sound too close for comfort? God knew you when you were an embryo! **You know, in David's day they didn't have "ultrasound" technologies to see babies inside the womb. They certainly didn't have 3D technology like what we have now to see inside the womb.** So, the womb was a place that was hidden to the outside world. Nobody could see David in his mother's womb. Nobody could access that sacred space. But God, the omnipresent, omniscient God of the Universe, could see David in his mother's womb. **And he saw you in your mother's womb too.**

And even more than that. David says at the end of **verse 16**,

in your book were written, every one of them,¹¹ the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.¹²

God is not only omnipresent in space; he's omnipresent in time. He knew the number of David's days. He knows the number of your days, Christian. They are written down! Nobody dies early! Nobody dies too late! Your days are numbered by God!

Remember what **Lottie Moon** said, **"I am immortal till my work on earth is done."** God never says, **"Oops."** God never says, **"Wow, I didn't see that coming."** God is omnipresent in space and time.

Why submit your life to God, church? Why should you do that? Why should we, as Paul says in Romans 12, offer up our bodies as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable, as an act of worship (12:1–2)? We should do that because God created us. He knitted us together in our mother's womb.

Write this down as #2 in your notes. Here's another reason to submit to your Maker.

2. He is **superior** to you in every **way** (139:17–18)

David says in **verse 17**.

¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*

Several years ago, I was listening to a well-known female teacher comment on Psalm 139. And she said that many women that she interacts with have a wrong view about this psalm. She said that she went to a women's conference once and all three of the main speakers for the conference spoke on this passage of Scripture. And the sum of their message was essentially this—"Love yourself because you are awesome." That was the message they were conveying to this roomful of women. And they quoted Psalm 139:14, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," as if that was the only verse in this chapter... as if that was the only thing that David wanted to communicate in this psalm.¹³

¹¹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 561: "In addition to shaping human personality, God predestined the psalmist's destiny by writing the mortal's personal diary beforehand: *upon your book they* [all my days] *were written.*"

¹² VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 962: "The Lord had a purpose for the undeveloped embryo ('my unformed body,' v. 16)."

¹³ Jen Wilkin, "Women, Trade Self-Worth for Awe and Wonder," *Desiring God*, July 14, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/women-trade-self-worth-for-awe-and-wonder>.

But Psalm 139 isn't ultimately about how awesome we are as humans. It's about how awesome God is. Psalm 139 isn't about improving our self-esteem. It's about establishing a proper view of God. And the cure for "body issues" and "self-esteem issues" and "mental health issues" isn't having a higher view of ourselves, as important as that might be. It's having a higher view of our God!

David says,

¹⁷ *How precious to me are **your** thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*

David is basically saying here, **"You are awesome, God! And I'm not!" "Your thoughts are so infinite and eternal and magnificent, I can't count them."**¹⁴

Look at **verse 18**.

¹⁸ *If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.*

Remember how David started this psalm? He didn't start it with how awesome we are as human beings. He didn't start it with **verse 14**, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." He started it with statements about God's omniscience and God's omnipresence and God's omnipotence. **That's the cure for bad theology. But it's also the cure for self-esteem issues.** We have a better and more accurate view of ourselves, when we have a better and more accurate view of God.

Danny Akin, the president of Southeastern Seminary, says it this way: **"Wrong ideas about God lead to wrong ideas about who we are!"**¹⁵ **"Wrong ideas about God lead to wrong ideas about who we are,"** ergo **"right ideas about God lead to right ideas about who we are!"**

Look again at **verse 18**,

¹⁸ *If I would count them [that is, God's thoughts], they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.*¹⁶

In other words, **"You are otherworldly, God. You are truly and utterly awesome, beyond what my mind can even conceive. And yet, at the same time, you are with me. You love me! You haven't obliterated me instantly because of my sin. You are utterly transcendent. And yet, at the same time, you are immanent. You are superior and magnificent in every way. And yet, you are here with me."**

God knows you so intimately; he knows you better than you know yourself. And yet at the same time God loves you. The greatest human longing, to be fully known and fully loved, can only be found in God. If you get that, if you understand that, that's the remedy for self-esteem issues. That's the remedy for depression and self-loathing and low self-esteem. God knows everything about you, your deepest darkest secrets, your most profound imperfections, and yet he still loves you. He loves you! Psalm 139 is all about our infinite, intimate God!

Write this down as #3 in your notes. Here's another reason to submit to your Maker... and this next point may surprise you... this is where David, the psalmist, turns on a dime, and goes a different direction with this psalm... a direction you might not be expecting.¹⁷

Submit to your Maker, because...

3. He **opposes** evildoers (139:19–22)¹⁸

Look at **verse 19**,

¹⁹ *Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!*

Even as I read that some of you might say, **"Whoa, where'd that come from?"**

¹⁴ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 563: "Having spoken of the sum of God's blessed thoughts, the poet immediately disabuses mortals of thinking they can tally them."

¹⁵ Daniel L. Akin, "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made," sermon manuscript on Psalm 139, 1, accessed September 12, 2026, <https://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/psalm-139-fearfully-and-wonderfully-made-manuscript-kh.pdf>; cf. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Exultant: Praising God for His Mighty Works (Psalms 90–150)* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2004), 192.

¹⁶ VanGemen, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 963: "They are like a dream; but, unlike a dream, God's love is real. When awake, the psalmist still knows that he enjoys God's presence (v. 18)."

¹⁷ VanGemen, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 963: "The tone changes from thanksgiving and overpowering gratitude to imprecation. The wicked have caused the psalmist great anguish. Though the Lord has been good to him, he prays that the Lord will remove the cause of evil in this world."

¹⁸ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 563–4 identifies the structure of 'the fourth stanza' (139:19–24) as follows: "[It is] a wish with regard to the wicked (vv. 19–22) and a petition with regard to himself (vv. 23–24). The interplay of his confession of loyalty to *I AM* against the wicked and his petition to prove his integrity unify the stanza."

And yet, those of you who have read the **Psalms** frequently, you know that sometimes a psalmist does this. Sometimes a psalmist turns on a dime in the midst of a psalm. Sometimes a psalmist will make a pretty abrupt 90-degree turn, and go a totally different direction with their psalm.

For example, in **Psalms 110**, David was writing about the Lord who will be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. David talks about how this coming Lord will be a priest and a King. It's all very inspiring and it's all very non-threatening. But then David says, "[The Lord] will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses" (**Psalms 110:5-6**).

When you read that, it's a little bit of a shock to your system. Most of **Psalms 110** is inspiring and uplifting. **It's all very social-media-worthy. But I don't see a lot of Christians on social media quoting Psalms 110:6:** "[The Lord] will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses."

And similarly, **Psalms 139** makes an abrupt 90-degree turn at **verse 19**. It's all very inspiring and motivational in **verses 1-18**. **It's all very social media friendly.** But then David says in **verse 19**.

¹⁹ *Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!*

Yikes! What happened to David? What happened to sweet little king David with all that talk about embryos and his mother's womb? What happened to David saying, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them"? David, all of a sudden, it would seem, gets violent and aggressive towards evildoers. What's going on here? What's going on in this psalm?

Some scholars are so struck by this statement that they think this can't possibly be the same composition as **verses 1-18**. Those scholars think that there are two different psalms which were glued together here into one psalm. **I personally think that view is ridiculous.** Because as I read the **Psalms**, this technique is pretty common.

Oftentimes the psalmist will change or adjust their message abruptly. And that's because there is an emotional volatility in the writing of these psalms that can lead a writer to move quickly from one statement to another totally different statement. And that's what David does here.

What is David doing at **verse 19**? Why this abrupt change in language that communicates a desire for violence toward evildoers? I think this transition indicates that David is thinking God's thoughts after him. I think this is David's way of saying, **"Your thoughts are so precious to me, God. I know you hate the wicked. I hate the wicked too. So, why don't you do something about it, God? Why do you tolerate it?"**

"You're omnipotent, God! Do something about this!"

Remember now, David's an ancient king. He's surrounded by bloodthirsty, evil men both inside and outside of his kingdom.¹⁹ People hate Israel, and they want to destroy God's chosen people. And so, David entreats the sovereign God of the Universe to do something about that.

Look again at **verse 19**.

¹⁹ *Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!*²⁰ *O men of blood, depart from me!*²¹

²⁰ *They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.*

In other words, **"Do something, God!" "You're omnipotent, aren't you? You created them! Why not de-create them? Why not obliterate them?"**

The statement about taking God's name in vain echoes the third commandment (**Exod 20:7**). Why does God allow this? Why does God endure this?

And then David says this in **verse 21**.

²¹ *Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?*

¹⁹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90-150)*, KEL, 830: "Apparently David was being harassed by men intent on killing him (their intentions conflicted with God's intentions)."

²⁰ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 564-5: "His wish that God slay the wicked is most unusual. Typically the prayer in a lament psalm urgently petitions God to deliver him from the wicked and vehemently prays that God will punish them (cf. Ps. 59:1-2, 11-13 [2-3, 12-14])."

²¹ VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 964: "The psalmist, overwhelmed as he was with gratitude for God's purpose in him (vv. 13-18), sees no purpose in the existence of the wicked (v. 19). They foil God's purposes by their rebellious ways."

²² I hate them with complete hatred;²² I count them my enemies.²³

This is an example of what's called an imprecatory psalm.²⁴ This is David calling out for vengeance. This is David asking God to show his power and eradicate the wicked. He's invoking judgment on them. And this is David saying that he shares God's thoughts after him. This is David saying, **"I am with those who are with you, Lord. And I'm against those who are against you."**²⁵

Now I can't say this for sure, because the Bible is silent on this... but I actually think that David wrote this psalm (**Ps 139**) as a younger man... maybe even before he became king of Israel. Here's why I think that. Because David's zeal for God's righteous judgment here is devoid of the grace that David himself would require later in life.

David says, **"O that you would slay the wicked, Lord!"** Would David say that after his affair with Bathsheba? David says **"O men of blood, depart from me!"** Would David say that after he conspired with Joab to murder Uriah the Hittite? Would David have said, **"Slay the wicked, God!"** after Nathan the prophet came to him and said, "You are that man" (**2 Sam 12:7**). **"You have committed a vile and evil thing against the Lord."**

Would David have written **Psalm 139** after that? Or would David have written **Psalm 51**, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin!... Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me" (**51:1–2, 11**)?

Here's the thing about imprecatory psalms. Let me make a few comments on this before I continue. Because if you read the **Psalms** in the OT—and I hope that you do read the **Psalms** for yourself—you're going to come across imprecatory statements like this in **verses 19–22**, and you're not going to know what to do with them or how to interpret them.

So, here's what you do with them. First of all, you don't pray them like the psalmist prays. (By the way, not all Christian interpreters agree with me on this.) You don't invoke judgment on God's enemies. Leave that to God. Jesus turned the tables on this for us in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. We are kids of grace, not kids of judgment.

But also, be reminded that the psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is conveying an essential part of God's character and God's essence. God will ultimately slay the wicked. He will! God will ultimately punish his enemies.

God will, in his perfect time, bring judgment on those who oppose him. But God will do that in his own time and according to his ways. Yahweh is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness! The Apostle Paul says, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom 12:19**).**

Our job, as Christians, is not to hate the sinner. Our job, as Christians, is not to punish our enemies. Our job is to hate the sin and love the sinner.

And also, our job is to hate the sin and the opposition to God that is in our own hearts. Our job is to make war against the "schemes of the devil" that are inside of our own souls. Ephesians 6:12 says, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." That's where our battle

²² Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 565: "He hates those who hate God, not with malevolence and vindictiveness, but because in the covenant community God's enemies are Israel's enemies. In this spiritual battle there can be no middle position."

²³ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 833: "The Psalmist knew what the apostles affirmed later, namely, that to be loyal to the Lord one cannot have fellowship or even close friendship with the avowed enemies of the Lord (2 Cor. 6)."

²⁴ Technically this is a psalm with an imprecatory section. The imprecatory psalms of the Psalter include Pss 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137.

²⁵ BASIL THE GREAT: "Yet, it is not hard for us, if we wish it, to take up a love for justice and a hatred for iniquity. God has advantageously given all power to the rational soul, as that of loving, so also that of hating, in order that, guided by reason, we may love virtue but hate vice. It is possible at times to use hatred even praiseworthy. "Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hated you and pined away because of your enemies? I have hated them with a perfect hatred." Quoted in Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, ACCS, 389.

is fought. That's where our prayers are prayed. That is where the condemnation of evil needs to take place in the heart of a Christian... against the evil that is inside of us.

Interestingly, I think David himself recognizes this. Because notice where he goes after writing **verses 19–22**. Notice what David says in **verse 23**.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Actually, notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, "Search them and see if there be any grievous way in them, God!" He doesn't say, "I hate your enemies, Lord. Search them and test their thoughts." No. Instead, David gets personal.

Instead David invites God to search him out.²⁶ Instead David gets real with God. "Search me, God. Test me, God. And see if there be any wicked way in me."

Pray that, church. Pray that verbatim! Maybe we shouldn't pray the imprecatory statements of verses 19–22 against our enemies. But you can pray... you should pray... verses 23–24.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

This psalm, by the way, is an emotional roller-coaster. David is up and down and all over the place. And this psalm is also a theological tour de force of who God is and who we are before him. Yet it ends with a simple prayer... a simple petition to God to do what only God can do.

And do you remember how this psalm began? Remember **verse 1**? "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" (139:1–2). This was presented as somewhat invasive at the beginning of the psalm. "Where shall I flee from your presence? I can't escape you, God. You are everywhere that I go, and you know everything about me."

But by the end of the psalm, David doesn't mind this invasiveness. He comes full circle. He returns to where he began and says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart."

"I'm okay with you being invasive, Lord. I'm okay with you getting in my business." I read a commentator once who said that **Psalm 139** is a "celebration of God's invasion of our privacy."²⁷ **How's that, church? How do you feel about that, Christian?**

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,

Some of you might say, "Why is David telling God to do this? God already knows his heart. He already knows his thoughts. God doesn't need an invitation to search us out." That's true. God doesn't need our permission.²⁸

David's not giving God permission to do something he is already doing. David is asking God to reveal to David what God already knows about him. "Search me, O God, and know my heart" is an invitation to expose our sin to us so that we can root it out. It's a willful submission of ourselves to God. "Here I am, God. I give my life to you. I submit my heart to you. Search me. Test me. Refine me."²⁹

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me,

"Kick my tires, Lord. Check my oil. Check my transmission fluid. See if there is any wicked way in me that is gunking up my fuel tank. See if there's anything defective inside of me that is keeping me from running as good as I could for you."

"I need a checkup, Lord. Is there any sin in me, Lord? Is there anything grievous in me that I need to get rid of, Lord? Anything that would keep me from serving you and loving you and representing you before this world?"

²⁶ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 568: "Remarkably, the object of his petition is not God's judgment of the enemy but of himself."

²⁷ William P. Brown, cited in John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 640.

²⁸ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 570: "Why command I AM to know and lead him if God always knows and leads him? Resolving the enigma unlocks the gate to the message of the psalm."

²⁹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 830: "We have in this psalm, then, the antinomy that is found in all of Scripture. On the one hand the Bible teaches clearly that God is absolutely sovereign in all things; and on the other hand it teaches that he has given to us the responsibility of our choices. This keeps the doctrine from becoming fatalism. We do not know the details of God's sovereign will for our lives; but we do know that we must live by faith in accordance with his will. But our faith must be strengthened by the knowledge of the perceiving, pursuing and planning God."

Have you ever prayed a prayer like that to God? Have you ever been that vulnerable and that transparent before the Lord? David wanted that. He wanted God to refine him and to purify him and take the sin out of him.

And then David says this. Here's the last request of the Lord. Search me. Try me. Test me. Refine me. And finally... end of verse 24...

*and lead me in the way everlasting!*³⁰

Write this down as #4 in your notes. Here's another reason to submit to your Maker.

4. He **leads** you in the way **everlasting** (139:23–24)

How does God lead us in the way everlasting?³¹ How does God lead us into eternal life? How did God make a way for us to be whole and perfect and purified, so that we might enter into his presence as a recipient of his mercy and not a recipient of his judgment?

Well, let me be clear about that. A thousand years after David penned this great psalm, a greater-than-David son of David came to earth and took on flesh and died a ghastly death on the cross for our sins. This person, Jesus Christ, was the only man whom God searched and found no guilt.

He's the only man who was tried and tested and no grievous way was found in him. And this Jesus Christ became a perfect sacrifice, a payment for my sin and for your sin, so that we might become the saved children of God. And this God-in-the-flesh Savior offers us eternal life. He leads us in the way everlasting.

So, hear me on this. This is the most important thing I have to say today. I want you to hear this. Jesus Christ made a way so that when you die, you don't return to the earth from whence you came. When you die, you don't have to be separated from God in hell for all eternity as an enemy of God. When you die, you can actually go home to the Father in heaven who loves you, and created you, and redeems you by the blood of Jesus. God made a way for you to do that. God made a way for David to do that. But it's only possible, it's only feasible through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I heard a great story about Martin Luther once. At the end of Luther's life, he was a battered and broken man. He had absorbed much physical and emotional pain, and he was ready to die. And when he told his beloved wife, Katy, that he was nearing death, she was inconsolable.

Because here was this woman that Luther had sprung out of the nunnery and scandalously married. And they had six kids together. And they had this beautiful, happy, wonderful marriage together. And Katy was inconsolable about the prospect of life without her beloved "Doctor Martin." But here's what Luther told her. Here's what he said to her. He said, "Dear Katy, don't cry for me when I die. I'm going home to the only person in the world who loves me more than thee."³²

So what's Psalm 139 about? What does this psalm teach us? How does this psalm instruct us? Well, it teaches us about a God who knows us completely... he knows us better than we know ourselves... and yet at the same time, he loves us completely. And in his love, God has led us in the way everlasting. Through Jesus's death, God has made a way for us to live eternally with him. Believe in Jesus. Worship him. Submit to him.

Let's bow in prayer together.

³⁰ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, KEL, 834–5: "His final request is to be guided (which he earlier described as God's work wherever he might be) in 'the everlasting way.' This expression refers to the right way of living that will endure. It is comparable to seeking first the kingdom of God and its righteousness. It is the course of life that results in rest and blessing, but which if abandoned results in destruction (cf. Ps. 1:6; Jer. 6:16; 18:18)."

³¹ VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, 964: "The psalmist desires nothing less than conformity to God's will; therefore he prays for God's examination of his spiritual condition. He contrasts the two ways—the way of the world ('offensive way,' v. 24) and the way of God ('the way everlasting'). The one way leads to destruction and the other to life and fellowship with God (cf. 1:6; 16:11; Pr 12:28)."

³² Taken from the podcast *Thinking in Public* by Al Mohler, "Brand Reformation: A Conversation about Martin Luther with Historian Andrew Pettegree" 04.25.16. <https://albertmohler.com/2016/04/25/thinking-in-public-andrew-pettegree>