

LIVING ON THE EDGE

"ON THE EDGE OF LIFE"

PSALM 139:1-18

Looking for God in our world does not require university training or extreme asceticism. God can be seen everywhere, every moment, in the world he has created. Perhaps the closest expression of God's power in our lives is literally right under our own noses. Our own bodies are an interactive science museum of wonder and complexity. God's creative genius is on full display in a finger on our hand or in a follicle of our hair.

In his award-winning and best-selling book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Dr. Paul Brand (with co-author Philip Yancey) examines a number of systems and properties of the human body that sublimely illustrate the wisdom and beauty of God's design. Each chapter highlights an amazing purpose designed by God for a number of body parts and systems. The Psalmist marveled that his "frame" was not hidden from God as he created (Psalm 139:15). Dr. Brand's chapter on "Frame" is especially intriguing. He writes about the wonder of human bones. "No Exxon researcher has yet discovered a material as well-suited for the body's needs as bone, which comprises only one-fifth of our body weight. In 1867 an engineer demonstrated that the arrangement of bone cells forms the lightest structure, made of least material, to support the body's weight. No one has successfully challenged his findings. As the only hard material in the body, bone possesses

I could prove God statistically. Take the human body alone - the chances that all the functions of an individual would just happen is a statistical monstrosity.

– George Gallup

incredible strength, enough to protect and support every other cell. Sometimes we press our bones together like a steel spring, as when a pole vaulter lands. Other times we nearly pull a bone apart, as when my arm lifts a heavy suitcase."

"In comparison, wood can withstand even less pulling tension, and could not possibly bear the compression forces that bone can. A wooden pole for the vaulter would quickly snap. Steel, which can absorb both forces well, is three times the weight of bone and would burden us down. The economical body takes this stress-bearing bone and hollows it out, using a weight-saving architectural principle it took people millennia to discover; it then fills the vacant space in the center with an efficient red blood cell factory that turns out a trillion new cells per day. Bone sheathes life" (Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, 85).

This Week's Core Competency

Personal God – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Psalm 139 is a most beautiful expression of God's personal care and concern for us. God is described in this psalm as being most personal and most persistent in his love and care for his people. Often this psalm is used to show the value of human life. The description of God's intimate creation of the unborn with such intense detail shows how much God is concerned with and how much he loves each human life. To destroy something that God has taken such care to create is dangerous. This Psalm lends itself as support for

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the argument against those who would end an unborn life. The psalmists detailed description of God's handiwork in the womb makes a strong case for protecting what he has so carefully crafted. But there is much more description in this psalm of God's personal care for us than just what is prenatal.

Perhaps an even more compelling argument for the life of the unborn would be to reference the entire Psalm. Psalm 139:1-12 emphasize that God is personally involved in and cares about every aspect of our daily life now. A young woman, fearful of how she could ever care for an unexpected baby, could gain great comfort and courage knowing that God sees and knows her (Psalm 139:1-6) and that he will be with her wherever she goes (Psalm 139:7-12) and will help her with whatever she or her child may need. If another were to contemplate giving up a child for adoption, this person could be confident that God would see and know the child and that he would be with the child everywhere the child should go. Parents or friends who know a loved one who is suffering the shame and fear of an unwanted pregnancy could encourage their loved one that God is a God of love (Psalm 139:6,17) who promotes life no matter how dark the situation may be (Psalm 139:11-12). A God who knows all and is present in all can provide for all of the life he creates. God actively cares about what he creates.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Psalm 139:1-18

1 You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me

and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the
earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your
book
before one of them came to be.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts, [a] God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand-
when I awake, I am still with you.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle all personal pronouns for God.
- * Underline each word that describes the action of God in Psalm 139:1-6.
- * Bracket each verse that mentions God's hands.
- * Draw arrows pointing up, down, left and right next to verses that show the scale of God's presence.
- * Draw lines connecting the repeated word "darkness" in Psalm 139:11-12.
- * Double underline each word that describes the action of God in Psalm 139:13-16.
- * Draw a line connecting the word "thoughts" in Psalm 139:2 and 139:17.
- * Draw a line from "they" and "them" in Psalm 139:18 to the word they refer to in Psalm 139:17.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Divide Psalm 139 into 3 sections and give a title to the theme of each section.
2. How do these three sections relate to each other?
3. Does God's searching knowledge bring more comfort or more anxiety to you? Explain.
4. How is God able to know all things? (See Psalm 139:1-10.)
5. Put what Psalm 139:11-12 means in your own words.
6. Much of the creative imagery in Psalm 139:13-16 focuses on things hidden. What does this secret work say about God?
7. God's creative work is abundant before the birth of a child (Psalm 139:13-16). What does this effort from God say about his value of human life?
8. What should be our response to all of God's personal attention lavished so abundantly upon us (Psalm 139:17-18)?
9. If God is so personal with each of us, how should we change the way we treat others?
10. What would you share from Psalm 139:1-18 that would encourage someone to preserve life rather than end it?

Psalms can be categorized in a number of forms. Some Psalms are Lament Psalms (51, 57); others are Thanksgiving Psalms (32, 121). Praise Psalms (100, 113), Wisdom Psalms (1, 37), and Royal Psalms (2, 110) fill the book with different tones and sentiments. Psalm 139 is considered a Petition Psalm. The author of a Petition Psalm may be grieving a loss or celebrating a victory, but even more specifically, the bulk of the Psalm is focused on asking God to do something specific. Petition Psalms focus upon God. Psalm 139 is unique as a Petition Psalm. "The psalmist's petition, however, is atypical. Instead of petitioning God for deliverance from his enemies, he petitions God to know him and so lead him in the way everlasting. Also atypically, the psalmist mixes the motifs of confidence with anxiety (vv. 1b-12), and his petition combines certainty with uncertainty (vv. 19-24)" (Bruce Waltke, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: An Historical Commentary*, 543).

Psalm 139:1-18 can be divided into three clear sections. First, God is described as all-knowing (Psalm 139:1-6). Second, God is described as present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-12). Third, God is described as the creative force of human life (Psalm 139:13-18). One writer has labeled these three sections as God's Omniscience, God's Omnipresence, and God's Omnificence (Waltke, 542). From these descriptions of God, the Psalmist expresses much praise and awe. Throughout these three sections, the Psalmist expresses overwhelming wonder as he meditates on the greatness of God (Psalm 139:6, 14, 17-18). Each of these sections is exceptionally personal. God's greatness is not described as extreme transcendence or sterile superiority. God's "all" attributes are not cold, sterile, concepts describing an impersonal and untouchable force. God's "all" shows up in all of our world and is intimately and personally concerned with even the hairs on our heads. God is described as being close and intimately aware of all that is going on in the Psalmist's daily life.

Much of God's greatness is due to his largeness, but even more amazingly great is God's concern and attention to our individual smallness.

God's knowing of us (Psalm 139:1) is more than just data. God omniscience is a deep and personal investigation of all our ways. The "searching" of God is a picture of excavation. "The songwriter says that God searches him. The Hebrew term that led to this translation originally meant 'to explore' and sometimes conveyed the idea of digging into or digging through something. The thought is that God explores, digs into, and examines me through and through" (Charles Swindoll, *Living the Psalms*, 264). This "knowing" of us by God includes the mundane (Psalm 139:2a), the mind (Psalm 139:2b), daily activity (Psalm 139:3), and even the very words we speak, even before we speak them (Psalm 139:4)! God's knowing of us is so comprehensive that it surrounds us and touches us deeply (Psalm 139:5). This intimate and all-encompassing "knowing" that God showers upon the Psalmist is overwhelming (Psalm 139:6).

While the omniscience of God in every detail of our lives can be comforting, it can also be sobering. If God knows everything good about me, then he also knows everything that I try to hide from others. We often run from others to hide the things that bring us shame. God's omniscience is possible because of God's omnipresence. There is nowhere I can flee that will hide me from this all-searching and all-knowing God. The highest and deepest extremes find God present there (Psalm 139:8). In the farthest distances East or West, even there God finds us (Psalm 139:9). Even if we hide in the darkest of places, God has no trouble finding us, because even the "darkness is as light" to this all-knowing, ever-present God (Psalm 139:11-12). The presence of God in all of my world, does bring pause to my own ambition. If I am doing wrong, God knows and is present. I cannot hide from him. If am doing good, he also sees and is present to bless and reward, even if it seems like no one else cares.

God's omniscience and omnipresence are large

ideas. They show the grandeur of God. But there are those who try to mimic God's knowledge and ubiquity, looking quite impressive in the process. If you want to know anything, just ask your web search engine. Or if you want to see something that is everywhere, just ask for your favorite bottled or brewed beverage. Things other than God can produce a facade of all-knowledge or ever-presence. But only God can create. Only God can create life! The Psalmist is perhaps most overwhelmed by the intricate formation of his own body (Psalm 139:13-18). He speaks of God's handiwork in forming his body (Psalm 139:13-16a) and in ordering his future (Psalm 139:16b). God knows me because he made me.

The petition that ends this Psalm (Psalm 139:23-24) finds its roots in verse one. Inviting

God to search and know us is to recognize that God knows all and can uncover our most glaring of needs. Asking God to dig (v. 1) into our lives is to acknowledge that we can hide nothing from his presence. And finally, asking God to sift (v. 3) our lives acknowledges that he is the creator and we are created. He is the potter and we are the clay. Asking God to cleanse us can be frightening but also freeing. Openness to God's intervention can also bring the comforting hand of God upon our lives (Psalm 139:5,10).

God initiates his love for us by creating us with detail, precision and tender care. God completes his love for us by knowing us and by leading us everywhere he is and wants us to be. Let us look for him as he looks for us and leads us to himself.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Celebrate life given to you by God by refusing to hide from God's loving leadership.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

What would be involved in refusing to hide from God's digging into your life?

What does God think of you as his creation?

How would you encourage someone to protect unborn life?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **searched** "The word searched literally means 'to pierce through.' We sometimes speak of seeing right through a person. That of course is poetic but when it comes to God it is simple fact. Not that David shrank from this truth. The word he used for searched also carries with it the idea of searching for treasure. God was looking for what He could bless, could approve of and reward. When Hagar burst out, 'Thou God seest me' Genesis 16:13, it was not an exclamation of terror, but a grateful acknowledgment that God, Abraham's God, took notice even of her, an unwanted slave" (John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms: An Expository Commentary, Volume 2*, 592).
- v. 2 **afar** "From afar (see PS. 22:1) probably has its normal sense of spatial distance (PS.138:6; cf. Job 39:29), not its rare sense of temporal distance (cf. 2 Kings 19:25; Isa. 37:26, where it is parallel to 'since days of old'). More concretely, 'afar' refers to God's local enthronement in the heavens, which symbolizes his transcendent rule (PS. 11:4). In sum, verse 2b combines God's transcendent knowledge with his transcendence in space" (Waltke, 547).
- v. 5 **hem** "Employed to describe the action of an army besieging a town-'Thou hast besieged me-there is no escaping from Thee.' Behind-that none may attack from the rear. Before-He searches out the path and meets our foes. Hand upon me, as if a child were to put one hand over the hollow of another to keep some frail insect from its pursuer, John 10:28, 29" (Herbert Lockyer, *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, 720).
- v. 5 **hand** "The 'hand' represents active power (Exod. 14:31; Deut. 32:36; 34:12; Josh. 8:26). 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. When used with 'set, place,' the gesture of laying one's hand on another exhibits full authority" (Waltke, 549).
- v. 8 **heaven/depths** "Everywhere, in the topmost height of heaven as well as in the nethermost depths of the underworld, in the remotest east, where the dawn rises, as well as in the distant west, where the sun sinks into the sea, even if he were to flee across the sky with the speed of the dawn (which in antiquity was thought to be winged), God would 'seize' him and take hold of him. ... Heaven and the underworld were originally regarded as the abodes of different deities, so that in the realm of the one god one could feel safe from the other; again, the ancient idea of magical flight seems to be at the root of the poetical image of the wings of the dawn. The poet, however, rejects both these conceptions. His conception of God (cf. Amos 9.2) is so sublime and so comprehensive that the idea of a place outside the sphere of God's power is unthinkable" (Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, 804).
- v. 11 **darkness** "In the Biblical world 'darkness' is associated with the primeval ocean covered in darkness (see Gen. 1:2; Job 38:8-9) and is usually seen as a negative power of chaos threatening life and human existence. The psalmist personifies the darkness: 'will crush me.' [This] is well known from Genesis 3:15. "The Seed of the woman will crush/bruise your head, and the Serpent will crush/bruise his heel. Darkness in the Bible is more than the absence of light: It possesses a quality of its own, which unmitigated makes it inimical to life. It is a realm that is cut off from light, hostile to that which provides safety, freedom, and success; it is the realm of evil and of the wicked (Job 24:13-17; Isa.29:15; Ezek. 8:12)" (Waltke, 556).
- v. 13 **inmost being** "Literally mean[s] 'kidneys.' In ancient times the kidneys were symbolic of all our vital organs-kidney, heart, lung, liver, etc. In fact, the verse goes on to say that God did 'weave me together' in the womb. The verb *sanak* suggests the idea of knitting together like an interwoven mass or thicket. God is involved in placing all the organs and various parts of our body together in such a well-ordered fashion, it forms a veritable 'thicket' of muscle, tendons, bone, blood, veins, and arteries" (Swindoll, 274).
- v. 13 **unformed** "Something rolled together; hence, rude and unformed matter, not yet wrought, the parts of which are not yet unfolded and developed. Thus of an embryo" (H.F.W. Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, Entry on "golem". blueletterbible.com).
- v. 17 **thoughts** "David has moved on from contemplating his own thoughts and their nakedness before God (v.2), to considering God's innumerable thoughts towards him (cf. PS. 40:5). He is not exaggerating. Even in his own body (v. 13 ff.) there is an unimaginable wealth of detail, every point of it from the mind of God. Such divine knowledge is not only 'wonderful' (cf. v. 6) but precious, since it carries its own proof of infinite commitment: God will not leave the work of his own hands (138:8c), either to chance or to ultimate extinction" (Derek Kidner, *Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 73-150*, 503).
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Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Several years ago, I was teaching Psalm 139 to our second, third, and fourth graders in the Mix. I was sharing that God created us and knows us intimately. I remember a boy interrupting me right in the middle of teaching, "Wait a minute. God knows who we are?" To which I answered, "God made you and He loves you. He knows when you sit and when you stand up. He knows your words before you speak them, He even knows the number of hairs on your head." This boy sat back in his chair with the most amazed look on his face. You could see the lightbulb going off in his head, the gears shifting into place. He got it. It's a sweet moment and gift from God that I'll never forget. It is an absolute privilege to share Christ with your kids on Sunday, but you, parents, are the ones in the daily trenches. I want to encourage you to keep at it. Keep pointing your kids to Christ. Keep praying for your kids to know Christ and grow in Him. Keep talking about Jesus in your home. Keep opening your home to your kids' friends because it might be the only place they hear awe-inspiring Bible stories. Keep parenting with the love and mercy and grace that Christ extends to you. I'm praying the lightbulb moment will come and your kids will know Jesus as their Savior and grow into spiritual maturity.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Psalm 139

1. What does the Lord know about you?
2. What does the Lord know about your location?
3. What does the Lord know about your thoughts?

What Do You Think

How does it feel to know that you are wonderfully made?

What R U Going To Do

Play 20 questions at the dinner table this week. Think of an item and have your family take turns asking yes or no questions to determine what it is. Remind them that God knows what they are thinking even if you don't.

Core Comp

Personal God - I believe God cares about everything in my life.

Memory Verse

Ephesians 2:10 - *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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