

## **SEARCH ME, O GOD!**

### **Psalm 139**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

I remember the day like it was yesterday. I sat at my school desk, #2 pencil in my trembling hand, and my breath erratically entering and leaving me. My knees were knocking and my heart was racing. It was my senior year of high school, and my teacher was passing out my first of three AP tests I would be taking that week. Then to conclude the week I had the SAT test on Saturday. Usually you want to finish your grade school years with a peaceful, low key ending, but mine felt like the grand finale of a fireworks show.

I spent the entire year preparing for all four of these tests. The final two weeks leading up to them were especially stressful with study groups, mock tests, and whatever else I could push into my short-term memory (we all know how that goes - I'd forget it all the following week). A lot was riding on these tests since it determined which classes I'd be for the Fall in college.

Tests, examinations, assessments - These words have a way of putting us in an uncomfortable position. Even to this day, if you happen to hear the words "POP QUIZ!" you tend to sit up in your chair and feel your hands getting balmy! You may even give a glance to the person next to you and say, "Oh, I didn't know I was supposed to take this seriously!" Maybe this is the way Darin and I should start every message. We can say, "Church, at the end of this message, just to make sure you are paying attention, we will call on 5 random people to ask questions about the content of the message." I think we will try that today! I can already see some of you looking at your family and thinking, "Whoa, church just got serious!"

Most of us have various forms of assessments still today: job interviews, job performance reviews, certification exams, even physicals at the doctor's office! A lot of us may prefer to wear airpods during this visit to avoid the trust. Your wife will ask you at home, "How'd the physical go?" And you say, "Eh, Eat more vegetables."

Why do we have such a bad relationship with examinations? ***I think we are terrified of being proven to be less than what we thought we were.*** Exams provide an objective scale by which we can measure our progress, our success, and even our weaknesses. They open our eyes to reality. Just like a police officer coming up behind us with his siren on, exams call us back to what's expected and how we should behave.

Examinations are an interesting concept when it comes to the Christian life. In our walk with the Lord we never face a formal test that determines our status before the Father. Praise God there was no entry exam upon joining becoming a Christian or joining the church! We fully affirm our salvation was by grace alone! But it is also true that the Lord is examining and assessing the way we live our lives. He is watching us, testing us, and discerning the way we think and live.

No other passage in Scripture more fully breaks down God's watching and assessing of our lives than Psalm 139. This passage will show us how well God knows us through and through! This is an incredibly comforting reality, but it is also a scary one! ***Coming face-to-face with an all-knowing God is similar to coming face-to-face with an exam.*** When we are put before the objective standard for our lives, there's no longer any room for cover up! It forces us to confess we are not as great as we think we are.

Therefore many of us will try to avoid such encounters in this life as much as possible! ***Even though Socrates said, The unexamined life is not worth living," many of us are content not to come to grips with who we really are.*** But what we are going to see today is that these encounters

are for our benefit. God designs them not to discourage us but to restore and reinvigorate us for holy living. *Our big idea today is that we can trust God to examine us and change us.*

## STRUCTURAL SETUP

How can we most easily see this from this text? I'm going to show you right now. The bookends of this psalm provide the entire framework for our big idea. Look at v.1. *"O Lord, You have searched me and known me."* And now at the end of the psalm notice v.23. *"Search me, O God, and know my heart!"* David, the writer of this psalm, is concluding that because God has searched and known him already, he can intentionally invite God to know him. Knowledge gives way to invitation: "You know me, so come know me! You've already searched me, so come search me again!"

Everything in this psalm is moving towards v.23-24. V.1-22 provide the rationale for why God can be trusted. They convince our minds and massage our hearts to being open and vulnerable with the Lord. Then v.23-24, with our hearts open and vulnerable before the Great Physician, tell us how we are to respond. If we can trust Him, then we can invite Him to test us and change us. So let's first look at three quick truths that deepen our trust in God.

## BODY

*In v.1-6, we can see that God knows us intimately and therefore we cannot deceive Him.* V.1 declares God's omniscience that rains down through these six verses: *"O Lord, you have searched me and known me!"* This is something he has already done. Before you were even born, God already knew everything about you. As is said later in v.16, *every one of our days were written down in God's book, when as yet there were none of them!* To demonstrate the full breadth of God's awareness of you, remember that He stands outside of time! While God does consciously experience everything about your present moment, He also consciously experiences ALL your life's moments simultaneously!

The lines of Casting Crowns' song, *Already There*, speak into this profound reality: The first stanza says this: *"From where I'm standing, Lord it's so hard for me to see where this is going and where you're leading me. I wish I knew how all my fears and all my questions are gonna play out in a world I can't control."* Then the chorus says, *"When I'm lost in the mystery, to you my future is a memory, cause you're already there, you're already there, standing at the end of my life, waiting on the other side, and you're already there, you're already there."* Right now He is experiencing your first day and your last day at the same time! His transcendence should send chills up your spine!

The Hebrew word for "search" here was used by the Jewish people to describe digging deep into a mine. God doesn't just know the full scope of our days, He knows the minute details of each individual day! V.2 says *He knows when I sit and when I rise up.* V.3 goes deeper and says that *He knows my path and my lying down.* After I get out of bed in the morning, His eye is upon me all day. He sees the path of my feet and all the places I go. It even says He's acquainted with all my ways! He sees and knows when I'm happy and when I'm sad. He sees me singing to Him in the car. He knows all the things I buy at the store. He's watching when my coworker says a hurtful word to me. He's watching me in the emergency room when the news is devastating.

More than just seeing and knowing the outer you in the physical realm, He sees and knows your inner person. V.2 says *"You discern my thoughts from afar."* V.4 says that *"before even a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether."* Before you speak, God knows what you're going to say. Even when you don't speak, God knows the thoughts that run through your mind. He knows our actions, our locations, our thoughts and words, our ways, and our motives.

When some of you hear this, you may feel violated! You may think, “What an invasion of privacy! I have a right to keep certain things to myself, undisclosed to others!” You’re the kind of person who doesn’t have social media, doesn’t like when people take pictures that may include you at public events, and who doesn’t EVER text your credit card information to a friend!

But let’s remember that God is not a mal-intended being! He knows us greatly that he might help us greatly! Is it not true that those who can best help you are also those who best know you? This is even more so with God! God uses His intimate knowledge of you to increase his blessing to you! V.5 says, *“You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.”* To “hem someone in” means to literally “wall someone in.” This is God’s protection of your life. There is nothing that harms you outside of allowing. If you have a BIG view of God’s sovereignty, the way I do, then you believe that not evil befalls you except for what God intends for His greater and GOOD purposes. The fact that God lays His hand upon you is a Judaistic sign of blessing. He aims only to help you!

Since God knows you so completely, you are unable to deceive Him. You cannot cheat on this test! It’s not open book! You will be found out; you will be caught! Adam and Eve tried to get around God as if they had done nothing wrong, but God knew! King David tried to cover up his affair with Bathsheeba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, but God knew! Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts tried to hold back a portion of their goods from the offering, yet God knew! Peter, speaking for God, said to them, *“Why have you lied to the Holy Spirit and tested the spirit of the Lord?”* We cannot keep any secrets from God. Psalm 90:8 says that *“God has set our iniquities before himself, our secret sins in the light of His presence.”*

This is an admonition for us to get clean with the Lord. If He already knows us, we should be entirely honest with Him. Confess the things you know are ashamed of. We can freely do this because God doesn’t intend to pour

wrath on us. He intends to heal us. God's knowledge of David wasn't crippling; it was life-giving. David says in [v.6](#), *"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."* If God's omniscience led David to trust Him more, then we too should trust Him more.

*Not only does God know us intimately, God is with us constantly - We cannot escape Him.* [v.7](#) says, *"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"* David goes on to give examples: *"If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. <sup>11</sup> If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' <sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."*

I'm reminded of the movie, ***The Truman Show***, which starred Jim Carey as the centerpiece of a completely fabricated world with cameras everywhere he went. He didn't know these cameras were there because from birth he grew up believing this made up world, just for him, was all there was! These cameras watched his every move to create a live reality tv show of Truman's 100% conditioned life. But as he got older, he realized something fishy was going on. He noticed he was being watched and attempted several times to get away, to hide, to not be seen. He finally decided to take a boat out onto the sea to sail away, yet even there the watchful eye of his made-up reality saw him completely.

Likewise, God is a watchful eye that sees all we do and knows all the places we go! We cannot run from Him! Jonah, just like Truman, tried to run away from God's calling by sailing out on a boat in the opposite direction of where he was supposed to go. Yet even there God's watchful eye was still upon Him! God caused a giant storm to cause him to be thrown overboard to die. Yet God saved Jonah from utter peril by seeing him under the water and rescuing him by means of a big fish.

Heb 4:13 - *“<sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”* Therefore, you cannot escape Him.....but let me ask, “Why would you?” If you have a healthy view of God, why would you ever run away? This is exactly the lie Satan wants us to believe. Satan uses our shame, just as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden, to cause us to hide from God. Ever since this moment when sin first entered the world, mankind has attempted to hide because they know they deserve judgment. You know your sin deserved judgment.

But what does the Gospel proclaim? The judgment that we deserved was placed on Jesus upon the cross! He covered your sin so that you never need to cover yourself under anything else! He took away your shame so that you can take off the mask you’ve been wearing. The idea of us running away from God goes against God’s never-ending mission of running towards us! God, in love, so desired to come near to us that he became one of us. Even more, God so desired to restore a relationship with us that he died for us. To run from that is the greatest of evils.

***In what way are you trying to hold God at a distance?*** What sin are you so ashamed of, that you can’t find victory over, that’s led you to stop pursuing deeper fellowship with God altogether? God came all the way to us that we might come all the way to Him. Don’t let there be a barrier! The Scriptures say He tore down the temple veil to the fullness of His presence. This is for our benefit. God’s inescapable presence is for our inexhaustible joy! Therefore, we can trust Him with our life.

***Yet, not only does God know us intimately, and is with us constantly, but He’s made us wonderfully - We cannot ignore Him.*** We spend most of our time discussing God as our Savior, but little time is given to God as our Creator. In v.13-18 we get the Bible’s clearest explanation of what happened behind the curtain of our earliest moments of existence. Our

blinded culture would like to convince us that what happens here is purely the result of science - natural processes taking their natural course. ***This is why they call this view Naturalism!*** There is no need for supernatural involvement if there is already a natural order. ***Another faulty view is that of Deism.*** Deism accepts that God created the universe and holds it in place, but He plays no intimate and personal role in its direction. This view is also known as “The Clockwork Universe.” God made the clock, caused the pieces to all work together, but once it was set in motion, He took his hands off and walked away. One cause leads to another cause and no continual superintending is necessary.

***Yet what we find in these verses is an extremely planned, purposeful, and personal divine involvement in the creation of human life.*** V.13 says ***“You (God) formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.”*** V.15 shows that it wasn’t a hands-off process: ***“My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.”*** “intricately woven” is literally translated “embroidered.” ***God consciously made us each a certain way. Therefore nothing was an accident!*** Your hair color, your height, the size of your nose, the color of your skin, your freckles, your birthmarks in noticeable places - God, as a master artisan, fashioned you just the way you are for a purpose!

We know this is the case because it says in v.16 that while we were still an unformed substance, God had already written every one of our days that were formed when as yet there were none of them. I loved that play-on words there: While I was yet unformed, God had already formed all my days! Now God is not illogical. ***If He already knew your days, then surely he designed you just the way you are that you might accomplish the work that those days held.*** If you ever feel inadequate or poorly placed, remember that God has specifically made you to handle that situation. God would not make you as a square peg and try to force you through a round

hole your whole life. If this is how you feel, it may be that YOU are trying to force yourself into that position and aren't supposed to be there!

God's intimate and detailed involvement in our making was something David could not ignore. It led him to say in v.14, "*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*" This could also be translated, "*I praise you, for I am reverently set apart.*" Someone once said, "*In the presence of birth, we don't calculate - we marvel.*" The making of a human is no simple work of ONLY natural causes; it is a wonderful work that should lead us to adoration and praise!

There are some who think what happens in the hiddenness of the womb should be ignored. The "rights" of a mom are more important than the life God has started. Abortion activists, in the name of freedom, will try to convince us that life starts not at the moment of conception but at the moment of birth. They say they are not a human until we can see them. Do they not consider that God sees them? They say life doesn't begin until their day of birth. Do they not consider that God has already written everyone of their days in His book?

Abortion is murder. It is the taking of life that was not ours to take, no matter how ill-prepared we were to raise that baby, no matter how much shame that baby was supposed to bring us. I think most mothers of abortions would agree that there is far more shame later in life that outweighs the shame of having an unexpected child. Since records began to be kept in 1970, in America alone there have been over 50,000,000 abortions. The World Health Organization estimates that each year worldwide there are 40-50 million abortions. Our culture right now is getting so caught up in Black Lives Matter, and that's a good thing - we should be fighting for social justice on behalf of those who speak and feel unheard. But what about the lives of those who don't even *have* a voice to speak? Who will speak up for them?

If you are here today and you have had an abortion, we do not mean to guilt you. We all have done things God does not like, yet God is a God of abundant grace. His grace always outweighs our sin. ***If God was truly still upset over you taking a baby's life, then He wouldn't have offered to regenerate your life.*** God forgives you entirely. He forgives all our most heinous sins entirely.

For all of us, as sobering as those statistics are, the message is crystal clear: God is not to be ignored. We should marvel at the artistic beauty of humanity that he has made. ***Surely if He formed us in the beginning, we can trust Him to continue reforming us today.***

## CONCLUSION

This brings us to our final point for this message. Up to this point, Psalm 139 has had one grand mission: ***To build your trust in God.*** How have we seen that? We learned in v.1-6 that God knows us entirely, yet rather than a violation of privacy, he uses that knowledge to direct us and protect us. We also learned in v.7-12 that God is constantly with us, so much so that He wouldn't even let sin get between us. And we just learned that God wonderfully made us. If He could make us with purpose, then surely we can trust His provision for our lives.

The question now is how do you respond to God's intimate care and concern for your life? Like all good discipleship moments, this one doesn't end with just affirming God's character. The tables are now turned to us. David concludes the psalm in v.23-24: ***Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*** If God knows us intimately, is with us constantly, and makes us wonderfully, then surely we should invite him to change us spiritually. Our last point today is that God wants to change us spiritually - We must invite Him!

This takes us back to our opening illustration of a test. Very few of us like tests because they always reveal who we really are. This is the scary part. A good example is that of Simon Peter when Jesus called him to be His disciple. Jesus was out on the fishing boat with Peter when he told him to cast his net out again for a catch. Peter initially spoke against the idea because he had already toiled all night and caught nothing, but he obeyed Jesus' command and threw his net out again. To his complete surprise, the net immediately filled with fish to the point at which it was breaking! Peter's reaction to this is even more unexpected than the miracle Jesus performed. Peter got down at Jesus' feet and said, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*

Peter realized in that moment that he was in the presence of a test, that being Jesus - an objective standard of holiness and perfection that left Him utterly lacking. ***This is what happens when we get in the presence of a test and when we get in the presence of God: we realize we are utterly lacking.*** We don't measure up! Our sin is so great and He is so pure that we cannot and should not be in His presence! Our hands get clammy and our knees knock. ***Because of this fear, many of us don't allow the great examiner to look deeply at the state of our souls.***

And yet here David invites God to do just that! He says, *"Search me! Know me! Try me!"* ***The only way we get to such a vulnerable position with God is if we know we can trust Him.*** Think of the people you open up with the most - is it not those who have proven their care, concern, and selfless interest in your life. Has not Psalm 139 already proven God's care, concern, and selfless interest in you?

Oh, but it gets even better! ***Another and even greater way we get to such a vulnerable position with God is if we know He is willing to get vulnerable with us!*** Jesus humbled Himself and condescended to our level. He then, after living a perfect life, went to a cross, fully open to shame and disgrace. Yet if we know the Gospel, we understand this was

done entirely in love so that he might take our sin and restore us to a right relationship with Him. If Jesus went to these lengths to fix our hearts, can we not also trust Him to continue fixing us?

In going to the cross, Jesus proves that He has no ill-intentions in examining our hearts. He does it for our own good! The same is true with any good doctor. We get vulnerable with doctor's so they can redirect our lives on a more healthy course. Our knees should not knock when Jesus comes knocking on our hearts to examine us. Our hearts should not be pounding because we assume Jesus is pounding on our door to clean-house.

So the question remains, will you invite Him to test your heart? This is an important thing to regularly do. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5, *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?”*

We will conclude by asking, “How do we test ourselves?” I offer to you the idea of a spiritual assessment. You could see this as a diagnostic that you allow God to perform maybe once a month. I'll define it as this: *A spiritual assessment is an intentional, extended period of time for humble submission, unbiased reflection, and holy aspiration.* This is a time that you set aside to first, **humbly submit** to God. You tell God again that He is the King of your life. You have no say and no hold on your life. You remove yourself from any area in which you were the ruling voice and humbly bow to Jesus.

This then leads to **unbiased reflection**. This is when you are inviting God to search you, to try your thoughts, to know your heart. The only way this can be unbiased is if God has humbled your heart. A humble heart can see things God's way and not cling to its own way of seeing the true state of itself. In this stage, **God will likely reveal things to you that break your heart, things you didn't know were true and wish weren't true.** This is

true for all of us, no matter how far along we are in spiritual maturity! I promise you, every time I've allowed God to search my heart, I am blown away by what He reveals! I can tell you, being married to Emma has allowed me to learn things about myself that I never knew I did. When I look at myself, I see things dimly, but when Emma looks at me, it's like seeing clearly. The same is true with the Spirit: He shows things to us (when we're willing) that we never knew were there!

But lastly there is *holy aspiration*. God always leads us to a point of confession and transformation. This is why David concludes the psalm with praying, "*God, lead me in the way everlasting!*" Don't just reveal things to me; give me a resolve to change! Our knowledge of our shortcomings should lead us to change our hearts, reform our minds, and alter our actions.

When you get away like this, it can be such a powerful time of transformation. Will you make a decision to do this this week?

## **COMMUNION**

To put this in practice in a small way, we are going to take communion. In communion, we are told to do two things: First, we REMEMBER the purposeful death of our Savior. Secondly, we REFLECT on the life we are living. Paul says, "Walk worthy of the Gospel." Are you walking worthy? You can do a small spiritual assessment today before taking communion to allow God to bring you into a better place with Him.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**