

Summit Woods Baptist Church  
Sermon Study Equipping Class

Psalm 139:1-6

Remember to begin your study early in the week so that you have time to really think (and keep thinking) about the passage without being rushed.

❖ Day 1

Read Psalm 139:1-6.

For these lessons, the sermon text is provided in a format that visually helps display the structure of the paragraph or section of text. The main verbs are underlined. Commands are double-underlined. Generally, the main indicative clauses remain to the left, and the other clauses are either directly underneath when they have equal priority to what comes before, or are tabbed to the right when the clause supports, develops, or draws a conclusion from a neighboring clause.

**For the choir director. A Psalm of David.**

O LORD, You have searched me  
and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down  
and when I rise up;  
You understand my thought from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You scrutinize my path  
and my lying down,  
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

<sup>5</sup> You have enclosed me behind  
and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is too high,  
I cannot attain to it.

1. Who is the speaker and audience?
2. What structure do you see in this psalm as a whole? How do verses 1-6 fit within this structure?

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3. What verb is most often repeated in this passage? Do the other verbs contrast it or modify it?
  
4. Look at the block diagram. What does the parallelism in the passage emphasize in verses 1, 2, 3, and 5?
  
5. Of the two parties described in verses 1-5 (God and David), what various terms does David use to describe what God is doing and what David is doing? How might we summarize these descriptions?
  
6. What does the personal name of God (“LORD”) along with the exclusive use of the first and second person (“you” and “me”) suggest about this opening section of the psalm?
  
7. For David to describe and praise God’s omniscience, he could have focused on God’s knowledge of the entire universe. But instead, he reflects on how God searches and knows *him*. Why do you think David did this?

❖ Day 2

Read Psalm 139:1-6 again.

1. At the end of this psalm, David asks God to search and know his heart to see if there is any sin (verses 23-24). Yet here at the beginning, he claims that God has already searched and known him (verse 1). What does David mean here then between his opening statement and closing request?

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2. 2 Kings 18 and 19 recount the story of Assyria's invasion of Judah. Consider reading the whole passage for context, but read in particular 2 Kings 19:20-28 and look for echoes of Psalm 139:2. Although Psalm 139 is relating God's omniscience to the righteous heart of David, what else does this cross reference remind us of God's omniscience of the rest of mankind?
  
3. How does God understand our thoughts "from afar" in verse 2? Commentators differ on interpreting this phrase. Is David using "afar" in a locative sense (emphasizing the transcendent, heavenly distance between God and David), or in a temporal sense (emphasizing the eternal foreknowledge of God of all our thoughts and possibly connecting to verse 4)? What emphasis does this imply David is making here regarding God's omniscience?
  
4. Verse 3 is translated in a variety of ways. Look up some alternate translations to see some of these differences (for instance, ESV, KJV, NIV, and NET). With these various shades of meaning in mind, what does it mean to "scrutinize" something, as seen in verse 3? How does this relate to God being "intimately acquainted" with David's ways?
  
5. Look back at the block diagram. What might the parallelism in the passage highlight in verses 4 and 6?
  
6. In verse 5, David says that God surrounds him and lays his hand on him. Scripture speaks of God surrounding and laying his hands on people with both positive and negative connotations. (See in the Old Testament's wisdom literature, for instance, Job 9:32-33, Psalm 34:7 and 125:2, or Job 16:13, Psalm 32:4 and 38:2) Consider doing a word study along with some cross referencing to find examples of these two ideas. Within the context of the whole psalm, what does David have in mind here- a constraining view or a comforting view? Why?

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7. Is verse 5 pointing to God's omniscience (God knows every action David takes) or sovereign providence (God ordains every action David takes)? How are the two connected?

❖ Day 3

Read Psalm 139:1-6 again.

1. What knowledge is David referring to in verse 6? Why does he conclude this opening section by declaring that he cannot obtain or reach this knowledge? How might one's interpretation of verse 5 affect one's interpretation of verse 6?
2. If David's focus here is on God's specific knowledge of David himself (rather than God's general knowledge of all things), why does he end this section by exclaiming that such knowledge is too high for him to comprehend? Surely David would understand his own self more than anyone else?
3. How does God's omniscience in this psalm reflect David's whole life as Israel's king? (see 1 Samuel 16:7 and 1 Chronicles 28:9)
4. Do you ever think about God's omniscience? If you do, does it lead to meditative, reverent praise or just to your mental filing cabinet of theological facts? How can you cultivate the psalmist's heart towards God? (See also Job 42:1-6 and Isaiah 55:8-9 for two other descriptions of the awe-inspiring knowledge of God)
5. It is only after meditating on God's omniscience in verses 1-5 that David turns to praise and awestruck wonder of His knowledge in verse 6. How might this inform us as we seek to become better worshippers of God?

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6. What are some practical ways we can glorify and honor God's omniscience in our daily lives? How does His all-encompassing knowledge of us shape our thoughts, words, and actions? (See, for instance, Job 31:1-4)

In preparation for Sunday, pray that the Lord would open your eyes to the glory of His omniscience and that you would live in the fear and wonder of His knowledge of you as His creation and child.