

My God How Wonderful Thou Art

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[0:00] Psalm 139. We'll read the entire psalm. O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise.

You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord.

You hem me in, behind, and before. Therefore, you've laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there, your hand will guide me. Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, surely the darkness will hide me, and the light become night around me.

[1:05] Even the darkness will not be dark to you. The night will shine like the day. For darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being.

You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

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. Your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. If only you would slay the wicked, O God!

[2:03] Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! They speak of you with evil intent. Your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you?

I have nothing but hatred for them. I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me, and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Well, we're in Psalm 139 this morning.

I must confess that the reason I came to this psalm was to look for a passage to preach on concerning the sanctity of human life. But what I found, the more time I spent in this psalm, I found that I need this psalm for many, many reasons.

That merely being one. So, Lord willing, in the next two weeks, we'll be looking at this psalm this morning, just the first 12 verses, and then next Sunday, the last 12 verses.

[3:12] Now, before we dive into these verses, I want us to see the big picture of this psalm. David is struck with two things in this psalm.

Number one, how wonderful God is. How wonderful God is. He's talking about God in this psalm, and he's talking to God about what he knows about him.

And so he points out his attributes, the fact that he knows all things, that he's everywhere present. He talks to him about his works, his works of creation, creating man, ordaining all things that come to pass.

And as David thinks deeply about these things, his breath is taken away at how wonderful God is. Verse 6, Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Verse 14, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

[4:22] Three times in this meditation, we find him breaking out, acknowledging how wonderful, wonderful, wonderful God is.

Now kids, do you know what wonderful means? It means full of wonder. That's not too hard, is it? We sang how sweet and awful is the place.

What is awful in that context? It means full of awe, full of wonder. That's the idea here. Awesome, astonishing, astounding, amazing, staggering, stunning, stupendous, surprising, jaw-dropping, eye-popping, breathtaking, spine-tingling.

Our God is full of wonder. And it's the element of wonder that is the very heartbeat of worship. Without it, we may have truth about God.

We may have right theology. But we may have very little worship of Him going on. That happens all too easily.

[5:35] A heartless formalism sets in where our lips say the right things, but our hearts are far from God and are cold. And so we understand many truths about God's grace.

But for some reason, it's no longer amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. We understand all about God's love.

Many things. You could list the qualities of God's love. And yet, for some reason, it's no longer amazing love. How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

We sing that song, O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds your hands have made. Awesome wonder.

Wonder. When have I stood last dumbfounded before God in awe of Him and His works?

[6:44] He is full of wonder. Wonderful, wonderful Jesus is to me. Do we think long enough and hard enough about who God is and what He does to be raised to wonder?

I need a psalm like this to swallow up my little and hurried thoughts about God. So let's follow David up the ladder of his own thoughts about his wonderful God.

And if God, the Holy Spirit, is pleased to bless this word to us, then we'll find our hearts standing in awe and wonder before Him.

Open my eyes. I want to see Jesus, we say. The psalmist said it as well. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

But the other thing that, before we dive in, the other thing that David is struck with in this psalm is not only how wonderful God is, but how personally involved God is with Him.

[7:49] the language all the way through the psalm is you and me. You and I. I and you. Very personal situation.

It's not just that God knows all things. He says, O Lord, You know me. It's not just that God is everywhere present, but You are with me wherever I go.

It's not just that God created all things, but that You created me in my mother's womb. And it's not just that God ordains all things that come to pass, but that all the days ordained for me were written in Your book.

It's a very personal understanding of God's attributes. This is theology applied. Truth about God is not left in general terms.

The omniscience of God. The omnipresence of God. The creation of God. But it's rather brought up close and personal. This awesome God knows me.

[9:05] This awesome God is with me. He created me. He's thinking of me. He's ordained this day for me. He is intimately involved in my life.

So let's learn from David in this psalm how to do theology, how to read our Bibles, how to study the Bible. We're not done with any truth about God until we have seen it in relation to ourselves personally.

family. And that very idea is what comes through so clearly in this psalm. So these are the two big things in this psalm.

This is the big picture then. God is wonderful and he's personally involved with me. Now it's the combination of these two things that really fans the flames of worship.

Each one alone is sufficient to raise us to worship. but oh when you bring them together there is this amazing conjunction and stimulation that goes on that produces an effect of wonder and awe.

[10:21] Kids, some of you know what baking soda and vinegar do when you bring them together. It causes a reaction doesn't it? And so do these two aspects of God is being so far above us his transcendence and yet his nearness to us is imminent.

The fact that he is so wonderful beyond our comprehension and yet he is so intimately involved with us when you bring those two together it's a catalyst to worship and we see that in many of the psalms not just Psalm 139.

Think of that familiar psalm Psalm 8 where the psalmist is struck with the wonder of God Lord oh Lord our God how majestic is your name in all the earth you have set your glory above the heavens and when I consider your heavens the work of your fingers the moon and the stars which you have set in place what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you should care for him you see how these two come together this wonderful breathtaking God is intimately involved with men with me when I think of who you are and what I am why should you even notice me much less care for me why should you ever ever send your son for me to be damned in my place when he took my sins on Calvary why should you trouble yourself with my cares and my sorrows and my needs and my desires why should you even bother to hear my puny prayers much less answer them you've got stars to bring out each night you've got billions of galaxies to keep in their rightful place who am I that you should count the hairs of my head that you should see to it that food gets to my table and the grace gets to my heart so these two things

God is wonderful beyond telling and yet he's so intimately involved with me from the catalyst for worship being lost in wonder love and praise so we'll want to notice those two things working together throughout Psalm 139 now we're done talking about the psalm let's dig in to its very verses and when we do we're going to see some four wonders I believe in the chapter about God I'm going to divide it into those categories and this morning we'll see two of those wonders and next Sunday God willing two other wonders about God but the first wonder that we see about God in this psalm is God's omniscience the fact that he knows everything and as soon as we begin to read this psalm we see how intensely personal this truth is to David and it must be so to us as well oh

Lord you have searched me and you know me now there's one being in the universe who knows you completely and it isn't yourself here's one that knows you better than you know yourself you've been sad sometimes and and you don't know why but he does you haven't been able to sleep at night you're worried about something you don't readily know just what it is but he does he knows you like no one else and at once David gets very specific about this knowing of him how well do you know me oh he says you know when I sit and when I rise now this is something we do a lot of you've already done it a lot this morning you haven't thought about it but you were in bed to start with and you rose and then you went out in the kitchen and you sat down and ate some breakfast probably then you got back up and and got dressed and maybe some of you even sat down to put your shoes and socks on and you got up again and you went out in the car and you sat down again and you rode to church and you got up and you walked in here and you sat back down stand to sing sit

[15:13] Stand! Sit! You've been doing it all day already and the day's just half gone and you're going to do it a lot more you're going to get up at the end of this service and you're going to walk out and sit in your car up and down and you might say well what's what's the big deal here we don't stand in awe of somebody standing and we say it's no big deal to us it seems so insignificant to us and that's precisely David's point the things that seem so insignificant to us in our world and in our life are known by God and if he knows the insignificant things the things that really don't we don't even think about or care much about how much more does he observe and know!

everything that's so important nothing escapes his gaze not only the movements of your body but the movements of your mind your thoughts verse 2 goes on to say you perceive my thoughts from afar what is a thought anyway it's so ethereal immaterial you can't grab it you can't see it and yet God sees them and knows them now there are thousands of thoughts that rush through our minds in a day some come fast and furious and they're in and they're out and others we stop and ponder long but he knows each one every proud thought every self righteous thought every worrisome thought every thought of revenge every thought of greed or lust or hatred every humble thought every loving thought every kind thought every prayerful worshipful thought the

Lord speaks to Israel in Ezekiel 11 verse 5 he says that is what you are saying oh house of Israel but I know what is going through your mind isn't that scary we sometimes say things and think other things and God says I've heard what you're saying but I know what's going through your mind he reads our minds right now he's reading our minds right now he knows what's going through your mind what you're thinking of him his son his gospel his word his worship his world yourself others he's reading our thoughts he judges the very thoughts and motivations and attitudes of our hearts

he always gets it straight how many times did Jesus in the gospels rebuke his listeners not for something they said but for something they were thinking John says he knew all men he didn't even need man's testimony about men because he knew what was in a man he knows our thoughts oh lord you know me you know me but then he knows our deeds verse three you discern my going out and my lying down you are familiar with all my ways he discerns he weighs he judges these things are going out in the morning we're off and we're back and laying down at night and everything in between all my ways he's never at a loss as to where

I've been or what I've been up to he is notice familiar with all my ways whether public private open or secret he's familiar doesn't mean he knows a little bit about where we've been and what we've been doing he is well acquainted he is he's very familiar with all our ways all that we have been doing for the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good every detail there there's that immoral Samaritan woman by the well outside of Sychar and she wants to have a pleasant polite conversation with Jesus once he strikes it up and Jesus knows every man that she's ever been intimate with and so he says go call your husband and come back she said don't have a husband you're right you have had five and the man you're now living with is not your husband and she's so befuddled that she leaves her water pot at the end of the conversation and runs into town telling everyone come see a man who told me everything

I ever did he knows every skeleton in my closet and yet he offers me the bread of life the water of life that I might not thirst anymore the great searcher of hearts he knows my thoughts he knows my deeds and next we see he knows my words verse four before a word is on my tongue you know it completely oh Lord well there's some debate as to how many words we speak every day some of you speak more than others you know that but the average the best I could tell was around 16,000 they put tape recorder devices and sent people off for weeks and counted the number of words real simple and the average is 16,000 words a day well there's over 6 billion people on the planet and they all speak at an average of 16 well you can do the math and you see there's a lot of words being spoken and

[21:36] God knows every one of them I recently saw a program about what our government is doing to try to thwart some of the terrorist attacks and so they're listening in to phone conversations as they come into the United States and it had a graphic and it showed all these lines that are coming into the United States and how they funnel through this massive computer program and spit out all kinds and they just sample little bits here and there and hope to catch some sinister plot but there's not a word that the Lord doesn't know it just brought that home to me all these words flying back and forth every day he hears he knows every single one if men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word that they have spoken well then means that God knows every careless word but

David says even more here he says you know my unformed words doesn't he because before a word is on my tongue you know it completely oh Lord what is an unformed word what is a word before it even exists God knows it whatever it is he knows it completely he knows precisely which thoughts of mine will tumble out of my mouth into actual words he knows exactly every word that will be preached this morning it reveals the intimacy you see David struck with how intimate God is with us with him personally he knows the intimate details of our lives our sitting our rising our thoughts our words even the ones we don't speak they haven't been spoken yet oh Lord you have searched me and you know me that's the first wonder about

God he knows me through and through the second wonder in this chapter is God's omnipresence the fact that he is present everywhere now these two attributes of God are closely related and so we'll find David throughout the chapter bouncing back and forth between them and it stands to reason doesn't it that if God is everywhere then God knows everything he's there to observe it and so that's the connection we have here and in this psalm we see these two are brought together in the closest proximity as David is talking to God you know everything you are present everywhere some people are at home sick today they are there they are not here because people can't be two places at the same time but

God has no problem with pulling that off in fact he is everywhere at the same time and not just a part of him here and a part of him there divides himself up and he's so big that he can split himself into all these pieces no all that he is is everywhere at the same time notice notice how the how David says it to God in verse five you hem me in behind and before you have laid your hand on me perhaps you've been hemmed in before it often happens in traffic excuse me or in crowds and let's

take the traffic jam and there's someone up in front of you and so you think can I back out and no there's someone behind you and there's someone on the left of you and someone on the right of you and you say

I'm hemmed in that's the word it means to surround completely now usually it takes many to hem you in it takes many to surround you at least four cars and when a city is surrounded there's many soldiers around it perhaps as we often read in the Old Testament but here's something different God hymns the sin all by himself he surrounds us by himself just one surrounds how can one person surround you well he can't unless of course he is everywhere present at once and that is precisely what God is he hems me in before and behind now not everyone finds that to be a welcoming reality indeed the natural response of sinners in the presence of a holy

[27 : 04] God is the urge to escape we don't like this idea that we're surrounded and known by God Adam and Eve felt that urge to escape Jonah felt that urge and even David knew the reality of it so for any and all who might like to get out from under God's all-seeing eye and away from his presence he asked this question in verse 7 where can I go from your spirit where can I flee from your presence notice how he personalizes it again where can I go where can I get away from your presence not just theory personally applied and he doesn't just answer nowhere and leave it at that I can't go anywhere that's the short answer but he doesn't give the short answer just as he didn't with God's knowing him rather he descends to particulars to press this reality home to himself and indeed to us as his readers and so he considers where can

I go from your spirit where can I flee from your presence and he considers the many directions that he could possibly go up and down is first well if I go up to the heavens you're there well if I make my bed in the depths in sheol the grave or hell you are there I didn't get away from you up or down Spurgeon says God's presence is the glory of heaven and the terror of hell next he considers east and west verse nine if I rise on the wings!

of the dawn where does the sun rise It's in the east it's probably a poetic reference to the east if I could rise on the wings of the dawn where the sun rises in the east or if I settle on the far side of the sea now for the Palestinians the people of Palestine the Mediterranean sea was in the west and so for them to speak of the sea is to speak of the west east so if I could go farther than ships have have yet gone to the far side of the sea to the most distant parts of the earth what does he say verse 10 even there your hand will guide me your right hand will hold me fast even if I could go to the most remote parts of the earth even there I could not so much as get outside of your reach the reach of your hand and he's relieved that it is so isn't he because notice how he speaks of that hand your hand will guide me it's not within man that walks to direct his steps we need the hand of God to guide us isn't it a wonderful thought to think that no matter how far we go east or west we don't get beyond his guiding! and your right hand will hold me fast and protect me and keep me and that's just what I need in this world so where can I go to flee from your presence the Lord asked a similar question himself in Jeremiah 23 and he answers it with another question that's an interesting way to respond to a question isn't it here's the question he puts am I only a God nearby declares the Lord and not a God far away can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him there's the question where can I go to flee from God how can I get so far away that God won't see me and I'll be hidden well his answer is another question do not

I fill heaven and earth says the Lord where can you hide since he fills the heaven and the earth folks the heaven and the earth is the entire universe that's the whole shebang the cosmos the all that there is that is created and God fills it he fills it so I've got a cup and it's empty and I fill the cup all the way to the top with water it fills the cup that means there is no place in that cup where there is not water now the cup is the universe the heavens and the earth and God fills it and that means there's no place in the entire universe where God is not it's like the water in which the fish swims he may swim fast and far but he's never out of the water it's the air the bird flies in

[32 : 20] God fills the universe he's not far from each of us for in him we live and move and have our being so we see that trying to flee from God's presence is an exercise in futility God and that's not because God runs so fast that he keeps up with us it's just because he is everywhere and when you run you run into God wherever you run you're running into God and Jonah found that to be the case didn't he when God told him to go down to Nineveh he ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish he went down to Joppa and boarded a ship but he found that God was waiting for him there on the sea waiting for him there with his wind and his waves and his big fish he hadn't gotten away from God because God was there as much as he was back home you can never ditch God

because he's everywhere well David says well maybe I could try the darkness people often try to hide in the dark don't they they'll do many things in the dark they would never do in the light so David says in verse 11 if I say surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me even the darkness will not be dark to you the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light to you you've seen those night vision glasses without them everything's pitch black you can't see a thing but with them the night shines like the day that's the way it is with God all the time he sees as well without light as with it and so you might have hidden something from your mom and your dad and your pastor and your your spouse the government you might have kept them in the dark but you never kept

God in the dark once in your life the dark and the light are the same to him so that's the two important truths about God the wonderful things about God he's everywhere and he is and he sees everything we come then to our response to such a God and folks it's time to take off our shoes and bow down in the sand and worship we bow in wonder before this wonderful God verse 6 says such knowledge is too wonderful for me too lofty for me to attain it's like like the little boy trying to reach up and touch the moon it's beyond his reach how can God know everything about everyone how can he know my thoughts how can he know my words even before I've spoken them how can he be everywhere at the same time how does he do that such things are too wonderful for my brain too lofty for me to attain what a mystery what a wonder it surpasses not only my comprehension this outreaches my imagination how does he do that

I have no idea oh man prides himself on his advanced knowledge doesn't he and we stand beside the God of Psalm 139 and we see what mental pygmies we are we don't know nothing he knows all things and we worship we bow and we there's no God like you there's no one like you who knows everything there's no one like you who is everywhere present and that's where we begin in our response to this God we begin with worship the acknowledgement of who he is the glorious being that he is but then these attributes of God should go on and change our lives let's think how each one of these two attributes of God should affect us!

we could be here all day with these but just a few thoughts this morning about God's omniscience the fact that he knows me through and through I am completely known by God I am totally exposed before him at this moment and every moment he has searched me and he knows me and suddenly I'm aware of just how many sins he is aware of how many thoughts how many words how many actions more than the hairs of my head and yet wonder of wonders he still loves me he still loves me you know people think so highly of me because they don't know a tenth of my sins it's the same with you people think so highly of you because they don't have a clue what's going on in terms of your sins but

God does he knows it all and as someone has said the one who knows me best loves me most does the fact that God knows everything about you does that not make his love all the more wonderful he loves me he knows me and yet he loves me surely that's what that Samaritan woman felt he knows me but with love he offered me the waters of life as I think of all that he knows about me I'm so thankful for the blood of Jesus because the blood of Jesus cleanses me from every sin and I think about all that God knows about me and I can only think of that with comfort as I realize the wonder of Christ's blood just making me as white as that snow wonderful thing to think of God's knowing everything about us and yet to know that he has cleansed us in the blood of his son and when

[38:58] God's full knowledge of me sinks in it also frees me from trying to pretend to be something that he knows I'm not and so when I pray I can talk to him like David talks to him not only in this psalm but in other psalms and he just tells God what he's thinking because God already knows what he's thinking and we can come with freedom and say God that thought was raunchy it was wrong God that word it shouldn't have come across my lips and we can confess our sins open God that that worry that anxiety in my heart it ought not to be there you know me Lord you know I'm confused about this you know I'm sad because of that you know I'm confused or I'm concerned about this one and that and I'm free to open up and spill the beans to him why because he knows me perfectly there's no surprises with him but oh what a freeing thing to be able to come and pour out our hearts before him he's intimately acquainted with us he knows every longing in your heart for holiness he knows every desire that you've ever put forth in your heart to be done with sin he takes note of that with pleasure he sees every sigh because of the battle that life is he sees every loving thought about him and oh how that was such an encouragement to Peter you remember after

he denied the Savior three times then went out and wept bitterly in repentance well when the Lord Jesus comes to him on the seashore of Galilee and is about to reinstate him publicly in front of the other disciples he says

Peter do you love me and Peter says oh Lord you know I love you but you see what you did made it look like you didn't love me indeed it was weak love wasn't it and so the Lord asked again Peter do you love me and Peter says again Lord you know that I love you yes and the third time Peter's heart was broken but you know his answer didn't change it just got a little longer he says Lord you know all things you know that I love you wonderful thing that to know that God knows that we love him even where other people may question that fact he perfectly understands others may misunderstand me God never what a comfort when we're falsely accused for our conscience to be able to plead and to appeal to God who knows our hearts you know all things you know what I've done and what I've not done well these are some of the comforts that come from God's omniscience what about his omnipresence how should we be affected by his knowing his being everywhere present well we should be careful how careful we would be not to sin against God if we were more aware of his presence if we realize that all sin is right in front of him you know to sin a lie is wrong kids but to lie to your mother's face is even worse there's something about doing it in front of their face that has an aggravating sense to sin you know you've never told a lie except in his face you've never sinned except in his face for we are always before the face of our God he's always there beholding and so we ought to be very careful not to sin because we realize I'm in front of God I'm in front of God and then what comfort we should draw from this fact that God is everywhere how blessed to be hemmed in by a reconciled God in Christ widows you are never really alone you are never really alone wherever you are he is there wherever you go you are never outside of the reach of his hand to guide you and to protect you that's a comfort he's always at hand to bless he's that ever present help in trouble now these two truths are some of the most basic truths about God you've all known them before you came in here God is everywhere present and he knows everything about us but how many of our troubles stem from not living in the light of this reality that we forget too often that God is here wherever we're at and that he knows me through and through it seems that we have trouble don't we we spend half of our lives as it were half awake to this reality and we have to to say with

Jacob at Bethel surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it how many times have we not been aware of the Lord's presence and though he is never far from us we have to confess he's often far from us in our minds and that's one of the benefits of taking up Psalm 139 and if our devotional times were more like this of God you know me and pondering that not running off oh I've got it down God's omniscient God's on the no but pondering it and pouring over in specific detail then when I ran off into my day I'd have far more likelihood of remembering that this God is with me and he is ever knowing me which is to say that right living flows out of right worship be still and know that I am

God before you rush off into your day pause and wonder who I am and then go and live in light of it and if God is everywhere then surely we ought to live in the awareness that he is everywhere and David's teaching us how and he says in Psalm 16 in verse 8 I have set the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken so do you see him there Christian he's there wherever you are he is right there with you at your right hand to help you and so set him there in your own mind's eye know that he's there so that you will not be shaken in the midst of your day we need to learn to practice the presence of God to say to ourselves often he is here when you change locations and you're off to work as you're walking into the plant he is here as you're coming home he is here wherever you're going he is here or even better to say you are here that's the way David does it do we ever talk to God like David does may we learn to we're to run each step of the race with our eyes fixed on Jesus seeing him at my right hand and so here's the challenge I lay before you as you should leave this morning it's the challenge that meets us every new day of of our life and it is to set our eyes on Jesus early and then to never lose sight of him the rest of the day may the

[47 : 18] Lord help us to feast on this wonderful wonderful God who's present with us everywhere and who knows everything about me if you're lost and outside of Christ this hasn't been a comforting message to you this morning because the one who knows everything about you and is everywhere present is marking every one of your sins thoughts words deeds and he's going to punish you for it and you can't get away from him I just have one word for you this morning there's

one place where you can run and find refuge and that is to turn around and to run right back into the arms of this God in Jesus Christ he is ready to receive you if you will stop your running from him and turn from your sin and run to him and embrace him and trust him to save you from your sins he will have you he says whoever comes to me I will never cast out let's pray oh our God we stand amazed when we think very long at all about you that you are not like us you're not like anything we have ever seen or heard of it's only in the scriptures that we know this about you so thank you and thank you for Psalm 139 and thank you for a fresh look at old truths and come by your spirit and fasten these on our hearts that we might live out our days in the light of your presence until we see you face to face help us to see you by faith the invisible

God ever at hand bring some sinner to quit running from you and to run into your arms for mercy help us and thank you we pray in Jesus name amen