

Study 1 – Created by God. Psalm 139

Theme: David meditates on the wonder of being Created by a God who knows him and will never leave him. This leads him first to worship God and then to be zealous for God's honour.

Aim: That we would be filled with love for God, as we reflect on how precious we are to him and how intimately he knows us.

Intro Question:

Who in your life has known you best (or at least known you very well)? What kinds of things show you that someone knows you well?

Context:

This Psalm was written by David, but its place in the Psalter suggests that it was used by the Jews after the exile. They find themselves surrounded by people who hate God, presumably feeling vulnerable and confused about their place in the world.

God's intimate knowledge of his people

Read Psalm 139v1-6

David describes different ways that God knows him in v1-4. What are the different aspects of God's knowledge which he highlights? **Everything about him – his sitting and rising, his going out and lying down. This is a typical way in poetry of using 2 contrasting things to cover the whole spectrum of things in between. God is 'familiar' with him. He knows the words that he will speak before he says them – this is an intimate knowledge.**

Some people might find it threatening or unnerving to think that God knows them like this, that he has searched them. Why might that be? **We worry what they might think of us – there are parts of us that we want to keep secret from others, perhaps because we are ashamed, or because of the way that others have reacted when they have discovered this about us.**

How does David feel about God knowing him like this? **It is possible that he is slightly uneasy about it – v5 does describe the sense of being hemmed in, or cornered. He can't escape. And yet the word 'hemmed in' can also have the sense of being surrounded, or bound, like by a garment. The much bigger sense is that he is overwhelmed by God's intimate knowledge of him. He treasures it.**

How do you feel about God knowing you like this?

What are some of the reasons why we might doubt that God knows us in this intimate way?

So how might these verses help you begin to answer the question 'Who am I?' **I am known, intimately, personally by God.**

God's inescapable presence

Read v7-12

If v1-6 focussed on God's knowledge, what do v7-12 focus on? **God's inescapable presence. Wherever he runs he can't escape God.**

How is this related to God's knowledge? **God knows us because he is with us – we will come to see that both are a consequence of being created by him. But his presence shows us that he isn't just a distant observer. He is actually close to us.**

What does David say God will do for him? (v10). **Guide him and lead him.**

David looks at the world full of God's enemies and v11 describes his fears of these enemies overwhelming him, that seems to be what he means by 'darkness'. What helps him when he feels these kind of worries? **The knowledge that the darkness is as light to God.**

When we hit tough times we often put our hope in our circumstances changing. How is David's confidence different from that? **David knows that what to us feels like darkness isn't dark to God. And that God's perspective matters. This gives him something to cling to when it feels like darkness to him.**

Why is this a better hope than simply a hope that our circumstances might change? **Our circumstances might not change!!! And actually this hope enables us to draw on the comfort of God's presence with us in the middle of the tough times rather than simply waiting it out.**

What are the enemies or the darkness which we might fear could overwhelm us, either now or in the future?

How might we use these verses to encourage us when we feel anxious?

God's intimate attention

Read v13-18

David could have simply said 'God, you made me.' What do these verses add to that simple truth of being made by God? **There are many dimensions of God's creating us which are emphasised here. The language speaks of a very careful, intimate act of creation. God was personally involved in shaping the deepest part of me. I am created by a master craftsman who has mapped out my life and has a purpose for me.**

Which is your favourite verse and why?

If someone admits to you that they just feel worthless and pointless, how might you use these verses to pray for them and with them?

Our culture tends to treat us as just a bundle of chemicals which evolved by chance over millions of years. What will that kind of teaching do to someone's sense of worth? **It will rob them of a sense of worth. It wouldn't be a surprise to find that it led to a whole host of other related issues – people struggling with mental health, people seeking worth in the wrong place – in their work, in their leisure pursuits.**

Why is the Bible's teaching more attractive? **It means I am intended.**

So how might these truths affect the way I answer the question: 'who am I?' **I am created by a God who lovingly shaped me.**

Zeal for God's honour

Read v19-24

These verses probably catch us by surprise. Why is David upset with these people (cf v20, 21)? **NB this isn't to do with how they are treating him, it's to do with how they are treating God.**

Why do you think that he is so passionate about God's honour? **Look particularly at the truths that have been so precious to him in the Psalm so far.**

Now probably isn't the time for a full discussion about whether or not we should use this kind of language as Christians. Clearly we are called to love our enemies (Matt 5v44). But at the same time we know that God both loves every human being (John 3v16) and also hates those who do evil (Psalm 5v5). His hatred is an expression of his holiness and his passion for his own glory. If we truly grasp how precious it is to be created by God, known by him and loved by him then we will be distressed by any insult to him (cf Acts 17v16).

What is David's concern for himself in v23-24? **That his life is honouring to God and that he is walking in the way of eternal life.**

Our culture loves to believe that we are all valuable. But its conclusion is that I need to be free to do whatever I want to do and no-one else has the right to correct me. How is David's response different from that?

Our culture often speaks of the 'self-made man'. Why might we find it attractive to think of ourselves as 'self-made'? What is the problem with it?

Look back over the Psalm and discuss the different truths that it has offered in answer to the question 'Who am I?' Which do you think God most wants you to hold onto this week? How can you help yourself to do that?

Respond: you may like to listen to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8woRLh48iZo>