

## In the Spotlight...and Loving It

### Psalm 139:1–6

Want to know how you can make someone feel important? Give that person thirty minutes of your undivided attention. Don't be distracted by anything else. Don't look at your watch or your smartphone. Just look that person squarely in the eyes and listen. Ask lots of questions. Be sincerely interested in who he/she is and what he/she has to say. Do it with a friend. Do it with your spouse. Do it in a convalescent home. Do it with your children, one at a time. I can almost guarantee you will make their day.

It is part of being human to want to be known. Even if you are a private person, even if you are shy or introverted, you still desire, on some level, to be known by others. Because if no one knows you, you cannot be loved or appreciated. And we need love and appreciation to satisfy our craving for significance.

But having said that, I'd like to follow up with a question. How *much* of yourself do you want to be known? Are you willing to be transparent about everything, or just the things that put you in a good light? Would you be willing to allow someone to indiscriminately shine a spotlight on your soul, revealing *all* your innermost thoughts and motives and desires and attitudes?

Chances are, you would not. A flashlight with a weak battery...maybe. A spotlight? No way!

For most people, there are limits to how much we want others to know about us. That's why we have doors and window shades and shower curtains. That's why we wear clothes. That's why we have internal mechanisms that compel us to erect psychological walls when we feel vulnerable. Because just as great as the desire to be known is the desire to limit that knowledge. We call it privacy—and in our culture, privacy is a right for which we have been willing to fight and even die.

But what if I were to tell you that there is no such thing as privacy? That you were in Someone's spotlight right now, and you could not escape? That everything about you, at this very moment and every other moment, is being observed and scrutinized?

You would say, "Hey, that's not funny. That sounds like a script for a horror movie."

Indeed there are limits to how much we want to be known. At the very least, we'd like to have control over that knowledge, and be selective about who has access to it.

An evidence of that is when we discover someone has been staring at us. Most of us feel self-conscious and uncomfortable. We may blush. We may get angry because we think that person has intruded on our privacy or violated our space. Which is why staring is socially unacceptable and why a peeping tom is morally outrageous. You don't let someone fix their gaze upon you unless they've obtained permission.

It brings me back to the question: How would you feel if you knew that you were in Someone's spotlight, not just now, but twenty four/seven?

I would submit to you that it all depends on who's holding the spotlight. It depends on who the Person is that's watching you, and what your relationship with that Person is. For one individual, David, the thought of being under constant surveillance gave him goose bumps—not out of fright, but out of sheer delight. We read his personal testimony in Psalm 139. Look at **verses 1-6**.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup>You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

<sup>5</sup>You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

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

We are going to spend the next few weeks exploring this marvelous psalm that reveals some wonderful things about the character of God. In other words, Psalm 139 is theology—it is theology put to music, which is why it is so thought provoking and yet heart-warming at the same time.

The first part of Psalm 139 is about the knowledge of God. Not our knowledge of God, but the knowledge that God possesses. It declares that God’s knowledge is pervasive and comprehensive. Theologians call this *omniscience*. It means simply that God knows everything. He knows everything completely, exhaustively, and perfectly. There is nothing He does not know. There is nothing that escapes His attention.

But this passage is not a theological treatise. David is describing how God’s omniscience affects him personally, and how his awareness of God’s omniscience makes him feel. He begins by making a simple statement. It is a fact about God with reference to himself, and notice it is addressed *to* God. “O LORD.” This is a prayer. He is communicating with Yahweh his God. **Verse 1.** <sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

It is difficult to adequately describe or explain any of God’s attributes in human language. But what David is saying here is that God’s knowledge is not passive. Verse 1 is not describing a casual interest or a quick glance. “Searching” implies investigation; “me” implies that there is an intensely personal dimension to this investigation. It is not, “O LORD, you know mankind”, but “LORD, you know *me*.”

How well does the LORD know him? The next three verses tell us.

**Verse 2a.** “*You know when I sit and when I rise up...*” David is intentionally describing practically the most mundane of all human activities. So mundane that most of the time we are not even conscious of doing it. How many times have you sat down or stood up today? I haven’t got a clue, do you? And yet David says that God knows. He knows every time we do it and how many times we do it, even if we do not.

**Verse 2b.** “*You discern my thoughts from afar.*” Our thoughts: the most private, personal part about us. No other human being knows all my thoughts—not my wife, not my twin brother, no one. And yet God knows my thoughts even before *I* know them. Even before they are fully formed.

How long does it take to form a thought? A fraction of a second? And yet God knows that thought before it ever takes shape. Before I am conscious of it and can make sense of it. He knows my thoughts even when I am not conscious of them. The dreams I have at night when I’m sleeping—the ones that I can’t remember when I wake up He knows every one of them. He can even make sense of them even though they seem senseless to me.

But that's not all. **Verse 3a.** *You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.*

There is an interesting Hebrew word used in this phrase. "Search out" means "to winnow" or "to sift". It's the process of separating grain from chaff or dirt. David is saying that God has you all sorted out. He has figured out what you will do, where you will go, when you will do it, before it even happens.

Sometimes we try to do that with people. We've got labels for certain personality traits and patterns of behavior, and we put people in those categories. We say, "so and so is *neurotic*, he's a *type A*, she's *obsessive compulsive*, he's an *extrovert*..." While those labels may be helpful to some degree they are, at best, imprecise. We don't have the capacity to completely or accurately figure out just exactly how any person ticks. Man is too complicated a creature.

And yet God knows. He knows the intricacies of your personality. He knows why you think the way you do and why you do the things you do. David says, "*You are acquainted with all my ways*" (verse 3b).

There is nothing about me that escapes His attention; there is nothing that surprises Him. There is nothing over which He puzzles or about which He wonders. His knowledge is perfect.

**Verse 4.** *<sup>4</sup>Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

Before my words are formed—in that millisecond when my brain is forming its thoughts and telling my mouth how to move so that my thoughts are translated into words—God knows. Even when I don't think before I speak, which is all too often, God knows that, too. When I'm at a loss for words and don't know what to say, God does. Even when I don't know what I've *said*, God does. He can interpret anything, even silence. He's got all the answers to all the questions, including the ones that have never been asked.

In one of Gary Larsen's *Far Side* comics there is a picture of a game show called "Trivia Tonight". Two contestants sit in their booths, one the current champion and the other God. Each has their hand on the buzzer. The score is 1065 to zero, and you-know-who is winning.

God's knowledge so far transcends our own that it is incomparable, unfathomable.

I don't know how often or how much you reflect upon the comprehensiveness of God's knowledge, but I would encourage you to do so often. It is truly awe-inspiring, especially in comparison with our own.

Yes, I know. We live in a day of information. More information is accessible and available now than at any other time. We can go to our computers and obtain knowledge about virtually any subject with a click and have it in a matter of seconds.

But the knowledge that has been accumulated in the world today is only a tiny fraction of the knowledge that exists in the mind of God. And there are never any glitches or errors in His knowledge. His knowledge requires no effort or extraction because He is the Source of all knowledge.

Think about it. We exist by learning. If we don't learn, we perish. But He has never learned anything because He's always known everything. His knowledge is perfect and

complete. He is the only true expert that exists or has ever existed, because He is the only One with *all* the facts and the only One who is able to accurately interpret them.

And something else: He knows all things equally well. That means He knows you just as well as He knows David. You, too, are in God's spotlight.

That's essentially what David says in **verse 5**. <sup>5</sup> *You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.*

The Hebrew word here means, "to enclose". I have a hedge around me and there is no way to go through it or around it or under it or over it, and if I turn around it is behind me as well. There is nowhere I can go to escape the gaze of God. I am under constant surveillance.

How does that make you feel? Does being closed in make you feel a bit claustrophobic? Does it make you feel incarcerated? Or violated?

It all depends on what you think of God, and what you think God thinks of you.

As I said before, we are independent creatures who crave privacy. And now that you know there is no such thing as privacy you may feel violated. You may feel that God is spying on you or that He's some ruthless prosecutor who holds a bright light up to your soul without your permission.

But if that's the way you feel, it is evidence that you don't know Him or have a personal relationship with Him like David did.

Jean Paul Sartre wrote a play entitled *No Exit*, in which three characters are confined to a room with nothing to do except talk to and stare at one another. It is a symbol of hell. In Sartre's view, the idea of being under the constant gaze of another is reason for doing away with God, for beneath God's gaze, he said, we are reduced to mere objects and our humanity is destroyed. We are mere puppets (Boice, *Sovereign God*, p. 176).

But perhaps there is another reason, a moral reason, why Sartre chose to deny the existence of God. If there were a God who could see through me, I couldn't live with myself. I would be exposed for who I really am, and I could not handle the shame.

If God is holy, that makes sense. He knows every vile, corrupt, perverted thought I've ever entertained. He knows every hypocritical, deceitful thing I've ever done, and every selfish, insincere motive I've ever had.

Should I feel ashamed? That depends on how you are related to Him. If I'm a stranger to His grace, then I'd have every reason to feel ashamed and terrified at the thought of God's knowledge. It *would* be a prison, a hell with no means of escape.

But if I've experienced His grace and mercy—if I have the assurance that this God has forgiven me completely and that He loves me immeasurably, then being enclosed by this knowledge would compel me to blurt out with the Psalmist in **verse 6**. <sup>6</sup> *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*

Do you detect David's attitude here? He was thrilled, he was ecstatic. Because he was not only acquainted with God's omniscience, he was acquainted with His grace. And depending on how you are related to God's grace, you will either feel like a POW or a VIP. You will either feel like you are under a searchlight, or you are in a spotlight. You will either hate it or love it.

David was obviously basking in the warmth of God's grace, because there is not an ounce of fear or anxiety in the language of this Psalm. He was in the spotlight and loving it.

Think about your own life in relationship to this truth. Are you aware of the fact that the God who thoroughly knows you, thoroughly loves you? Do you understand that He has made provision for you to be fully and unconditionally accepted by Him? Not because you have earned that kind of acceptance. No. Our sin has alienated us from God so that we deserve His judgment. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made it possible for us to be acceptable in Jesus Christ. He sent His Son into the world to bear our sin and our shame in our place. So Jesus lived on this earth for 33 years, and though He was tempted in every way that we are, He never once sinned—He didn't so much as have an impure thought or an insincere motive. And that qualified Him to be our Substitute, to bear our sin in His body on the cross, to experience the punishment we deserve, so that we might no longer be alienated from God, but become His friends.

Faith in Jesus makes me acceptable. When I believe that He did what He did on that cross for *me* and that He is God's provision for *my* forgiveness and my salvation, God declares me righteous in Him, and I stand before God in His merits, and with His righteousness.

That is our only hope. That is what makes us secure and gives us the confidence that we are loved unconditionally, even though He knows everything about us. God knows all, and yet He loves us still!

But our knowledge of God's knowledge ought to do more than just make us feel secure. It ought to affect the way we live each day. Let me mention three ways.

1. Knowing that I am under God's perpetual gaze **leads to a crumbling of all facades and all pretenses**. An awareness of God's omniscience launches a fierce, unrelenting attack upon the fortress of my ego. I cannot hide behind my cleverly constructed walls. I cannot put on a mask and pretend to be someone or something I'm not. I cannot make excuses. I cannot blame something or someone else.

Why? Because God knows. And if I cannot pull the wool over His eyes—the only Person whose opinion really matters, there's really no point in trying to fool others. I might as well just be honest. I am who I am—a sinner saved by grace, a person who is in constant need of that grace.

Indeed, God's omniscience frees me to be authentic. For He knows everything, and loves me still. If you really believe that God knows you perfectly inside and out, and that He loves you more than you could ever imagine in spite of what He knows, you are free to become what He intended you to be.

So many people are paralyzed by fear. Fear of being exposed for who they really are. Fear that if they are exposed no one will like them or love them or want to have anything to do with them. And so they live in the shadows. They are like a bud that never opens up and blossoms into a flower.

But God's perfect knowledge of you accompanied by His perfect love for you gives you the freedom to come out of the shadows into the light, where your true nature in Christ can be revealed and clarified and defined.

2. But there is something else. Knowing that I am under God's perpetual gaze **is a deterrent to sinning**.

If I really believe there is no such thing as privacy, if I were continually aware that God is watching, and that He not only *knows* but is *grieved* when I do sin, then I'm going to think twice before I give in to temptation.

Do you understand why? No one who knows He's in the spotlight wants to make a fool of Himself, especially in the presence of One He deeply respects and loves, and especially if that Person would be grieved and injured by that foolish behavior.

3. Third, knowing that I am under God's perpetual gaze facilitates an honest and active prayer life.

You can tell a lot about a person's concept of God by the way they pray. Some people don't pray, they actually preach in prayer format. "Lord, be with So and So. He's been backsliding and he needs to be in the Word and start coming back to church and..." Wait a second. Why do we need to inform God about what So and so is doing and tell God what So and so needs? He already knows the situation perfectly and knows exactly what he needs.

I remember being at a Christian function several years ago in which a man was giving an invocation and was praying about our country. And he was telling God about all the corruption in the U.S.—the drugs, pornography, divorce, etc. and after he had listed all these things he paused and said, "But Lord, we're still the best nation in the world". I guess he was afraid he was being so negative that maybe he had influenced God's opinion.

If we are convinced God knows everything, that He knows exactly what the situation is and how to handle it, that He even knows what we are going to pray before we pray it, it's going to make a difference in how we pray. We'll learn to trust Him more, and ourselves less. We'll learn to commit things to Him rather than try to get our own way. We'll listen to Him more rather than always tell Him what we think He needs to do. Our prayers will be honest and sincere, God honoring and God centered.

I want to close with this thought. What you think about God is the most important thing about you. It affects everything—your thoughts, words, attitudes, behavior, relationships—everything. If you want to have a vibrant, dynamic, passionate faith, if you want to live life to its fullest potential—know the Lord and know Him well. Explore His Word. Plumb the depths of His Being.

I will promise you this. You won't be disappointed. You will be continually amazed and delighted and awed by what you discover. For if you are related to God through Jesus Christ, you will realize, as did David, that the attributes of God are not mere theological abstractions, they have an intensely personal dimension. And in this particular passage, it is God's omniscience that ought to convert that knowledge into wonder, adoration, and praise. It ought to make us feel extraordinarily special.

When my children were infants my favorite thing was to hold them in my arms and just stare at them. I would explore all the intricacies of their features. I would scrutinize all their movements, their expressions, their sounds. I'd sit there for hours at a time, and just look for things that made them distinct and special. Why? Because I wanted to know as much about them as I possibly could, and the more knowledge I had the more precious they became to me. The more I knew the more I was filled with delight.

By staring at them so long and so hard, was I being intrusive? Was I violating their right to privacy? Will they suffer psychological scars from being in the spotlight? I think not. Not when that gaze is accompanied by intense love.

Let your awareness of God's knowledge of you let you understand and feel how precious you are to Him, and how much He delights in you.

## In the Spotlight...and Loving It Psalm 139:1-6

**Main Idea:** God's comprehensive knowledge (omniscience) is awe-inspiring and assuring to those are convinced of His love.

**God's knows everything (vv.1-5)**

**About me (v.1)**

**About what I do (v.2a)**

**About what I think (v.2b)**

**About my personality (v.3)**

**About my words (v.4)**

**Under constant surveillance (v.5)**

**Thrilled to be in the spotlight (v.6)**

**Application: Knowing that I am under God's perpetual gaze...**

- leads to a crumbling of all \_\_\_\_\_ and all \_\_\_\_\_
- is a \_\_\_\_\_ to sin
- facilitates an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ prayer life