

*Knowledge of God, Knowledge of Ourselves:*

Inviting God to Search

a message based on

Psalm 139

Followers of Jesus, and Those who want to know God:

Brett Alan Dewing, one of the editors of the magazine *Christian Courier*, recently asked what we know about Michael Jackson, that publically scrutinized pop star who recently passed away. “His nose was prosthetic, his doctor may have 'killed' him, his children have an uncertain heritage and even more uncertain future, he was guilty or innocent of child molestation and his fears about a comeback may have led to his semi-self-destruction.” Despite all we know about his life, he was still so very un-knowable. In fact, writes Dewing, “None of us is truly known by our fellow humans. None of us is truly knowable” (“Through a Mirrorball darkly: Life, death, and the King of Pop”).

Yet God knows everything. God knows everything about us. God knows what we're thinking before we say what we're thinking. God knows what we're going to say next, or (as Neal Plantinga points out) what we were going to say, but didn't. God knows us really well.

In the third chapter of Genesis we're told what happened when Adam, along with Eve, listened to the voice of the enemy we know as “Satan,” or “the devil” (a designation that means that he acts as our accuser). What happened? Adam, along with Eve, ran and hid from the presence of the LORD God. So there is something inside all of us that makes us want to run from God. C.S. Lewis points out that Satan's plan was diabolical: he wants to make us think that we can “invent some sort of happiness for [ourselves] outside of God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history – money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery – the long, terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make them happy” (Mere Christianity).

Is it possible to escape God? Can we ever get away from him?

We are asking ourselves some important questions these days. Who are you? And, who is God? We answer this morning first of all, that second question: who is God? David is convinced of two things regarding God. First, God is everywhere; second, God knows everything. This is not some far-flung theory that David is toying around with. This is something he knows by experience.

God is everywhere. He is there when I sit down, watching television. He is there when I go for a walk in the woods alone. He is there in my mind, probing what I am thinking. John Stek (who just recently passed away) observed that God is in the horizontal: I can go east to the other side of Canada, and he'll be there waiting. I can go west, across the ocean to China or Korea, he is there. God is also in the vertical: I can climb Mount Tzouhalim, and he'll get there ahead of me. I can go scuba diving into the deepest part of the ocean (as deep as it is safe to go), and he's there, too. In a world where privacy is held dear, this notion of God is disconcerting.

**Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account** (Heb 4:13).

We cannot escape from God.

God is everywhere, and God knows everything. Matthew Henry wrote: "He knows what rule we walk by, what end we walk toward, what company we walk with." God knows our secret thoughts. "God, who knows every thought, word and deed, from whom there is no hiding, who has been privy even to one's formation in the dark concealment of the womb" (J.S.), where no one else sees. He sees.

So God is everywhere, and God knows everything about us. This is who God is. So a very simple question needs to be asked. Can we be everywhere? Do we know everything? Of course not! Do we really live this truth out, or do we pretend we are like God in this way?

John Calvin points out that one of the secrets to knowing ourselves and knowing God is to admit, deeply and without trying to hide, that there is something about us, now that sin has come into the world, that keeps us from viewing ourselves in the right way. "We always seem to ourselves more righteous and upright and wise and holy" ("Knowledge of God"). We say today that we all have "blind spots," things about ourselves that we are not even aware of; our loved ones may be aware, but we oblivious to this reality.

**Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain** (Psalm 139:6).

One of the things, I think, that motivates us way too much goes back once again to Genesis 3. Why do we fruitlessly try to hide from God, when we can't escape him? We try this impossible thing because we are afraid. I don't know about you, but I know myself well enough to realize that too often what motivates me to do anything at all in

this life is fear. I am afraid to make a decision, because what will people think? I am afraid to say something, because if I say something that offends, then people may reject me and I don't want to be rejected. I'm afraid to say, "No," because deep down I want to be Superman who can do all things, who can do everything, and impress everyone, and prove that I can do it! I don't think I'm alone in this; am I?

Psalm 139 begins with an observation that the LORD searches us. He just does. And it ends with a prayer request, that God do what he does, search us, an invitation that God do what he does best.

**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 (Psalm 139:23-24).**

Why does he speak of *anxious thoughts*? Anxiety is rooted in fear, and if there's anything we're afraid of, it is being found out. If there's anything we're frightened of, it is being discovered for who we really are, with all of our offensive (to God) foibles. We are anxious because we wonder, what will God do with what he knows about us? How will he handle it?

Do you want to know the answer to how God will handle our secret thoughts? It goes back to Genesis 3 once again. God's first reaction to our dirty little secret.

**But the LORD God called out to the man (and woman), "Where are you?"**  
(Gen 3:9).

When they found out about Richard Nixon, he resigned in disgrace as President of the United States. When they found out about Martha Stewart, they tried her and put her in a jail (N.P.). When they found out about Conrad Black, they had no mercy and threw him there, too. When God found out about our sin, what did he do?

**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).**

Is this not good news? Our secrets are safe with God! He is not going to parade them out in public for everyone to see and mock and yap about. Even the faults that are hidden to us, the things we are not even aware of, even these he forgives through Jesus Christ crucified! If he does that for us, how can we respond? How now shall we live in his presence?

David's doxology is derived from the wonder of what he knows about God.

**I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well (Ps 139:14).**

Richard Baxter points out that true knowledge of God effects the heart and the life in powerful ways. It's not how much we know about God that counts; what counts is how what we know results in the way we live. Knowing God results in the habit of respecting him highly, believing him always, trusting him no matter how things look, and loving him by searching out his high worth. This is our challenge in knowing God, and knowing ourselves.

David also sees how God being present in our lives all the time is of great benefit.  
**... even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast (Ps 139:10).**

We often believe and know that God is with us when things are going well. What we must know is that God is just as surely with us when things aren't going well. Someone has pointed out that there is no place deep enough that God will not go deeper still. In Jesus, God went to hell and back for us, and he is surely with us when we think our lives are hellish; when it seems most likely that God is not there.

**He guides me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake (Ps 23:3).**

One more thing. This psalm emphasizes that God is with us always, through his Spirit. In the New Testament we're told something new about the Spirit of God: he is not just with us, surrounding us. The Spirit of God is IN us! What is the Spirit of God doing in us?

**For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (or: the Spirit of adoption). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Rom 8:15-16).**

Is the Spirit of God in you? Have you asked for him? Is he reminding you from time to time that you are a child of God? Do we find ourselves crying out to God, "Abba Father"? Here is the truth of this matter: we cannot know who we are without the Spirit of God in us! Do we have a desperate need for him, a desperate desire to know him?