

Rejoicing in the Omniscience of God

The Song, Part 10

Psalm 139:1-6

Several years ago I was down at Chick-fil-A, eating my usual chicken sandwich, no pickle; fries, diet lemonade and a chocolate chip cookie – to balance things out.

I began reading the USA Today newspaper that they provide on the counter . . . since we don't order the newspaper it's the only one I ever look at, and it's usually more than enough.

One of the articles caught my attention, with the headline, **"Frauds put up a decorated Front."** The subtitle read, "Mail-order medals let phonies play hero."

The article began by telling about the annual Marine Corps Birthday Ball near Atlantic City, last fall. One gentleman was there wearing row upon row of battle ribbons on his chest – you know, this silent testament to a history of courage and sacrifice.

Some of the awards this 52 year old man proudly wore included the Bronze Star, a Silver Star and the Navy Cross – second in significance only to the Medal of Honor. The other retired soldiers intuitively made room for this man in his dress blues, wearing the rank of lieutenant colonel.

But as the night wore on, some of the men noticed little flaws – like when he excused himself to go to the latrine – which is not what Marines call it. They call it the Head – a term they got from the Navy – simply because in the early sailing ships, the bathroom was in the front of the ship – or ahead of them.

But even worse, he had his Combat Action Ribbon pinned upside down.

One of the attendees quietly snapped a picture of this retired lieutenant colonel and later sent it to the FBI. After checking the records, this man was found

to be an imposter. He had served as a plumbing specialist in the navy but had been dishonorably discharged. The imposter was sentenced three years of probation and fined several thousands dollars.

Evidently, this article revealed, masquerading as a war hero is not uncommon; because everybody appreciates war decorated heroes who served our country. People assume these heroes are not only heroic, but honest and loyal and sincere and trustworthy. It helps them in business, in civic recognition, panders to their pride.

The USA paper also included a picture of another man in his late 60's, dressed in full military uniform and cap, medals everywhere, speaking at a 9/11 commemoration, surrounded by balloons and an adoring crowd.

He later admitted to authorities when he was questioned that he had never even been in the military – he had been masquerading for decades – in fact, his life had even developed around his make-believe history.

Evidently, according to this article, you can purchase a look-alike Bronze Star and other medals for less than 100 bucks and effectively become an instant hero.

The article ended by one authority stating that he believed that in virtually every city in America, no matter how small, there are people claiming to be war heroes, who are not authentic . . . they are fakes and imposters.¹

And we would all echo the same sentiment – isn't that terrible to pretend to be something you're really not.

The truth is, we are all, at heart potential imposters. We can be quite good at acting like

someone we really aren't – we can easily represent a spiritual life we're not really interested in living at all.

Listen, it's possible for a believer to cross the line between authentic humility before God and secret rebellion.

That line is crossed, and the masquerade begins, not necessarily by large decisions . . . but a lot of little ones.

Like the man I read about who was with his wife at an expensive restaurant . . . they had not put in reservations and when they got inside, the lobby was packed with waiting customers. They stood there for a while wondering what to do when the hostess called out, "Morgan family . . . are Mr. and Mrs. Morgan here?" No one answered to that name. This man took his wife by the arm, feeling rather clever and said, "We're over here." "Wonderful," she said, "follow me" and they walked through that crowded lobby filled with envious people still waiting for seats; as the hostess led them through the crowded restaurant, she said to them over her shoulder, "I'm so glad you've finally arrived . . . the rest of your family is already here."

Caught!

David is about to write a song that informs us that we never really ever get away with pretending . . . with masquerading.

The reality of the Christian life is that God knows who we are, no matter how many medals we pin to our chest.

I'd like you to turn to *Psalms 139* and get ready to write three words into the margin of your text. And we're only going to cover one of them today.

Next to *verses 1 through 6* you can write the word **omniscience**.

David is actually going to tell us why we can rejoice in the omniscience of God.

Next to *verses 7 through 12* you can write the word **omnipresence** – and David is going to tell us why we can truly rest in the omnipresence of God.

And then from *verses 13 on* it's the word **omnipotence**; David is going to explain why we can revel in the omnipotence of God.

This isn't some kind of stale lesson in theology . . . this is exhilarating grace and security and joy. In fact, you might even notice that your Psalm opens with the added notation that this particular Psalm was given to the choir director – this was intended for public singing.

Now, we have no idea how this song sounded – we don't really know how any of these Songs sounded. Some of you are sure that there's a **brass** section leading the way . . . some of you would say, no, this is for **violins** – some of you hear **guitars and drums** – and then some of you are convinced it would be great – in fact, that all music sounds better with a **banjo**.

How did we all get together in one auditorium? I have no idea how God is going to solve this problem in heaven, but I can't wait to find out.

Here's something you didn't know about **Gary Hallquist** – he plays the saxophone, the piano, and the saw. How many of you would like to hear him **play the saw**?

Ok, never mind!

Now, while we don't have the instrumentation or the musical score, we do have the lyrics.

There are several stanzas here . . . we'll cover the first stanza.

David begins in *verse 1, O Lord, You have searched me and known me!*

If you look ahead to the end of the Psalm in *verse 23 David writes, Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts.*

Why would David start out by saying this is what God does and then end by asking God to do it?

I think the answer is this:

- **Verse 1** is a declaration of God's omniscience.
- **Verse 23** is a declaration of David's openness
- **Verse 1** praises God's sovereignty
- **Verse 23** promises David's surrender

Both are absolutely necessary to becoming real and authentic and unpretending before God and others.

Now go back to *verse 1 and the declaration of God's omniscience.*

O Lord, You have searched me and known me!

This word, *searched*, comes from a Hebrew word that originally means "to dig . . . to explore". It can carry the idea of someone digging for treasure.

You could translate it, "Lord, you have dug deeply into me."ⁱⁱ

David is effectively saying, "Lord, you have excavated every crevice of my soul; Your omniscient spade has dug into my heart and mind and turned over every stone . . . you've uncovered everything."

Now don't misunderstand. David is *not* suggesting that God had to dig around in his David's heart in order to learn everything about David.

No, David is writing from the perspective that he *has discovered* that God has *already discovered* him. God's knowledge of him was comprehensive – past, present and future.

Look down at how David expresses this truth in **verse 2. *You know when I sit down and when I rise up;***

Imagine – He knows where you sit – and you help Him, because you always sit in the same place . . . the truth is, God doesn't miss one movement by any of us.

David adds, in verse 2, you discern my thoughts from afar.

In other words, God not only sees our every *movement*, He knows our every *motive*.ⁱⁱⁱ

He discerns my thoughts . . . He sees perfectly the invisible patterns of thought and intent and motive and purpose.

He's not only an eyewitness to our deeds; He knows why we did it!

At least twice in the Gospels we are explicitly told that Jesus Christ knew the thoughts of those in His audience.

David isn't saying here that God knows we're thinking; like we might ask our kids – “What were you thinking?” and we're probably wondering if they were at all.

God not only knows if we're thinking, He knows what we're thinking – and why.

Notice verse 3 – You search out my path and my lying down.

The word for *search* means to literally *scrutinize* – it refers to minute scrutiny – can you imagine God's insightful examination?

He knows every thought we have and every step we take and even when we stop to take a break and lie down – He knows that too.

John Phillips wrote on this text, “The Lord knows when I leave the house. He knows whether I walk to work, take my car, or ride the bus. He knows when I go for a coffee break, when I leave to go home, and when I walk back in the front door. From my first step as a toddler to my last faltering steps in old, there is not one step that He does not know.”^{iv}

Look further at **verse 4 – *Even before a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.***

In other words, God isn't waiting to find out what you're going to say.

And that isn't just true about David – that is true about everybody you know . . . everyone on the planet – throughout human history.

Every action, every thought, every motive, and every word.

A.W. Tozer wrote, God knows every word of every language on every human tongue on every continent at every moment of every day – even before any word is uttered.^v

This is the omniscience – the comprehensive perfection of God's knowledge.

Tozer went on to write, God is never surprised. He is never amazed. He never wonders about anything; God has never learned from anyone. God cannot learn. God knows effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all feelings, all desires, every secret. God never discovers anything . . . He already knows.”^{vi}

I like to pose the omniscience of God by asking, has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?

This was the astounding claim of Jesus Christ when He spoke in the upper room of their denial and His coming death: He said, ***I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am He - literally, that I AM (John 13:19).*** (That I'm God in the flesh.)

This is how Jesus Christ could look Peter in the eye and say, Peter, I hear what you're saying about your commitment to me, but you're going to deny even knowing who I am – not 2 times or 4 times, but 3 times – and then after the third time a rooster is going to crow.” How specific can you be?

And ***Jesus was not saying under his breath,*** “Man, I hope it works out like that . . . I hope that rooster doesn't get distracted in the barnyard by some pretty little hen and forget to crow.”

One author describes God's omniscience by writing, “God knows everything actual and everything possible . . . past, present, and future.”^{vii}

David writes at the ***last part of verse 4 – look there – Behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.***

In other words, “Oh God, You know it all”. God is the only genuine “Know-it-all” . . . because He does.

Notice verse 5. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

God literally “fences you in.”^{viii}

The word translated *hem* – or *enclose* – is a strong Hebrew term used for a city that is under siege. All the escape routes have been cut off . . . they are hemmed in.

Which is a stunning thought . . . God shuts off all escape routes when we want to run . . .

- He keeps us from escaping that situation;
- He keeps us from running away from that responsibility;
- He keeps us pressed in and held fast.

He keeps us pressed in until, as one poet wrote it, *We are pressed into loving the staff and the rod; Pressed into knowing no helper but God.*^{ix}

Notice what David writes in *verse 6*. ***Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.***

Theology is breaking out into doxology.

Don't ever wonder if God knows about you.

The truth is there isn't anything about you that God doesn't know – and care – and graciously superintend.

Omniscience can produce two different kinds of responses.

One would be uneasiness, right?

Do you remember when you had this theory that your parents were omniscient? And they wanted you to think that?

And you periodically tested that theory, didn't you?

When I was in elementary school, psychologists had not yet discovered that spanking was a bad idea. That it could ruin a child's self-esteem. In fact, they hadn't discovered self-esteem yet. So we still believed in stuff like self-control . . . how outdated was that.

I remember Mrs. Jolly giving me a paddling – it was in the 4th grade I believe . . . I can't remember the grade exactly, although I do know I was paddled at least once each year from kindergarten through the 4th grade . . . in my efforts to be consistent.

I remember this particular one because on this particular day I decided not to confess when I got home. And I remember the fear . . . would I be found out?

I made it through the afternoon – my brothers didn't know . . . my parents didn't know. There was no way they could ever find out.

I made it through supper that night . . . I wasn't very hungry, but things were looking good; and then . . . around 8 o'clock that night the telephone rang.

That was back when there was only one telephone in the house and it hung on the wall in the kitchen . . . listen, I can't remember where I was a week ago, but I can remember 45 years ago, running down the hallway and listening around the corner to my mother answer the phone, while I held my breath and then I heard her say, "Well hello, Mrs. Jolly."

My life was over! (I just stood there quoting AWANA verses – preparing for the last rites)

A.W. Pink wrote that there's something unsettling about omniscience . . .^x

There is something unsettling about the fact God has already found us out.

He knows every time we cross the line between authentic Christianity to pretender.

- When we tell someone, I'll pray about that . . . and never do
- When we say to someone, God bless you . . . and we really don't care what God does;
- When we sing, "I love you Lord, and I lift my voice . . ." and it's the first time all week we've said anything to Him at all.

The omniscience of God may be unsettling.

But would you notice that for David, instead of discomfort, it brought him delight.

Look at *verse 6 again*. ***Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.***

Instead of creating dread in David, it produced sheer delight!

Instead of running and hiding, David sang with joy about the omniscience of God – "My God knows everything there is to know about me – this is wonderful news!"

Listen, this is the song of a clear conscience. This is music from the lips of someone who's come clean and confessed his sin and surrenders afresh to his Sovereign Lord.

When you think about it, the omniscience of God produces several reactions in us:

1. **First, the omniscience of God sobers us . . . we're going to appear at the Bema seat of Christ and give an accounting of what He thoroughly knows (2 Cor. 5:10).**

If we truly understand the omniscience of God, there is no room for pride in any of us.

We have been found out by Him.

And He still loves us and uses us? No wonder we will place our crowns at the foot of His throne (*Revelation 4:10*).

2. Secondly, the omniscience of God secures us:

The blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin . . . (1 John 1:7) Listen, Jesus could not have paid the penalty for all our sins unless He already knew what they were.

If God were not omniscient, He would be unable to secure our redemption.

J. I. Packer writes, “The omniscience of God is wonderful truth; I am never out of His mind. There is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love for me is utterly realistic, based at every point on knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me. This is momentous knowledge. This is unspeakable comfort.”^{xi}

3. The omniscience of God satisfies us:

He knows what we have need of before we even ask it. (Matthew 6:8).

God will never say, “I didn’t see that problem coming; I didn’t know you would need that!”

The omniscience of God means that when you face the troubles of tomorrow you discover that God already knew they were coming!

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, David writes, I cannot attain it.

In other words, I can’t comprehend it . . . it’s beyond me!

Eugene Peterson paraphrased it, It’s just too much . . . too wonderful . . . I can’t take it all in.

No wonder David thinks the omniscience of God is a wonderful thing to sing about.

The omniscience of God, for the believer, is not a threat, it’s a refuge.^{xii}

Let’s join David in rejoicing in the omniscience of God!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/16/2014 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2014 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

i USA TODAY: Wednesday, June 21, 2006

ii G.A.F. Knight, *Psalms: Volume 2* (Westminster Press, 1983), p. 319

iii John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms: Volume 2* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 592

iv Phillips, p. 593

v Quote of A.W. Tozer by Charles Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Part 2* (Word Publishing, 1988), p. 359

vi James Boice, *Psalms: Volume 3* (Baker Books, 1998), p. 1202

vii Boice p. 1202

viii Knight, p. 320

ix Swindoll, p. 360

x Quoting A.W. Pink by James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Volume 3* (Baker, 1998), p. 1204

xi Lutzer, p. 134

xii Boice, p. 1204