

THANKING OUR GOD
STUDY ONE

For These Reasons, Lord, We Thank You! (Part One)

Psalm 139:1–12

This is the reason for Thanksgiving. Not simply to name the things we have received. Not to be preoccupied with the gifts. But to be thankful because of our God and to remember Him. To reverently and gratefully and solemnly acknowledge the One who is above us and about us and beyond us.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN today's world, ads barrage us with reminders that our clothes, phones, cars, and homes need updating. And social media celebrates users whose polished lives exude nothing but smiles and extravagance. These ever-present voices shout, "If you only had *this*, then you'd finally be happy." We hear a constant encouragement to crave what we *don't* have.

But no soul has ever found true joy moving through life focusing only on what's *lacking*. Herein lies the *wonder* of the Thanksgiving season. Each November, we get the chance to slow our busy, noisy lives and to show gratitude to God for all the innumerable blessings we *already* have.

During Thanksgiving, many of us gather with loved ones and thank God for the gifts He *already* has given us: family, friends, health, safety, food, clothing, homes. How often do we take a moment to give thanks . . . not merely for all our gifts but for the gift-giver Himself, who is Himself *the* greatest gift?

Psalm 139 records a song of thanksgiving that leads us to do just that! In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will see the reasons why King David is more thankful for God Himself than all the other blessings God has given him. And the same deep theological truths that stirred the heart of this great king can also move us to sing praises of sincere thanksgiving to our great God.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you open God’s Word today, meditate upon this prayer from Pastor Chuck. Pray it yourself, giving thanks to God for who He is:

Thank You, Father, for Your attributes, the greatness of Your character, the magnificence of Your mercy, the glory of Your grace, the significance of Your plan, Your knowledge of us, Your presence with us. Thank You for holding fast. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

What is a psalm? How should we read one? We typically use different approaches for reading various genres of literature—be it a letter from a dear friend, a novel, an article from the local newspaper, or, in this case, a poem. Each *genre* of writing has its own distinctive qualities. The biblical psalms are no different.

Keep in mind the following tips as you study Psalm 139.

First, most psalms begin with a *superscription* which provides information about its context, such as the author, the occasion of its writing, or circumstances in which it typically was read. Read the *superscription* for Psalm 139. We’ve already discovered who wrote this psalm, but for whom was it written?



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Next, the people of ancient Israel sang most psalms. Just like modern-day songs, psalms have verses called *stanzas*, and each stanza has its own theme or focus. Bible translations use special spacing to highlight each stanza. How many stanzas does *Psalm 139* have? How many unique themes should we look for as we read?

Finally, each stanza is made up of parallel *verses*. These verses are sometimes *couplets* or *triplets* in which the psalmist builds upon the idea in first line with one or two additional lines. Subsequent lines might restate the original idea, create a contrast against it, or expand upon it. Breaking down this long psalm into its smaller parts will help us make sense of its meaning.

With these tips in mind, read aloud all of *Psalm 139*. As you read, imagine standing with the assembly of Israel, singing this song in worship to God.



Observation: What God Knows and Where He Is

Each psalm contains its own blend of beautiful poetry and rich theology, but before we can discern this psalm's unique meaning, we must first observe what David originally said. In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck shows how repetition often “is intended to build to a climax.”¹ Remember this as you observe!

Look again at *Psalm 139:1–12*, and write down the most-repeated words.



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To whom is this psalm addressed?

What God Knows—Psalm 139:1–6

In the first stanza of Psalm 139, David uses several expressions to describe what God knows about him. Chart below everything David lists:

Verse	What God Knows
139:2a	
139:2b	
139:3a	
139:3b	
139:4	

Omniscience means that God knows everything. He doesn't learn. He's never surprised, never shocked, never taken off guard. He knows it all—past, present, future. Everything.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Where God Is Present—Psalm 139:7–12

The second stanza of Psalm 139 focuses on God’s presence. Using the chart below, list all the places where God is present:

Verse	Where God Is Present
139:8a	
139:8b	
139:9a	
139:9b	

According to 139:10, how was David aware of God’s constant presence? How did God’s presence benefit David?

Omnipresence. God is everywhere at the same time and at all times—any place or space in earth or heaven, under the earth, in the seas, around the earth, in the heavenlies. He is around us at all times. That will change your life if you focus on it long enough. You will never ever be away from His presence; you cannot escape God’s omnipresence.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: God’s Omniscience and Omnipresence

Now that we’ve broken down Psalm 139:1–12 into its smaller parts and observed the fine details, let’s look at each stanza and consider what theological truth each communicates.

David begins *Psalm 139:1* acknowledging that God has “examined” his heart. The Hebrew verb used here has a generic sense of *exploring* and is often used to describe one person *cross-examining* another. How does this term provide clarity regarding the depth of God’s knowledge about David’s character, thoughts, and actions?

The thought of someone knowing you this well might make you uncomfortable. Understandably so! How does David respond in *139:6* to the reality of God’s all-encompassing knowledge? How is this instructive for those who follow God today?



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What does *Psalm 139:11–12* reveal about human efforts to hide from God? How can knowing that God is present even in the “darkness” provide comfort for God’s people? See *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org for some helpful insights.²

Summarize the main theme of this psalm’s first two stanzas.

The shameful things you should never have done—I should never have done—the dreadful things we should never have thought or participated in, He knew those things. God knows it all. The beautiful thing is He keeps it to Himself. It’s called grace. What a great relief!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The All-Knowing, Ever-Present Creator

Few passages of Scripture reveal the majestic nature of God’s character more than the creation account in *Genesis 1:1–26*. Read these verses, and as you read take note of the images, ideas, and concepts discussed both here and in *Psalm 139:1–12*.



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Now jump over to *Colossians 1:15–20*. What role did Jesus the Son have in creation?

How does seeing God as the creator of the universe clarify Psalm 139's picture of His omniscience and omnipresence?

Understanding that we serve the all-knowing, ever-present creator God is a powerful idea. But how should knowing this affect our day-to-day lives? How can we apply the timeless truth that God is both omniscient and omnipresent?

Application: Thanking God for Who He Is

As we look to the application of Psalm 139:1–12, consider these words from Pastor Chuck:

This Thanksgiving—rather than just pondering the things for which you are grateful—I urge you to solemnly and reverently and gratefully acknowledge your thankfulness for God Himself . . . that He is God . . . and by His grace, He came to your rescue by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross. He knows you completely. He loves you unconditionally. Thank Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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In what ways does this psalm of David encourage you today? How does knowing that God is aware of your innermost feelings give you peace? How does knowing that God is always with you bring you comfort? Let the gratitude flow!

How beautiful is the sound of God's people giving thanks! We can't deny that God has given us a bounty of gifts we don't deserve, but even without these blessings, He would remain worthy of our thanks because of His omniscience, omnipresence, righteousness, and holiness. Be sure to thank God for who He is this Thanksgiving season and in the days, weeks, and years to come.



A FINAL PRAYER

To conclude your study, use what you learned in Psalm 139:1–12 to thank God for who He is.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 100.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*.

