

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

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

STUDY

Psalm 139:1–12



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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Psalm 139:1–12

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.



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

Psalm 139:1–12

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



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

Psalm 139:1–12

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



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:1–12



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?



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:1–12

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*.



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

Psalm 139:1–12

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



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:1–12

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*.



THANKING OUR GOD STUDY TWO

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

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24

If anyone attempts to tell you that life doesn't begin until after birth, remind him or her of Psalm 139:13–18. God is at work. He watched as we were in that womb before birth. "Your eyes saw me in my very first stage of life, hours and days of existence, still wrapped in embryonic form. You were there watching over every moment of my being formed."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ALL creation proclaims the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). From the spinning galaxies that fill our vast universe to the tiniest grains of sand sitting on the most remote seashore, God's brilliant design shouts and shines everywhere we turn.

Yet, nothing in creation proclaims God's poetic power more than the image of a frail newborn child. If you've ever seen an ultrasound scan of a fetus or witnessed a small baby in a mother's arms, you've seen how every part of that little human is a miracle—the wiggling body, the quickly-beating heart, the fragile head.

Psalm 139 records King David's poem that tells of the astonishing miracle of a baby developing in a mother's womb. He shows how the smallest human embryo declares God's power *more* loudly than even the grandeur of the cosmos. And David has only one response to God's majestic power . . .

GRATITUDE!

This *Searching the Scriptures* study on Psalm 139 explores King David's masterful song about God's power over His creation—which invites both our wonder and our gratitude.



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God’s cosmic power might make Him seem distant, or even unconcerned about our day-to-day struggles. But God is near, and He hears *and answers* our prayers. Ask Him to guide you as you search the Scriptures today.

Father, I praise You because You are the almighty creator God. Thank You for creating me and giving me a role to play in Your plan for creation. Give me eyes to see Your power in my life as I study Your Word. In Jesus’ mighty name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Psalm 139 is a song of gratitude composed by King David. This psalm contains four separate stanzas, each focusing on a different theme that highlights a different attribute of God’s character for which David offers thanks.

The first stanza celebrates God’s *omniscience* and reveals how God knows everything about David (Psalm 139:1–6). Next, David describes God’s *omnipresence*, showing that He’s always with us (139:7–12). The third stanza moves to God’s *omnipotence*—His absolute power over creation (139:13–18). Finally, David concludes with a refrain of reverence for God (139:19–24).

These three attributes—God’s omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence—call upon all to worship Him because He made us, He is near us, and He knows us. The truth that God had mapped out David’s life before he was even conceived specifically leads David to praise God in Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24.



Observation: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck lays out his method for understanding Scripture and applying its truths to life. Before asking questions about meaning and application, the first step observes the passage and asks, “What does it say?”¹



THANKING OUR GOD

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

STUDY

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24

Read *Psalm 139:13–18*. Which specific element of God's creation does David use to highlight God's omnipotence?

According to *139:13*, who ultimately is responsible for David's existence?

This is the inception of life. "Knit me together" suggests a network, like a thicket. Except in this case, the network is the veritable thicket of bones and muscles and glands and veins and tendons and arteries and lungs and blood that flows through the system to cleanse and energize the body. It's a phenomenal system. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

According to *139:14*, why does David consider God worthy of praise?



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24

According to *Psalm 139:16*, who laid out the plan for David's life? When was this plan established?

David concludes his psalm by making a request of God. What does he ask of God in *139:23–24*?

David saw the power of God demonstrated in his own life, *from womb to tomb*. God personally formed David in his mother's womb, and He ordered each moment of David's life until his very last days. Such an image is not one of a cruel dictator or a distant, aloof deity, but of an ever-present, all-loving, all-powerful God.



Interpretation: God's Omnipotence

After making observations about Psalm 139, the interpretation phase asks questions about the meaning of the passage to determine its theological truths that are relevant across time. What truth does *Psalm 139:13–16* reveal about how God views human life?



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

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24

God's thoughts about David "outnumber the grains of sand" (*Psalm 139:18*). He thinks of you as much as He thought of David. God knows everything you've ever said, done, or thought. This might make many people feel uncomfortable, but not David. It compelled him to praise God even more.

Why is God's intimate knowledge of us good for us?

Summarize the main theme of this psalm's third stanza (*139:13-18*).

The ideas expressed in the original Hebrew of *Psalm 139:23–24* are difficult to communicate in English. Read these verses in a few different Bible translations to get an idea of David's profound emotion. Why does David make this request of God? For some guidance, see *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.²



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

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24

God doesn't search us so He can learn. He never learns anything. He's omniscient, remember. He searches us so that we can learn the condition of our hearts. He can reveal to us the truth. See, He's able to search under every rug of coverup, every closet of concealment, every secret room of sin. He knows our every passing thought. He even knows our anxious thoughts. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Image of God

No biblical passage expresses God's omnipotence quite like the creation account in Genesis 1–2. As God unveiled the masterpiece of the universe piece by piece, He paused when He reached the pinnacle of creation: human beings.

Read [Genesis 1:27–30](#). According to these verses, what does it mean for humans to be made in the image of God? (Hint: look at how the author describes the humans and the commands God gives them.)

What is the relationship between humans and all other created life according to [1:28](#)? In what ways are humans similar to the rest of created life? In what ways are they different? See [1:24–26](#) for the back-to-back creations of animals and humans.

These verses make clear that we play a special role in God's plan for His creation, but what does Psalm 139 specifically teach us to do in light of these truths?



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24



Application: From Womb to Tomb

Pastor Chuck nicely summarizes the overarching theme of Psalm 139:

God ordered our birth and authored our days. He is in control—from womb to tomb.

Many in the public square might feel challenged or even offended by the theme of this song of gratitude. As followers of Christ, however, we can follow King David's example and thank God for His power over *all* creation.

How should this psalm's discussion of human life affect how you see others—such as the unborn, people who look or act differently from you, even your enemies? Write down how you sense God is leading you to apply this truth.

Take a moment to reflect on some difficult moments you've faced in recent years. How was the power of God, made available to you through Jesus, evident to you in these circumstances? How can you actively show Him thanks for His mighty mercy?

God is in control! He orchestrated the creation of the cosmos and ordered the events of history. Despite His greatness, though, He knows each and every person intimately, and He cares deeply. God sits on the eternal throne, and through Psalm 139, King David invites us to acknowledge Him as the King of our lives and to show gratitude for all He's done for us.



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

STUDY

Psalm 139:13–18, 23–24



A FINAL PRAYER

Wrap up your study of Psalm 139 by pondering this prayer of Pastor Chuck. Offer it in your own words as an expression of thanksgiving:

How grateful we are, our Father, for Your will and plan, for Your interest in even the most minute details of our lives from our conception to the end of our days. From the womb to the tomb, You are there. You are ever aware. You care about the things that make us anxious. You meet our needs. You remind us again and again that You are here . . . ever available, full of compassion, marked by mercy and always grace. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
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*.

