



Wonderfully Made

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God the Creator cares intimately for all people—the pinnacle of His creation.

Today's church in the West is in the midst of a culture war—a clash of biblical and secular worldviews that has been waged since at least the 1990s. On one side stand people who hold more "traditional" values. On the other side stand those who hold more "progressive" values. The battles between these two sides can begin suddenly and be intense. Abortion. Sexuality. Immigration. Race. Marriage. Politics. Euthanasia. Truth.

While the battle lines tend to be distinct (although they are shifting with some of the issues) and the skirmishes out in the open, as in any war, there is a guerilla war transpiring as well. The first shot in this guerilla war was fired in the garden of Eden when the serpent tricked Eve into thinking that God was holding something back from her and that she deserved more. Eve fell for that lie, and Satan found an effective battle tactic.

Several millennia later, we are still grappling with questions of self-worth. Where we find our worth is a critical question to answer. Is it from somewhere within ourselves? Is it from what our culture values—possessions, power, or influence? Or is it from somewhere else? How we answer this question and understand our worth—and that of others—shapes the other battles in the culture war and, more importantly, informs our own worldview.



How does a person's worth impact some of the issues being fought over today, such as abortion, sexuality, and racism?

In this session, we will examine Psalm 139 and see that God knows us intimately. He knows everything about us, and no thought can be hidden from Him, which can be a great comfort and also quite frightening. We will also see that God is always with us—there is nowhere we can go to be apart from Him or to escape from His presence. Finally, we will see that God made us wonderfully as the pinnacle of His creation. From these three truths, we will see where our value comes from—not from within or from our culture but from God Himself.

1. God intimately knows us (Ps. 139:1-6).

- ¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me!*
- ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.*
- ³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.*
- ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*
- ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.*
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.*

Imagine going to a book store or library and selecting a random book off the shelf. It's an average book—250 pages long, with about 80,000 words, or 400,000 letters, typed on those pages. God knows each page, word, and letter of that book—even the typos. He knows what words were changed in the editing process, and He knows which words the author wanted to use but did not. He knows what every word means, what is true in the book, and what is not true. Now imagine looking up from that one book and realizing that God knows every other book the same way. Every word and every letter on every page in the entire room. But even that is too small; God knows every word that has ever been printed in books, magazines, handwritten letters, signs, and on the Internet. And He knows every word that *will* be printed.

Too abstract? How about the grains of sand on every beach on the planet. Researchers have estimated there are 7.5×10^{18} grains of sand, or seven quintillion, five hundred quadrillion grains of sand in the world. God knows what that exact number is, and He knows where each one is right now.¹

This *begins* to help us picture God's omniscience. And the more God's knowledge comes into focus, the more in awe of Him we become. Our God is a glorious God! We are left with our jaws agape, echoing David: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it" (v. 6).

?

How does the extent of God's knowledge make you feel about Him?
About yourself?

God knows every word, grain of sand, byte of data, and more, and yet, His knowledge is not just an inventory of creation. He doesn't merely know *about* creation; He *knows* creation, which includes people, the pinnacle of all He made (Ps. 8:3-9). God is not distant; He is near. He is immanent and He relates with us in a personal way while remaining distinct from His creation. *This*, more than God's knowledge of sand, is what is at the forefront of David's mind. This is what has stupefied him—God is intimately aware of every detail of his life.

When we consider the full counsel of Scripture—seeing who God is and who we are—it is fitting that we respond to God's omniscience with a mixture of comfort and dread. While it is comforting to be known and loved by God, it is also unnerving knowing how sinful we are. God's knowledge of us should be sobering. It should motivate us to consider carefully our thoughts and actions, knowing they are never truly private. But at the same time, we delight in knowing that we are under God's grace in Christ and we have been given Christ's righteousness. God knows us completely and perfectly, and yet, He still loves us. That is wondrous knowledge, too lofty for us.

?

Are you more comforted or troubled by God's knowledge of you? Why?

?

How does the gospel impact how you view being known by God?

2. God is always with us (Ps. 139:7-12).

*7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,”
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.*

When we read David's rhetorical question and its restatement in verse 7, we might respond with a question back to David: "Why do you, a follower of God, *want* to flee from God's presence?" David's question feels off to us, out of place, perhaps even inappropriate. God's people should not look for ways to "go" and "flee" from God. We should look for ways to *draw near* to Him. And that is true, but if we are honest, many of us have felt the same way David does in verse 7. We can trace this impulse all the way back to Eden (see Gen. 3:8).

We see this pattern in other places in Scripture as well. When Isaiah realized he was in the Lord's presence, he responded in dread, not joy: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isa. 6:5). Simon Peter responded similarly when he was confronted by the deity of Jesus: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). And even John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, fell at Jesus' feet as a dead man when he encountered His presence in Revelation 1:17.

When we consider the holiness of God, we are also forced to come to terms with our sinfulness. The natural reaction at the juncture of these two realizations is to want to move *away* from God, not *toward* Him. Just as we must shield our eyes from a brilliant light, God's glory humbles and convicts us.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

14. God Is Immanent

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.



How does your sin tend to impact how you relate with God?

God's omnipresence may prompt a question: "If God is present everywhere, does that mean He is present in hell? Isn't the punishment of sin eternal separation from God?"

To answer this, we have to understand that God is present everywhere, but He is not present everywhere in the same way. God is present with His people—the redeemed—as a loving Father. So God is present with His people in a more profound way—He is not merely spatially present, but He is relationally present. That cannot be said for those who are not in Christ. They are separated from God in that they are not in relationship with Him.



Voices from Church History

"Though heaven be God's palace, yet it is not his prison."²

—Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

Even if David's response to God's omniscience was dread (Ps. 139:5-6), as he considers God's omnipresence, he begins to see the goodness of an all-knowing, all-present God. God is always there to lead and hold him (v. 10). As believers, it is good that even in our sin, God is present as our Father. *Apart from Christ*, being unable to escape from God forces us to confront the reality that we stand condemned under His divine judgment.



How have you experienced the goodness of God in guiding and holding you?



How should God's presence as a loving Father for all Christians impact how we view and relate with other believers? How should God's presence as the righteous Judge of all unbelievers impact how we view and relate with them?

3. God wonderfully made us (Ps. 139:13-18).

¹³ *For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.*

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.*

¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!*

¹⁸ *If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.*

David begins this section by considering his development as a baby in his mother's womb—a truly remarkable process. Within the first month after conception, a baby's first nerve cells have formed and the face begins to take shape. Blood cells begin to develop and circulation begins. The "heart" tube also forms and beats 65 times a minute by the end of the fourth week. At this point, the baby is just one-fourth of an inch long.

In the second month, the face continues to develop and the ears begin to form. Buds that will become arms and legs begin to take shape, as well as the fingers and toes. The neural tube is formed along with the digestive tract and sensory organs. Bones begin to replace cartilage and the heartbeat can be detected at the end of the sixth week. And still, the baby is only one inch long and weighs one-thirtieth of an ounce.

By the end of the third month, the baby is fully formed, and from this point he will mature. The baby can open and close his fists and mouth and is a mere four inches long and weighs one ounce.³

While David may not have had a full understanding of all that went on in his development, he is sure of one thing: God was providentially at work in the process. David did not have a deistic notion of a baby's development in the womb. God did design the natural process, but He did not remove Himself from it. He was at work creating, knitting, making, and forming David, and He does the same for every other baby in the womb as well. The thought of God, the all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful Creator of the universe, being intimately involved in his development as a baby drives David to worship (v. 14).

How should God's providential work in forming every person in the womb impact our value of human life?

David looks back at God's involvement at the start of his life in the womb, and he also look ahead to all the days of his life. As God looked on David's formless body in the first few days and weeks of his life, all the rest of his days were already written and planned (v. 16), further evidence of God's loving sovereign authority over him. The same God who carefully knit David's body together in the womb also knit all the days of his life.

If David had been uneasy about God's involvement in his life at the start of the psalm, he is no longer. The thought of God working providentially in and through David is "precious" to him (v. 17). The scope and depth of God's knowledge amazes him.

If we work from this point of the psalm back to its beginning, we can see the gospel come into view.

God created people for a purpose (His omnipotence) and wanted to be with us and know us (His omnipresence), yet our sin separated us from Him. But in His perfect wisdom (His omniscience), God sent His Son, Jesus, to be with us, and through His perfect life of obedience, sacrificial death, and resurrection, we can be saved and brought back into relationship with God.

Like David, we can find great comfort, hope, and joy in understanding how our all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful God loves us and cares for us. However, this psalm also challenges us to look beyond ourselves and consider how God views other people, and how we should too.

Knowing that God forms every person in the womb in His image (Gen. 1:26) compels us to value all human life—inside the womb and outside of it as well. God calls on us to defend the lives of the unborn, as they are precious in His sight, but our concern is not to end there. The gospel is the great equalizer. Our sin joins us all together, no matter our ethnicity, nationality, income level, education, political party, or any other factor. We all, together as one, stand condemned because of our sin. But we know we are also united by our opportunity to repent of our sin, trust in Jesus, and be saved.



How do you feel about God knowing all the days of your life? Does that truth prompt any questions?



What are some ways we can declare and show the value all people deserve—both the unborn and the born?

Conclusion

As God's people, we should be known for our love and value of all people as we take a stand in our culture against any attempt to devalue human life, such as through racism, abortion, murder, pornography, genocide, and more. At the same time, we are to share the gospel with everyone, recognizing that all people are loved and valued by God.

CHRIST CONNECTION: God created people to be in relationship with Him, but because of our sin, we were separated from Him and deserved death. God provided Jesus to be Immanuel—God with us. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, whoever trusts in Him is brought into relationship with God as His child and has eternal life with Him.



Voices from Church History

"If we leave the soil of our [children's] self-worth unwatered by our unconditional admiration, we send them into a world happy to satisfy that parched ground with conditional praise."⁴

—Jen Wilkin



HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Because God provided forgiveness through Jesus as an act of grace to us, we share the gospel with everyone, recognizing that all people are loved and valued by God.

1. What steps can we take not to forget the gospel as we involve ourselves in practical efforts to affirm and protect the value of human lives?

2. What can your group do in order to contribute to the cause of preserving, protecting, and valuing human life?

3. How can praying for the salvation of those who oppose our gospel-minded endeavors help instill in us their value as fellow image-bearers?

The Gospel Project[®]
Adult Leader Guide ESV
Volume 6, Number 2 Winter 2017-18

Eric Geiger
Senior Vice President, LifeWay Resources

Ed Stetzer and Trevin Wax
General Editors

Brian Dembowczyk
Managing Editor

Daniel Davis
Content Editor

Josh Hayes
Content and Production Editor

Ken Braddy
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Michael Kelley
Director, Groups Ministry

Send questions/comments to:

Content Editor by email to
daniel.davis@lifeway.com or mail to
Content Editor, *The Gospel Project: Adult Personal Study Guide*, One LifeWay Plaza,
Nashville, TN 37234-0102; or make comments
on the Web at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project[®]. *Adult Personal Study Guide* ESV
(ISSN 2330-9393; Item 005573553) is published
quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234,
Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2017 LifeWay
Christian Resources.

For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or
write LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One
LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk
shipments mailed quarterly to one address, email
orderentry@lifeway.com, fax 615.251.5933, or write
to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author;
salvation for its end; and truth, without any
mixture of error, for its matter and that all
Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To
review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit
www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are
taken from the English Standard Version[®] (The Holy
Bible, English Standard Version[®]), copyright 2001
by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News
Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

About the Writer

Unit 1:



Brian Dembowczyk is the Managing Editor of *The Gospel Project* and has seventeen years of pastoral ministry experience in churches in Florida, Kentucky, and Maryland. He is the author of *Gospel-Centered Kids Ministry* and *Cornerstones*. Brian and his wife, Tara, have three children.

REFERENCES

1. Robert Krulwich, "Which Is Greater, the Number of Sand Grains on Earth or Stars in the Sky?" NPR, September 17, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2012/09/17/161096233/which-is-greater-the-number-of-sand-grains-on-earth-or-stars-in-the-sky>.
2. Thomas Brooks, "The Signal Presence of God," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, vol. 5 (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 458.
3. "Fetal Development: Stages of Growth," Cleveland Clinic, September 9, 2014, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/fetal-development-stages-of-growth>.
4. Jen Wilkin, "To Your Daughter, Speak the Truth," The Gospel Coalition, February 16, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/to-your-daughter-speak-the-truth>.

WRITER