

LESSON ONE

Knowing God in Daily Life

FOCAL TEXTS

Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24;
Proverbs 3:5–6

BACKGROUND

Psalm 139; Proverbs 3:5–6

MAIN IDEA

Since God can be counted on to be present in daily life, we are to seek God's presence there.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

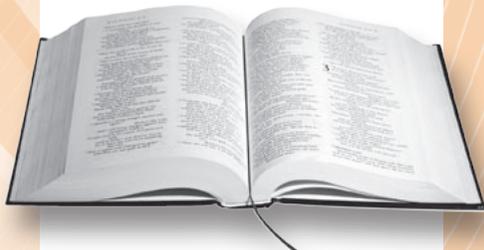
How is it possible to experience God in the worlds of work, community, and home, even in every moment of daily life?

STUDY AIM

To identify how I can experience God in the affairs of daily life

QUICK READ

Since God is present with us, we should be present to him, giving him our attention and trusting him with our lives.



Can you hear me now? That's the familiar tag line from the commercials of a cell phone company. The ads feature a man asking this question while speaking on a cell phone in various obscure places. The message is that this company can keep you in touch wherever you are.

This advertising has been effective on me because I use this company. I live in the Smoky Mountains, an area that challenges all cell phone providers. My service has been good, but I've been in a few places where if I asked that question—*Can you hear me now?*—on my cell, no one could! While this company provides excellent coverage overall, it isn't perfect. Despite its best efforts, it can't be everywhere.

This lesson's texts tell us of the God who is everywhere. He isn't limited by time or space, and so we're never out of touch with him. As we explore these texts, we'll discover that since God is present with us everywhere and at all times, we should seek God everywhere and at all times.¹

PSALM 139:1–12, 23–24

- ¹O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
- ²You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.
- ⁵You hem me in—behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
- ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
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- ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

PROVERBS 3:5–6

- ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
- ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.

God Knows Us Intimately (Psalm 139:1–6)

A couple of years ago, I had to go through a battery of medical tests. They weren't fun, but they were amazing. Physicians now have incredible technology that enables them to probe inside our bodies without surgery. They can use X-rays, scopes, blood tests, and the like to reveal our internal organs. But none of their instruments can reveal our souls. Only God can do that.

Psalm 139:1–6 tells us that God knows us intimately. Verse 1 begins with the assertion that God has seen into the psalmist's innermost being. The word used for "know" refers to more than knowledge of facts. It refers to intimate relational knowledge. People may know facts about you, including such things as your home town, height, and weight, but they don't truly know you until they know you relationally. To do that they must spend time with you, speaking with you and observing you.

Even then, they won't know who you are deep in your soul. Only God knows us this way.

In verses 2–3 the psalmist continued speaking about this intimate knowledge by saying that God knew everything the psalmist did in the course of the day. God knew when the psalmist got up in the morning and when he lay down to sleep at night. He knew when he was working, playing, and worshiping.

The writer extended the images of God's knowledge in verses 4–6, saying that even before he spoke a word, God knew what that word would be. God limited him in a protective fashion, the way a shepherd hems in his sheep, to keep him out of danger. God laid his hand on him, not for punishment, but for protection and power. The psalmist admitted he could never know God or another human being the way God knew him. Such knowledge was too great for the psalmist to attain.

The fact that God knows us this intimately is both intimidating and reassuring. It's intimidating because God knows everything that goes on in our inner worlds. Each of us has an inner world that no other human can enter or peer into. Have you ever been shocked to learn that someone you thought you knew had done something terrible? That terrible thing was in that person's heart, but no human could see it. No human can see into your inner world, and you can't see into anyone else's. But God can. He knows both your actions and your motivations. He knows every unworthy thought.

Such knowledge can make us uncomfortable. Yet God's intimate knowledge of our inner worlds is also reassuring. He knows our joy, sorrow, pleasure, pain, faith, and doubts. God understands us fully.

God knows us and yet still loves us! As one teacher said, "He loves us, warts and all!" This knowledge should give us assurance, not fear.

God Is with Us Everywhere (Psalm 139:7–12)

While verses 1–6 focus on God's intimate knowledge of our inner worlds, verses 7–12 focus on God's presence wherever we go. As we consider these verses, it's helpful to know how ancient people viewed the universe. They believed the earth was a flat disk that rested on pillars over chaotic waters. In the earth was *Sheol*, the abode of the dead. It was like a large cave or hole in the ground. In fact, some called it the *ditch*

or *pit* (see Ps. 28:1). The Hebrews believed the sky was a solid dome, and above the sky was heaven, where God lived.

In verse 7, we see that with this view of the universe in mind the psalmist asked the rhetorical questions, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” He didn’t express the desire to get away from God, but he was wondering where he would go if he wanted to flee from God.

In verses 8–10 he pondered God’s presence in the boundaries of the universe as he understood it. In verse 8 he spoke of the height and depth of the universe: heaven and *Sheol*. It’s not striking that God is present in heaven. But God’s presence in *Sheol* is unexpected. Yet the psalmist said that God would be present with him even in the abode of the dead. Even in the place of greatest despair, God is near.

Verses 9–10 explore the horizontal boundaries of the universe. The psalmist said that even if he went to the farthest limits of the sea, God would be with him. The Israelites weren’t a seagoing people, and so the sea was mysterious and fearsome. To go to the farthest limits of the sea was to go to strange and unknown places. Even there, though, the psalmist knew God would be with him.

Night was more intimidating for ancient people than it generally is for us. They considered it evil and frightening. People could get lost in the darkness, and their friends and family members couldn’t find them. Verses 11–12 say that darkness isn’t a problem for God. It’s like light to him.

A VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE

The ancient Hebrews didn’t see the universe as we do. They believed the earth was a flat disk resting on pillars above chaotic waters. The sky was a solid dome that held the sun, moon, and stars. Above the sky were chambers of water, and above the chambers of water was heaven, where God and the heavenly beings lived.

Too, the ancient Hebrews believed that underground, in the earth, was *Sheol*, the abode of the dead. All the dead—rich and poor, good and evil—went to *Sheol*. There they lived as *shadows* of their former selves.²

Psalm 139 affirms that God is present everywhere in the universe, even in the abode of the dead.

These verses assure us that no matter what our location or circumstances, God is with us. If we're at church, at work, at a football game, or at a shopping mall, God is with us. If we're going into surgery, if we're facing a crisis, or if our hearts are broken, God is also with us.

God Leads Us in the Everlasting Way (Psalm 139:23–24)

The psalm climaxes in verses 23–24 with a heartfelt cry to God. Based on God's intimate knowledge and his presence everywhere, the psalmist asked God to search him and know his heart. Ancient people used the word "heart" much in the same way we use the word *self*. We think of the heart as a person's emotional center. They thought of the heart as a person's emotional *and* cognitive center. "Heart" referred to their inner world. So when the psalmist asked God to know his heart, he was asking God to probe his innermost being.

When I took a guided tour of Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, the ranger had us all sit down on benches at one point. When everyone was seated, he told us he was going to show us how dark the cave was without light. After he turned off the lights, I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. It was the darkest dark I've ever experienced.

A person's heart can be just as dark and inaccessible to others. But God can see into it clearly. The psalmist asked God to shine his light into the deepest reaches of his heart to see whether there was any wicked way in him. His goal was to obey God from the inside out. He also asked God to test him and know his anxious thoughts. He wanted God to know his inner anxiety as he sought to deal with life's challenges.

Further, the psalmist wanted God to see whether there was any offensive way in him. Just as a modern surgeon would use modern technology to remove a malignant growth, the psalmist wanted God to probe in his soul and remove any sin, any spiritual malignancy. Since God was with him in all his daily activity, he wanted God to lead him in the way everlasting. "The way everlasting" refers to the way that leads to life.

Here, the psalmist gets at the heart of the spiritual life. The aim of the spiritual life is deep communion with God. This communion takes place as we become increasingly aware of God's presence and allow God to shine his light of revelation in our inner world. As we commune with God in this way, God shows us how he wants us to live.

FOR THOUGHT

A person has a ticket to get on an airliner but is detained and unable to board. The airliner crashes, and all on board die in the crash. Someone says, *God must have been with the person who missed the plane*. What do you think about that statement? Does it mean God wasn't with those on the plane?

God Calls Us to Trust Him (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Proverbs 3:5–6 calls us to build on our relationships with God by trusting in the Lord with all our hearts. We can paraphrase verse 5 by saying that *we are to trust God with all our selves, with all that we are*. We're not to rely on our own insight or understanding because God's knowledge is infinitely greater than our own.

Since God is with us wherever we go, we should acknowledge him in all our ways. Not long ago I took a spiritual study course that spoke of being present to God. The idea of being present to God intrigued me. To be present to God is to be continually aware of God. It is knowing that God is with us and being attentive to God's presence.

Sometimes we're in physical proximity to others, but we're not present to them. For example, when we're sitting down at the dinner table with our families, we can be physically present with them but our minds can be elsewhere. The same can be true in our relationships with God. He's always spiritually present with us, but we're not always spiritually present to him. We're absorbed in whatever is concerning us in the moment.

The psalmist says that if we're present to God, if we acknowledge God and follow God's directions in all our ways, God will straighten and smooth our paths. He will straighten the curves, even the grades, and fill in the potholes!

Implications and Actions

Probably every person reading these comments is busy, very busy. We have jobs to do, church functions to attend, homes to clean, classes to

attend, and much more. We can become so absorbed in our busyness that we lose touch with God.

How do we maintain our contact with God? We begin by knowing that God knows us intimately. He reads our souls. We continue by knowing God is with us everywhere. God is with us when we get up in the morning, when we go to work, when we return home in the evening, and when we lie down to sleep at night. On our part, we are to seek to be present to God in all we do each day, cultivating our relationship with him.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about God's intimate knowledge of you? Do you find it intimidating or assuring?
2. When is it easiest for you to feel God's presence? When is it most difficult?
3. How do you feel about asking God to look deeply into your soul and reveal your offensive ways?
4. How can you increase your trust in God?

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–7, 10–11 are from the New International Version.
2. By Jesus' time, Jews believed *Sheol* was divided into two sections: *Paradise*, the place of the righteous dead; and *Gehenna*, or hell, the place of the wicked dead. A huge chasm separated the two (see Luke 16:19–31).