

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

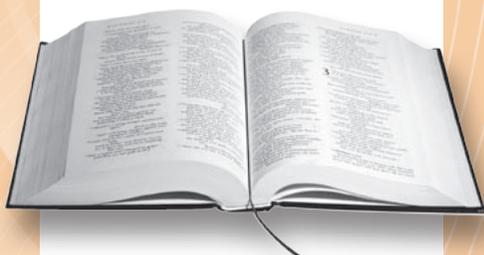
Since God can be counted on to be present in daily life, we are to seek God's presence there.

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?

TEACHING AIM

To lead the class to identify how one can experience God in the affairs of daily life



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Psalm 139 contains four distinct units: verses 1–6, 7–12, 13–18, and 19–24. This lesson focuses on three of these units. The keyword *know* binds verses 1–6 together. *Yahweh*, the personal name of God, translated LORD, appears as the subject of the verb *to know*. Verse 6 forms a conclusion to the first section. The second section, verses 7–12, begins with a series of rhetorical questions followed by a series of statements that highlight one’s inability to hide from God, who is omnipresent. The fourth section, verses 19–24, is different from the previous three sections of the psalm. The final verses (Psalm 139:23–24) along with verse 1 form a frame for the psalm.¹

The psalm has characteristics of an individual complaint and praise that focuses on the motif of creation. The divine attributes mentioned in the psalm serve to encourage the psalmist.

The temple may provide the setting for the psalm. The speaker, who is under attack, knew that *Yahweh* has insight into every aspect of his life—public and private. Nothing is hidden from God.

The psalm presents an applied theology, not theoretical speculation. The psalmist lived with the keen awareness of the pragmatic presence of God in his life.²

Proverbs 3:5–6 stresses intellectual humility as a manifestation of genuine piety. One’s mind and will are to be committed to God’s custody. The search for true wisdom is not a secular search but an acknowledgment of its divine origin.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Divine Omniscience (Psalm 139:1–6)

139:1. The psalmist placed the emphasis on the “LORD,” *Yahweh* (the divine name of God). The expression “O LORD” properly captures the

petitioner's address to God. The Lord, not some other god or individual, searched for the writer of this psalm. The first person pronoun "me" indicates that the person is important to God—"you have searched *me*" (italics added for emphasis). The psalmist did not say *us* or *them*, but "me." The focus is personal, one-on-one. When the Lord searches for an individual, the Lord knows the person.

139:2. The psalmist emphasized the personal pronoun "you" at the beginning of the verse—"you know" (italics added for emphasis). This is the second occurrence of the verb "know" in the psalm, which indicates the Lord's personal relationship with the petitioner.

The expressions "I sit down" and "I rise up" demonstrate that God is aware of the person's situation all of the time. Parallel to this is the next statement, that God properly interprets the concerns of the psalmist no matter how far away the psalmist may view God's attention.

The thoughts of the psalmist were far away and small, even minute, compared to the thoughts of God as expressed in verse 17, which are vast, numerous, and infinite. Clearly, no human concern is too small for which the Lord shows concern.

139:3. The psalmist stressed "my path" and "my lying down" to indicate that God is aware of the individual's circumstances 24/7. "Path" refers to all activities while awake because you do something every moment of the day whether the "path" is sitting or running, reading or writing. God personally takes an interest in the affairs of each person.

139:4. God is aware of the thoughts of every person. This truth has tremendous implications for daily life. There is no reason to withhold any personal thought from God—anger, joy, frustration, or elation. The petitioner never tells God something God does not already know.

139:5. God surrounds the person to provide protection. The expression "hem me in" expresses a positive, protective idea. The phrase "lay your hand upon me" in the present context is a sign of divine protection, not punishment. No one dares to attack the one on whom the hand of God rests because it represents an attack on God.

139:6. In a world where it appears that everyone is interested only in his or her own interests, it is unimaginable that anyone, including God,

has an interest in us. Knowing that God cares so much is described as *overwhelming* or *admirable* in a supernatural sense. God's concern is incomprehensible; it is so high, the psalmist cannot attain it. The psalmist appears to say that it is a wonderful miracle to know that God knows one's needs, seeks out the individual, and provides divine protection.

The Eyes of God Are Upon You (139:7–12)

139:7. The psalmist raised an absurd scenario. Is there any locale to which one may flee and hide from the presence of God? Is God a corporate CEO who is inaccessible to the masses or who does not care for the individual servant? The answers to the questions in this verse are a resounding *No!*

The “spirit” refers to the *breath* or *wind* of God. The psalmist could not escape the breath of God. As a person's breath is always an indicator that the person is present, so God's *breath* (“spirit”) assures the petitioner that God is near. The prophet Jonah attempted to “flee” from or *escape* the presence of God but could not succeed.

139:8. The psalmist raised several hypothetical situations, each a polar opposite of the other. Heaven and *Sheol* represent two opposite concepts. The word *heaven* does not mean in this verse the place of reward; and, *Sheol* does not mean the place of torment. The word “heaven” in the Hebrew is plural, *heavens*, and refers to sky, which the ancient Israelites understood as what was *up*. The term *Sheol* is simply the place of the dead. According to the ancient Israelites, everyone, good or evil, went to *Sheol* at death. It was not thought of as a place of punishment. The answer to the question emphasizes the place of God in relation to the situation, literally *there you are*—the word “there” is given emphasis. God is there before you! You cannot outrun or relocate to any place where God is not there before you.

The psalmist described *Sheol* as a couch spread out on which one may lie. Therefore, even if one makes his or her couch in *Sheol*, God is there first.

139:9–10. The psalmist again referred to extremes with the allusion to “the wings of the morning.” The expression may refer to the winged sun-disc as in Malachi 4:2, which says “the sun of righteousness shall arise,

with healing in its wings.” The winged sun-disc is a common motif in the art of the ancient Near East.³ The Mediterranean Sea lies to the west of Israel and the sun sets into the sea each evening beyond the reach of any ship or person. Therefore, the petitioner stated that if one rose as the sun out of the sands of the eastern desert and arched across the sky to enter the western sea beyond the reach of humans, then God would be there.

God is already present in the unknown regions of the world. No one knew what lay beyond the sea where it appeared that the sun entered each evening. Yet, God was there to greet and to guide the psalmist. Nowhere in God’s creation can one evade God. The term “lead me” refers to God causing the guidance. Ancient peoples viewed the “right hand” as the hand of strength. God *grasps* or *takes possession* of the petitioner with the hand of strength. The combined use of “right hand” and “hold me fast” assures protection from the unknown beyond where the sun sets.

139:11–12. The reference to darkness and night is parallel to *Sheol* in verse 8. Job 34:22 states, “There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves.” The psalmist and the author of Job affirmed God’s vision irrespective of light. God sees the psalmist in the dark, in the depths of his soul, and into the abyss of his conscience.

The Lord overcomes darkness. God created the darkness and the night. God called the light to shine in the midst of the darkness. No matter how dark are one’s surroundings, the presence of God brings light. God knows no darkness in the sense of human fear.

An Invitation for Divine Search (Psalm 139:23–24)

139:23. The psalmist returned to the beginning theme of the psalm, the omniscience of God. Again in the psalm, the writer used a form of the word “know.” This is a key word in this psalm. The two occurrences of “know” in verse 23 are imperatives.

The terms “my heart” and “my thoughts” represent synonymous parallelism rather than conveying two separate ideas. The heart and thoughts go together; they are synonymous in meaning. The psalmist addressed God with a polite form of the imperative “search me” or *thoroughly explore me*. The psalmist was not only willing to permit God to examine the “heart” and “thoughts,” but also the psalmist insisted that God do this.

Verse 13 proclaims, “for it was you [God] who formed my inward parts,” which include the “heart” and “thoughts.” Confidence in God gives the petitioner this boldness.

139:24. The term “wicked” refers to any wicked habit or hurtful activity. The activity may bring mental or physical anguish to another person. The psalmist issued a challenge for God to make a careful examination of the psalmist’s life to find any error. If anything hurtful was found in the psalmist’s life, then God would guide the petitioner to make corrections. The petitioner twice called on God in the psalm (verses 10 and 24) to “lead me.”

Intellectual Humility (Proverbs 3:5–6)

3:5–6. The sage began the verse with the imperative “trust,” which means to *throw oneself down on one’s face in total submission in the presence of the other party*. *Yahweh* is the one before whom we are called on to lie prostrate. Therefore, if you trust in God, you acknowledge your helplessness before the deity. The expression “with all your heart” is a call to trust God with all of your emotions—fears and joys.

The word “rely” means to *lean upon or support oneself*. The phrase is a negative command and has a reflexive meaning, for example, *you yourself*.

The passage denounces academic arrogance but does not accommodate anti-intellectualism. All actions, beliefs, and decisions face God’s final scrutiny.

The word “insight” expresses the idea of discernment, as in Deuteronomy 4:6 where it indicates a proper response to *Yahweh*’s instructions. It also conveys the meaning of the ability to respond skillfully to life’s situations. Therefore, people may have “insight,” which is good, but the wise person will not rely on his or her own “insight” to the neglect of submission to *Yahweh*.

As in Psalm 139, the sage used a form of the word *know* to describe the proper response to the deity. In Psalm 139, God *knows* the psalmist. Proverbs 3:6 instructs the student to *know* God. This acknowledgement of God will lead to God’s making smooth the paths down which one travels. The expression “straight” or *smooth* does not mean that life will be easy, as understood by modern cultures. God will make *smooth* the

obstacles that hinder God from working in the life of the person who acknowledges God.

Focusing on the Meaning

Is it possible to separate the encounter with God on Sunday from the experience of God's presence during the week? Many passages in Scripture indicate that we encounter God in the daily experiences of life. The Christian attends worship services on Sunday or other days of the week to seek fellowship with the Lord. However, what happens during the week following Sunday? Can a person find God during the days between formal times of worship? The passages in the lesson appear to indicate that God is present where we are even before we arrive.

Since God's presence is already around us, should we not acknowledge that presence? Many ways exist in which the Christian can respond to the divine presence in life. The popular saying *what would Jesus do*—*WWJD*—may provide the individual with a starting point. An examination of the life of Jesus provides an excellent model for the Christian to follow.

Another way of encountering God is through communication. We speak with God through prayer. We listen to God in prayer and through the reading of Scripture. Christians view the Bible as God's message. If we want to hear God speak to us, then Scripture is a good place to begin.

How is it possible to experience God in the worlds of work, community, and home, even in every moment of daily life? When is prayer and Bible study appropriate outside of the church and home? How can the believer implement these encounters with God beyond the walls of church and home?

A racehorse runs a race with blinders that restrict the horse's vision. The horse cannot see behind and in many cases to the side. Unfortunately, many Christians run the race of life with blinders that restrict them from seeing the presence of God outside of the church or home. Removal of these blinders will allow them to experience God in the most complete manner.

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Introduce the unit by asking: *How can our faith be something more than we talk about on Sundays? How can we live out our faith each day?* After several responses, point out that the lesson studies over the next few weeks will help equip us to do just that—live out our faith in daily life.
2. Provide a slip of paper and pencil, and invite people to jot down at least three things about themselves that others may not know (these could include honors, where they went to school, how many children they have, likes and dislikes, favorite foods, hobbies, where they grew up, jobs held, etc.). Collect the slips and place them in a container. Then, invite class members (one at a time) to select a slip from the container, read it aloud, and lead the group to discover whom the clues lead to. Remind members to keep their slips for later use.
3. After each person is identified in some way, point out that today's Scripture passages remind us that God not only knows all the facts about our lives, but God also knows *us* intimately.

Guide Bible Study

4. Read Psalm 139:1–6 aloud, asking class members to listen for words or phrases that help us understand how well God knows us. You may want to write key words on a markerboard as members share them. Use these words to prompt further discussion of the passage. Provide further explanation of the verses using information in the *Study Guide* section “God Knows Us Intimately (Psalm 139:1–6)” and “Bible Comments’ in this *Teaching Guide*.

5. Invite a class member to read Psalm 139:7–12 aloud. Then guide discussion using the following questions:
 - Why do you think David’s first words after his acknowledgement of God’s presence were, “Where can I flee from your presence?”
 - Does God have any boundaries?
 - Does God’s presence ensure God will lead us? If so, how can God’s leadership happen?
6. To examine a few biblical examples of Psalm 139:7–12, ask the class to form three small groups. Assign each group one of the following passages –Daniel 3; Daniel 6; John 11:1–44. Encourage each group to look for ways their assigned passage demonstrates God’s presence. Allow time for study, and then invite groups to share their findings with the class.
7. Invite a member to read Psalm 139:23–24 aloud. Point out that David’s recognition of God’s knowledge and presence earlier in the psalm have now given way to David’s hunger and desire to know God in the deepest way possible. David gave God permission to come into his life and make any changes needed.
8. Ask, *How is the psalmist’s deep trust in God really possible?* After a couple of responses, direct pupils to the final passage for today’s study, Proverbs 3:5–6. Use the following questions to explore the verses:
 - With what are we to trust God?
 - How would you explain “with all your heart” in some specific ways? Would it translate into *with all we have*?
 - Why should we not trust our “own understanding” (NIV)?
 - How do we acknowledge God *in all our ways*?
 - How has God made “your paths straight—*filled in the potholes*—in your life?”

Encourage Application

9. Comment that if we are honest, sometimes when we face the struggles of life we ask, *Where is God?* Remind participants that today we can know for sure that God is here! Invite class members to

respond aloud (antiphonally) with the phrase *God is here!* after you say each of the following phrases:

- When you lose a family member
- When your retirement account is half its previous value
- When a family member goes in for surgery
- When you lose your job
- When you hear the word *cancer*
- When your motives are pure, but you are wrongly accused
- When your children disappoint you
- When the night is so dark you do not think morning can come

(A copy of this reading is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

10. Ask, *What are some ways we can remind ourselves that God is present in every circumstance of our lives?* (See the last paragraph under “Implications and Actions” in the *Study Guide*.)
11. Call attention once again to the slips of paper used in the opening activity. Invite class members to carry the slip of paper with them this week in their pocket or purse, and to pray daily that the person named on their slip would truly experience God’s presence and trust God for everything. Close with prayer.

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Introduce the study for the coming weeks, *Living Faith in Daily Life*, by asking the following questions:
 - How (or how well) do you think most Christians live out their faith on a daily basis?
 - Do you think most people around Christians notice their faith? Why or why not?
 - Why is it a challenge to live out our faith every day?

Comment that our lessons for the coming weeks will help us understand how better to live out our faith.

2. Lead into today's study with these continued questions:
 - How well do you know the person sitting beside you?
 - What is his or her name?
 - How long has the person attended our class?
 - How long has he or she lived here?
 - What are some things you do not know about him or her?

Guide Bible Study

3. Call attention to the following lesson outline (you may want to write it on a markerboard):

God Knows Us Intimately (Psalm 139:1–6)
God Is with Us Everywhere (Psalm 139:7–12)
God Leads Us in the Everlasting Way (Psalm 139:23–24)
God Calls Us to Trust Him (Proverbs 3:5–6)

4. Read Psalm 139:1–6 aloud and then ask the following discussion questions:
 - What do you think the word “know” means?
 - Do you think God is concerned with our every move, when we “sit down” and “rise up”?
 - What is the difference between how we know each other and how God knows us?
 - What does it mean that God knows our every word, even before we say it?
 - Do you ever feel God’s “hand” upon you? If so, when?
5. Comment that God not only knows us intimately, but God is also with us everywhere. Invite participants to read Psalm 139:7–12 silently, and then use the information on these verses in the *Study Guide* and “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide* (and additional study tools) to present an overview of this passage. Be sure to discuss these words: “flee,” “heaven,” “Sheol,” “sea,” “right hand,” “darkness,” and “light.” Invite comments about how par-

participants feel about God's presence being like this. Is it comforting? worrisome? challenging?

6. Invite a class member to read Psalm 139:23–24 aloud. Lead the group to consider the following questions:
 - What did the psalmist ask God to do?
 - How well was the psalmist willing for God to know him?
 - Why do you think the psalmist was willing to trust God to this degree?
 - What is the aim of our spiritual life?
7. Call attention to the final passage for today's study, Proverbs 3:5–6, and have these verses read aloud from several translations, including *The Message* if it is available.⁴ Point out that since God knows us intimately, and since God is everywhere, we can trust God for everything. Suggest two words for the class to discuss—*trust* and *obedience*. Point out that as we trust, and as we obey, we grow in our intimate knowledge and understanding of God. Reread Proverbs 3:5–6, from *The Message*, if available, this time adding verses 7–12.

Encourage Application

8. Ask, *If God is present everywhere, including the experiences in daily life, should we not seek God's presence in all of those experiences?*
9. Direct class members to the questions in their *Study Guide*. Invite them to discuss responses aloud.
10. This is an appropriate time to make sure participants recognize that just as God is not satisfied to merely know *about* us (God knows us intimately), our relationship with God must be more than just knowing *about* him. Our understanding of God must move beyond knowing stories about God and hearing others talk of God's greatness. It must come from a heart that knows God—a heart that has made God Savior and Lord. Invite members and guests who want to know God in the deepest way to stay after class for a few minutes to visit. Be prepared to share how to be saved as you have opportunity.

11. Close with prayer, thanking God for the gift of God's presence and God's desire to relate to us intimately.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–4 and 11–13 are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible.
2. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 263.
3. See www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/ancient_near_eastern_art/panel_with_a_male_figure_grasping_a_tree_winged_sun/objectview.aspx?collID=3&OID=30003591 Or go to www.metmuseum.org and do a search for “winged sun-disc.” Accessed 1/29/2010.
4. See www.biblegateway.com. Accessed 1/29/2010.