

Valued

God, who knows all things, designed and created each person for a purpose.

PSALM 139:1-10,13-16,23-24

Remember the days before flat-screen TVs? Earlier models relied on bulky tubes filled with cathode rays projected onto glass screens. In 1895, physicist Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen experimented with these rays and noticed a nearby screen glowing unexpectedly. He discovered the rays could pass through soft tissue but not solid objects. Unsure what they were, he named them x-rays—an accidental discovery that transformed diagnostic medicine.

What's the earliest age you remember seeing an x-ray? What do you remember about that experience?

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

PSALM 139

When we allow ourselves to seriously contemplate the vastness of God, our hearts go, "Wow!" Attempting to describe Him, theologians have used what they call the "omni-attributes." These terms are built on the Latin word *omni,* which means "all."

The first word is "omnipotent." Potency has to do with power. This attribute affirms that God is all-powerful. We hear this word in Handel's "Messiah," which quotes Revelation 19:6, "for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (KJV).

Scripture puts this declaration about God's omnipotence in the form of a rhetorical question: "Is anything impossible for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14; see also Jer. 32:27). Jesus answered this question about God's power. Teaching about salvation, He said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27)

"Omniscience," the second word, means God is all-knowing. Believing this, we say, "God is omniscient." He knows all things—past, present, and future, and He fully knows Himself—all at the same time (Isa. 46:9-10). Job's friend and counselor, Elihu, referred to God as, "him who has perfect knowledge" (Job 37:16). John the beloved disciple, who could always put complex thought into profound yet simple statements, said of God, he "knows all things" (1 John 3:20).

Finally, "omnipresence" is the unique ability God has to be present in all places at the same time. He created time and space but is not limited by either (Deut. 10:14). Jeremiah recorded the Lord's self-declaration: "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" (Jer. 23:23-24). Yet, Scripture also declares that heaven itself cannot contain the fullness of God (1 Kings 8:27). Thinking of these three omni-attributes, our hearts go, "Wow!"

As you read Psalm 139 in you Bible, look for one or more of these three omni-attributes. How does this psalm cause you to pause and reflect on the vastness of the God it describes?

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

KNOWN BY GOD (PS. 139:1-6)

[1] LORD, you have searched me and known me. [2] You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. [3] You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. [4] Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD. [5] You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me. [6] This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

VERSE 1

In Psalm 26, David wrote, "Test me, LORD, and try me; examine my heart and mind" (v. 2). This is the dual focus of Psalm 139, the Lord's examining David's heart and mind.

The idea of God knowing people's thoughts is common in Scripture. Zophar accused his friend Job of sinning. Job retorted with, "Would it go well if [God] examined you. Could you deceive him as you would deceive a man?" (Job. 13:9). The implied answer is clear.

VERSES 2-5

David used four verbs in verses 2-3: God knew, understood, observed, and was aware. Together they show that God saw and comprehended where David was and what he was doing.

The Hebrew word translated ***know*** originally referred to piercing something. The thought was that God knows His creation inside and out. The subject of the Hebrew verb ***understand*** is emphatic. God alone comprehended David's thoughts. Giving evidence of His divinity, Jesus also knew people's thoughts (Matt. 9:4; John 6:64).

Because God knew David's thoughts, He knew David's words before he uttered them. God could know what was behind the words he spoke: ***You know all about it, LORD.***

We can hide our thoughts from others. God, though, is not limited by what limits us. Our words may deceive others but not God.

Thinking about God having the ability to know the intent behind our words can be reassuring, or it can be alarming. Understanding that God has this ability should compel us to watch our words. Both the Old and the New Testaments instruct us to be careful about what we say (Prov. 15:1; 21:23; Col. 4:6; Jas. 1:9).

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

In Old Testament times, builders would construct a perimeter wall to fortify a city and secure it from attack. This is the picture the verb ***encircled*** creates. God had surrounded David for his own protection. We see a similar image in the opening chapter of Job. Satan accused Job of being loyal to God only because of what he got out of it, God's protection (Job 1:9-10).

David also declared that the Lord had placed His protective ***hand*** on him. Some biblical scholars believe this depicts God working as a potter, always guiding, shaping, and molding. For those who walk faithfully with God, His encircling them or placing His hand on them is reassuring rather than restricting. It is comforting rather than confining.

VERSE 6

Scripture clearly teaches that God's ways and thoughts are higher and beyond ours (Isa. 55:9; Rom. 11:33). The Hebrew word translated ***beyond*** carries the idea of something that is extraordinary. Several translations render this as "wonderful." The word ***lofty*** points to something that is above us. This thought does not contradict the description in the previous verse, that God has surrounded us and has His hand on us. The text says that the ***knowledge*** is above us and beyond our full understanding.

How might we communicate that we value others in our daily routines?

UNDER GOD'S RULE (PS. 139:7-10)

7 Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. 9 If I fly on the wings of the dawn and settle down on the western horizon, 10 even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me.

VERSES 7-10

The two rhetorical questions in verse 7 are parallel ways of saying the same thing. The implied answer to both rhetorical questions is "nowhere." Whereas the word ***go*** simply refers to intentional movement, ***flee*** conveys an intentional and typically rapid attempt

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

to get away from a person or situation. Both ***Spirit*** and ***presence*** were indirect ways of referring to God. Regardless of where David went, he knew God saw him and was with him.

Verses 8-9 present the farthermost directions in Hebrew thought. They believed ***heaven*** was upward, the realm where God dwelled. The word referred to the highest level that humans could imagine. The word ***Sheol*** referred to the realm of the dead, a place of a shadowy existence in the afterlife. Whereas *heaven* would be filled with light and life, *Sheol* would be increasingly darker and filled with death. Rather than a place of joy-filled reunions, it is marked by separation and abandonment.

To think of God being in *Sheol* seems contradictory to our understanding of the afterlife; we think of Him being in heaven. Heaven is a place of God's grace and acceptance. *Sheol*, in contrast, is the realm of His righteous judgment.

The ***wings of the dawn*** refers to the east and the sun's rising. The ***western horizon*** is the place where it sets at the end of the day. Again, David presented the extremes in directional opposites.

David's thoughts in these verses were radical. Pagan peoples of his day believed their deities' influence and power were limited geographically and confined to a set region. David's declaration stood in direct contradiction to pagan theology.

David affirmed that God was ***there***, meaning beyond the heights and depths and reaches of his mortal span and grasp. In Scripture, one's ***hand*** symbolizes his power and authority (see Josh. 4:24). David knew that God's strong hand would lead him; he had no reason to be intimidated by external threats. The Hebrews believed the ***right hand*** represented strength, favor, and protection. For David, this meant he was fully safe and fortified in God's all-sufficient care. Jesus used this imagery to describe the security He offers believers (John 10:28-29).

When have you been comforted by God's presence or guidance?

DESIGNED FOR GOD'S PLAN (PS. 139:13-16)

[13] For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. [14] I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

are wondrous, and I know this very well. [15] My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. [16] Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.

VERSES 13-14

Having considered the expanse of God's awareness, David turned his attention to a much closer and intimate topic—the Lord's involvement in his prenatal development. David knew that God had been present and involved from the very beginning of his life, in the development of his full being, not merely a particular body part. Thus, God's concern for humans begins at conception.

God's concern for humans begins at conception.

Before industrialization, to ***knit*** was a hands-on task. David was describing what occurred on a microscopic level without being able to fully appreciate the accuracy of his own words. Job similarly said, "You clothed me with skin and flesh, and wove me together with bones and tendons" (Job. 10:11). These men were describing what God alone could do.

Considering how the Lord had created and knit him together caused David to overflow in praise. For David, the focus was not on biology or on his parents' physical relationship but on God's supernatural work, which by itself was remarkable and resulted in his being wondrously made.

The Hebrew word translated ***remarkably*** conveys a sense of reverential awe. In calling God's creative works ***wondrous***, David was expressing his admiration for what the Lord had done.

VERSES 15-16

In verse 15, David returned his focus to his being knit together prior to his birth. Some translations render ***bones*** as "frame," referring to a skeleton's development. David knew God could see what no one else could. He could see what his parents had conceived in ***secret*** and what was occurring during his months of physical development. The word ***formed*** points to careful and intricate work.

Verse 16 covers from when David was in an embryonic stage, ***formless***, through the days of his life. God was present and God

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

saw him. David's words about his days being ***written*** down and ***planned*** point to God's knowing the end from the beginning and of His having a plan for each person's life (see Isa. 46:10; Jer. 1:5).

The One who is Lord over creation is also Lord of our lives. He decides all our days, when they began and when they will end. Our task between those two days is to live in obedience to His divine purpose.

Why is it important to recognize God's plans for our lives?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and the Social Order*

We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. (See Genesis 1:27; Proverbs 24:11-12.)

ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD (PS. 139:23-24)

[23] Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. [24] See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

VERSE 23

Similar to what he had declared at the beginning of this psalm, David here pleaded with God to continue searching and knowing him. David knew that God could search and know him better than David could himself.

Yet here, at the climax of the psalm, David made a further request. He wanted God to ***test*** him and ***know*** his ***concerns***. To test was to scrutinize. The word originally referred to examining metals, specifically gold, for impurities. David's *concerns* would have been any fears, burdens, or anxieties that robbed him of peace.

David was asking God to take note of those items and elements that might hurt him either spiritually or emotionally. Since God would have already known about these elements, David's request implied that he wanted God to help him to be aware of those things. "God, you see them; help me to see them, too."

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

VERSE 24

The implication from the previous verse was that David wanted God to remove anything from his life that would lessen his purity. Here, he continued that thought. He wanted God to reveal to him anything within that was offensive—or, as other translations render it, harmful, evil, or wicked. What a soul-piercing prayer that is. Show me any area of my life that is offensive. Wow! Just, wow!

David's intent, though, was not just to gain knowledge about his spiritual condition. His desire was to be spiritually cleansed. He yearned for spiritual purity. He wanted to walk in ***the everlasting way***, meaning he wanted to live a life of eternal significance and according to God's standards. May we desire the same for us.

What does it look like to invite God to search our hearts and thoughts? How can we respond when God reveals things we need to change?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use other verses to gain a better understanding of God's character.*

Psalm 139 reminds us of God's omniscience (all-knowing), omnipresence (always present), and omnipotence (all-powerful). Read the following verses that mention these doctrines and then write the reference next to the doctrinal characteristic that the passage describes: Genesis 18:14; 1 Kings 8:27,39; Job 42:2; Psalm 115:3; Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 23:23-24; 32:17; Matthew 28:20; Acts 1:24; Hebrews 4:12-13; 1 John 3:20. How do these great truths about God impact your daily trust in Him?

Omniscience (all-knowing):

Omnipresence (always present):

Omnipotence (all-powerful):

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to value every human being as God does, reflecting His care in our actions.
- Believers can be assured that we are never outside God's presence or without His guidance.
- We should affirm that God has a purpose for each life He has created.
- Believes can seek God's help to remove offensive attitudes and pursue righteous living.

Who do you know in your Bible study group who could benefit from being reminded that God is surrounding them right now and has placed His loving and guiding hand on them? What can you do as a group this week to remind them that God values them and to offer genuine Christ-like encouragement?

How are you currently fulfilling what you believe to be God's purpose for your life? Are there areas that you are still holding onto and trying to control yourself? Set aside some time this week to honestly evaluate what you are doing versus what you think God might have you do with the life and opportunities that He has given you. How will you commit to making any needed changes?

Memorize Psalm 139:16.

Prayer Needs

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources