

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 2

Scripture: Psalm 139

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Date: September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### ***Is it Possible to “Know” the Independent, Personal God?***

**Psalm 139** (ESV) — TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. 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. 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. 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. 19 Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! 20 They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? 22 I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

**Introduction** We Christians go around asserting a pretty incredible thing—a thing that most less conservative or liberal Christian people almost never claim. We go around asserting that we “know” the one, true and living God.

- It’s annoying to people--like if I said, “I know Tom Brady and we have coffee every couple of months and let me tell you, he...” You would find that annoying. It would be me name-dropping. Or if I said, “I was chatting with Vice President Pence the other day, and I sez ‘Yo Mike, so what are we going to do with the tax reform situation. You know, I think we should’...”

And fairly often, I think, it annoys people around the Christians, who see us for the imperfect, occasionally inconsistent, sometimes hypocritical persons that we are (or might be). And we compound the problem in that we have become so marketing minded about our faith—conference, products, and even injecting Jesus into fantasy scenarios... It is no wonder people ask us just who IS God? There is always for us, a **small gurgling fountain—We Know God...**

Psalm 139 is a piece of literature written by David about three thousand years ago in which he asserts that God is a God of deep knowledge. David imagines that knowledge as focused on him, David, and lacking in NO information. He even says God's awareness and intimate knowledge of him began even when David was still a fetus—in his mother's womb. God knew, David wrote, about him before David was even born. He gives so many statements about all the kinds of personal knowledge of him that God had.

- God knew when David sat down and when he got up. (Vs. 2)
- Before David says something, God knew what he was going to say. (Vss.3,4)
- God knew where David was at all times—even if he, David, went to heaven God would be there and that isn't hard to imagine but Sheol? Which to my mind is an incredible thing to ponder. Who wants to go there? Well David doesn't want to or intend to but even if he did, God would be there too. (Vss.7,8)
- Even if I take the dawn flight to Europe, Lord, You are there! (vs. 9)
- David felt like God formed his **inward parts** when he was still a fetus (vs.13)

In David's mind it isn't so much about he, David, knowing God as it was God knowing him. That amazed him. He wrote a song (a psalm) about it. *God knows me inside and out, God knows me totally and awesomely. God knows all kinds of tiny junk about me—whoaaa whoa. God knows me totally and awesomely... whoa whoa whoa.*

So we are wondering today, here three thousand years later, "Is it possible to KNOW the independent, personal God?"

- Is He knowable?
- Is He independent of creation?
  - Can a being who is independent of creation be known?
- But if He is independent, can He really be a personal God?
  - Maybe some completely transcendent Being might exist, who is wholly alien to our world, but how could such a being be personal?
  - Is He a "He?"
  - Does He communicate and would He want to?
  - Does He have feelings on some kind of awesome and sinless level?
  - Does He want to relate to us and how would we know?

- God the Father sent God the Son to do this very thing!

This brings together three of the attributes of God that we assert to be true and correct about God. He is knowable—if it is true. He is utterly “other” from His creation and everything else and yet He is a personal God. He offers a personal kind of relating to each and every one of His creatures if they want it.

You will remember from last week that we are going to explore the attributes of the one, true living God this fall and I offered you THIS LITTLE CHART<sup>1</sup>, listing the attributes of God as laid out by six well-known evangelical scholars, being fairly confident that Catholic or Eastern Orthodox theologians would enthusiastically affirm these attributes too. But DO NOT let this list mislead you. Getting to know God is not just in memorizing a technical list of features as you might memorize if you were looking for a **new car**...

But can God be known, personally? For some they would feel comfortable just saying, “No.” If God is knowable, then it implies He wants a relationship with people, and if so, probably He wants to control the parameters of that relationship. Maybe it would just be better if we decide He can’t really be known with any detail, He doesn’t want to stoop down for personal relationships with little us. Then, we’re off the hook.

I turn your attention now to a conversation near the end of Jesus’ life. The disciples have been with Jesus of Nazareth for three years. We read in John 14:8-11 ***Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.***

Jesus, in coming, demonstrated that God wants to be personal with His people. “Immanuel” means “God WITH us.” It isn’t just a Christmas designation! He wants to be WITH us, personally. This is why prayer is such a blessing for us and is PERSONAL communication.

I always find it interesting that some of my more “formal” church colleagues on campus can’t bring themselves to feel comfortable praying spontaneously. They feel like that is too personal, too intimate and even too familiar with God. So they pray memorized, set, prayers.

We are saying that God is KNOWABLE. You can get to know Him. You can learn to distinguish His voice from other “voices” in your life and from false theological ideas about who He is. You can understand Him better and better each year.

We are saying that at the same time He is NOT OF THIS WORLD. He is not bound by His creation. He is not limited to the physics of the known universe. He is not hemmed in by time or by location. He is utterly OTHER.

We are saying that He is A VERY PERSONAL GOD. Were He to speak with you, literally, you would feel like this is someone who “gets” me. You would think, as did David, **Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.** (Psalm 139:23). This song from Charlotte Baker in 1975.

Set my spirit that I might worship Thee  
 Set my spirit free that I might praise Thy name  
 Let all bondage go, and let deliverance flow  
 Set my spirit free, to worship Thee. *Calvary Chapel, Praise I album.*

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The Attributes of God  
 from Evangelical Theologians

| Josh McDowell            | A.W. Pink                 | A.W. Tozer                     | Charles Hodge           | Wagne Grudem     | John Frame                            |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| God is a personal Spirit | The Solitariness of God   | The Incomprehensibility of God | The Spirituality of God | Independence     | Love and Goodness                     |
| Omnipotence              | The Decrees of God        | Omnipotence                    | The Infinity of God     | Unchangeableness | Righteousness and Holiness            |
| Omnipresence             | The Knowledge of God      | Omnipresence                   | Eternity                | Eternity         | Knowledge                             |
| Omniscience              | The Supremacy of God      | Omniscience                    | Immutability            | Omnipresence     | Power and Will                        |
| Sovereign                | The Sovereignty of God    | The Sovereignty of God         | Knowledge               | Unity            | Lord of Time                          |
| Holy                     | The Holiness of God       | The Holiness of God            | Foresknowledge          | Spirituality     | Lord of Space, Matter, Light & Breath |
| Absolute truth           | The Power of God          | The self-sufficiency of God    | Wisdom                  | Invisibility     | The Self-Contained God                |
| Righteous                | The Faithfulness of God   | The Faithfulness of God        | The Will of God         | Knowledge        |                                       |
| Just                     | The Goodness of God       | The Justice of God             | The Power of God        | Wisdom           |                                       |
| Love                     | The Patience of God       | The eternity of God            | Omnipotence             | Truthfulness     |                                       |
| Merciful                 | The Mercy of God          | The Mercy of God               | Holiness                | Goodness         |                                       |
| Faithful                 | The Lovingkindness of God | The Divine Transcendence       | The Justice of God      | Love             |                                       |
| Unchanging               | The Immutability of God   | The Immutability of God        | The Goodness of God     | Mercy            |                                       |
|                          | The Love of God           | The Love of God                | Benevolence             | Holiness         |                                       |
|                          | The Love of God to Us     | The Grace of God               | Love                    | Peace            |                                       |
|                          | The Wrath of God          | The Holy Trinity               | The Truth of God        | Righteousness    |                                       |
|                          | The Contemplation of God  | The self-existence of God      | Sovereignty             | Jealousy         |                                       |
|                          |                           | The Goodness of God            | The Holy Trinity        | Wrath            |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Will             |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Freedom          |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Omnipotence      |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Power            |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Sovereignty      |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Perfection       |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Blessedness      |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Beauty           |                                       |
|                          |                           |                                |                         | Glory            |                                       |