

God Is Omniscient

Psalm 139:1-24

All Knowing

The word “omniscience” combines two Latin words: *omni* (“all”) and *scientia* (“knowledge”). So when we say that God is omniscient, we simply mean that he has *all knowledge*. Scripture often refers to God’s omniscience. He knows minor details, such as the number of the hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:29-31). He knows events even before they happen, such as what we will pray before we pray it (Matthew 6:8) and major world events (Isaiah 46:10). He knows not only what *will* happen, but what *could* happen, whether or not it actually does (1 Samuel 23:10-13).

Personal Knowledge

The reality of God’s omniscience baffles us because we do not relate to time the same way God does. As time-bound beings we find it impossible for us to understand how, on the one hand, all events can be present to God’s knowledge, while on the other hand, our free-will is preserved. The Bible, however, is not concerned with unraveling this philosophical problem, for this reason: God’s knowledge is not merely an abstract concept; it is a dynamic, personal reality. It is true that God knows everything (1 John 3:20), but what most deeply affects us is that “God knows *me*” (Genesis 16:13; John 21:17).

God Knows Me

The most extensive meditation on God’s personal omniscience is Psalm 139—in itself a poetic marvel that begins by declaring God’s personal knowledge and ends by inviting God’s personal knowledge (“You have searched me and known me! . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart!” Psalm 139:1, 23).

In each of the psalm’s six sections, David reveals an aspect of God’s knowledge of us as individuals.

1-6 **God’s knowledge of me is *comprehensive*.**

“You . . . are acquainted with all my ways” (3).

7-12 **God’s knowledge of me is *inescapable*.**

“Where shall I flee from your presence?” (7).

13-16 **God’s knowledge of me is *intimate*.**

“Your eyes saw my unformed substance” (16)

17-18 **God’s knowledge of me is *incomprehensible*.**

“Your thoughts are . . . more than the sand” (17-18).

19-22 **God’s knowledge of me is *ignorable*.**

“Your enemies take your name in vain” (20).

23-24 **God’s knowledge of me is *comforting*.**

“Lead me in the way everlasting!” (24).

Can We Handle Being Known?

It is unbearable to be *invisible* to others, especially people whose attention we long to have. But being *visible* comes with its burdens too. In fact, the idea of someone knowing this much about us would be unbearable—were it not for the fact that God also loves us. The gospel reveals *how* God, who knows us completely, could also love us completely: he loves us *in Christ*. When a person trusts in Christ, he or she enjoys such a close relationship with Christ, that now God views him or her as having the same love and acceptance as his own Son. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians: “In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:4-7).

Discussion Questions

1. If God knows us completely, which sins should we be most concerned to avoid—private ones or public ones? Which ones do we tend to avoid most? What does this say about whether or not we really believe that God is omniscient?
2. The connection between Psalm 139:19-22 and the rest of the psalm is this: People who do not really think about God’s omniscience are emboldened to sin, because they do not think God knows or cares (see Psalm 94:6-7). What does this teach us about the importance of meditating on God’s omniscience?
3. Suppose you did think more often about how much God knows you. How would that change . . .
 - a. your view of private sins?
 - b. your self-image?
 - c. your level of anxiety?
4. We rightly think about the fact that God knows us personally. But God also knows other people just as well. How would thinking about God’s knowledge of other people change your view of them?