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Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Psalm 139

2014 Summer in Psalms Series

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I'm sure you've heard me say this many times, but I've become convinced over the years that nothing affects your experience as a Christian more than your view of God. I would suggest that some people have a view of God that is very big. But by "big" it would be the idea that God is big and distant and unknowable and very busy. As a matter of fact, I actually have a friend who would say he maintains that view of God. God's like a CEO who's very busy and He gets upset when He hears Christians pray about ordinary, everyday things because he thinks it's like bugging God, who already has too many things to do. At the other end of the scale would be those who would have a view of God where God's like *my buddy*. He's like my pal. He's like my friend that I do life with. But there isn't much awe. There isn't much mystery to this God. He's just pretty much like me, only a little higher. A God like that simply comes up powerless in your moment of need, in your hour when your world comes crashing down.

I would suggest to you a correct view of God, a biblical view of God would be to understand that God is so amazingly big that He has the capacity to be unimaginably intimate with every single Christian. If you understand that, it is life changing. This is our introduction to God in the very beginning of the Bible: Genesis 1 is the bigness of God; Genesis 2 is the intimacy of God. The rest of the Bible discusses that out. It is also the theme of our last psalm of the summer—Psalm 139. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Psalm 139—the most requested psalm of the summer—*A Psalm of David.* We pick it up in verse 1:

> **O LORD** [all caps, Yahweh, the intimate God]**, You have searched me and known *me*.**
> (*NASB, Psalm 139:1)

The Hebrew word **known** doesn't mean *know about me*. It's not like reading a biography or a name in a phone book. It's the word used to describe sexual relations between a husband and wife. *God, you have known me in a deep and intimate way.* How much so? Verse 2:

> **You know when I sit down and when I rise up;** (Vs. 2a)

The idea of that is that God knows the most ordinary, everyday stuff of our lives. It would quickly dismiss the idea that God is a busy CEO who doesn't have time for the ordinary things of life. Of course He does—to the degree that I'm willing to bet that there isn't a single person here this morning that already, this early in the morning, you have absolutely no idea how many times you've sat down and stood up today. But God knows. God knows how many times today you've already stood up and sat down—the intimate, ordinary, everyday details of life.

> **You understand my thought from afar.** (Vs. 2b)

Which is basically saying, "*God, before I even think my thought, you already know what it is."*

> **You scrutinize my path and my lying down,** (Vs. 3a)

That word **scrutinize** can be a little bit misleading. I think in English it tends to have a negative overtone. But the Hebrew is much more the idea that God goes before us and He looks at our path and He *examines* it, and He looks for obstacles and barriers and dangers and risks. Basically, it's saying that God is so intimately aware of my story that He goes before me; He examines my path, and He makes it safe for me. Same thing with *He scrutinizes* **my lying down**, which is what we talked about in Psalm 23 a couple of weeks ago. God creates an environment that is safe for me to lie down and be at rest.

> **And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.**
> **Even before there is a word on my tongue,**
> **Behold, O LORD, You know it all.** (Vs. 3b-4)

Again, before I even say something, God already knows what I'm going to say.

> **You have enclosed me behind and before,**
> **And laid Your hand upon me.** (Vs. 5)

God goes before me; God comes after me. It's the idea that He protects me *before me,* protects me *behind me* and the *laying His hand upon me* is the idea of *He blesses me*. He protects me before, behind, and blesses me along my way. Verse 6:

> ***Such*** **knowledge is too wonderful for me;**
> **It is too high, I cannot attain to it.**

Basically, what David is saying is, "This is so utterly remarkable, I can't even comprehend it." It would be one thing to imagine that level of intimacy if we're only talking about one single person. But imagine God knowing that level of intimacy about every single one of His children around the world at the same time!

So now we're back to our definition of how unimaginably, amazingly big does God have to be to be that unimaginably intimate with every single one of His children? At the end of the day, we'd have to say that I can't even comprehend that; I can't even grasp that. And that's exactly what the psalmist is saying. It gets into a couple of the big themes of God—attributes of God—that God is *omniscient*. He knows everything. That God is *omnipresent*. He's everywhere present at the same time. These are things that we can say about God, but our minds have no capacity to actually understand what that means. It is worth noting, then, that if God is that big, the idea that we can be our own gods, that somehow we can run our own lives better—understanding all of our limitations compared to the magnificence and mystery of God—the idea that I can actually be my own god is utterly ridiculous! We have a tendency to lower our view of God like this, raise our view of ourselves, and maybe not see so much difference. But the reality is that God is so utterly *other than* us, we can't even really comprehend it. Verse 7:

> **Where can I go from Your Spirit?**
> **Or where can I flee from Your presence?**
> **If I ascend to heaven, You are there;**
> **If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.** (Vs. 7-8)

Sheol, like a compartment in the earth, so, from the heavens into the earth, You are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn, (Vs. 9a)

Meaning, if I take the wings out to the sunrise, You are there.

If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me. (Vs. 9b-10)

Some people see the imagery there as kind of a north, south, east and west. Heaven is north; earth is south; the idea of the sunrise in the east, and from where David would have been writing, the sea would have been to the west. It's just a kind of a poetic way of saying *north, south, east, west—everywhere I go, God is there and He protects me and He leads me.*

If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,
And the light around me will be night,"
Even the darkness is not dark to You,
And the night is as bright as the day.
Darkness and light are alike to *You*. (Vs. 11-12)

So David is saying, "*God, sometimes life gets so confusing; it gets so difficult; it gets so hard to process, that the day actually becomes like night."* But for God, the darkest night is as if it's day because day and night are the same to God. The psalmist is basically looking at this from two different perspectives. One is that he's saying, "*God, there is nowhere I can go to run from You, to flee from Your presence, to hide from You, because You are everywhere."* So in one sense, he's saying it's kind of a disturbing thought if I'm doing things that are unrighteous or displeasing to God. But it's a very comforting thought if my desire is to walk uprightly before God, because God is always with me.

So, let's take the first of those: the idea of the omnipresent, omniscience of God—that God is everywhere present; He knows all things—so the idea of running or fleeing or hiding from God. Think of it this way: I think most of us would agree that accountability in our lives is a good thing. We have this sense in which it's good for people to know where I'm at, what's going on, ask me questions, and that we do life together. As a matter of fact, there are few things more disastrous in life than isolation. Isolation almost always gets us in deep trouble. So I need people to whom I am accountable, that are helping me, walking with me, and asking me questions. So, let's imagine that level of accountability. But then let's ratchet it up a little bit and imagine that it isn't just your accountability partner—it's a spiritual authority in your life. So, in this case, let's just imagine it's me, as your pastor. And somehow, some way, I am able to be with you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I am with you and watch every single thing you say and do. I see how you talk to your spouse. I see how you treat the people you work with. I see what you watch on the internet. I go with you to the movies you go to. I watch what you watch on television. I am with you in your most public moments; I am with you in your most private moments. Is it possible that if that were true, it would cause you to stop and think about what I'm watching on the internet...what movie I'm going to...how I'm talking to my spouse...how I'm talking to my children...how I'm treating my employees...how I'm running my business? I know that, because we as pastors are kind of the party-killers! Parties are full of laughter and joy until the pastor arrives! *(laughter)* Then everything gets weird and awkward! *What would the Pastor think?* Trust me. That *is* my life! *(laughter)*

But now let's take this from what could *never* be—me being with you 24/7—to what actually *is*. And that is that this magnificent, omnipresent, omniscient God is actually with you every moment of every day—wherever you go, whatever you do, whatever you say. There is a reality that when you understand the ultimate accountability, at the end of the day, there's only one opinion that matters, and that is the opinion of the One who is with you 24/7 and knows everything. So, think about that the next time you're watching something on the internet. Why not just say, "Hey, God, what do you think of this...or the next television show...or the next movie...or what's coming out of your mouth to your spouse or your children or your friend...or how you run your business? Just be aware...*GOD is here! What would God think of this?* Once you begin to comprehend that, it *is* life changing.

The second part of what he was discussing is the *comfort side* of that. If you do want to walk uprightly, you do want to walk pleasing to God, you're not wanting to operate with this secret, hidden life that's offensive to God, then all of a sudden this becomes a very comforting reality.

One of the biggest problems we have in our culture today is loneliness. But this is the staggering reality for every Christian: the moment you trusted Christ as Savior was the last minute that you would ever be alone for the rest of eternity. The God who has saved you made you a promise at the moment of salvation that He would put His spirit within you and there would never be another moment for all of eternity that you would ever be alone. There's a comforting reality to that!

Years ago, one of my daughters went on a missions' trip to one of the most dangerous places in the world for a Christian. Because this was a covert operation, she went alone. She literally landed on the ground alone, was met by someone from a mission organization, got her to her destination, and she virtually disappeared from all communication for ten days in one of the most dangerous places in the world. I'm telling you, that does increase a parent's prayer life! Dramatically! But the one thing that Patty and I knew was that she wasn't going alone, that there is a God that is so amazingly big that He has the capacity to be unimaginably intimate, to be aware of every moment of every day in every place that we go. Now the question that might arise would be, *"Why would God do that?"* I mean, it's beyond our ability to comprehend! But having said that, why would God be so interested in me and what I do and what I say and how I live? The answer is in the paragraph that follows:

> **For You formed my inward parts;**
> **You wove me in my mother's womb.** (Vs. 13)

As we go through this, it's important to realize the imagery is the imagery of an artist. In this case, it's the Hebrew word that refers to a potter and piece of clay. It's the Genesis 2 word. When you read Genesis 1 and 2, what you find out is that *God spoke the universe into place*! But when it came time for the creation of people made in His image, He rolled up his sleeves and He got down in the mud and the clay and He began to form this magnificent creation that would matter deeply to Him. **For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.** It's the imagery of a weaver making this beautiful piece of cloth with great care and great beauty. Verse 14:

> **I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;**
> **Wonderful are Your works,**
> **And my soul knows it very well.**

Fearfully a word like *awe* or *awe inspiring*—You are awesome, as God has made you, and wondrous, full of wonder, as God's original piece of art, as God's very special creation. So think of

it this way: The God who made the majesty of the mountains, the God who made the wonder of the depths of the ocean, the God who rocks the earth with summer storms is the God who made you personally. And He says, "*I made you to be awesome and wondrous!"* Do you realize, out of all that God has created in the universe, as spectacular as it is, God's favorite creation—his favorite work of art of everything He's made—is *You*! That's why you matter so deeply to Him. You are His magnificent piece of art. Verse 15:

My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

Wrought is a Hebrew word; we'd probably use the word *embroidered*. Again it's a very artsy term.

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained *for me*,
When as yet there was not one of them. (Vs. 16)

That's a very interesting verse. Basically, the verse says that you actually existed in the mind of God before you even existed in the womb, and before you were even born, somehow God had already determined the number of days that you would live. Now there is this reality that's beyond our ability to comprehend. It is what theologians call *coterminous* actions—that God is sovereign, yet within that sovereignty we, as people, are made in the image of God and we make choices, and we make decisions, and they affect how our lives go. There's a reality to the fact that if I exercise my will and step in front of a bus, there is a reality to that. But somehow God, in His sovereignty, works within the framework of human choices to make this work. The question we have is, *"How does this work?"* And the answer would be, "*I don't know."* There's no way for anybody to know! I'm not God! But there is clarity in the psalm in saying, *"Before you were ever born, God already numbered your days and your story was already written in the mind of God,"* which reminds us that life and death is ultimately in God's hands. Often, when things happen, we find ourselves thinking *if only—if only this...if only that,* and *what if,* and *how things could have been different*. But at the end of the day, life is not just about fate and luck and chance and *if-only's*. Your story is bigger than that. God is sovereign and, somehow, God is in control and, somehow, God works it out—and all we can do is trust Him with that. That's ultimately what he's saying there. Verse 17:

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.
When I awake, I am still with You. (Vs. 17-18)

The psalmist is saying that it is impossible to even comprehend how much God thinks about me. There are three practical applications I'd like to make out of this section of the psalm:

The first one has to do with the very socially, politically charged issue of our day—the issue of abortion. I want to start by saying that I want my words to have kindness and compassion to those of you who, at one time in your life, believed the lies of the culture and did something that, if you could, you would go back and change it a million times over. But the reality is, you can't go back, and you can't change it. We celebrate that God is a merciful, forgiving, gracious God who forgives our sin and brings healing to our life. There's nothing gained by dwelling on the past and going

over that again and again. The past is past. Accept God's grace and forgiveness and healing and move on. But I'm also asking you to understand I need to be very clear on this because what is at stake are the lives of unborn children. I cannot be anything less than clear. In our culture, this is a big discussion. One of the challenges is that there is this tendency to divert the issue away from the issue and talk about everything that isn't really the issue. The issue is not about privacy. The issue is not about choice. The issue is not about birth control. The issue is not whether or not the law can invade a woman's body. Those are not the issues. The issue is as simple as this: "*Is that which lies within the womb of a mother a child, fearfully and wonderfully made by God, or is it not?"* That is really the only issue. I would guess every single person in the city of Lincoln would agree that no mother has the right to choose, whether in public or in private, to kill a one-year-old child. So the issue is: "*Is that which lies within the womb of a mother just a blob of tissue that travels eight inches out a tube and then magically becomes a child...or is it, indeed, a child?"* Please understand, you cannot use the answer, "I wouldn't do it myself, but I don't think I can tell anyone else if it's right or wrong." At least have the courage to take a stand. That statement is built on a foundation of relativism which the Bible summarily dismisses as foolishness. Either it's right or it's wrong because it's either a child or it's not. If it's a child, it's wrong. If it's not, then it's something else. We could argue this medically. We could argue it scientifically. We could argue it philosophically. We could argue it morally. But this morning, since we're in church, I just want to argue it theologically, and theologically, the text is abundantly clear. If you consider yourself a Christian and you take the Bible seriously, the Bible could not be clearer that what lies within the womb of a mother is a magnificent baby that is **fearfully and wonderfully made** by God. It is a magnificent piece of art and no human being has the right to destroy it. The Bible is not unclear on this. The Bible is clear—black and white on this issue.

The second application of this part of this psalm has to do with special needs children. Unfortunately, as a culture, we feel this need to say "this" is normal. Consequently, we define "this" as abnormal. But I would raise the question: "Who makes that definition?" Who has the right to say "this" is normal and "this" is abnormal? Wouldn't the text rightfully say **fearfully and wonderfully made**? That this child that may not fit the culture's definition of "normal" may actually be God's special agent on assignment—on purpose for a purpose—to accomplish an eternal mission and, in God's economy, it's not "normal" and "abnormal". It's not "wonderful" and "tragic". It is **fearfully and wonderfully made**. How do we know that these special needs children don't have a connection with God that is deep and rich and abundant? As a matter of fact, I would suggest that that is true—that there is a connectivity there that goes beyond our ability to explain. How do we know that God isn't using these magnificent children to somehow change the world as his special agents?

As a matter of fact, Gregg Easterbrook, in his book *The Progress Paradox*, talks about the fact that we as a nation live better-off than any people ever have in the history of the world, and he kind of documents all of that. And then he goes on to document that we are more dissatisfied; we're more unhappy; we're more depressed; we're more anxious; we're more hopeless than any people have ever been in the history of the world, and he goes on to document that. But he also says, in their research they've found two exceptions. One of those two exceptions is special- needs children who just seem to have an uncanny ability to understand what matters and to find joy and pleasure and satisfaction in life. Rather than seeing them as some sort of a tragedy, why don't we accept what the psalm says and realize they are **fearfully and wonderfully made**—a magnificent piece of art.

Thirdly would be the application to every single one of us. Is there a single person in the room who, this week, looked in the mirror and said to yourself, "*Fearfully and wonderfully made!"* I'm guessing not! *(laughter)* I was up to my eyebrows in the psalm all week, and I didn't do it! But it

raises the question: *Why not? Why not?* Why is it that we look in the mirror and see so many things we're dissatisfied with...so many things we wish were different? If only I was prettier...if only I was skinnier...if only I was taller...if only I was shorter...if only I was smarter...if only I had a smaller nose...a bigger nose...bigger ears...more hair—whatever it is!

Here's my question: "*Why is it that we are so willing to believe the voices of a culture that we know is filled with lies and deceit, that defines us in such a way that we're constantly dissatisfied with who we are, rather than choosing to believe God, who ALWAYS tells the truth?"* Basically, when we look in the mirror and we wish a hundred things were different, what we're saying is, "*God, I don't think YOU tell the truth. I think the culture tells the truth, and these are all the things I'm dissatisfied with.* Rather than accepting that—rather than the definition of the culture—I'm going to go with the definition of God. And out of all the things in the world that He has created, the thing that is most wondrous to Him is *me*! I am created the way He wanted me created—as a work of art, fearfully and wonderfully made—perfectly created to fulfill the mission He's given me on planet earth. Why can't I accept that and relax and ask myself, "*Who am I as God has made me to be, and how do I maximize that? How do I steward that to accomplish God's purpose in the world?"* Verse 19:

> **O that You would slay the wicked, O God;**
> **Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.**
> **For they speak against You wickedly,**
> **And Your enemies take *Your name* in vain.**
> **Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?**
> **And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?**
> **I hate them with the utmost hatred;**
> **They have become my enemies.** (Vs. 19-22)

Now it seems like the psalm took a rather dramatic turn, but it actually doesn't. Basically the idea is that David is so struck by the wonder of a God who would know him and celebrate him and all His creation so intimately, that he's actually defensive for God. His heart breaks for God because he realizes that all these people who do evil, all these people that rebel against God and they fight against God and they offend God and break God's heart—these are all people who were fearfully and wonderfully made! And God had a plan and a purpose for them! He had something so wondrous and so beautiful for them, and yet they chose to rebel and to walk away and dedicate their lives to hating the God who created them—and David feels that deeply. And so he says, "God, I'm defensive for You! I want those people to go away! I want them quieted down! I want them to shut up! I want You to do something about them because they consistently break Your heart!" That's the essence of what he's saying in those verses.

Verses 23 and 24, then, are the only real, logical conclusion to a psalm like this:

> **Search me, O God, and know my heart;**
> **Try me and know my anxious thoughts;**
> **And see if there be any hurtful way in me,**
> **And lead me in the everlasting way.** (Vs. 23-24)

That's how the psalm started in verse 1, and that's how the psalm ends. If God is so committed to me, if God dedicated Himself as the master artist to make me in such a way that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and He loves me and He celebrates me and He made me on purpose for a purpose, if the God of the universe is so dedicated to me, the only reasonable response would be to

say: "*God, then **search me**! Know me! **Know my heart**! And if there's anything in my life that offends You—anything in my life that is unrighteous—then, God, I want to know what it is and I want to deal with it, and I want to get rid of it out of my life. I want to surrender my life to You. I want to walk with You in the everlasting way."*

At the end of the day, if we have a God who is so amazingly big that He has the capacity to be so remarkably intimate, how could we not say, "*God search me. Examine me. Expose me. I want anything in my life that offends You—I want it out. I want to hold Your hand and I want to walk with You now and forever."* God is so committed to His desire to experience that with you that when we rebelled and walked away, He gave up the life of His own Son, not only to create you, but to *recreate* you—that once again, you could experience the intimacy that God longs for you.

My prayer would be that every one of us would pray the words of Psalm 139:23 and 24: "God, search me. Know my heart. Convict me of my sin. Expose what's in there...because I want to get rid of everything that offends You...and I want to walk uprightly with You in the everlasting way."

> *Father, we are thankful that You love us in a way we can't even really comprehend. God, You're so big that You have the capacity to be so unimaginably intimate. God, my prayer would be for each one of us, that we would say the words of David. We would invite You to search our hearts, convict us of sin, and, Lord, that we would surrender to walk with You in the way of life. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

[Reader]:

> **O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.**
> **You know when I sit down and when I rise up;**
> **You understand my thought from afar.**
> **You scrutinize my path and my lying down,**
> **And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.**
> **Even before there is a word on my tongue,**
> **Behold, O LORD, You know it all.**
> **You have enclosed me behind and before,**
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> ***Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me;**
> **It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it.**
> **Where can I go from Your Spirit?**
> **Or where can I flee from Your presence?**
> **If I ascend to heaven, You are there;**
> **If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.**
> **If I take the wings of the dawn,**
> **If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,**
> **Even there Your hand will lead me,**
> **And Your right hand will lay hold of me.**
> **If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,**
> **And the light around me will be night,"**
> **Even the darkness is not dark to You,**

And the night is as bright as the day.
Darkness and light are alike *to You*.
For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother's womb.
I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
***And* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;**
Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained *for me*,
When as yet there was not one of them.
How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.
When I awake, I am still with You.
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(*NASB, Psalm 139)

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