



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost Sunday

May 19, 2024

Where Shall I Go from Your Spirit?

Psalm 139:1-12

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.

For two millennia the church has contemplated the attributes – or characteristics – of God, asking broad, sweeping questions concerning God's ontology: What is His nature? What is He like? How can He be described?

The psalmist David considers two of these attributes in the first half of Psalm 139; in verses 1-6 he ponders God's omniscience, and then in verses 7-12 his thoughts turn to God's omnipresence.

For those who may be struggling to recall the meaning of these terms, a brief review may be helpful. Quite simply, the prefix *omni* is Latin for "all." Knowing this, you can figure out quite easily the second of these terms: omnipresence. This refers to that aspect of God's nature by which He is everywhere at the same time. He is *omni-present*, present everywhere (in all places), all at once.

The first term – omniscience – isn't quite as easy. The *omni* part we recognize, but the second half of the word may not be familiar. It comes from a Latin word relating to knowledge. Science is a pursuit of knowledge. Conscience is the knowledge of right and wrong. So, to say that God is omniscient, is to say that He knows all things.

David, recognizing that God is all-knowing, that He sees and knows all things, confesses that God knows everything about *him*. "You have searched me and known me," he says. What exactly does God know? Well, *everything*. David admits that God knows



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even the small things that he does – when he sits down and when he gets up, where he goes, and when he goes to bed. God even knows his thoughts. “Before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you already know what I’m going to say.”

From this David moves to consider that God is always with him. “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” There is nowhere for him to go that God is not already there ahead of him. “If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” God, who is omnipresent, is found even in the region of death and hell. “If I take to the sky or the depths of the sea,” David says, “even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” No cover of darkness can hide him, for with God it doesn’t make any difference whether it’s dark or light; all things are the same to Him.

So, we must ask whether this omniscience and omnipresence – the fact that God knows everything and is with us everywhere – is this a good thing or a bad thing. To say that God knows everything about you, everything you do and everywhere you go; to say that God is *with* you wherever you go . . . is that Law or Gospel?

I suppose that depends on how things are between you and God, doesn’t it. If your relationship with Him is good, if you’re living in repentance and forgiveness, seeking His grace that you may walk according to His commandments, with a ready confession on your lips and in your heart – the thought that He’s with you wherever you go, that He knows what you’re thinking and what words are going to come out of your mouth – in other words, that He is omniscient and omnipresent – this is a source of comfort. You realize He’s there for your benefit, for your good, that He’s on hand to help you make good decisions, to forgive you when you don’t, to comfort you in the midst of a crisis, to strengthen you to be a comfort to others. If your relationship with God is right – that is, if you believe and trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation – then you will rejoice in His presence, and be delighted to think that He knows you so well.

But . . . if that relationship is not what it should be, if you’re not living in faith, and if your faithlessness manifests itself such that you find yourself going to places you shouldn’t go, doing things you shouldn’t be doing, thinking and saying things that you know are not pleasing to Him, then the thought that He’s always around, always aware of what you’re up to . . . is not a pleasant one. Rather, it’s a fearful one, and you will prefer that your interactions with Him would be limited; in fact, you really won’t want Him around at all.

Think of this: When you have children at home and they’re in another room in the house, and things get quiet, you often have the sense that maybe you’d better go see what they’re up to. And when you walk in the room, if things are going well and they’re not misbehaving, often their faces will brighten and they’re glad you came in. They’ll show you what they’ve been doing and tell you all about it, whether you want them to or not. They’re



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happy you're there. But if they have been misbehaving, you'll see a startled look on their faces. They'll try to hide whatever they've been doing, and will seem very uncomfortable with your presence.

Think of Adam and Eve. Every day they walked with God in the evening and delighted in His presence, but once they sinned, what did they do? They tried to hide, going so far as to make coverings for themselves out of leaves. Why would they suddenly be afraid of their Creator, who loved them and gave all good things to them? Because they had transgressed His Law and they knew it. And now, what once was a thing to which they looked forward every day, was a thing to be abhorred and despised.

It's the nature of the relationship that determines whether the knowledge and presence of God are perceived in terms of Law or Gospel.

We can see the condition of David's relationship to God in how he expresses the realities of the omnis as he was led by the Spirit of God to write this Psalm. The context tells us that these thoughts were precious to him. Mind you, when he asks, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" he's not actually seeking to hide from God or to get away from Him. He says in Psalm 27(:8) – "You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek,' " and in Psalm 122(:1) – "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!' " People whose relationship with God is not what it ought to be are not happy to be in God's house; they'd rather be pretty much anywhere else. For, being in God's house confronts them with the sins for which they ought to repent, but don't want to. But, like those pilgrims in Acts 2, who came from all over the world to attend the Feast of Booths on Pentecost, who longed to be in Jerusalem and traveled great distances to do so, David longed to be in God's house, for there he knew he could gather with fellow believers who also understood that God knew them intimately and desired to be with them, and that was for them a very good thing.

Why, after all, does God search out His children? Why does He desire to know them so fully and completely? Why does He want to be with them all the time? Why do you want to know yours? Why do you desire to be with your children? You love them. They're part of you. And it really doesn't matter how old they get, you want what's best for them. Now, you're not God; you don't do all things well. And maybe there are times when your children don't want to be with you, and it's your fault. But that doesn't make your heart ache for them any less, does it. And when it's not your fault, if they avoid you simply because being around you reminds them of something in their life that's not right, that perhaps *they* are not right with God, the pain that goes along with that is profound.



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How must God feel when His children want nothing to do with Him? Or they consider Him to be an inconvenience? There's an attribute of God that some hold to, especially those of the Orthodox communion, known as the impassibility of God, that it's in God's nature that He suffers neither pain nor pleasure. In other words, that God is passion-less. We, of course, reject this notion on the grounds that Scripture, in many places, speaks of God experiencing both heartache and delight. God tells the prophet Jeremiah that His "eyes run down with tears night and day" (Jer. 14:17). Isaiah writes that in the afflictions of His people, God Himself was afflicted (Is. 63:9). Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus (John 11:35) and lamented over Jerusalem (Mat. 23:37). Clearly, He suffered on the cross as He atoned for your sins and mine. On the other hand, David writes in Psalm 35:(27) that the Lord delights in our righteousness and in the welfare of His servants.

Look, the Lord cares for you deeply – far more than you can imagine. He doesn't seek you out so that He can catch you doing something wrong and punish you for it. He seeks and searches our hearts because He loves us and He wants what's best for us. If you've been wandering away from Him, or even intentionally hiding from Him, please know that He desires to know you and be with you because He wants to take what's dead in you and bring it back to life. Like that valley of bones in Ezekiel's vision, He wants to lift your soul from the dust by the power of His Spirit and breathe into you again the very breath of life.

This day is a celebration of the sending of that Spirit, whom God intended to be our helper, who would lead us into all truth. He wants you to have the truth. He wants you to have life. He wants to have you in His life and He wants to be in your life. And He wants that to be a source of joy for you, not a source of terror.

Beloved, stop running, stop hiding, stop avoiding, stop rejecting Him. Turn to Him and embrace the life He longs to give you. And rejoice that He seeks you, that He never gives up on you, and that He never will. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen