

## The One Who Knows Us

### Psalm 139

On this Mother's Day, we celebrate those wonderful women who gave us birth and who cared for us when we were most helpless. Today, we thank them for always seeming to know what we were doing, especially when we were trying to get away with something. Today, we honor them for always being ready to swoop in and provide either protection or correction – and sometimes a bit of both. Today we celebrate a mother's selfless, unconditional love, even as we are grateful that it was extended to those of us who certainly didn't deserve it.

But as we recognize and honor the selfless love, the ever-present protection, and the ready justice of our mothers – and our fathers too – we should also remember that there is Someone even more loving, even more protecting, even more knowing and even more just. We should remember that there is Someone of whom our parents are at their best a shadow, Someone to Whom the best of our parents point the way by both their exhortation and their example. For, after all, the reason that we honor these good traits in our mothers and fathers is because they find their origin in the God Who is good. In short, our parents are most effective when they model the attributes of God for us.

And this is true even from the very beginning of our lives, as Psalm 139 reminds us. For while verse 13 acknowledges that our mothers were the ones who gave us birth, it reminds us that God was the One Who covered us, who wove us together, Who designed our every distinguishing characteristic while we were still in the womb.

Now, to be sure, there is something sublime in a mother's unconditional love, bestowed without question on her children, regardless of their defects. Sometimes in jest we speak of someone having a face that only a mother can love. We thus acknowledge and celebrate a mother's unquestioning devotion, even to those whom the rest of society finds off-putting or even repugnant.

But how much greater should be our wonder in the presence of a God Whose love could design such a face, a God Whose love could give birth even to those people whom we find most difficult to love, and to let them be the bearers of His holy and perfect image. Yes, our mothers have loved us just the way we are, but God is the One Who loves each one of us enough to design us as unique masterpieces, intended to be an expression of His nature to the world He created.

But of course, none of us really fulfills God's purpose, do we? And the best of our mothers know that better than anyone. For if they love us unconditionally, they also know us very well, seeing not only our potential, but also the many times that we fail to live up to it. They love us, but most of the time with clear-seeing eyes.

And God loves us in the same way, with even clearer sight. For let's face it – children in their cleverness do occasionally manage to pull a fast one on even the most vigilant parents. And it is easy for a mother's unconditional love at times to slip into overindulgence, allowing us to get away with things for which we really should have been punished.

But God makes no such mistakes. In verse 12, David reminds us that it is impossible for us to hide anything from God – even the darkest night is as bright as day to Him. There's no point in trying to pull a fast one on God – we can't conceal any of our sins from Him, because He is always watching us.

And part of the reason that's true is that God is everywhere. Some men may head out to the deer camp or the golf course to get away from it all, but God is there. Families may go on vacations to Canada or Europe, but David reminds us that God is there too, even in the farthest oceans. David says that God is in the highest heaven. He says that God is in the deepest hell, which is perhaps better translated the place of the dead. Simply put, there is no place out of God's sight or beyond God's reach.

But God doesn't just see us all the time, everywhere we are. God also knows us inside and out. Yes, as our designer His knowledge of our nature and character is complete. But verses 1-4 remind us that God also knows

everything we do and everywhere we go. He even knows our thoughts before we think them, our words before we speak them. As verse 3 says, God is acquainted with all our ways.

But God isn't just with us all the time, seeing and knowing everything we do. No, God is sovereign over us, in control of all the circumstances of our lives. Verse 5 says that God has beset us behind and before, hemming us in, enclosing us on every side. In verse 10 we learn that God isn't just with us everywhere – He takes hold of us and leads us, wherever we are. And perhaps most amazingly, verse 16 says that God even wrote down everything about us before we were even born, even to the exact number of the days that we will live.

So, how do we respond to a God like this? Does He seem to be intrusive, or perhaps even smothering? Or does He make you feel warm and safe? Do you resent the notion that someone else controls so much of who you are and what you do? Or do you rejoice that God is the One Who is in charge of your life? Does God's omniscient and omnipresent sovereignty feel threatening, or is it comforting? How do you feel about the God that David describes in this psalm?

Well, to someone still living in rebellion against God, this psalm is probably not good news at all. By definition, such a person wants to do his own thing and doesn't want God to stop him. At the core of her being is distrust of God, fear of God, because she expects only punishment from God. To him, it is oppressive that God is always watching, that God knows everything. To the sinner, this psalm is very bad news. He doesn't want God to be everywhere – she wants God to go away.

But what about for a Christian? He has already admitted to himself, to the world, and to God that he has done all sorts of wrong things. She isn't trying to hide anything, especially from God. Instead, he readily confesses his sins, willing to admit that his ways might be very wicked indeed, as David does in verse 24.

And how can Christians do that so freely? Because we know the self-sacrificial character of God and the unconditional love of God, shown so clearly on the cross of Christ. We thus know that we have no reason to fear God and that we have every reason to trust God. It is because of a Christian's close relationship to God that this Psalm can be such good news for us.

And this is why, instead of being confused and threatened by the notion of God's sovereign omnipresence, David simply says in verse 6 that such knowledge is too wonderful, too high for him. He is happy to rest in the knowledge that God is all powerful because he is confident that God will use that power for his good.

And instead of feeling smothered by our Creator's complete and intimate knowledge of us, in verse 14 David gives God thanks and praise. Instead of being dissatisfied with his own talents or his own appearance, David marvels that he has been fearfully and wonderfully made, acknowledging God's right to bestow His gifts as He chooses.

And instead of trying to have his own way, instead of trying to make his own rules, in verse 17 David says that it is God's Word that is most precious to him. Instead of trying to figure out everything for himself, David is content to dive into the vast depths of the Scriptures, discovering more and more about the God Who made him and who loves him so much.

In short, David gives us a good example of a Christian's proper response to the fact that our God is the all-seeing and all-knowing Creator of all things, a God Who is present everywhere all the time and Who controls all the circumstances of His creation. And that proper response, in a word, is humility. In this psalm, David sees himself not as a mighty, powerful king, but as a helpless, needy child of God. David thus humbly admits his need for forgiveness, his need for guidance, and his need for learning. And we would all do well to follow his example, especially when the circumstances of our lives make no sense to us.

But even after we have truly humbled ourselves before our omniscient, omnipresent, sovereign God, this psalm raises another issue, another problem for us, a problem that comes not from denial or rejection of God's sovereignty but from the acceptance of it. For in verses 19-22, David wonders aloud: if God sees everything and

knows everything, if God is everywhere and controls all the circumstances of our lives, then why doesn't He punish the wicked? Why doesn't He exercise His justice and destroy all His enemies?

Maybe you've wondered about that yourself. Maybe, as you see our culture slip further and further away from God, as you see senseless violence fill our streets and hateful lies fill our newsfeeds, maybe as you see evil being called good and good called evil, maybe you are like David, wishing that all these wicked people would just depart, would just go away and quit messing everything up for everyone else.

The people of Jesus' day would certainly have shared such a longing. They wanted God to bring justice on the wicked Romans who were causing them so much trouble and grief. In fact, they were looking for a Messiah to come and do to the Romans what David was asking God to do in verse 19: to slay the wicked.

But of course we know that God had a better plan, a bigger plan. For God sent Jesus not to drive out the Romans so that He could just rule over the nation of Israel the way David had done. No, God sent Jesus to die so that the sins of people from all over the world might be forgiven – even the sin of those Romans who nailed Him to a cross. God sent Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice for us so that the whole world might come to know Him the way that David did, not fearing Him as a bloodthirsty, cruel tyrant, but trusting Him as a loving Heavenly Father Who sees all things and knows all things.

Yes, God is everywhere. Yes, God is in control. Yes, God is perfectly just and righteous, but the way that God chooses to exercise His sovereignty, His power and His justice is oftentimes simply beyond us.

For sometimes God uses the overweening ambition of tyrants to bring them to a swift end – that's what happened to Napoleon and Hitler. Sometimes, God allows tyrannies to continue for generations, as He did with the Soviet Union. And the people living under the oppression of Communist China or Islamic Iran are still wondering how long they will have to suffer – and we just don't know.

And so David ends the psalm in the same way that he began it – in humility. He doesn't insist that God answer all his questions. He doesn't insist that God exercise His justice in the way and according to the timetable that David understood. No, David simply asks that God would use His all-seeing, all-knowing power to look inside David's heart and take away anything bad, anything hurtful, anything that is separating David from God. No, at the end of the psalm David still doesn't know how all of God's plans work. But in the face of his ignorance he simply asks God to give him more faith, more trust in God.

And on this Mother's Day, in the midst of this COVID crisis, God is calling us to do the same thing – to trust Him even more than we trust our mothers and fathers, to trust Him to lead and guide us, to protect us and correct us, to teach us the truth and bring justice to the world in His way, in His time. For the good news is that He loves us, He is always with us, and He will lead us wherever it is best for us to go.