

### **Truly Known and Truly Loved**

Who truly knows and truly loves you? Perhaps it's a family member – spouse, sibling, parent, child, or cousin. Perhaps it's a friend – from childhood, from the neighborhood, from work, or from church. Perhaps it's a combination of people – different people know and love you in different ways. Perhaps it's difficult for you to name even one person who truly knows and truly loves you.

Most of you are familiar with my life story. I grew up on a farm in central Illinois with my parents and three brothers. My parents were lifelong Christians, active in the Mennonite Church. I majored in math education at Goshen College, a Mennonite school in Indiana, and then taught junior and senior high school math and science for seven years. While attending graduate school full-time, I began working at Provident Bookstore, a Mennonite Church owned business, and then ended up staying there full-time even after finishing my master's degree in education.

During that time, members of my church began suggesting that I attend seminary. I wasn't sure why I would do that. I knew I couldn't be a pastor. One summer during my three-week vacation I took the beginning biblical Greek class at AMBS, the Mennonite seminary in Indiana. I loved it! I decided that the following year I'd take a leave of absence from the bookstore and attend AMBS majoring in biblical studies. Then I'd return to the store or possibly teach in a Christian high school somewhere.

But there were complicating factors. I learned that the bookstore manager was planning to retire and if I wanted to manage the store, I needed to begin the next year. When I talked to my parents about attending seminary, they were not in favor. Why would I attend seminary if I didn't want to be a pastor? And we know that God doesn't allow women to be pastors.

Eventually, I decided that I couldn't pass up the opportunity to manage the bookstore. Also, I was surprised to be asked if I would be an elder in the church I was attending. I canceled my plans to attend AMBS.

When the store closed six years later, I knew immediately that I'd go to seminary – still certain that I'd never be a pastor, but eager to study and see what would come next. Before I told my parents about this plan, my father came to me with a job opportunity. He had spoken to the manager of the local grain cooperative and learned of a job opening. He knew I was good with numbers and had a lot of experience in customer service. This was the perfect opportunity for me. I remember his excitement when he talked to me about it.

But my heart sank. I loved and respected my father. And I knew that he truly loved me and always wanted the best for me. But in this area of my life, at least, he didn't truly know me. He didn't know that this job wasn't a good fit for me. He didn't know that I had continued to receive internal and external nudges toward seminary.

However, once I told my parents that I was going to attend AMBS and, later, that I was going to pastor a church, my dad never spoke against my decisions. I'm not sure that his feelings about women pastors ever changed, but I'm confident that his love and support for me never did.

Who truly knows and loves me? Who truly knows and loves you? How does Psalm 139 help us to answer this question?

This summer, we're seeking peace together – peace with God, peace within, peace with others, peace with creation.<sup>1</sup> As the psalmist makes clear, it's precisely God's presence and intimate knowledge of us that allows us to experience peace within. While the language of this psalm is intensely personal, these words are intended for use in corporate worship. They are words of testimony, confession, and

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<sup>1</sup>This sermon draws from the Week Four Prepare Essay and Sermon Notes written by Joanna Harader, *Current: Seeking Peace Together*, a digital curriculum from MennoMedia, [Current - Menno Media](#)

prayer, written to strengthen and encourage people striving to worship and obey the one true God in a culture where many were bowing down to numerous gods and giving their deepest allegiance to national powers. These words continue to speak to us in our context.

*LORD, you have examined me.*

*You know me.*

*You know when I sit down and when I stand up.*

*Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.*

*You study my traveling and resting.*

*You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.*

*There isn't a word on my tongue, LORD,*

*that you don't already know completely.*

*You surround me—front and back.*

*You put your hand on me.*

*That kind of knowledge is too much for me;*

*it's so high above me that I can't reach it.<sup>2</sup>*

Another translation of the psalm begins with these words: *You have looked deep into my heart, LORD, and you know all about me.*<sup>3</sup> The psalm begins by declaring God's intimate knowledge of us: God knows our movements and thoughts; God knows when we're resting and even what we will say. This is the type of intimacy we crave. It is also what we fear, especially if we view God as an all-powerful, critical judge who is waiting to punish us for any minor mistake in thought or action. But, for the psalmist, it's wonderful to be known by God.

The writer goes on to insist on God's close and constant presence with us: God is behind and before and upon us—even if we flee as far as we can possibly go. We cannot run from or hide from God's presence.

*Where could I go to get away from your spirit?*

*Where could I go to escape your presence?*

*If I went up to heaven, you would be there.*

*If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!*

*If I could fly on the wings of dawn,*

*stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—*

*even there your hand would guide me;*

*even there your strong hand would hold me tight!*

*If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me;*

*the light will become night around me,"*

*even then the darkness isn't too dark for you!*

*Nighttime would shine bright as day,*

*because darkness is the same as light to you!<sup>4</sup>*

The psalmist seems to find a sense of deep peace in the fact that we can't escape God. Or that there's no place we can go or be taken to where God isn't present. This is good news for those who feel distant from God – due to their physical location or life circumstances or personal choices. Even when no one else is there, God is present and God cares.

In some cases, however, this language would be frightening. For those who have experienced stalking or an abusive relationship, the idea of someone keeping tabs on you isn't comforting. The idea of no way to escape is terrifying.

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:1-6, *Common English Bible*

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 139:1, *Contemporary English Version*

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 139:7-12, *Common English Bible*

You may have noticed that some of the songs we used to sing a lot are not in our new hymnal. It's been four years since we sang "I Will Come to You in the Silence" or "Peace before Us." Those songs and others written by David Haas are heart songs for many people. They draw us closer to God and bring peace to our hearts. But when it came to light that David had a long history of sexual abuse under the guise of mentorship, the *Voices Together* committee decided not to include any of his songs in the new hymnal.<sup>5</sup> These songs may continue to bring peace to some who sing them, but for others, hearing them is traumatic. The same may be true with this psalm.

For God's presence to bring peace, we must realize that God's presence is for our good. The reality of God's unrelenting presence is only good news if we understand God's abiding love and believe that God desires our flourishing. I hope this is the case for you.

Next, the psalmist declares that not only does God know us intimately and in all places, but God also knows us in all times.

*You are the one who created my innermost parts;  
you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.  
I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.  
Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.  
My bones weren't hidden from you  
when I was being put together in a secret place,  
when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my embryo,  
and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me,  
before any one of them had yet happened.*<sup>6</sup>

God has known us since we were "unformed substance"<sup>7</sup> and knows all of our days. God was there when we were developing in our mother's womb. God is deeply connected to us from our beginning until our end. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

When I've preached on this psalm before, it's been with a theme of honoring our bodies. In a time when biblical passages are used to judge the worth of someone's body and dictate how someone can use their body, this celebration of God's presence at the very beginning of our physical existence is good news indeed. Paying attention to all parts of who we are – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual – is necessary as we seek peace within. God wants us to love and care for our bodies.

Reading on:

*God, your plans are incomprehensible to me!  
Their total number is countless!  
If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand!  
If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you.*<sup>8</sup>

This is where our readers theater ended this morning, but I want to continue with Psalm 139.

*If only, God, you would kill the wicked!  
If only murderers would get away from me—  
the people who talk about you, but only for wicked schemes;  
the people who are your enemies,  
who use your name as if it were of no significance.  
Don't I hate everyone who hates you?  
Don't I despise those who attack you?*

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<sup>5</sup> [Replacing the songs of David Haas - Voices Together Hymnal](#)

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:13-16, *Common English Bible*

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 139:16, *New Revised Standard Version*

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 139:17-18, *Common English Bible*

*Yes, I hate them—through and through!  
They've become my enemies too.*<sup>9</sup>

It's not unusual for psalms to contain sections we'd rather not read, that make us uncomfortable, that express hatred of enemies and desire for retribution. But I think there is value in these expressions. Anger and hate are legitimate human emotions. We all experience them. It's good to acknowledge them and to express them in healthy ways rather than to deny them, let them build up, and have them come out in ways that harm us or other people.

Who better to confess our desire for vengeance to than to God? Who better to leave retribution up to than to God? Expressing these real emotions in healthy ways allows us to then channel them into productive ways of addressing the relationships and situations that cause them.

The psalmist ends with a prayer, inviting God to truly know them.

*Examine me, God! Look at my heart!  
Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!  
Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me,  
then lead me on the eternal path!*<sup>10</sup>

Here is the prayer from a different Bible translation.

*Look deep into my heart, God,  
and find out everything  
I am thinking.  
Don't let me follow evil ways,  
but lead me in the way  
that time has proven true.*<sup>11</sup>

This prayer is written by someone who feels truly known and truly loved by God. It reminds me of words written by singer-songwriter Lauren Daigle in her song "You Say."

*I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough  
Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up  
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low  
Remind me once again just who I am because I need to know  
You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing  
You say I am strong when I think I am weak  
And you say I am held when I am falling short  
And when I don't belong, You say I am Yours  
And I believe, I believe,  
What You say of me, I believe*<sup>12</sup>

I invite you to listen to the entire song – and others by Lauren including *Trust in You*, *Love Like This*, and *Thank God I Do*.<sup>13</sup> Many of her songs remind me of the psalms. You may not appreciate her music as much as I do, but I trust that her words will speak to you.

Millenia before Lauren wrote songs and centuries before Jesus told his disciples to abide in him, the writer of Psalm 139 provided a beautiful expression of how God abides with us. Even though we cannot understand the fullness of God, even when we try to run away or hide from the presence of God, we are held and led, loved, and sustained by the eternal Creator. We are truly known and truly loved. When our identity is grounded in that astounding reality, then we can, indeed, know peace.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>9</sup> Psalm 139:19-22, *Common English Bible*

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 139:23-24, *Common English Bible*

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 139:23-24, *Contemporary English Version*

<sup>12</sup> [you say lauren daigle lyrics - Google Search](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Lauren Daigle - You Say \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#), [Lauren Daigle - Trust In You \(Lyric Video\) - YouTube](#), [Lauren Daigle ~ Love Like This \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#), [Lauren Daigle - Thank God I Do \(Official Lyric Video\) - YouTube](#)