

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: December 11: Psalm 139: Some Notes

Psalm 139

The Message

139 1-6 GOD, investigate my life;
get all the facts firsthand.

I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.

You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.

You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.

I look behind me and you're there,
then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.

This is too much, too wonderful—
I can't take it all in!

7-12 Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?

If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!

If I flew on morning's wings
to the far western horizon,

You'd find me in a minute—
you're already there waiting!

Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!"

It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

13-16 Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.

I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!

I worship in adoration—what a creation!
You know me inside and out,

you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.

Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,

The days of my life all prepared
before I'd even lived one day.

17-22 Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful!
God, I'll never comprehend them!

I couldn't even begin to count them—
any more than I could count the sand of the sea.

Oh, let me rise in the morning and live always with you!
And please, God, do away with wickedness for good!

And you murderers—out of here!—

all the men and women who belittle you, God,
infatuated with cheap god-imitations.
See how I hate those who hate you, GOD,
see how I loathe all this godless arrogance;
I hate it with pure, unadulterated hatred.
Your enemies are my enemies!
²³⁻²⁴ Investigate my life, O God,
find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—
then guide me on the road to eternal life.

Baptist Hymnal 1991

69: [Eternal Father, Strong to Save](#)

73: [God Moves in a Mysterious Way](#)

456: [Precious Lord, Take My Hand](#)

The Hymnal 1982: according to the use of the Episcopal Church

345: [Savior, again to thy dear Name we raise](#)

398: [I sing the almighty power of God](#)

579: [Almighty Father, strong to save](#)

Psalter Hymnal (Gray)

253: [Praise to the Lord, the Almighty](#)

324: [Forth in Your Name, O Lord, I Go](#)

434: [God Moves in a Mysterious Way](#)

You could argue that this is the most challenging as well as the most memorable psalm in the whole Book of Psalms. The writer(s), not being faced with light pollution, and not being supported by much science or by a welfare state or by a health service, knew that (s)he was pretty small and vulnerable in a big, old, and often hostile, universe. But (s)he could say that God knew him/her in a way that not even his/her family could know him/her. We know about billions of stars, billions of miles, billions of years, billions of people; and we, if we say this psalm, are saying that God knows us intimately: God is closer to us than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.

Think of the person or people you know best.... and you will probably feel that you know in part, but not in whole, not in detail. They can still surprise you.

But the challenge of the psalm doesn't stop there. If God is concerned about the minute to minute and life-long doings and welfare of David the King, God is concerned about the minute to minute and life-long doings of David the cess pool cleaner. Are we? The psalmist has his explosive moment about his/God's enemies; but the logic of the psalm is that God is just as concerned about those enemies as he is about the psalmist. Maybe a teacher is unlikely to know every member of the class equally well; a doctor or nurse unlikely to know every patient equally well; an employer or team manager unlikely to

know every team member equally well... That isn't God's way. Wellington is reported to have described his soldiers as cannon fodder. Nobody bothered accounting for each and every slave that died in the course of the big project. That isn't God's way. In the Covid outbreak, some people were held by some other people to be of less value than others. That isn't God's way. Abortion and euthanasia are complicated issues, but.....

Then there is the reality that not every birth is physically and mentally "perfect". How do we deal with "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the context of "badly made"? (At the very least, we need to hesitate about "imperfection" meaning without value. Some have not hesitated!)

If God feels that way about me, then I need at least to think twice before feeling otherwise about other people. They matter: each and every one of them matters, infinitely.