

What God knows

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I really like smart people. I don't mean smartly dressed. I don't really care how people dress, as you can see. But I like people with, like, big brains, people who know a lot of stuff, people whose brains are just so enormous that really they should be wheeled around in a cart behind them. You know, sometimes you come across people who just seem to know so much about so many things, and it's intriguing listening to them explaining things and describing the world around us, and they've just got such a vast knowledge about so many topics.

So, Sir David Attenborough, you know, people love to hear him explaining the natural world. And sometimes these big-brained beauties turn up in town to do a book signing, or make some kind of public appearance. So, you might be one of those people who thinks, wow, Jordan Peterson's in town. I'm going to go and hear what he's got to say. I might even get to meet him. Or maybe Caroline Criado Perez is your hero. So, you go along, and you want to hear what she's got to say about feminism in the 21st century, and you wait for her afterwards so that she will sign your copy of her book. And this even happens with Christians. There's a really well-known New York preacher, Tim Keller. About 10 years ago, I was in London hearing him speak, and there was a bunch of us there from Edinburgh, and somebody who I think is here this morning was with me. And after Tim Keller spoke, this New York pastor, this chap queued up to meet Tim Keller.

This big-brained pastor, Manhattan preacher, written hundreds of books. And my friend queued up to meet Tim Keller, and he got to the top of the queue, shook hands with the great Dr. Keller, and said, hi, I'm so-and-so. And Dr. Keller went, oh, I know you. I read your blog. Okay, wow.

What a humbling but inspiring moment. So, you know, it's amazing to meet somebody who knows a lot, but when the person who knows a lot knows you, that's even more amazing. And then they might say, you're right, let's go for dinner, or a cup of coffee. I'd really love to find out more about what you think about the world. Well, the amazing thing for us in the psalm that we've got this morning is that here we have the God who knows all things about the universe we inhabit, the world we live in, how it came to be, what its future is. The God who knows everything about everything, knows everything about you. He knows you in a real personal way, and he knows you in a way that he says, right, I want to sit down with you. I want to get to know you and to be in your life. So, we're going to think about the psalm to just think about how God knows us in a very intimate way, and then I'm going to say that God knows us in a very extensive way, and then just think for a moment about how much we know God. So, God knows us intimately,

God knows us extensively, and then how much do you and I really know God? So, the psalm reminds us in its beautiful way, it's such a wonderful poetic psalm, the psalm reminds us of God's all-seeing knowledge of us. Lord, you search me, and you've known me. You know when I sit up. You know when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path, my lying down. You're acquainted with all my ways. So, that means that as a human being, you live out the whole of your life from beginning to end. Every second, every thought is lived out before the face of God. So, that's one thing that the psalm does then is it gives you this knowledge that the whole of life is lived in the presence of God.

[4 : 39] Theologians have a word for that. They call it *coram deo*, living before the face of God. The Christian writer R.C. Sproul says, to live *coram deo* is to live one's entire life in the presence of God under the authority of God to the glory of God. To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing, whatever we are doing, and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze. He is omnipresent and omniscient. He sees it all. He knows it all.

So, that's the big idea in this psalm, isn't it? If there's one thing that you can take away from this psalm, it's that He knows you in every tiny detail of your life. You may think that so many aspects of your life are mundane or irrelevant, that the details are so trivial that nobody could care about them, and yet God says, I care, I know, I see, I notice. When you're at work, you know, scribbling on your pad, daydreaming, frustrated and bored, I know. I know the small things that you do for other people, the kind things, the hard things. I know it all. All of life, then, is lived and acted out in the presence of God. That's an amazing thought to have that consciousness in your life, isn't it? All I do, I am doing in the presence of God. None of it is hidden from Him. He's all-knowing. God is greater than our hearts, and He knows all things, is the way the

Apostle John puts it in one of his letters. And this knowledge is a really personal knowledge. It's not just that God knows about you, that your name's on a list somewhere. But He knows you in the same way that you know the people that are closest to you.

So, you know, when you know a friend or a colleague or a family member, you know their habits, you know their manners, you know their morals, you know their ethics, you know their desires, their dreams, you know, before they speak, you know what they're going to say because you know them so well. And that's what the Psalm says about God's knowledge of you. Even before a word is on your lips, He knows it. He knows you in the most personal and intimate and careful way. It's a deep personal knowledge. He discerns your thoughts. He searches them out. He understands your motives, your fears, your anxieties, your dreams and longings. The Psalmist says this is too wonderful for him to begin to get his head around. Such knowledge, he says in verse 6, is too wonderful for me. It's so high I can't even begin to attain to it. It's a mind-blowing reality, the depth of knowledge that

God has for you. Every detail of your life. Jesus put it this way, didn't He? That He's counted every single hair on your head. He knows the color of your toenails if you paint them. He knows the name of your deodorant. Just all the details of your life are known to Him. He even knows the inner commentary that's going on in your head at this moment as you listen to this sermon. He's got it all nailed down. There's nothing hidden. There's no secrets. He knows you. You're an open book in His sight.

[8 : 41] He reads you. He's got you. Matthew Henry, who is a sort of well-known Bible commentator from long ago in the far distant past, he says, God takes strict notice of every step we take, every right step and every wrong step. He knows what rule we walk by, what end we walk towards, and what company we walk with. Even when I am withdrawn from all company, thou, Lord, knowest what I have in my heart. There is not a vain word, not a good word, but thou knowest from what thought it came, and with what design it was uttered. Wherever we are, we are under the eye and hand of God.

So that's the first thing that the psalmist is really getting into your head is God knows you intimately. He knows you intimately. I don't want to say God knows you extensively. Okay? He knows your past. He knows your future, and He knows your today. So the psalmist says that, doesn't He? He says that God knows our past. Verse 13, for you formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb.

He knows where you came from. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and your book was written every one of them. The days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. God can look right in to the very, very, very, very beginning of your prenatal existence, to the womb, where you were formed in intricate and beautiful and wonderful ways. The language that the psalmist uses is of an artist, a creative process, taking colors and mixing them together and weaving something really beautiful. And that's you. God did that. Before you had any moment of consciousness, God was there making you and making you wonderfully and beautifully in His own image. My life matters. Why? Because I'm handmade, handcrafted in heaven. Your life matters because you are handmade by the living God. You're the work of His hands. You're the product of the creative genius of the mind of God. He mixed all the colors of your life together, all your days planned out by Him. There is a God-sized plan for your life. He knows your past, where you come from, how you were made what you are. This psalm is one of the reasons why Christians have such a high view of prenatal life. The psalm teaches the great Christian ethic that every life really matters. Every fetus, every child in the womb is a creation of God, woven together by Him and for Him.

This is why Christians carry a really strong conviction that God gives and creates life and only God can take life. And for us that limits the choices that people have in pregnancy and the choices about what they can do with their own bodies. We have compassion for people who suffer, of course, but we have a really high degree of respect for God's gift of life. And that's here written in this psalm for us in such a beautiful way. We value every life from the moment of its conception to the moment of its death. So God knows the past, the beginning of every person, and God knows the future. No matter what the future, the psalm says, God's in control.

God's in control of my future and your future. He's in control of that future with a power greater than death. We have no fear for the future, truly and ultimately, because although we don't know the future, He does. Death is disarmed because God is there. The psalmist says in verse 8, if I ascend to heaven, you're there. If I take my bed or if I make my bed in shul, you are there.

[13 : 53] The place of the dead from which there is no return, God is there. Death doesn't exclude God's work, God's power, or God's presence. He is a power greater than death. For the Christian, death means to be with God, to be with Christ. He is redeemed and overcome day. Later on in verse 18, He looks and He says, when I awake, I am still with you. Theologians read there this hope of resurrection life, that one day we will awake into the presence of God forever. God's got a firm hand. You know, you might not have a lot of confidence about your future sometimes, and you might carry quite a lot of concerns about your future a lot of the time. And God says, I hold every day and every moment of your future in the firm, unshakable grip of my hand. All your days were written in my book before they came to be, God says. And God has written a better story for your life than you could ever have written yourself. But God also knows you today. God knows you today.

Whatever it is that's going on in your life today, He knows it. Whatever your thoughts, your dreams, your fears, God knows it. You know, you might try and fake it to make it with other people.

You might be quite slippery, disingenuous person. But God knows it. Now, that can be really comforting, but it can also spook some people. And the psalmist is kind of spooked by this, isn't he? He wants to run from the presence of God. This amazing, incredible, intense, powerful knowledge that God has of him is actually driving him to the edge. He says, where can I go? Where can I flee from this intense, powerful, but sometimes oppressive presence of God?

Where shall I go from your spirit? Verse 7 says, where shall I flee from your presence? The psalmist is slightly freaked. But even death can't hide him from God. He says, maybe the night will cover me so that God can't see me. Maybe the darkness will cloak me so that God's gaze won't find me. But he knows that there's no way that he can hide from God. To God, the night is as bright as the day. Verse 12, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. It's an amazing thought. What no one else can see, he sees. When you feel lost in the darkness, you are not hidden from his sight.

The darkness is as dark. The darkness is not dark to you, Lord. He sees through our disguises. He sees our hiding places.

[17 : 31] None of us can hide. You know, we put on our makeup, our wig and our sunglasses and try and sneak out the back of the room.

But God isn't fooled. He sees you sneaking around. He sees what's good on. He sees how you want to escape from it all sometimes.

And hide yourself away from everyone. And he's there. And he reads your fears and your loneliness and your anxiety.

And he comes to comfort. And to bless with his love. Because the amazing thing about this, Sam, is it says, not only does God know absolutely everything about you, but he's absolutely committed to you.

God knows me in all my circumstances. And he isn't put off. That's quite an incredible thought. You know, he gets to see every last little ugly bit of my darkness.

[18 : 43] And he's not repelled by me. That's really great. That's an amazing thought. And when things seem dark and overwhelming to us, it doesn't look that way to God.

And for those of us who are Christians, we know that we come to Christ clothed in His righteousness.

That God sees us not just in our ugliness and sin, but in the beauty and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Now, there are times we really want to get away from God.

Most Christians will go through seasons where they feel sad, depressed, full of doubt, full of fear, uncertain about the future, uncertain of their faith, unconvinced about God and His love for them.

I remember a time after surgeries a number of years ago, and I just felt very physically low. And as I felt physically low, I also felt really spiritually low. I just wished I could get away from everything, including God.

[20 : 01] I was quite annoyed with Him, I think, for some of the things that I was going through. But there was a song that really was a beautiful song for me at the time, which was, Oh, love that will not let me go.

I rest my weary soul in Thee. I give Thee back the life I owe, that in Thy ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.

Oh, joy that seeketh me through pain. I cannot close my heart to Thee. I chase the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be.

So God knows you intimately in the very details of your life. God knows you extensively. He knows your past, your future, and He knows this moment.

He knows you today. He's involved in every moment and aspect of your life. I just want to go to this question about how much do you know Him?

[21 : 06] The fact that God loves you and refuses to give up on you is what allows us to trust ourselves and our lives to Him. At the end of the psalm, the psalmist says this.

He says, I reject, verse 24, I reject every way that sorrows your heart, Lord. The things that grieve you, Lord, I am not going to go in those ways.

I'm going to take the path to life. Do you know God well enough? Do you know God well enough to say, God, I want to live the ways and walk the ways that are beautiful in your eyes?

And I want to leave the ways that grieve you? This is such a sort of beautiful, comforting, you know, there's a sort of warmth and a grace to this psalm.

And then all of a sudden you get to, I really hate these people and I hate them so much. You hate them, I hate them. Everybody hates these evildoers. And it can feel like it's a really kind of jarring note in the psalm.

[22 : 24] Where does it come from? It comes from how much he loves the beauty of God. And because he loves God's beauty and goodness and holiness so much, every wrong thing grieves him.

And makes him sorrow. He knows so much of who God is. That everything that's opposed to God, everything that's evil, disturbs him.

And God wants to lift you from where you are and bring you to know him in that same way.

Not in a kind of distant, remote way. But to know him up close, face to face, personal.

So that you are intoxicated with God. And in love with God. And that that's your joy, your delight, your comfort, your praise in life.

[23 : 39] You know, often we don't want to get involved with other people, do we? The beggar in the street, the junkie in the shop, the drinker on the bench. We avoid them so often. But the amazing thing about God is this.

He sees the utter mess of our lives. Every dark and nasty thing about us. And instead of saying, I'm not getting involved, he says, I'm going to take that. I will carry it to the cross.

I will pay for all that sin. No matter how much running and hiding we do, God comes after us. We cannot flee him. You may be trying to avoid God with all your heart these days.

But God is not avoiding you. He's calling you. He's pursuing you. He's offering you His grace.

He's offering you His Son. He's offering you forgiveness. So I'm going to give Matthew Henry the last word in this sermon. He says this.

[24 : 38] How should we then delight to meditate on God's love to sinners in Jesus Christ? God's knowledge of you is so amazing.

And yet He still loves you in a greater way. How should we then delight to meditate on God's love to sinners in Jesus Christ? The sum of which exceeds all reckoning.

I'm going to ask you that next week just to see if you remember it. No, I won't. But it's a nice way to think, isn't it? Just how good it is to meditate on God's love to sinners in Jesus.

It's communion today. So we're going to finish. I'm going to pray. And then we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper. So let me pray.

And then we're going to sing When My Heart Is Torn Asunder. Father in heaven, we thank you for your incredible knowledge of us, which searches us out in the very depths of our being.

[25 : 46] And yet, thank you that you don't just shake your head in despair and walk away. But you decide that you will rescue us and restore us. You will redeem us and renew us.

You will make us holy and beautiful. And one day you will present us faultless in the sight of God. We have a great future. Amen.