

## PSALM 139 verses 1-12

- <sup>1</sup> You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.
- <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- <sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.
- <sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.
- <sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.
- <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.
- <sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?
- <sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- <sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.
- <sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"  
<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you..

## MEDITATION

Until a few years ago Psalm 139 would not have been described as popular. However, in recent years it has been sung to the tune "Highland Cathedral". That is the tune which opened this video clip. The tune has certainly helped to popularise the psalm.

The psalmist is making the point that God is everywhere. He realises there is no place he can go to and escape God's presence. In his mind he climbs up to heaven and finds God. Then he descends to Sheol, the realm of the dead, which was believed to be beneath the earth, but again he finds God. He imagines flying to the East, where morning dawns, and going in the opposite direction to the limits of the western sea, but the hand of God is always there to guide him. He remembers how darkness can hide him from his fellow human-beings and he thinks that may conceal him from God, but even that does not work because darkness is not dark to God. He concludes that God is always at his side. Theologians call this the *omnipresence* of God – he is present everywhere. But this is not simply a lesson in theology. It has implications for our lives.

It is comforting and reassuring. There is no place we can go, no situation we may face, no difficulty we may encounter, but God will be there in the midst of it with us. In the current pandemic God is there. Amidst all the restrictions of lockdown, God is at our side. He is there to guard us and to uphold us. There is nothing in the world which can separate us from his presence and his love.

The message of Psalm 139 is also deeply challenging. If God is always there, he witnesses our every move; he sees all that we do. We may be able to conceal some of our actions from other people, if they are not around us when we perform them. But God sees everything. He penetrates our thoughts as well as our actions and words. The psalmist feels that God has searched him and known him. Before a word slips off his tongue God knows what it is going to be. Here is the challenge for us. We need to ensure that all our actions, all our words, even our inmost thoughts are fit for him to see and hear.

So how do we react to this psalm? Does it fill us with fear, knowing there is no escape from God? Or does it fill us with joy, knowing that his loving presence is all around us?

## **PRAYER**

Lord God, we know that we have no need to ask for your presence with us, for you are already at our side. What we do ask is that we may be conscious of your nearness to us. When we are by ourselves, help us to know that you are with us. When we are with family or friends, help us to enjoy their company with you. We want you to journey with us, as we face the future. We want you to speak to us, as we travel on. We want you to impart your strength to us, as we confront the difficulties and dangers of the way.

May your presence be our protection when we are tempted. May your presence be our strength if suffering comes. May your presence be our light when the way ahead seems dark. Help us not to think of saying anything we would not want you to hear, not to do anything if we could not ask your blessing upon it.

O God our Father, we seek the blessing of your presence for our fellow Christians, wherever they serve you. Where they serve amidst war, famine or disaster, may they be upheld by your presence. Where they serve you amidst poverty, human degradation or disease, may they be sustained by your presence. Where they are persecuted or imprisoned, may they be conscious of your nearness to them.

We pray for our rulers, since there is so much to cause them anxiety at the present time. Grant that they may know you are with them, as they deliberate upon the virus, the restrictions of lockdown, the economy and other important matters.

We pray for local councillors and all who lead our community life, as they face the changing patterns of our society and its challenges. May they too experience your presence with them in all their endeavours.

Heavenly Father, we pray for the suffering, especially for any whom we know, and for the doctors, nurses and loved ones who tend them. May they know that you are indeed with them. We think also of the bereaved, those who journey on alone. May they truly feel you are close at hand.

We ask for the blessing of your presence on all your people everywhere. AMEN.