

Psalm 139

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- ¹ You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying
down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are
there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's

womb.

- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths
of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written
in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts,
God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand
— when I awake, I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion
against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Sermon Summary: Along with depression, anxiety, and addiction, loneliness is one of the biggest health crises in our world today. This psalm has a lot to say about our experience of loneliness, as well as a culture like ours that produces so much loneliness.

The longings of loneliness. The first three stanzas talk about 1) God's knowledge of us (vv. 1-6), God's presence with us (vv. 7-12), and God's creation of us (vv. 13-18). These three things - being known deeply, experiencing someone's presence, and a sense of belonging - are three of

our deepest human longings. They are part of our created design, and we should embrace them (rather than feel embarrassed or weak).

The challenge of loneliness. Even though we long to be known and loved, we are afraid to be known that deeply (vv. 5-6), and intuitively seek to “flee” from it (v. 7). In other words, our fear of rejection is greater than our fear of being alone. This is because we are captive to the idea that we “belong” to ourselves, rather than God (“rebellion” against God; cf. v. 21). That level of relational breakdown with God will inevitably result in relational breakdown with others.

The end of loneliness. In spite of his desire to flee God, David experiences a change when he realizes that God holds his hand in the darkness (vv. 10-12). God’s knowledge of him becomes precious (v. 17), leading him to welcome God’s knowledge and presence (v. 23)! This is because true intimacy requires radical vulnerability. Even though David was afraid of this kind of vulnerability, Jesus became radically vulnerable on the cross, losing God’s face and presence, so God could hold our hand when we’re alone in a dark place. This renewed intimacy and vulnerability with God leads us to renewed intimacy and vulnerability with others.

Application Questions:

1. Describe your past or current struggles with loneliness. We recognize this is a vulnerable topic, so please only share if you’re comfortable. (If you don’t share, we hope you will be encouraged that you are not alone in your experience.)
2. What do you think about the three longings of loneliness (being known, others’ presence, a sense of belonging)? What are the dangers or pitfalls of not acknowledging or embracing these needs?
3. We noted our culture’s idea that “I am my own and I belong to myself,” and mentioned a few responsibilities that “self-belonging” forces on us (justifying our own existence, creating our own meaning, identity, and morality).¹ Where do you see the influence of these things in your own life?
4. How might greater vulnerability and intimacy with God transform the vulnerability and intimacy you’re capable of with others? What are some ways this psalm points you to Jesus and help you experience it?

¹ For a deeper treatment of this subject, see Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021).