

As you know, I often write about the Psalms for these emails and so I've chosen to look at Psalm 139, which is one of my favourite psalms and, if you don't know if well, I commend it to you heartily now! Do please read it all through. When this psalm comes up in services, it is not often read in full. This is partly because it is quite long but partly because some of it is quite difficult for Christians to contemplate.

It starts off with a few verses which acknowledge that God knows us better than we do ourselves. So far so good – we probably sense this already. In fact, it's a bit scary! The next few verses say that we cannot escape from God. There are some very comforting phrases – “even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast” (v9) – “even darkness is no darkness with you” (v10). The writer is in awe of the Creator – “I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are your works, my soul knows well” (v13).

The psalm goes on to say that God has known us as we were being formed in the womb and how God has helped the writer with words of counsel – so numerous that they were more than the grains of sand.

We then arrive at the verses which we now find difficult today. The psalmist asks God to slay the wicked who not only threaten his life, but also speak against God. The psalmist finishes this section with “I hate them with a perfect hatred; they have become my own enemies also” (v22). As Christians, we find this difficult as we strive not to have these sorts of thoughts. We need to remember, of course, that this psalm is like the voice of a King who will have been the target for enemies of his realm and is asking for help from God to save him as the leader of his people. He knows that his hatred will be acceptable to the God who has made him King.

As Christians we should strive to “love your neighbour as yourself”. The verse from the psalm certainly doesn't follow this injunction! But as ever, the psalm just reflects what many of us from time to time might feel even though we shouldn't. The psalmist finishes with much calmer and more measured and contrite verses:

“Search me out, O God, and know my heart; try me and examine my thoughts. See if there is any way of wickedness in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” (vs 23-24)

In *Reflections on the Psalms* (Church House Publishing), Jeremy Worthen (once a tutor during my time on the Reader training course) says “we are able to know in part, but we are *completely* known by God. We can, with more or less success, conceal our actions from other people, but God sees it all and knows our intentions before we act, and our words before we say them”. He goes on to say that we think our lives are shaped by our knowledge, by our achievements and limitations, when in fact it rests on God's knowledge of us.

Let us pray:  
Creator God,  
may every breath we take be for your glory,  
may every footstep show you as our way,  
that, trusting in your presence in this world,  
we may, beyond this life, still be with you  
where you are alive and reign  
for ever and ever. Amen.