

“FOR SPIRITUAL TRUST”
A Sermon Preached at
FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Belleville, IL
By The Rev. Rob Dyer
August 10, 2025
(transcribed from audio file)

Today’s reading is from Psalm 139. I’ll be reading the original text and Pastor Rob will be providing summary of each section along the way. Hear now God’s Holy Word in Psalm 139.

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it. NRSVue*

Lord, you know me completely – every thought, every action, every hidden part of me. Your perfect knowledge of me is a wonder I can’t fully grasp.

Or in other words ... **God, you get me completely!**

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, “surely the darkness shall cover me,*

*and night wraps itself around me,”
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you. NRSVue*

There is nowhere I can go to escape you, Lord. Even in the darkest moments, you are there to lead me and make me feel secure.

Or in other words... **God, You're always with me!**

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know 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 beheld my unformed substance;
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed. NRSVue*

You created me with intention, Lord; My very existence is your wonderful handiwork. All my days are already known by you.

Or in other words... **God, You made me on purpose!**

*How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them – they are more than the sand;
when I wake, I am still with you.
O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me –
those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with a perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked or hurtful way in me;
and lead me in the way everlasting. NRSVue*

You think and see in so much bigger ways than I can even imagine. Now, Lord, rid the world and me of any evil or hurtful ways, and then lead me on the path of righteousness.

Or in other words... **God, help me do better!**

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

One of the things I like to do in my free time is play the piano. I'm not really great. Took some years of lessons, but inevitably when you tell people that you play piano, then they will say, "Oh, well play something." So, there are songs that I would love to play. I don't play a lot in public. I don't know how this is going to go, but this is the song I would like to be able to play. (He plays a few bars of a song)

I have to stop there because I don't know the rest. I love that song because it's called The Luckiest. I love that song because it makes me think about my wife. I love that song because it's from one of my favorite movies about time and I love that song because it's one of my favorite artists, Ben Feltz and I wish I could play that whole thing through. Most of the time I'm too nervous to try to play that cause I've only been playing that for a couple of years. So, when people say, "Oh play something" I go back to my little kid taking piano and do ... (He plays a few bars of Scott Joplin).

When I had young children, I used to play that. And I played it so much when I was younger that I didn't have to look at the keys when I played. My kids would say, "How do you play without looking at the keys?" It was like a magic power that I had. But that's about the limit of it.

I just want to try something. Hey Mat. Go to the piano for a second. I didn't tell him this week I was going to do this to him. Hey Mat. Um. Play something. (Mat plays a few bars). Very nice. Very nice. Very good. Play something else. Hold it. Who wants to make a request? What do you want to hear?

Come Thou Font. (Mat plays it)

Very good. Andy Link's got one. Smashing Pumpkins! Very good. I'll let you off the hook now, Mat.

It is a completely different experience when Mat plays the piano than when I play and it's not just the fact that he's 10 times better. When he plays, he's doing a completely different thing than what I'm doing. When I play the piano, I'm just desperately trying to remember the individual notes of the song I play. I'm relying on muscle memory from years of playing a song and that's how it's coming out of me. There's not a single moment that I think about what key that song is in, or what chords are being used in that song. I have no clue about any of the chords in any of the stuff that I play.

But when Mat plays and I know this because I interrogated him earlier about this. He didn't know why I was doing it, but I knew it was different for him. It is. He immediately has to think of what are the chords in that song. And then he just knows how to move from chord to chord and thinks about the progression and maybe the special little bits that need to be in between, but it's at a whole different level of coming at the process of playing the piano. And when you get to that level you can play a lot more songs cause you're not just memorizing notes. You understand the way music works. You understand the structure of it and in fact it makes it so much easier for you to play so much more.

Trusting God is one of the things that when we learn to trust God, it's just a fundamental knowledge that helps us in carrying out our lives as Christians. So, we're not memorizing all these individual rules we're supposed to follow and behaviors we're supposed to have, but instead having a trust of God is one of those fundamental bits of Christian development that we have and maturing in our faith that helps us in all sorts of circumstances.

This Psalm, Psalm 139 is basically about trusting God. It starts off simply saying, **God, you get me completely.** You know me. Being known by God was a big step to trusting God. How can you trust a God that doesn't even know us or understand us. Surely there are things about me that are too different - that don't fit.

It goes on, the Psalm says, **God you're always with me.** God has not just created us and said, well good luck with that mess. But when we come to an understanding that Psalm 139 guides us to know that God is always with us. In the dark valleys – in the valley of the shadow of death, to go back to Psalm 23, but also on those mountain tops. And in times of peace and calm God is with us and having that understanding builds our trust of God.

Also knowing that **God made you on purpose**. You're not a mistake. You're not a mess-up. Even though you might have messed stuff up, God created you on purpose. And knowing that, knowing that builds a trust, that one who created you, specifically formed you as it says in the words of the Psalm, this is a purpose that was given in your creation.

And finally comes the end of the Psalm where the psalmist says, **Lord, help me do better**. Because another one of those building blocks of trusting God is having the humility to take some instruction from God. Having the humility to think that you need to continually discover who God is. Even as we understand scripture we know that there is more that we need to learn as we go through. It's not as if you all went to confirmation class and found out everything and now you don't need to learn anything more. You figured it all out. Right? You're just gonna stick through it and coast through the rest of life. It's not the way it works.

Even our understanding of God has evolved for us as people. I don't mean just modern day. I mean within the construction of the Bible itself. The Psalms themselves were written over hundreds of years. And the Old Testament itself is written... so when we read things written in the Psalms, we're sometimes trying to decipher things that were written thousands of years ago.

The writings within the Psalms range over as much as a 500-year span. Can you imagine the difference between the way we think today and the way we thought in the 1500's? 500 years is a big-time frame, and so people's understanding of God changed through the years, and it is reflected in the Bible. So, sometimes we run into things, and this is where sometimes our Bible reading can hit these speed bumps.

We get to a Psalm, and it talks about God in a way that doesn't sound Christian to us because we have our modern knowing of God. Because Jesus has come and taught us that our enemy is a spiritual enemy in this world, a spiritual brokenness, a development of our understanding of what it is to be a person of faith and so you get lines like in the final section of the Psalm. I don't know if anyone else got caught up a little bit there, but when it said, *God, I want you to destroy those other people. Those people who are enemies of yours, God, who speak badly. I want you to just get them, God. I hate them too. You know I hate them. I hate them real good, God.* That just doesn't sound like Jesus. Ooh, I don't like that.

Sometimes when we read the Old Testament passages, we hear that type of language, you have to understand there are some things we need to move through because our understanding of God has evolved over the years. And the God who is revealed in

the earliest of our Bible scriptures is not the same picture we get in the later writing. I'm not saying that these things don't go together, what I'm saying is that the people of God developed in their understanding of God and that development continues to this day. And it continues in your life. My goodness, the way you understood God when you were a child, or even as a young adult is different than the way that you do now, if you are of an older age. And it shouldn't just freeze because bad things happen when we just stop learning and stop growing.

Two big things happen. One, we get real full of ourselves. Oh my gosh! I mean, when we figure that we have nothing more for God to teach us and shape in our hearts and our lives, suddenly we're the stuff. I mean, you know, I know what I'm doing. I can figure these things out. I don't need to study the Bible. I don't need to go to a class. I don't need to learn at all. I've got it all figured out. I don't have time for that. I've got to use all this beautiful wisdom I have now. I don't have time for learning. It builds up a very dangerous love of self. The kind that makes us cocky. The kind that makes us destructive. The kind that makes us less than who we are really meant to be.

The second thing when we stop asking God to help us do better, to develop. The second thing that happens to us is that we start making God in our image. See what happens is, we freeze our understanding of God and then as we move through life we run into something and we go, what does my faith have to say about this. Well, if we are frozen in our understanding, we just assume that God thinks just like us. Oh! Yeah! You look at something and you don't like that public figure, or you don't like that thing that's going on, well, I betcha God doesn't like it either. Oh! And the things that you do like, those issues or sides that you find yourself on, oh my goodness the Lord is on your side every time. Every time! You are the most amazing example of righteousness the world has ever seen. How do you do it? How is it that you and God are always perfectly aligned? I don't know, maybe it's that you have something to teach God. Maybe God needs to sit down with pen and paper and follow you around for a while. Or maybe what's happening is you are making God in your image instead of knowing that you are made in God's image.

The minute that we stop desiring to learn is a sign that we have given up on trusting God – trusting that God's ways as have been revealed to us over the history have a benefit to us, have something to give us to take into this world. There is a level of your spiritual maturity which can be a lot like my piano playing. I mean, it can pass off as pretty good or okay but at the end of the day you are just desperately trying to memorize little tidbits. You're not really understanding the great picture of what God is doing and what love and grace and mercy can be. You're just trying to follow

a bunch of little rules and not be too much of a jerk and amen. Or maybe your faith can be a little bit more like the way Mat plays the piano. Maybe understanding the principles of it, maybe understanding the structure of it and maybe understanding and truly trusting God which is one of those fundamental understandings for you to have.

And Psalm 139 is a gift to you in your spiritual journey because it reminds you of just how important it is for you to trust God more than you trust yourself. To trust God more than you trust and love that television. To trust God more than your favorite blogger. To trust God more than your favorite media stream. To trust God so that you can truly make this beautiful music in your life. Because at some point when someone finds out that you're a Christian, they're going to ask you to show it. Maybe you can tinker out a few notes, but maybe if you trust the Lord your God; maybe if you trust the one who has loved you, saved you, and sustained you, that instead you can play whatever melody or beautiful song your life needs to proclaim in that moment.

Let us be authentic and mature in learning and growing our faith and let it start with us just fundamentally trusting our God.

To God be the glory. Halleluiah and Amen.