

Inspiring Women

Every Day

JAN/FEB 2012

January

PSALM 139

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CHRIS LEDGER

February

UNDER PRESSURE

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CAROLINE FLETCHER

Plus ... Special Article, Ministry Report and CWR Events Page

CWR





CHRIS LEDGER

Chris Ledger worked for 18 years as a counsellor, supervisor and trainer in the NHS, and now has a private counselling service.

She enjoys speaking at Christian meetings and is a regular tutor on the CWR's *Insight* days. Her books include co-authoring those in the *Insight* series: depression, anxiety, anger, assertiveness, and perfectionism. As a Licensed Lay Minister at Greyfriars Church, Reading, Chris heads up the prayer ministry and co-leads the monthly Prayer Café. Having a very ill daughter, Chris knows how hard it is to hold on to a healthy esteem when life is very painful.



CAROLINE FLETCHER

Caroline completed an MPhil degree in Biblical Studies at Sheffield University. Study and work have always fitted alongside raising her three children whose ages range from 9 to 21. She

has been an open learning tutor for Spurgeon's College and The Open Theological College and has had a brief spell teaching RE and PSE in a local secondary school. Now a freelance writer, Caroline is married to an Anglican minister and lives in the Essex seaside resort of Walton-on-the-Naze. After a number of years of involvement in the young people's work at her local church, she currently helps with planning All-Age services and Messy Church.

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WEEKEND

Psalm 139

For reflection: Ecclesiastes 3:1

'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.'

As we begin this new year, let's reflect on the past year. No doubt there will be good memories and unfortunately, for some of us, sad, painful memories. Looking back at your happy memories thank God for them. Then recall your sad memories, with the inevitable disappointments, regrets and pain, and lay them at the foot of the cross – try to leave them there as you move forward into 2012.

As you cross the threshold into a new year, what is going through your mind?

Perhaps some see this new year offering a fresh start with exciting opportunities and challenges – for me, it's a year of the Olympics and a year when I reach the '70' mark! Maybe others are a little apprehensive, not knowing what the future holds: illness, unemployment, loss, difficult relationships and circumstances. But however you answer the question, 'I wonder what 2012 has in store for me?' there is one certainty – God never changes. His love is eternal and He will always be there *with* us and *for* us. Surrender yourself to God afresh at the beginning of this new year.

Optional further reading

Psalm 136; Philippians 3:12–14; Hebrews 12:1–3

The crown of the Psalms

Psalm 139:1–24

‘I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made ...’ (v.14)

For prayer and reflection

Heavenly Father, as I meditate on this psalm over the next month, may I grow closer to You as I open my heart to receive all You want to show me.

Over this month we will explore this wonderful psalm of praise to our Creator God. Written by David, the greatness of this psalm lies in its focus, introduced in the first words – ‘O LORD’. David immediately directs our attention away from himself and his circumstances, and makes God the central subject of this psalm. All else is secondary. To what extent is God central in our lives? Are we women who look inwardly, and harp on about our circumstances? Or are we more like David, praising God and allowing Him to live supreme in our lives (whatever we have done!)?

In this psalm, David conveys the intimate and personal relationship he has with God. David’s thoughts and language communicate a richness of emotional depth, revealing God as caring and painting a picture of Him as being infinitely powerful. Through beautiful images and expressive words, David exalts the greatness of God: He knows me (vv.1–6); He is my personal guide and protector (vv.7–12); He is my creator (vv.13–18); then these next verses move from worshipful awe to righteous indignation (vv.19–22); ending with the climax to this psalm as David invites God to search, test and know his heart and thoughts (vv.23–24). What confidence David has in God! No wonder Charles Spurgeon said, ‘The brightness of this psalm is like unto a sapphire of stone ... it flames out with such flashes of light as to turn night into day.’

I hope you are as excited as I am about studying this psalm together over the next month. We are God’s masterpiece, ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’, to be ‘me’ and to be ‘you’, according to God’s design.

God's torch light

TUES JAN 3

When was the last time you climbed up into your dark loft or walked down into your murky cellar with a torch light, looking for something specific? Perhaps you found what you were looking for. Or maybe you stumbled across something that caused you to flinch with pain because it was frustratingly in the way, or it reminded you of things you'd rather forget and keep hidden away.

Most of us have secrets hidden in the dark recesses of our hearts, some of which we are aware of, others which are so deeply buried in our unconscious that we have no clue they are there. But, in spite of all this, isn't it comforting that God knows all that is hidden – the good and the bad, the ugly and the beautiful – and He still loves and accepts us, warts and all! Whatever there is to discover, God knows. He doesn't condemn us for these things (Rom. 8:1–2) but wants us to become free and to walk in holiness, becoming the women He created us to be.

Therefore, consider inviting God to shine His light into your heart. The Holy Spirit is our strong ally in the battle for holiness and growth into our full potential. His inner voice will convict and heal when we invite Him to walk with us into those dark places. If we are inwardly honest with ourselves and accept all the facts He reveals, He will enable us to think things through to the right conclusions and make godly choices without overriding our personalities.

'For he [God] chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight' (Eph. 1:4). Would people see us like that? Holy and blameless?

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Psalm 139:1; 7:9;
17:3; 44:21
.....

'O LORD, you
have searched me
and you know me.'
(139:1)

.....
**For prayer and
reflection**
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**Heavenly Father,
shine Your light
into the dark
recesses of my
heart. Show me
what is hidden,
and give me the
courage to face
this and to change
what needs to be
changed.**

Our all-knowing God

.....
Psalm 139:2;

Matthew 9:4;

John 1:45–51;

2:24–25

‘You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.’ (139:2)

.....
For prayer and reflection

Thank You, Father, that You know every thought that crosses my mind. When they're not godly, help me to change destructive and critical thoughts into holier ones.

If ever you've been responsible for children you will probably have experienced times when your back was turned and a child was getting into mischief – as they do! Perhaps you've found yourself saying, 'I saw you doing ...' and the child retorts, 'I didn't do that,' only for you to reply, 'Oh yes you did, because I have eyes in the back of my head!'

The verses we are looking at this week reveal to us that God doesn't just have eyes in the back of His head, but has a 360 degree view, seeing *everything* that goes on in our lives. Yes, *everything*, because He is not only omniscient (He knows all things) but He is also omnipresent (He is everywhere). What an amazing, great God we have! Wherever we are, we're under the eye and hand of God. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

What is your response to this? One of excitement, like the psalmist? Or are you feeling a little unnerved, knowing that God sees every thought going through your head. Unfortunately we can't hide from Him!

When we find ourselves ashamed of what is going through our mind – the lies, pretence, criticism, hateful words – then the fact that God knows absolutely *everything* may not be such a comforting thought! I know that I'd want to shrink with shame if some of my thoughts were shouted out for the whole world to hear. What are your thoughts that you want to keep hidden? However, God isn't like 'Big Brother' spying on us, trying to catch us out. Yes, He sees our unrighteous thoughts and longs that we change, but He also sees the beauty He has created within us and enjoys our loving, gracious thoughts.

God knows!

God knows! This phrase is often used in a blasphemous way: 'How do I get to London?' 'God knows!' It means 'Don't ask me' or 'I've no idea'. How sad that this misuse of God's name is regarded by many as acceptable. Yet for Christians, when set in its proper context, it means just what it says: 'God knows'. Scripture tells us that God's knowledge has no limit – it's endless and unfathomable. Here in this psalm David considers God's 'all knowingness' as it relates to you, to me and to himself, ie to the *individual*. It's of practical personal relevance, relating to *our* lives, *our* circumstances, what we think and what we do.

So how can this truth that 'God knows' be integrated into our lives? This psalm celebrates God's love and acceptance of us as His creations. As a counsellor I'm aware that the difficulty and inability people have in loving and accepting themselves is a deep-rooted problem in our society. Unhappiness manifests itself in self-destructive ways. Some people are consumed by anger, others riddled with guilt, whilst many destroy everything and everyone around them because they cannot accept themselves for who they are.

Permit me to ask you a personal question. Do you love and accept yourself? 'All my ways' includes *all* our actions and *all* that affects us. This *all* is known to God and, wonderfully, He continues to love us, longing for us to learn to love and accept ourselves as well. Therefore let go of the inner critical voice and the self-hatred that easily destroys, forgiving yourself where appropriate and choosing to love yourself as a beautiful creation of God.

THURS JAN 5

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Psalm 139:3;
2 Kings 19:27;
Job 31:4
.....

'You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.'
(139:3)

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For prayer and reflection
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God knows that we are both beauty and beast, amazing and awful, with strengths and weaknesses, yet still loves us. Help me, Lord, to love myself.

.....
Matthew 6:19–21

‘Do not store up
 for yourselves
 treasures on
 earth ...’ (v.19)

Looking through magazines often leaves me dissatisfied. I don’t notice just how tired my own kitchen looks until I see the gleaming kitchen units inside their pages. I’m not bothered about the state of my settee until I catch an advert for a radiant white sofa.

In our materialistic Western society, we are fed the message that the more we have, the happier we are. Jesus, however, warns that wealth brings with it dangers and stresses. He says that the more possessions we have, the more things we have to worry about. The example of a lady I knew illustrates this perfectly. Her house became her life. It was so beautifully decorated and so immaculate that it would have fitted right into the pages of those glossy mags. But she could never keep her home looking perfect, no matter how hard she tried – and tried she did! Visiting children were a special source of stress as she followed the progress of their sticky fingers round her furniture with her ever-present can of polish! She became scared to go out in case someone broke in and damaged her property. She became trapped by her possessions.

.....
**For prayer and
 reflection**

**Lord, there is so
 much pressure to
 acquire ever more,
 to have bigger and
 better things. Give
 me the strength
 not to be driven
 by materialistic
 desires but to
 be directed by
 Your wisdom and
 values. Amen.**

For others, wealth has a different cost. To acquire more and more, often requires working more and more. We may become possession rich but time poor and become unable to enjoy our hard-earned possessions. More importantly, overworking steals our time with God, family and friends, and damages our health too.

As over the coming month we consider the pressures we are under, it’s good to begin by checking our foundations and asking where our priorities lie: in building up treasure on earth or treasure in heaven?

Anxiety

THURS FEB 2

If we were asked to write down a list of sins, I wonder how many of us would include worry.

Anxiety is such a common part of everyday life that we often fail to take Jesus' teaching about it seriously. Yet, in our passage, Jesus does not say 'try not to worry' or 'don't worry too much'. He gives us a command: 'do not worry.'

Worrying is something that God has been challenging me about recently. Facing a problem, to which I could see no solution, my immediate response was to worry. God has been encouraging me to think about why I've been anxious and why He commands us not to be. Worry is the opposite of faith. I've realised that my anxiety reflects how little I really trust God to help in difficult situations.

Today's passage reassures us that God *can* be trusted to help, for He cares so much for us. Matthew describes how God looks after even the needs of plants and animals; and if God cares so much for them, how much more can we trust Him to care for us? This point is re-emphasised later in his Gospel when he reveals that God is concerned with the lives of even tiny sparrows. If He is interested in the details of their existence, we can be assured that He cares deeply about what we face, for He values us even more than sparrows (see Matthew 10:29–31).

Throughout this passage, Matthew also refers to God as our 'heavenly Father'. By doing so, he reminds us that if human fathers, imperfect as they are, care so deeply for their children, how much more can we trust God, the perfect Father, to care for us?

Bring to God all that is worrying you.

.....
Matthew 6:25–34
.....

'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life ...'
(v.25)

.....
For prayer and reflection
.....

Lord, help me to trust that You care about every detail of my life. Help me with these worries and bring me Your peace. Amen.

Honest to God!

Psalm 13

‘How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for ever?’ (v.1)

How do we cope when things are not going well?

A long time ago I remember talking to a mature Christian about a painful situation. I was trying so hard to look at it with faith and was telling her that all was fine with me because God would bring good out of what had happened. This lady’s response has stayed with me over the years. ‘Yes, that’s so true,’ she said, ‘but it still hurts, doesn’t it?’ She encouraged me to tell God how I was really feeling, including expressing any anger I had with Him over what had happened! This shocked me initially, but this psalm shows us that this is exactly how David behaves – he’s honest with God. He’s clearly going through an awful time. Many think David’s words refer to his troubles with Saul. God has promised David that he’ll be king but there seems no sign of that happening. Instead, David is forced to leave his home and go on the run as Saul seeks his life. David doesn’t try to put a brave face on his situation but tells God exactly how he feels and how frustrated he is that God doesn’t seem to be doing anything to help! Interestingly, by opening up his heart to God, David finds peace again. By the end of the psalm he is able to express his trust in God’s care for him.

For prayer and reflection

Father, help me to know You as the God of unfailing love who comforts us in all our troubles. Amen.

If we do not share our hurt and frustrations with God we end up struggling alone with our suffering: we can put on a brave face but underneath the pain simmers away untouched. In sharing our hurt with God we allow Him to comfort us by His Holy Spirit and heal our pain from within. Then we will, like David, truly be able to say, ‘I trust in your unfailing love’ (v.5).

Spend time sharing with God any hurts and difficulties you face.

WEEKEND

Knowing we're loved

For reflection: 1 John 4:7–12*'... God is love.' (v.8)*

This week we have considered the importance of being honest with God as well as Christ's command not to worry. To be honest with God, we need to believe that He wants to listen to us. To stop worrying, we need to trust that He will help us. In other words, we need to be sure of God's love for us.

Try the following test to gauge how confident you are of God's love. Positive answers suggest that you struggle to appreciate how precious you are to God.

- Do you try to earn God's love and win His approval?
- Are you jealous of others and their God-given talents?
- Do you struggle with guilt even when you've asked for forgiveness?
- Do you believe that God will use others but not you?
- When you experience troubles, do you assume that God's punishing you?

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above, bring those issues to God. Ask Him to reveal to you more of His unconditional love.

Optional further reading

Hosea 11:1–11; Luke 15:11–32

David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Colorado Springs: Scripture Press Publishers, 1981)