# PSALM 139 STUDY LEADERS NOTES

**Read the whole psalm aloud, then observe one minute of silent reflection.**

**Re-read verses 1-6**

1. David uses several images of God’s intimate knowledge of him. Which image strikes you the most?
2. What point is David making in verse 6? How would you put it in your own words?

*“You know me better than I know myself, and better than I could ever know myself”.*

**Re-read verses 7-12**

1. What is David confident that God will do for him?
2. David lists a bunch of far-off places that are not too far away for God to be with him, guide him and protect him. Make up your own verse based on the same formula:  
    “Even if I go to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”

**Re-read verses 13-18**

1. Verse 13 begins with “for”, which suggests it gives the reason for something said earlier. How do verses 13-16 support what David has said previously?

*In verses 13-16 David realises that God made him and saw him whilst he was in his mother’s womb – a hidden and dark place that nobody else could see (before the advent of ultrasounds!). This is the basis for his confidence that in the “dark places” of life, he will still not be hidden from God (verses 11-12). “If God can see me and care for me in the darkness of my mother’s womb, he can see me and care for me through every dark patch of my life”*

**Re-read verses 19-22**

*This section presents some challenges. They need to be addressed, but try not to let it get out of proportion with the rest of the psalm!*

1. At first glance it seems like David is suddenly having a rant about his enemies. But look closely: who exactly is it that David hates?

*“the wicked”, “bloodthirsty” people, those who speak of God with evil intent, those who hate God. These people are God’s enemies in the first case, and David counts them as his own enemies as a result. (Not the other way around!)*

1. How can these impassioned verses be related to the rest of the psalm?

*The more someone loves and appreciates God, the more they will hate and be opposed to things, and even people, who are opposed to God. This does raise questions! See question 9.*

1. “The psalms are given not to be observed, but to be prayed by God’s people”. How is this principle difficult to apply for Psalm 139:19-22? How might we deal with this difficulty?

*To elaborate on the question: A general principle to remember is that the psalms are not just a relic from the experience of one man in 1000BC, given to us to observe with interest. They are given to God’s people for us to sing and pray ourselves. As Christians, our singing of the psalms is led by King Jesus, on whose lips they are ultimately true.*

*The difficulty is that these verses seem to conflict with Jesus’ teaching about loving our enemies. We’re therefore tempted to chop them out, or write them off as ‘just how David was feeling that day’. But we shouldn’t. The Jesus who taught “love your enemies” (Matt 5:44) was also full of strong language against those who misrepresented God’s laws and oppressed God’s people (“Woe to you… You snakes! You brood of vipers!” Matt 23:13-36). When Paul echoes Jesus’ teaching and says “bless those who persecute you” (Rom 12:14) it’s only a few verses after he has urged his readers to “hate what is evil” (Rom 12:9). So hatred of evil and practical love of enemies need to be held together. We don’t throw these “difficult verses” out but we do read them together with the rest of the Bible.*

**Re-read verses 23-24.**

1. How do these verses soften the impact of verses 19-22?

*David is aware that he might, to some extent, be “in rebellion against God” (see v21), and he wants this uncovered so he can repent. He is conscious of God’s perfection but not claiming perfection for himself.*

**Consider the psalm as a whole**

1. How does your own prayer life compare with the prayer of this psalm? What kinds of prayer could you add to your prayer life?

**Have somebody close in prayer by praying the ideas of the psalm:**

* *Praise for God’s intimate knowledge of us (vv1-6)*
* *Thanks for God’s attention and care for us in all circumstances (vv7-16)*
* *Longing for God to be honoured and his ways followed by all (vv19-22)*
* *Asking for God to reveal to us sins that we need to repent of (vv23-24)*