



**Big Idea Of The Series:** Psalm 139 is well-known devotionally. Psalm 139:14—“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made”—is emblazoned on T-shirts, coffee mugs, and social media memes. The psalm’s ubiquitous nature and conventional usage can hide its deeply important statements on the nature and goodness of God. This series will explore David’s understanding of his God...our God, with particular attention to four of the classical attributes of God: omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. The goal is to both teach correct theological points regarding these incommunicable attributes of God (attributes which He alone possesses) and to help people to understand why these attributes matter for their lives. Ultimately, our goal is to discover our all-knowing, always-present, all-powerful, and all-good God, who is always for us and never against us.

### **Week 3 - Who’s Truly Fearful & Wonderful**

**Text:** Psalm 139:13-18

**Topic(s):** Attributes of God, Omnipotent, Sanctity of Life, Ordained Days, Fearfully & Wonderfully Made, Awe

**Big Idea of the Message:** God is both sovereign and omnipotent. God’s sovereignty means that nothing ever happens outside of something that God has decreed or allowed. God’s omnipotence is what enables his sovereignty meaning that since God is all powerful and can do all things He is thus able to rule completely. Understanding these two characteristics of God should lead His people primarily into a state of perpetual awe. The cultivation of awe as a spiritual discipline is crucial for our walk with God.

### **Setting the stage:**

**Leaders:** Please read aloud to your group Psalm 139:13-18.

**As a group:** Understand that God’s omnipotence is not limited to these verses written by David, but is instead a foundational attribute of His being

evidenced continually throughout time by many of the writers of the Scriptures. As a group, take turns reading aloud the following verses in order to understand the pervasiveness of this revelation:

#### God is Omnipotent - Old Testament Evidence

“Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah (90 years old) will have a son.” (Genesis 18:14)

“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4:35)

“Then Job answered the Lord and said, ‘I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.’” (Job 42:1-2)

“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?” (Jeremiah 32:27)

“For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27)

“Even from eternity I am He, and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?” (Isaiah 43:13)

#### God is Omnipotent – The New Testament Evidence

“Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.*’” (Luke 1:34-37)

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” (Matthew 19:23-26)

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” (Romans 1:20)

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’” (Revelation 19:6)

### **Questions For Group Discussion:**

1. (*Read for group*) When we say that God is **omnipotent**, we are saying that God is all-powerful. Omnipotent is not a word used in the Bible, but “almighty” appears in virtually every book of the Old Testament, often dozens of times. Maybe you have heard God referred to as El Shaddai, a Hebrew name for God. El Shaddai means God most powerful or God Almighty. When we say that God is omnipotent simply put we are saying that **God is able**. It is God’s omnipotence which empowers God’s **sovereignty**. God is sovereign means that nothing happens outside of what God permits or decrees. When we say that God is sovereign, simply put, we are saying that **God is in control**.

David discovers God's omnipotence and sovereignty as he understands God's personal involvement in his life from creation through all of his ordained days. In other words, his life is not random but ruled, and thus holy and good. **How has our culture defined "a good life?" What is a life worth living? How does God's omnipotence and sovereignty infringe on that definition?**

2. David wrote that *"all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* **Your days are numbered - how does that make you feel? Comforted or cowed?**

3. It was in sensing God's involvement in his conception, creation and life that David came to understand God's unlimited power and plan. **What in your life has helped you to understand God's omnipotence and sovereignty?**

4. You actually are fearfully and wonderfully made...or as God told Jeremiah, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."* **What would be the life implications of really believing that and living life that way?**

5. John spent a lot of time in his talk decrying the dangers of reading the Scriptures or relating to God with an "it's all about me" mentality. **What are the dangers of plucking "fearfully and wonderfully made" out of it's context? When we do, what discovery of David's do we miss? Who are we to be ultimately awed by?**

6. **Have you ever actually gotten goosebumps from something other than fear? When was the last and what caused them?**

7. **Have you personally had an experience of the power of God?**

8. **Have you personally had an experience of the sovereignty of God?**

9. It's clear that awe is a spiritual discipline we are to be cultivating. It is the "special sauce" often missing in our approach to the Scriptures and our relationship with God. **Are "awe and wonder" a regular part of your life? If so, how? If not, why?**

10. David wrote, "How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you." **In light of how well known you are to God - specifically in relation to you, how He made you - what are His thoughts about you?**

### **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT - Cultivating Awe As A Spiritual**

#### **Discipline:**

**Background:** Andrew Tix in *Overwhelmed by Greatness: The Psychological Significance of Awe in Christian Experience and Formation*, recounts the following studies on awe:

**1. Gazing at Trees and Buildings: Awe, the Small Self, and Prosocial Behavior:** In one study, participants were randomly assigned to either gaze for 1 minute at (1) a grove of Tasmania eucalyptus trees (with heights exceeding 200 feet) or (2) a nearby science building. Immediately following this, researchers staged an accident in which an assistant dropped a box of 11 pens in front of participants. Those who gazed at the trees helped more than those who stared at the science building. In addition, in a survey completed afterward, those who gazed at the trees revealed greater ethical decision-making and lower sense of personal entitlement.

**2. Watching TV: The Effects of Awe on Religious Belief:** In perhaps the most spiritually provocative experiment on awe, researchers randomly assigned participants to either view:

- A. a 5-minute video of the BBC's "Planet Earth," consisting of grand, sweeping shots of plains, mountains, space, and canyons;

- B. a 5-minute video of the BBC's "Walk on the Wild Side" intended to be amusing; or
- C. a 1959 news interview conducted by Mike Wallace.

Individuals who watched the "Planet Earth" segment revealed greater belief that the universe is controlled by God or supernatural forces as well as stronger belief in God more generally, compared with those in the other conditions. How much awe participants reported feeling during the experiment accounted for these effects.

### **3. The Varieties of Awesome Experience: Assessing Whether Practical Wisdom and Awe of God Are Associated with Life**

**Satisfaction:** Another line of research has attempted to study individuals' proneness to experience awe. The assumption in this research is that the tendency to be awestruck in everyday life may vary across individuals. That is, whereas some people may not experience awe very often, others may experience awe more frequently. For instance, researchers at the University of Michigan have developed a measure of the tendency to experience an "awe of God." Example items include:

- "I am astonished by how little I understand about the universe and all that is in it." and
- "The ageless and timeless nature of God fills me with awe."

These are rated on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) scale. The researchers find that scores on this measure correlate with greater church attendance, practical wisdom, and connectedness with others.

**4. Awe Journals: Awe Expands People's Perception of Time, Alters Decision Making, and Enhances Well-Being:** For example, in one study, research participants were randomly assigned to write about a personal experience involving either (1) awe or (2) happiness. Results showed that those who wrote about an awe experience reported feeling less impatient and said they were more

likely to give time and money to a worthy cause, compared with those who wrote about a happy experience.

**Homework Assignment:** In light of all the above, this week cultivate the discipline of awe. For five of the next seven days until you meet again...just five times, commit to one another to set aside some time each of those days and find something to be awed over. It could be science, creation, nature, history - it could be live, inside, outside, on TV or the internet...you name it, get creative. And then, simply write down two things in an ***Awe Journal***: **what it was that awed you and how it made you feel. At your next small group meeting plan to take a few minutes to review your findings.**