

22. "I have hated them with a perfect hatred: and they are become enemies to me." It is no wonder that he who has his eyes fixed on God, and cleaves to him with his whole heart, should avow that he hated them who hated him, and then he should pine away with grief and sadness on beholding him so insulted by the wicked. And his hatred of them was intense; for it was "a perfect hatred," consummate and irreconcilable, but applying to the sin, and not to the center; and he, therefore, observes, "and they are become enemies to me." I was no enemy of theirs – for I merely sought to correct and reform them – but they became enemies to me by reason of my having so reproved and sought to reform them.

23. "Prove me, O God, and know my heart: examine me, and know my paths."

24. "And see if there be in me the way of iniquity: and lead me in the eternal way." He now implores of God to do what he said, in the beginning of the Psalm, God had already done; that is, to go on in the search of his heart and his ways, that is, of his thoughts, desires, progress, and conduct, with the view that if God "see if there be any of the way of iniquity in him," he make take him at once out of such way, "and lead him in the eternal way;" that is, to reflect on, to desire, and to do everything that tends to eternal happiness.

### END OF PSALM 138

## You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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## PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST  
IN THE  
LORD *and do good;*  
*dwell in the land and*  
*enjoy safe pasture.*

PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 138

God's special providence over His servants.

1. Lord, thou hast proved me, and known me:
2. Thou hast known my sitting down, and my rising up.
3. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off: my path and my line thou hast searched out.
4. And thou hast foreseen all my ways: for there is no speech in my tongue.
5. Behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, the last and those of old: thou hast formed me, and hast laid thy hand upon me.
6. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me; it is high, and I cannot reach to it.
7. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy face?
8. If I ascend into heaven, thou art there: if I descend into hell, thou art present.
9. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.
10. Even there also shall thy hand lead me; and thy right hand shall hold me.
11. And I said: Perhaps darkness shall cover me: and night shall be my light in my pleasures.
12. But darkness shall not be dark to thee: and night shall be light as the day: the darkness thereof, and the light thereof, are alike to thee.
13. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast protected me from my mother's womb.
14. I will praise thee, for thou art fearfully magnified: wonderful are thy works, and my soul knoweth right well.
15. My bone is not hidden from thee, which thou hast made in secret; and my substance in the lower parts of the earth.
16. Thy eyes did see my imperfect being, and in thy book all shall be written; days shall be formed, and no one in them.
17. But to me thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable: their principality is exceedingly strengthened.
18. I will number them, and they shall be multiplied above the sand: I rose up, and am still with thee.

*continued >*

*(continued from the preceding page)*

19. If thou wilt kill the wicked, O God: ye men of blood, depart from me.
20. Because you say in thought: They shall receive thy cities in vain.
21. Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hated thee; and pined away because of thy enemies?
22. I have hated them with a perfect hatred: and they are become enemies to me.
23. Prove me, O God, and know my heart: examine me, and know my paths.
24. And see if there be in me the way of iniquity: and lead me in the eternal way.

*The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.*

## **PSALM NUMBER: 138**

### **EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM**

1. "Lord, thou hast proved me, and known me."
2. "Thou hast known him and him and my rising up." David, speaking not only for himself but for all mankind, asserts that God has a most intimate knowledge of us, and of everything connected with us. "Lord, thou hast proved me;" you have searched and examined me, for such is the meaning of the word in the Hebrew. Now, God is said to search and examine, in a metaphorical sense, because he wishes to have the most perfect and exact knowledge of everything, as he really has; and because they who wish for such perfect and complete knowledge of a matter, examine and inquire into it with the greatest diligence; and David, therefore, expresses himself in such manner, without, for a moment, supposing that God needs such inquiry or examination. The meaning, then, is: you are not content, O Lord, with a superficial knowledge of our affairs, but you would have an intimate a knowledge of them as they who search and examine; and, in point of fact, you have a most accurate knowledge of me. "Thou hast known my sitting down, and my rising up." He now enters into details of his general assertion, saying, you have known from eternity, when, where, and why I should sit and I should rise; and not only as regards the motions of my body, but also of my soul, when, where, and why I should be humbled or exalted. If God has such an intimate knowledge, then, of man in general, how much more so must not have been his knowledge of Christ, the head of men and angels; and it is, therefore, with great propriety that the Church uses these words in the Liturgy, on the feast of the Resurrection. "Thou hast known my sitting down, and by rising up."
3. "Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off: my path and my line thou hast searched out." He now tells us that God not only knows every downfall and every up rise connected with our whole life, but that he also knows in detail all our thoughts,

St. John had to declare, "I saw a great crowd but no one could count, from all nations, tribes, and tongues;" as also, because after the Last Judgment all created things, the very demons as well as the reprobate, will be laid prostrate under the feet of the Saints, and will be subject to them. He, therefore, says, "I will number them; "I will endeavor to number them, I mean God's friends, or if you will, the subjects of the principalities of those friends, and such will be the number of them that I will fail in it; "for they shall be multiplied above the sand," will be more numerous than the grains of sand on the seashore. This, to be sure, is an exaggeration, but not unusual in the Scriptures; thus, the Lord said to Abraham, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth;" and again, "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the seashore." Having said so much, the Prophet now reverts to himself, and says that from having come to know the great glory of the Saints and friends of God, he, too was greatly moved to love him affectionately, and got the greatest desire of sharing in the same glory. "I rose up" – or rather as the Hebrew implies – I waked up to this new light, and rose up through love and desire of you, "and am still," to the present moment, "with thee," adhering to you, depending on you, with an earnest desire of final perseverance.

19. "If thou wilt kill the wicked, O God: ye men of blood, depart from me."
20. "Because you say in thought. They shall receive thy cities in vain." Having said that the just, the friends of God, were exceedingly honored by God, and that he wished for a place among them, he now, on the contrary, asserts that the wicked, the enemies of God would be slain by his just judgment; and he repudiates any friendship or companionship with such people. "If thou wilt kill the wicked, O God." If you, in justice, honor and exalt the virtuous, you will, with equal justice, reprobate the wicked, and condemn them to eternal punishment; and I, therefore, want to have nothing to say to them; and I, therefore, tell them, "ye men of blood depart from me;" which expression includes not only homicides, who shed human blood, but all other wicked and evil doers, who injure, or seek to injure others, or who slay their own souls by sin, or the souls of others by scandal; all of whom may be truly called homicides; for hatred may be called the mainspring of homicide; and thus St. John says, "who hateth his brother is a homicide." – "Because you say in thoughts;" you think with yourselves, and say in your hearts, "they shall receive thy cities in vain." The just shall receive the cities of God in vain, because they will shortly be deprived of them. This has reference to "their principality is exceedingly strengthened;" that is, widely propagated by the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith, and of sinners to justice; and as, in consequence thereof, many cities, that is, congregations, were rescued from the slavery of the demons, and the worship of idols, the wicked remnants of idolatry, envying the propagation of Christ's kingdom, said in their hearts, "they shall receive thy cities in vain," foolishly hoping that they would return to idolatry.
21. "Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hated thee; and pined away because of thy enemies?"

removed from God's handiwork. Anyone acquainted with the anatomy of the human frame cannot fail to be struck with astonishment at the wisdom of God, in the fabrication of so many bones, large ones, middling ones, small and minute ones, so marvelous by being connected with each other, and the whole thing accomplished in the smallest and obscurest possible place, without either tools or machinery.

16. "The eyes did see my imperfect being, and in thy book all shall be written: days shall be formed, and no one in them." He goes further in showing the wisdom of God as displayed in the structure of the human frame. "My imperfect being," means the embryo in the mother's womb, before the formation of the bones, so as to be distinguished. "The eyes did see my imperfect being," and they not only saw it, but they knew what was to come from it, what it was to turn into; and he tells why, when he says, "and in thy book all shall be written;" because you have, as it were, a book, as would a painter or a sculptor, containing copies or designs of all the works you may want to produce; "days shall be formed;" all these embryos will be formed from time to time, and brought to perfection, "and no one in them" will fail or fall short of the object of its creation; ordinarily speaking, no human being, conceived in the womb, will fail in coming to perfection, or will be found deficient in any of his natural members; and, when abortions occur, such as the being born blind, or with any other such defect, such does not happen through any deficiency in the first cause, it generally arises from secondary causes. All this may apply also to the perfection of man in respect to his soul, that is, in regard of his wisdom, prudence, moral virtues, grace, and glory. For the Lord knows our imperfect state, that, of ourselves, we are nothing but an unformed mass, but by reason of our being written in the book of life we are every other day formed and made more perfect, until we become "conformable to the image of the Son of God," and "be made like to the body of his glory." And it is on looking at such extraordinary perfection of body and soul, to which the favored of God are brought, out of so much imperfection, that makes the Prophet exclaim in the following verse,

17. "But to me thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable: their principality is exceedingly strengthened." On reflecting from what a depth of imperfection God brings his friends to the very highest and most exalted perfection, thereby displaying his own providence in the management of human affairs, as if they were his own, in highly rewarding the good, and severely punishing the wicked, the Prophet now exclaims, in great surprise and admiration, "but to me," with me, or in my opinion, "thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable;" they have been honored beyond my comprehension, for "their principality is exceedingly strengthened;" for they have been rescued from a mass of corruption, and from the bondage of the evil one, and translated to an everlasting kingdom, put on a level with the Angels, children and heirs of God, and brethren and coheirs of the only begotten, "whom he hath appointed heir of all things."

18. "I will number them, and they shall be multiplied above the sand: I rose up, and am still with thee." He now explains how, "their principality is exceedingly strengthened," and says it arises from the wonderful propagation of it is so very short a time. And such was the fact because these principalities became so numerous, that

all our counsels, everything that is to happen to us, or, perhaps, after having informed us that God knows everything connected with our exterior, our rise, or downfall, to wit, he now tells us that he is equally acquainted with our interior, meaning our thoughts and desires. "Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off;" you knew what my thoughts would turn upon before I began to think. "My path;" my progress and path through life, not only as far as my body is concerned, but also in regard of my soul which has strayed, and that through various doubts and difficulties; "and my line," to what end I was likely to come, what inheritance I was to fall in for, what rest to secure, thou "hast searched out," have been in full possession of. Briefly, you had, from eternity, a thorough knowledge of the motives, means, and end of all my actions.

4. "And thou hast foreseen all my ways: for there is no speech in my tongue." Having stated that God foresaw our thoughts, counsels, and actions, he now adds, that he also foresees all our other acts, however indifferent, such as our idle words; "for there is no speech in my tongue" that you have not foreseen. Hence the Lord assures us in the Gospel, that men will have to render account, on the day of judgment, of every idle word that falls from them; and it was in terror thereof that holy Job exclaimed, "thou, indeed, hast numbered my steps, but spare my sins." For God observes everything, weighs everything, then he may, in his own time, bring everything to judgment.

5. "Behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, the last and those of old: thou hast formed me, and hast laid thy hand upon me." He proves, by two arguments, that God knows everything that appertains to man: first, because he knows everything past and future; and it, therefore, should not be surprising if he had an intimate knowledge of everything connected with man, whose actions are not the least important among the daily events of life. Secondly, having created man, and being his sovereign Lord, there can be no doubt that he has a knowledge of everything connected with him. "Behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, the last and those of old" – everything past and future. With that, "thou hast formed me," created me in human shape; and when you did so make me you did not, like other workmen, lose sight of me, but thou "hast laid thy hand upon me," to guide, support, and protect me; for, otherwise, I should have at once returned to the dust, from whence I sprang, or, rather, to my original nothingness.

6. "Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me; it is high, and I cannot reach to it." Having proved, by the two aforesaid arguments, that God's knowledge extends to everything connected with man, lest anyone should suppose that we have, in consequence, come to complete and just notions of God's knowledge, he adds the present verse, that we may understand that, however satisfied we may be of God's knowledge being supreme, and extending to all things, still, that we are quite in the dark – that, in fact, we know nothing at all about it in detail; that is to say, that it is perfectly incomprehensible how God can foresee what is to happen, especially human acts, which man may do or not do as it pleases or suits him, such as all our thoughts, desires, which, and all our actions. The same

applies to the essence and attributes of God. We know that he exists, that he is powerful, wise, good, just, and merciful, but who knows or who can explain his essence, or how, with so many attributes, he can be essentially one? He, therefore, says, “thy knowledge is become wonderful to me,” more wonderful than I can comprehend; such is the meaning of the phrase in the Hebrew; “it is high, and I cannot reach to it;” far beyond my capacity.

7. “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy face?”

8. “If I ascend into heaven, thou art there: if I descend into hell, thou art present.”

9. “If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.”

10. “Even there also shall thy hand lead me; and thy right hand shall hold me.” He now adduces another argument to prove that no one can escape God’s ken, inasmuch as God is everywhere, penetrating everything. “Whither shall I go from thy spirit?” To hide myself from you, to escape from your mind or intelligence, “or whither shall I fly from your face?” From your eyes. “If I ascend into heaven,” to the very highest – “if I descend into hell,” to the depth of the abyss, the greatest possible distance from heaven – there, too, you are present. “If I take my wings early in the morning,” could I assume the wings of a bird, and fly all the day with the greatest rapidity, “and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea,” so as to reach the other extremity of the world, I could not, even thus, escape from you; “for thy hand shall lead me and hold me;” because without God’s help we cannot stir, nor can we go along but as he carries us, for “in him we live, move, and have our being.”

11. “And I said: perhaps darkness shall cover me: and night shall be my light in my pleasures.”

12. “But darkness shall not be dark to thee; and night shall be light as the day: the darkness thereof, and the light thereof, are alike to thee.” He raises an objection to himself, saying it is possible to hide one’s self from God in the dark; and he answers it by saying such is not possible, because darkness ceases to be darkness with God, “for God is light,” as St. John asserts in his epistle; and he also asserts, “the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” For as the sun’s light cannot be obscured by darkness, because it dissipates all darkness by its presence – and wherever the sun is, there day is – so it is with the spiritual and increate light, God, that cannot be obstructed by any darkness, because its presence dissipates all darkness; and, thus, there is no hiding place left for man in which to hide himself from God’s all seeing eye. “And I said, perhaps, darkness shall cover me;” perhaps dense darkness may envelope me, and I may thus escape God’s eye, “and night shall be my light in my pleasures;” darkness will not cover you, because the very night will be turned into light, that they may be visible. The literal meaning, then, of the two verses is that the night, so naturally dark, will cease to be such with God; instead of being dark, it will “be my light in my pleasures,” will throw a light on and expose me, indulging in my sinful pleasures; for those who are devoted to impurity always seek

the darkness of the night, when they think they can be seen by none, and thus commits sin with greater security; and hence the apostle says, “but they who sleep, sleep in the night; and they who are drunk, are drunk in the night, and he might have added, and they who abandon themselves “to chambering and impurities,” do so mostly in the night. But to no purpose, for the all seeing eye of God, brighter than the sun itself, penetrates all darkness, and there is nothing hidden from it. He repeats it, by way of confirmation. “But darkness shall not be darkness to thee, and night shall be light as the day.” The night, instead of being dark to you, will be as bright as the day.

13. “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast protected me from my mother’s womb.” That God sees in the dark, and that nothing, however secret is hidden from him, the Prophet now proves, from the formation of our interior members, while still in the mother’s womb, where they are doubly hid; first, by reason of their being interior parts of the infant itself; secondly, by reason of that very infant being hidden in the mother’s womb. For thou “hast possessed my reins;” that day or night, light or darkness, is all the same to you, is evident from the fact of your having formed my reins, the most secret part of my body, and that even when my whole body lay concealed and covered in my mother’s womb.

14. “I will praise thee, for thou art fearfully magnified: wonderful are thy works, and my soul knoweth right well.” He now interrupts his narration of the formation of man, by an address to God, in admiration of the wisdom and knowledge displayed in the formation of man by God. “I will praise thee” when I reflect on these your works; I will render to you my tribute of praise, for “thou art fearfully magnified.” I am filled with terror through admiration and reverence for you – and he explains in what respect, when he says, “wonderful are thy works, and my soul knoweth right well.” Your creating man in his mother’s womb, in a place so hidden and obscure, is truly a most wonderful work, and I am fully alive to the greatness of such a work. We are not to infer that the latter part of this sentence implies a thorough knowledge of God’s works, it merely means that we know them to be great and wonderful. Thus, we neither see nor know the extent of the sea, yet we know it to be very extensive; and that from the mere fact of our not being able to take the whole of it in a glance, from anyone given point. In like manner, though we cannot look directly on the sun, we know from that very fact that its light is intense.

15. “My bone is not hidden from thee, which thou hast made in secret; and my substance in the lower parts of the earth.” He returns to the knowledge and wisdom displayed by God in the formation of man. “My bone is not hidden from thee;” you know the use, object, arrangement, and structure of every bone in my body; no wonder you should, because thou “hast made” them all, and that “in secret,” enveloped in my own skin and flesh; and in addition to it, by my mother’s womb. “And my substance in the lower part of the earth;” a repetition of the former idea, with this addition, that my astonishing formation took place “in the lower parts of the earth,” where one would suppose I was so far