

God Is Omniscient

1 Samuel 23:1-14

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- January 1, 2023

Happy New Year! Let's take account, let's make the most of it, let's start it off right!

We're going to study an attribute of God today that is, honestly, just astonishing, if nothing else, but also inspiring and motivating for life change. And we're going to look at that while we look at a passage that I don't think you've ever heard taught in a sermon in all your life, because---well, you'll see. There's a reason. I taught this in 1993 and was told never to do that again. That guy's gone now, so I'm going to give it another run and try to make the most of it.

Before that let's play a little game. We do this in the car sometime. It's called "Anytime/Anywhere." You can play it on a long road trip when you're trying to fill the void. "Anytime/Anywhere" is about this: what could you do, where would you live if you could live at any time in human history in any place on the planet—anywhere in the world. What would you do? Where would you be? What would your life be like? Think about that for a second anytime, anywhere.

I'll never forget the first time Melinda and I played this on one of our trips and I went first. I said, "Well, I wouldn't be married." Umm ... still trying to get that one back. You have to understand the context of this, because anytime/anywhere for me, I would be a World War II fighter pilot, back when it was real dogfighting, flying by cable. And when you play "Anytime/Anywhere", by the way, you always win. So, it's not like I got shot before the wheels ever came off the tarmac. So, I'd be out there flying a Corsair in the Pacific or a P51 Mustang and the side of fuselage would just be covered in enemy flags.

And so, I wouldn't be married, because I wouldn't want a lovely wife back home wondering how I was doing, if I was dead or alive—that sort of thing. So, it was out of concern for my wife ... yeah, it didn't go over then either.

So, after about ninety minutes of very long silence, Melinda said, "Okay, I want to play. I would be Fred Astaire's dance partner. And I wouldn't be married." Zing!

So, hold that thought—Anytime/Anywhere.

We're going to look now at 1 Samuel chapter 23. If you want to turn there, that would be great. Here's the context of the story we're about to read. It's during the United Kingdom period, and at this time the king is named Saul, and the soon-to-be king is David. David has already been anointed as the next king. David killed Goliath—that David. But until that transition takes place, King Saul is literally insane with jealousy and wants to kill David. He's going to use all of his kingly resources to hunt down David like a rabid dog.

And David has a following at this point, and he's just hiding in various places like a forest, in caves, trying to just stay alive so that he can fulfill the prophecies of becoming the next king.

Now while he's doing that, God speaks to David and says, "There's this small town called Keilah and they're being invaded—actually besieged—by the Philistines." The Philistines are the really bad people. "And they're destroying even as we speak, and you, David, need to take your men and go save Keilah."

So, he goes to his guys and says, "Okay, let's tack up guys. We're on a mission for God. We're going to go and save Keilah."

And they said, "Fighting a war on two fronts? We're not doing that. The Philistines are better-armored than we are. Why don't you go back and check in with God and make sure you heard that right?"

1 Samuel 23:5

So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah.

So, David goes back and hears from the Lord again. And the Lord says, "Oh, I'm going to give you this victory and you're going to win and win big." That's where we pick it up in verse 5. "So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted"—God did—"heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah."

Now that's not the teaching point. You'd think it would be, but no, there's more. Actually, there's less.

1 Samuel 23:7

When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, “God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars.

It goes on. David is comfortably living in the safety of Keilah, and in verse 7 it says, “And when it was told to Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, ‘God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars.’”

And what that means is Keilah is such a small town or city that it only has one place of entry and exit, just one place of gates and bars. And so, Saul is looking at that like *Oh, this is a God-ordained thing. I mean, this is an easy kill. This is just shooting fish in a barrel.*

1 Samuel 23:8

So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

So he calls up all his troops in verse 8: “Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.”

1 Samuel 23:10-14

David said, “O Lord, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. ¹¹ Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell your servant.”

And the Lord said, “He will.”

¹² Again David asked, “Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?”

And the Lord said, “They will.”

¹³ So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

¹⁴ David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds and in the hills country in the wilderness of Ziph.

Now David knows that Saul knows. So David said, “ ‘Yahweh, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard?’” *Yahweh, talk to me.* “ ‘Yahweh, God of Israel, tell your servant.’”

“And the Lord said, ‘Yes, he will.’”

“Again David asked, ‘Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?’”

“And Yahweh said, ‘Yes, they will.’”

“So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there. David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph.”

That’s our passage. That’s why no one ever teaches on it, right there, because nothing happened. I mean, nothing happened.

And this is the bigger point: God knew that nothing was going to happen before nothing ever happened. God knew nothing was going to happen in eternity past. God knew that, and He knew that for sure. And that’s what we’re going to hear about today. God knew what would happen. Remember that. He knew what would happen if David stayed. He knew what would

happen if Saul came down. He knew what would happen if Saul came against the people of Keilah. He knew what would happen, and David would die. And so, David left, and so Saul never left, and so nothing happened.

Overview of Omniscience

So, that's what we're talking about today. We're talking about the attribute of God concerning His knowledge. The word is "omniscience." It means this: "omni" means "all" and "science" means "knowledge." It means that God knows all that will happen. But true omniscience—the biblical understanding of omniscience is that God not only knows what will happen; He knows what won't happen. He knows what will never happen.

I'll rewrite the definition: omniscience applies to the events that do not or will not ever exist. "Omni" means "all", and that means that God knows what will happen, what would happen, what could happen, what can't happen. That's what it means when we say that God is omniscient.

The doctrine of omniscience—the doctrine of God all-knowing—has been debated and studied for literally millennia. And I was exposed to this particular interpretation of omniscience in 1984 and have continued to study it, because I love this interpretation of what omniscience means. That's what we're going to try to do today—to explain the depth of omniscience. And that is three types of knowledge. There are three different parts to omniscience. I'll do it across the stage here.

Natural Knowledge

The first part, scholars like Thomas Aquinas, Molina, some other scholars I will mention in a few minutes, will start with what's called natural knowledge. Three types of knowledge, and natural knowledge is part of God's nature. That's why it's called natural. And it's completely independent of His sovereignty or His power, His omni-power. It's passive. God hasn't made any choices to create. He's negotiating all the things that could possibly happen. God knows all possible universes, all possible worlds, almost an infinite amount of hypotheticals.

You can imagine if we were just born straight into heaven. Can you imagine that? That's part of His natural knowledge. Or a creation where there were no angels—those sorts of things.

So, it's all about the hypothetical without choice.

Free Knowledge

That's called natural knowledge. And then over here they'll say this is what's called free knowledge, because it's after God has freely chosen to show Himself to be sovereign and powerful and freely choose to create. And these are the things that will happen. And God knows what will happen—absolutely—because He foresees them and knows that they will come into fruition.

Middle Knowledge

Now between natural knowledge and free knowledge—hold on—scholars will say there's something in the middle called middle knowledge. (I know, I kind of built that up, and it didn't ... anyway ...) Middle knowledge is—again, Thomas Aquinas, a Jesuit priest named Molina both put a pen to it to try and describe it--modern scholars like William Lane Craig and Alvin Plantinga, if you know those names.

William Lane Craig writes this about middle knowledge: “I would venture to say that middle knowledge is the most fruitful theological concept I have ever encountered.” He says it inspires the perseverance of the saints. It helps us understand the problem of evil and the existence of hell. Middle knowledge is talking about what would happen. This is what could happen, this is what will happen. It precedes God's choice. It's what would happen.

Here's a quote from Molina: “... an absolutely complete unlimited deliberation in every possible choice freely initiated by every soul.”

In middle knowledge, God is considering all the things over here in His natural knowledge. Before He makes this choice, He looks at every opportunity of every circumstance in every situation of every human soul and what choices they would make. And then He knows those all-but-infinite possibilities. And then He makes a choice, and this is the creation that we're in right now.

Let me just summarize in case you're getting dizzy. Natural knowledge—what could happen. Middle knowledge—what would happen if ... what if ... You know what if I had a different set of parents, a different time, and different place. And then, free knowledge—He makes the choice. This is what will happen. What could, what would, and what will happen.

And so, when David is living in this space and time and asks what would happen if Saul comes down here, what would happen if the people of Keilah find out that Saul's coming? What would happen?

God says, *Oh, they're going to turn you over to him.*

How did you know that, God?

I negotiated that over here in middle knowledge. That's one of the almost infinite things that I considered. That's why I'm telling you ahead of time, and that's why you're leaving. And that's why nothing happened that day.

Now you might be thinking, *Boy, I wish I would've slept in today.* No—you might be thinking, *This is so beyond my understanding.* It's not, because we practice these kinds of knowledge on a somewhat regular basis.

So, let's go to lunch after church. Here are the realms of possibilities, the things we could do. We could go to Jason's Deli, we could go to Schlotzsky's, we could go to McDonald's, we could go to Aviator Pizza, we could go to the Domain.

See how it just keeps growing? And then those are the possibilities that we could do. That's natural knowledge.

When we go to middle knowledge, we look at every menu at every one of those restaurants and negotiate with everyone else making the decision. And then we talk about, *But what if the kids don't behave? What if one of them melts down or is a bad mood, or the two girls are fighting? Okay, we need a playground.* Okay, so now we're going to make a decision based on all the other people's free wills ping off each other. And then you make a choice: *We're going to Aviator Pizza because they have a playground.* And then: *I'm going to order the pepperoni pizza? Do you know why? You know that I know that, because you know me, and I always order the pepperoni pizza there.* It's an innate knowledge of who I am, but it's after the free choice.

So, this deeper understanding of the omniscience of God, that it's not just the possibilities of His natural knowledge and not just after His choice of choosing and He knows those things because He foreknows those things.

The idea of middle knowledge and His consideration of every possible choice that a person can make in any lifetime has several implications for us. One of them that I'm particularly attracted to is that it exalts the dignity of human freedom.

Sometimes, especially these days when you hear people talk about reformed theology or total reformed theology, and particularly Calvinism, their commitment to the sovereign power of God, those hard attributes of God, leads them to speak in ways that take away free will and end up pushing God into a place where He's morally responsible for sin and evil because He made that happen. When you consider someone being condemned to hell for eternity, in their interview they say, *Well, I never really felt like I had much of a choice.* And the response is, *Yeah, you didn't. You really didn't have a choice. God chose for you, and here you are.*

So, this kind of omniscience with middle knowledge involved is saying, *Look, God considered every possibility of every life that you could ever live and every choice that you could've made that kept ping-pong and making other strings of reality—not just what could happen, but everything that would happen—and has made decisions based on that.* Every creation, every person freely choosing, is how God made His ultimate choice to bring this existence into reality.

Another good quote: “His omniscience is so intense that it knows every single person” and every possible “could” and every possible “would.”

Another great application for this deeper understanding of omniscience, God knowing all things, is the problem of evil and what's called the best of all possible worlds. Again, a scholar from the 1700s, Leibnitz, that some of you may have read, came up with this theory or popularized it. It's called “the best of all possible worlds.” Alvin Plantinga, a modern scholar and philosopher, in the book *God, Freedom, and Evil*, brings that up. It's called “Leibnizian optimism.” And the belief is this, concerning the problem of evil: if God is all powerful and God is all knowing and God is all loving, then why all the evil everywhere? And Leibniz's response is, *Okay, if God is all powerful and all knowing, then He would know how and He could create any world or no world. But He would create the best possible world. And if God is all knowing and all powerful and all loving, He would create the best possible, most loving world that could ever exist—the best possible world.*

In other words, if you're over here in this world saying—and I would say—*Can you imagine a world that would have less evil?* And while you're trying to answer that question, God would say, like He did with David, *Yeah, I thought of that one too, but it didn't work. I thought through every possible world, and the most loving world is the one that I created, because that's my nature.* He would have made the world different if it could be more loving.

Still another application—and if you’ve blacked out, if you could come back right now, it would be great—is the staggering importance of living for Christ today. This is the best possible world for you. It’s the best possible world for me. “Anytime/Anywhere” is not a game for God. It was completely negotiated from His natural knowledge to His middle knowledge to His choice, and now to this free choice, free knowledge. If there were a better place to put you, God would have put you there. If there were a better time in the timeline of history, He could have placed you there. No sweat on His brow. This is the best possible life that you could ever live for the glory of God.

Look at it this way. Instead of a throne where Jesus sits and rules, or Yahweh the Father, the trinitarian Father, think of it as a director’s chair. And all of creation that He’s chosen in His free will has been negotiated with what could happen and what would happen. We see this is the reel [*movie reel with film strip is displayed*], He’s directing, the movie is called To God Be the Glory. And each one of these little slides, let’s pretend, [*cuts off a couple of the film strip slides*], is a single life.

Example of Pharaoh

And God looks at this single life in middle knowledge and looks at every opportunity that this person could have, raised anywhere in the world at any time in the world, in comfortable circumstances or in evil. He could have been raised by a good Christian family and gone to good Christian schools and even taught at a seminary—whatever it might be. And no matter where this person lives, no matter when this person lives, they hate God. Because they don’t like to compete for worship. They want to be worshiped and they want to kill. They love death and they love themselves being exalted. Oh my!

And God says, *That’s okay*. And He looks at His reel and says, *You know what? I’m making myself known in about 1300 BC. I’ll patch him right into there, because I’m looking for someone that will go all ten rounds with me. I’ll give him the whole kingdom. I’ll name him Pharaoh. He’ll think he’s a god. And when I come out and show myself for who I am and for the first time introduce myself to all of creation as Yahweh in Exodus chapter 3, and then formally in chapter 5, Pharaoh says, “Who is Yahweh that I should obey him? Who is Yahweh that I should let his people go? No. I will not obey Yahweh.”*

And then the rounds begin. And God's going to use Pharaoh. And poor Pharaoh can only go seven rounds and he's getting tired and he's just a good egotistical fighter that's losing badly. He goes to his corner and says, *Look, I could still win this thing. Give me a shot right in the heart with that adrenaline and I can make it another three rounds.*

And so, even in the Book of Exodus where it says that God hardens Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh would say, *Thank you. Can you do it again in the eighth round?*

And so, God says, *Yeah, I can use that. In every "would happen" you're going to be evil, and you could be forgotten, or you could be used by God.*

And that's how it works. That's how He uses every life. There are no extras in this film, in this storyline of *To God Be the Glory*, though a lot of people live as if nothing matters and they live for themselves. There's only one star: that's Jesus Christ. And even Jesus is pointing to the theme "to God be the glory." And when we try to be the star, it doesn't work. It wasn't what was meant to be.

He can take any life and look at all the opportunities and all the possibilities and place them in the key role in which they could make the most of it, at the right time and the right place.

Example of Esther

Esther—you can look at a person—let's just say—that compromised. Her caretaker was her uncle, Mordecai, and while the faithful of Israel went back to Jerusalem and Israel because they were given that permission, there were some who wanted to stay back in Persia. You know, it was comfortable there. It was nice. It was civilized. And so, they stayed back. Some would say that's a compromise. God can use that. He understood all the things that would happen.

And maybe not too soon after that the crazy king steals Esther from the arms of her Uncle Mordecai. She's exposed to evil and she loses her virtue at the hands of a demon-possessed king. And then, in the language of Esther, somehow finds favor with him. God has her find favor with him and she becomes the king. And as part of the storyline one of the cabinet members of this king, in every life that he could ever live, in every hypothetical, he hates God and His people, and he wants to kill the Jews—all the Jews. And he's going to put them right in that storyline.

And now it will be up to Esther, if she plays her part. God's will be done. He knows what will happen. It's up to her to decide what would happen and how she's going to play her part in it.

Esther 4:14

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

The whole idea of omniscience and human freedom is played out in a single sentence. In Esther 4:14 it says, “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from some other place.” God will still rule. “But you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this.”

Who knows? God knows. He looked at every possibility right here and said, *Yeah, I’m going to put you here. I’m going to choose to put you here. This is what will happen. But you have to choose to play your part, and to God be the glory. At the risk of your life, at the risk of your safety, you do that.*

Esther understood what one of our mantras that we say here at Grace means: Every believer is a minister. I’ll say, *I’m just the pastor, but you’re the ministers.* Right. We could use our own language. *And who knows whether you have not become a minister for such a time as this.*

Let me say it a different way, or the same way again. This is the best time for you to live. This is the best place for you to do the good deeds that Jesus Christ has arranged for you before time. Ephesians 2:10: “You are His workmanship, created for good works in Jesus Christ that He arranged before time.” Right here in the coulds and all the woulds. He set us up right here. Just do everything that God has set you up to do, for the glory of God. This is the right time, this is the right place. If it weren’t, you’d be somewhere else at another time, because of all of that is negotiated right here in the middle knowledge.

There’s a frightening passage in a book that C. S. Lewis wrote. It’s part of his space trilogy called *That Hideous Strength*. I’ll try to explain. Hopefully, I can explain this in a way so that you can grasp it without reading the book. In *That Hideous Strength* the earth is being taken over and is about to be destroyed by a small group of demon-possessed individuals that have taken over. And the few good guys that are left on the planet (everyone else is just living their

lives) call up/resurrect a former hero from the old days, Merlin. They resurrect him and they're going to have him help defeat the bad guys.

Then there's this one encounter that frightens me every time I read it. It takes my breath away because of the subtlety of the sin of the person involved. It's not active—it's passive. The female lead meets Merlin for the first time, and the female lead is a wonderful person. She's young and ambitious—selfishly ambitious. She's making all of her choices for the sake of being comfortable and finishing her PhD and becoming a successful person, so much so that she and her husband have put off having children so they can get along with their careers.

Now when Merlin sees her, he knows everything that would have happened if she had chosen to wake up every morning and say, *I'm completely surrendered to You. I will go anywhere at any time and do anything with anyone.* And if that person would have chosen to live, she would have been a different person than Merlin met, because she was supposed to have a child. She was supposed to wake up every day and say, *Anytime, anywhere, any reason, with anyone.* If she would have heard the voice of God and she and her husband would have had a child, Merlin says that child would have set back evil for a thousand years.

And the person comes back to Merlin and says (because there's so much anger that he has towards this woman), "Hey, they're still married, they're still young. They can have their children. That child could still be born."

And Merlin interjects this way. He understands the timeline and what would, could, and will happen. And Merlin says this: "She could have set the enemies back a thousand years. But be assured that that child" —she can't have that child now—it's won't be that child—it'll be a different child—the timeline continues, right? "Be assured that that child will never be born. For the hour of its beginning is past. Of their own will they have chosen to be barren and not to have children. For a hundred generations in two lines the begetting of this child was prepared; and not it shall never be." Because it can never be.

You see? They missed the opportunity because they were consumed. They were just putzing through life. And the reason it's so shocking to me when I read it is because they're just making choices that are simple and career-oriented, and that's all it takes to kind of miss your place here, to waste your life, to just get a little distracted in front of a mirror.

And the reason that scares me is because I think about how many times I let an argument in my marriage set for too long, and roots of bitterness take. And I think, *I wonder what my*

marriage could have been used for, would have been used for, if I had been eager to apologize and take responsibility. How would my life be different if it weren't for this small amount of pride? What could God have done with my career if I weren't always looking to be acknowledged or always looking for the next step up instead of saying, "Anytime, anywhere, for any reason, with anyone." What could I have been if had just been more forgiving?

See, that's the dignity of human freedom being played out in a storyline where we get to choose if we're going to play our part, and to God be the glory. And just like Merlin said, "Look at all it took to get you here now... the hundreds of genealogies that got them ready to have this child and they chose not to for a simple reason." What about you and me, all that it took to get us right here, right now, our life experiences, our education, the evils we have suffered, the evils we've caused, the hardships that we've endured? And what do we do with our freedom? We make choices day after day not considering the big storyline of to God be the glory, and we just putz our way to the grave. We don't fully grasp the power of how we have been placed right here, right now, for this very purpose. The omniscience of God—He has done what He needs to do. We need to look at life like this is the day. This is the day that the Lord has made for me to glorify God and to make the most out of my life, to be focused on His will and not distracted by my own comfort. It's right here. It's right now.

And this is the only right now there is. Some of us only have a few more years left. Some of you have fifty. But after that there is no more faith; there is no more hope, because they're obsolete. In the next life you don't need faith to believe that God exists; He's right there. You don't have to have hope in the attributes of God or the promises of God; they're all realized right in front of you.

And so, for the next ten years or the next fifty years we're supposed to be making choices that show that we have hope and faith in the majesty of God who is all knowing—all the things that could happen, would happen, and will happen. And we come to a realization that we are here now for this very purpose.

Let's start this year right. If you want to know how to get started, think of all the things that happen on this campus so that you can make the most out of your life. There's an adult Sunday school class for every season of life, and for those who don't want a season of life group there are women's ministries and men's ministries, a dynamic youth group, a great children's

ministry. There are opportunities to serve and volunteer and play just a small part in God's church.

The scary part is we make choices to just sleep in. We continually decide, *I'm going to sleep another hour and miss the significance of playing a role here*. Every choice has a price tag is the consequence of the omniscience of God. Every choice has a price tag. I hope you appreciate that now.

So, January 1, 2023, is the moment that I get it. Now I get it. Of all the possible times and all the possible places where I could have existed, God—not just in His natural knowledge, but in His middle knowledge, considering every infinite possibility—has placed me here and now for me to seize the day. Because right now counts for eternity. Choose well.

Join me in prayer. Let's pray. You're going to love these words. These are from God Almighty—David spoke these words.

*Yahweh, You have searched me and You know me,
You know me when I sit down and when I rise up;
You're omniscient—You perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down,
You are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word even comes to my tongue
You know it completely, O God Almighty.
You are all about me, all around me,
You have laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me to understand;
Too lofty for me to obtain.*

Amen.

*He's got the whole world in His hands, doesn't He?
He's got you and me, brother, in His hands,
He's got you and me, sister, in His hands,
He's got everybody here in His hands,
He's got the whole world in His hands.*

Yahweh, God Almighty, You are a sovereign, ruling king. You are the great director, producer, the maker of a great story where You receive all the glory. And maybe today we get

that. Lord, I'd ask that You would allow us to start making decisions in an absolute surrender to You, knowing the small choices make a big difference and echo into eternity.

Lord, help us to be disciplined, surrendered, that we might bring the joy of the Lord to everyone we touch. Our hearts and souls themselves reverberate the awesomeness of Your all-knowing love for us. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.