



Lesson 1 – Know God

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” This is the opening sentence from A. W. Tozer’s classic work *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Tozer went on to write: “We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God... Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, ‘What comes into your mind when you think about God?’ we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.” In many ways the course of your life will be a test of how well you can answer the question: “What is God like?”

In some ways a series focused specifically on studying God shouldn’t be necessary. Every time we open God’s Word the question on the front of our mind ought to be, “What does this show me about God?” Our Bible reading should not simply be rummaging around for a new command to follow or promise to help me through a tough time. Although the Bible contains many commands and many promises, the ultimate purpose of Scripture is to reveal to us who God is and what He is like, and then to show us how we should live before such a God.

Why do people often read their Bibles and walk away without learning anything more about God?

People beaten down by sin need a fresh vision of God. They need that vision whether they are fighting that sin with everything they have, or are weary in the battle and ready to quit, or if they don’t even want to acknowledge they have a problem. People who find themselves in the middle of trials so deep they don’t know where strength for the next step will come from need a fresh vision of God. People wrestling with apathy need a fresh vision of God. People successfully following God and seeing His blessing need a fresh vision of God, so they don’t become proud and begin to think they have the resources needed to live for God. All of us, in every stage of life, find ourselves in need of a fresh vision of God.

What stage of life do you find yourself in? How is a fresh view of God important to you where you are today?

In this short series, we will study God. We are going to zero in on several key attributes of God – His holiness, love, wisdom, greatness, and goodness. Before we begin studying these attributes themselves, though, we’ll step back and get a big picture look of why knowing God matters so much, and we’ll also look at the right way to go about studying God.

The Importance of Knowing God

Some believers think a study of God's attributes is only important for professional theologians or Christians who get really excited about theology. But theology is the study of God, and God wants all believers to know Him and to get to know Him better. The Bible is consistently clear that a knowledge of God is crucial for every child of God.

Man's Greatest Accomplishment Is Knowing God (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

The greatest tragedy in life is not failure. The greatest tragedy is succeeding at something that doesn't ultimately matter. Some people give their entire lives to something, become incredibly successful at that one thing, and then die without having accomplished anything of eternal value.

What are some things people give their lives to thinking it will bring success, happiness, or joy?

God reminded Israel of this very fact through the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. As God was warning about coming judgment, He wanted to make sure that people were trusting in the right things. Facing an uncertain future can easily tempt people to look to their own wisdom, wealth, or power to prepare for what was to come. But Jeremiah pointed a country about to face a crisis to a very different foundation: how well they knew God.

What does it mean to glory in the fact that we know God?

How does God describe Himself in verse 24? What things does He delight in?

God's Greatest Desire Is for Man to Know Him (Hosea 6:6)

Many people think that if they do good things for God, God will be happy with them. So long as they keep the rules, serve here and there in their church, and try to be nice to people, then they can live how they want and God will overlook their faults. Israel used to think this way too. God warned them in Hosea 6:6, however, that sacrifices and offerings were not enough. Doing good things to get God off our back isn't enough. God wants more; He wants us to truly know Him.

What are some ways that we can do "good things to get God off our back"?

Another prophet would put it this way, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; And what doth the LORD require of thee, But to do justly, and to love mercy, And to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). "Walking humbly with God" is similar to the idea of "knowing God." The point here is that a close relationship that goes beyond mere external keeping of rules or following a ritual system with no heart in it.

What do you think it means to walk humbly with God? How does a believer practically do that throughout the day?

The Importance of Loving God

There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. I may know about the president of the United States, but I don't know him. There are many believers (and sadly, even many theologians) who know about God, but they don't really know Him. A true knowledge of God goes beyond facts and memorized verses. A true knowledge of God is a personal knowledge of God, it can only come to us as the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and we see the truths of God's Word at work in our own lives.

God's Word Warns against Right Doctrine and Cold Hearts (Isaiah 29:13)

It can be really easy to say the right thing. To show up to church and sing praises to God and engage in "church speak" with those around us. For those who have been Christians for a while, you can have major spiritual problems in your heart or home and yet show up in church with a smile and say all the right things and no one would know. But God knows, and He's not okay with it.

In Isaiah 29:13, God calls out His people for this very behavior: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, And with their lips do honour me, But have removed their heart far from me, And their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:" Israel said all the right things, but their hearts were removed far away from God. They had a "fear" of God, but it was just an outward form they had learned from others. If you looked at these Israelites, they looked good. But appearances were deceiving, because deep down there was rottenness.

As believers we need to watch out, because this same critical fault can be true of us. Simply being able to say the right thing is not enough, we need to truly seek after God with our whole heart, having a healthy fear and a fervent love for Him (Deuteronomy 10:12). It is possible to "know the right things" but for that knowledge to remain shallow and cold.

How does someone fall into a cold, shallow understanding of God?

What steps could be taken to avoid a cold, shallow understanding of God?

God's Word Warns against Right Doctrine with Big Heads (1 Corinthians 8:1)

The study of God is one of the most important things we could study, but it is also one of the most dangerous. Every time we study God's Word, we run the risk of filling our heads with knowledge while our hearts remain unmoved. Knowledge about God simply for the sake of knowing will lead to spiritual apathy, and eventually to apostasy.

Sadly, some people who know the Bible the best on this planet are unregenerate, don't believe a word of it, and unless converted by faith in Christ will spend an eternity in hell. Many universities today have a "school of religion," staffed with professors who have a broad knowledge of the content of the Bible, the cultural and historical background, and the history of doctrine over the centuries. In some cases, they know the content of the Bible better than most Christians. But that knowledge hasn't moved their heart.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul is dealing with believers who have certain knowledge, but rather than motivate a love for God and a concern for others, that knowledge has made them arrogant. Rather than a deeper love for God and others, it fueled selfishness and made them uncaring towards those they viewed as

less informed. If we simply grow in our knowledge, but don't also grow in our love for God and others, knowledge can become a deadly poison.

How can believers guard against arrogance for what they do know about God?

How is it that a love for God and a knowledge of God relate to each other?

The Impact of Knowing and Loving God

So what happens when we come to know and love God better? What kind of an impact will a careful, prayerful, loving study of God make in our lives? As we grow in knowledge, specifically a personal, loving knowledge of God, we will see at least two major differences in our loves: we will have hope and we will become holy.

A Personal Knowledge of God Will Give Us Hope (Isaiah 40:9-11)

Israel had received a lot of bad news. God's judgment was coming. Babylon would conquer them. They would be carried away as captives into a foreign land. But in chapter 40 of Isaiah, the focus of the prophet turns from the coming judgment to the hope of God. In verse 9, the charge goes to a city crier to stand on top of a mountain and cry out to the nation: "Behold your God!" After the devastation coming to Judah, devastation that God has decreed, God will come and rescue them. He will come in strength and redeem His people and feed His flock. To give people hope for the coming tragedy, Isaiah points people to God.

The problems we face are not always a result of our sin, as they were for Judah. But whether it is the result of our own sin or the result of the fall, we all face discouraging, disheartening situations. When we do, like the people of Judah we need to listen to the same challenge as Isaiah: "Behold your God!" Look to God, see who He is and how powerful and good He is, and take comfort in the storm. Those who are discouraged and beaten down in life will find themselves strengthened by a fresh vision of God.

What are some attributes of God that can be a help to people who are struggling with hopelessness?

Why is it important to review attributes of God that we already know? How does going over truth we already know build hope?

A Personal Knowledge of God Will Make Us Holy

Knowing who God is will make a deep impact on us. When we see God as He is, it will change who we are. We see this with Isaiah, who saw God and felt convicted over His uncleanness (Isaiah 6:1-5). God wants us to look at His holiness and imitate His character: "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15). John is clear that it is impossible to say that we know God, but then disobey God (1 John 2:4). Learning more about our great God should increase our devotion to God, our commitment to God, and ultimately our obedience of God.

Why do you think learning more about God leads to greater holiness?

What if someone learns a lot of facts about God but doesn't see a change in their life, what might this show?