

Knowing God (Theology Proper)

Series: These Things Never Change

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One of my favorite hobbies...always has been, is reading. As a child I remember devouring the biography section in my elementary library. I made it my goal to read every biography in the library. I went through a boxcar children phase and then a Hardy Boy mystery book phase – have always loved reading.

When I was called to ministry, I remember my home-church pastor telling me that every pastor needed a good theological library and so we gave me a few books to get my library going. Back in the day, Debbie knew that if we walked into a bookstore, she needed to take my wallet from me – because I would rather by books than clothes – always loved books.

Typically, I am reading 4-5 books at a time. It depends on what time of day it is...depends on the mood I am in...depends on whether the book is a page-turner or not!

On a personal level, the most influential book I've ever read over the years is A.W. Tozer's *Pursuit of God*. I first read it in November of 2002, and I remember the exact date because I picked it up the week that Debbie and I were getting married.

I was packing for the honeymoon – we were headed to St. Lucia – and typically – like on Spring Break a few weeks ago, I bet I took eight books with me and only finished one! NOT wanting to fill my bag with books on the honeymoon, I remember going to my books shelf with all my books and looking at each one – and I vividly remember praying and asking God to show me the exact book he wanted me to take – I was only going to bring one and did not want to miss it!

I grabbed Tozer's *Pursuit of God* – and that week I could not get enough of it. It seemed like every word he wrote, I underlined. It captured my heart – and let me just say that week on my honeymoon with Debbie and in my time alone with the Lord and A.W. Tozer – let's just say it one of the best weeks of my life!

I thought of Tozer this week because as we tackle important doctrine in our *These Things Never Change* series, the second book I ever read by him was his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

It's a book about the attributes of God and their meaning in the Christian life. In the opening chapter of that book entitled: *Why We Must Think Rightly About God* – the opening sentence of that chapter...the very first sentence of that book...it's probably the most often used quote by Tozer in Christian circles.

He writes this: **“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”**

I'm calling today's message: **Knowing God**

As we take a deep dive into the essential doctrines we believe as a Church, what is called “Theology Proper” or the study of God, the Father is where we begin.

J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* writes: “**The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.**”

This is Theology Proper, and in this message today I want to work out two points. Well, the first is a point, and the second will be a question.

The first point is this: **God desires to be known**

Illus. Hide and Seek – at house, in church – God is not hiding from us! He desires to be known and has made himself known to us...and has promised if we do seek him (Deut. 4:29, 1 Chron. 28:9, 2 Chron 15:2, Prov. 8:17, Jer. 29:13, Is. 55:6) we WILL find him!

Now, before we talk about how he has made himself known, let’s try to define who God is -if that’s even possible?! The scripture says, “his greatness is unsearchable!”

How would you answer this question: “Who is God?”

This is one of those questions that your kid asks you when they are four or five years old? They are coming to church and hearing about God and you’re just driving down the road minding your own business when all of the sudden, their little voice comes out of nowhere?

“Mom...Dad...Who is God? Where did God come from? If he made everything, who made him?” And typically, we look out the window and think, “How am I going to answer this?!”

Illus. Westminster Catechism - Speaking of teaching our children, one of the reasons the Westminster Shorter Catechism was created was to teach children doctrine. The Catechism is put in a question-and-answer format primarily to help children learn about God and more easily help understand who he is.

This was first created in 1647. The question is given: What is God? And here is the answer – **“God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”**

For each part of the definition given different scripture is provided to back up the definition. (workout)

The Apostle’s Creed, outside of scriptural creeds, it’s the earliest and most universally affirmed creed of the Christian faith. It dates back to the 2nd Century.

It starts off like this and let’s repeat it together: **“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.”**

It's a statement of faith – "I believe in God!"

- "I believe in God, the Father..." – he is a personal God – NOT aloof...not distant!
- "I believe in God, the Father almighty" – God can do anything...nothing is too hard or difficult for him! He is sovereign! God, is a father – think about what this does as it relates to our prayer life...how we interact with God!
- "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth" – the implications of this truth: if there is a creator...a mastermind behind all of this, then we are under his rule...what we enjoy and have is a stewardship...were not some mistake! Not some random clump of matter that came together through a big bang or the result of a long evolutionary process.

Recall the poem that's been repeated through the years: "Once I was a tadpole when I began to begin. Then I was a frog with my tail tucked in. Next I was a monkey on a coconut tree. Now I am a doctor with a PhD."

When someone says, "I don't believe in God" that's not a statement of fact – it's as much a statement of faith as someone saying, "I believe in God."

We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth for logical reasons...educated reasons...faith reasons – and we believe this because God is a personal God who has made himself known to us!

Now, it's important to understand that all that we know about God, we know because of HOW he has chosen to reveal himself...and this is important!

God revealing himself shows he desires to be known AND can be known (at least to a degree). There are four primary way that God has chosen to reveal himself to us.

The first way he has revealed himself so that we could know him is though: **Creation**

Psalms 19:1-2 – "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge (of who he is and what he is like)."

Rom. 1:19-20 – "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ 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. So they are without excuse."

God has chosen to reveal himself through nature, and simply by looking around and observing we can see how God, an invisible Spirit has chosen to make himself known – he has made himself known as Creator - just look at the beauty and glory of the heavens and the earth.

Think of the grandeur and majesty of the work of his hands...from the stars and planets to the ocean and other bodies of water to majestic mountains and green landscapes to beautiful sunrises and sunsets...think of the uniqueness of animal kingdom?

Did you know there are over 900,000 different insect species? Over 300,000 species of plants?

God has revealed himself through his creation – and that includes me and you – we are made in his image and can know something about God simply by observing the intricacies of mankind!

Secondly, God shows a desire to be known by revealing himself through our: **Conscience**

Rom. 2:14-15 – “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”

Remember what **St. Augustine** – “**You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.**”

Another way this has been said is by the French mathematician, **Blaise Pascal** – “**There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.**”

We’ll get to that last phrase in just a moment...the point here is we are made in the image of God...according to **Eccl. 3:11 – “He has put eternity into man’s heart.”**

God when he made us...he hardwired us with a desire for the eternal...with a hunger to know God – and our desire to find fulfillment and chase satisfaction and NOT find it in anything in this life SHOULD point us to something greater. And let’s be honest even the most fulfilled and satisfied you’ve ever been, it doesn’t last – but that desire for it to last is God beckoning you to know him.

The fact that you desire justice...that you know right from wrong - that you even can acknowledge there is a wrong points to a God! How else would you know right from wrong if there is no standard of right? God has stamped your soul with his imprint.

Thirdly, God shows his desire to be known by revealing himself in his: **Written Word**

As I mentioned last week, we will spend an entire week on the trustworthiness of scripture. We’ll talk about the sufficiency and veracity of the Bible.

Bottom line is this though: If God does not reveal himself in scripture, we are left scrambling. Because while he reveals himself in creation...if that’s all the revealing he does, then, yes, we see his hand in a beautiful sunset, what does a horrific tornado say about him?

If he just reveals himself in our conscience and we know something eternal is within us, but we are not told what it is or how that eternal can be fulfilled then we're chasing whatever feels good hoping that the next high we have stays and we found our answer.

Instead, God chooses to reveal himself through his written word, the Bible colors in the lines more fully informing us who God is and what he is like:

- The Bible shares with us actions of God. We see him loving and caring and redeeming and judging...
- The Bible shares with us names of God. We can know God through names like Jehovah Jireh – “God provides” or Jehovah Rophe – “God heals and restores” or Adonai – “Master and Lord”...

We wouldn't know ANY of these names of God and these descriptors of who he is if it wasn't for the written word! And speaking of descriptors:

- The Bible shares images with us that help us to know who God is and what he is like. Images like: Rock, Shepherd, King, Maker, Father...
- The Bible also gives us various attributes of God – these attributes are foundational to his character. We see he is love, holy, good, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, sovereign, AND he is in complete and perfect unity with the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – one God in three distinct persons (we'll talk about the Trinity next week).

We would know NOTHING of God apart from him revealing himself through the written word. There is a fourth way God shows his desire to be known and that is how he has revealed himself through the: **Living Word**

This is of course, Jesus. **John 1:1, 14 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

John 17:3 – “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Anything you want to know about God, just look at the life of Jesus and you will get your answer.

- Want to know how God responds to sin, look at how Jesus responds to sin...
- Want to know what's important to God, look at what Jesus taught and emphasized...
- Want to know how God treats outsiders and sinners, look at how Jesus treated outsiders and sinners...

The ultimate way God has made himself known and shows his desire to be known is by sending Jesus. And when we talk about knowing God, look again at what Jesus states in John 17:3.

John 17:3 – “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

We’re not just talking about what we believe in this series, but we are talking also about why it matters – and look at why knowing God matters – eternal life is based on it!

And so, the question I want to ask is this: **Do you know God?**

I’m not talking about a head knowledge...I’m talking about an experiential knowledge. True believers have “tasted and seen that the Lord is good” – they have experienced him!

J.I. Packer – “A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about God.”

It’s interesting...the word “know” in Hebrew is used to describe the sexual union that exists between a husband and a wife. It’s said in Gen. 4:1 that Adam “knew” his wife Eve and she conceived and bore a son.

It’s this idea of intimacy. Jeremiah takes the word in:

Jer. 9:23-24 – “Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”

Do you know God? It’s so important. This same idea of intimacy and personal knowledge is translated the New Testament when Jesus warns in Matthew’s gospel...one of the scariest verses in all of the Bible.

Matt. 7:21-23 – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

See, knowledge of God is critical. **Hosea 6:6 – “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”**

You’ve got to be able to answer this question in the affirmative – your eternal life hinges on it: Do you know God, personally and intimately? Perhaps the better question to ask is does God know you?

Illus. Taylor Swift - And look, it's not like Taylor Swift knowable. There's a difference in knowing Taylor Swift, going to her concert and being able to sing her songs...and really knowing her. Her inviting you backstage and sharing with you why she wrote those songs and asking you personal questions about what you think about them and how they make you feel.

God, as infinite and incomprehensible as he is – get this – he has **CHOSEN** to reveal himself to me and you – created beings who sin against him every day, and he has invited us to **KNOW** him!

In Jesus, he has promised if we will follow him...if we surrender our lives to his lordship, the Creator God who is infinite and incomprehensible would become a personal God to us. We could know him, and He knows us – it's called a relationship.

What grace! And having this personal relationship with God through Jesus is called salvation – eternal life (John 17:3).

So, question: Do you know him? Does he know you? If not, today is the day of salvation!

Listen: Don't settle for knowing facts about God, your salvation hinges on knowing him – and knowing him means trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins **AND** surrendering your life to his lordship.

Don't settle for being a nominal believer...remember what we said last week: What we believe **SHOULD** affect the way we behave. Nominal believers are practical atheists.

The atheist...the agnostic says, "God doesn't exist" OR say, "I don't know if he exists or not, it really doesn't matter to me." And they live life as if they are God – do whatever it is they want to do.

It's not much different from the person that says they follow God, but lives life on their own terms – it's practical atheism.

- Practical atheists have no problem worshipping on Sunday morning and then ripping people on their social media on Sunday afternoon.
- Practical atheists have no problem giving a tithe and at the same time talking about someone behind their back.
- Practical atheists can easily see the speck of sin in someone else's eye, never even knowing there is a plank in their own!

These are nominal believers and living like this points to the fact that we don't know God as we claim we do because **TRUE** believers who **KNOW** God recognize how he has revealed himself in scripture and adjust their life accordingly – the parts of their life people see and don't see!

True believers discover they can know God and spend their life trying to get to know him more and more!

We will NOT know God apart from spending time with the Word in the word! THIS is where a knowledge of God begins AND continues to flow from.

This brings me to the application part of this message. If we know God and want to continue growing in our knowledge of him, there are two primary ways we do this:

1. Listening to the Word

You simply cannot grow in your knowledge of God apart from giving your life to the word of God. It is by listening to the Living Word through the Written Word that your life is changed – we call it sanctification – being made more and more like God every day.

So, take God's Word in...you need more time, not less reading scripture. Write verses down and put them on note cards. Download apps like Dwell or YouVersion and listen to the word when you're driving or falling asleep (just don't fall asleep while driving!).

You know the Devil is real because you get serious about this and he's going to distract you like crazy...you'll have so many excuses as to why you can't get in the word. The phone will go off, you'll be tired, your mind will want to wander.

Why is this? Because Satan knows God's word is alive and active...he knows if we ever get serious about giving ourselves to it:

- we'll learn to say "no" to the flesh...
- we'll grow in our power of discernment...
- we'll have an increasing desire for holiness...

I think it was **Tony Evans – "God feeds hungry people."**

You get up and ask God to give you an appetite for his word. Set aside time to really study...to really get to know him and you watch what God does as you commit to listening to him.

And warning: Don't get discouraged as you grow in your knowledge of God. As you give your life to his word, you CAN get discouraged because the closer you get to God, the more sinful you are going to feel...the more you read his word, the more he reveals himself to you and sometimes it will feel like you aren't growing at all.

Don't give up! The closer you get to the sun, the hotter you are going to be. And as you read and God begins to reveal himself, you will begin to see yourself as you are – sin-filled...sick...in need of grace!

And that's a GOOD place to be because you are finally seeing the reality of the situation. You need him every second of every day! Growing in a knowledge of God will get you to this place.

There is a second way we grow in our knowledge of God and that is putting what we hear and listen to into practice. We grow in our knowledge of God by:

2. Obeying the Word

This is what I refer to as a “knowledge of God” super-power. See, we can listen to the word and memorize the word all day long and we will grow in a knowledge of God – as stated earlier though, if we don’t work it out that just means we’re good at Bible Trivia.

There is a knowledge of God that can only be gained by obeying the Living and Written Word. I’ll use an example of coming to Houston.

Illus. The move here – (tell story) I knew of God’s faithfulness. I knew God was. God of provision. I knew God was able – but when I acted on faith – I KNEW all these things at a much deeper level.

And let me just say this: a deeper level of knowing God will often come through a time of brokenness. It’s a spiritual reality. It’s the cost of knowing God – he weans you from this world by showing you, you don’t need it – and what you find in the process is knowing him is all that matters!

You want to grow (super-power) grow in your knowledge of God? Start obeying what you’re listening to:

- Share faith – share faith!
- Be courageous – be courageous!
- Take a step – take the step!
- Confess this wrong – confess the wrong!
- Confront in love – confront in love!

Illus. Charles Stanley (FBC Atlanta and InTouch) – “Obey God and leave the consequences to him.”

I have a saying about my time alone with God and it’s this: **When you have the word of God open before you and the Spirit of God living within you, nothing is coincidence.** (example)

I want to close by reading two passages of scripture. We’ve already looked at them in this message, but I want to close by really concentrating on them. Reading them slowly and letting the Spirit of God speak whatever he would desire into our life at this moment.

Jer. 9:23-24 – “Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”

The things we boast about! Can we boast that we know God? Intimately KNOW God!

John 17:3 – “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

What we believe about God matters. Why? Eternal life is at stake. So, I'll ask one more time – it could be said that this is the last question on God's final exam for your life? Do you know him?

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.