

The PRIORITY *of* KNOWING GOD

WHY IT MATTERS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE



◆
The
PRIORITY
of
KNOWING GOD

W H Y I T M A T T E R S M O R E T H A N
A N Y T H I N G E L S E

*Based on the ESV & NIV Translations of the Holy Bible
With Reflections from the Great Christian Commentators*

Dedication

*To every soul who has ached for something beyond what the world could give —
who searched every horizon for satisfaction and found the longing still there.*

That longing is a compass. It points to God.

May these pages help you find your way to Him.

Preface

There is a question beneath every question. Beneath the questions of career, relationship, purpose, and meaning lies one question that, answered rightly, illuminates all the others: Do I truly know God?

Not know about God. Not own a Bible, attend church, or affirm a creed. But know — personally, intimately, transformingly — the living God who breathed the cosmos into existence and who, in astonishing condescension, calls each of us by name.

This book is written with the deep conviction that knowing God is the single supreme priority of human existence. It is not one lane among many on the highway of self-improvement. It is the highway itself — the foundation upon which every other worthwhile thing is built. When we know God, everything else finds its proper place. When we neglect the knowledge of God, even our greatest achievements ring hollow in the end.

These pages draw from two of the most trusted translations of Scripture: the English Standard Version (ESV), prized for its precision and literal accuracy, and the New International Version (NIV), valued for its clarity and readability. Together they offer a rich, stereophonic hearing of God's Word. We also walk alongside the great voices of Christian history — Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, Spurgeon, Tozer, Packer, and others — whose lives of seeking God have left us a treasury of hard-won wisdom.

Each of the ten chapters is organized around a central theme, supported by Scripture, illuminated by commentary, and closed with a chapter summary and reflection questions for personal meditation or group discussion. This is not a book to be read quickly and set aside. It is a book to be prayed through, returned to, and allowed to do its slow, deep work in the soul.

May God use these pages not merely to fill your mind but to inflame your heart. May the reading of this book become the beginning — or the deepening — of the greatest journey available to any human being: knowing God.

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Introduction: The Highest Pursuit

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

— John 17:3 (ESV)

What if the central story of your life is not the career you built, the family you raised, or the dreams you pursued — but whether or not you came to truly know God? What if the defining question of human existence is not What did you accomplish? but Did you know Me?

Jesus defined eternal life in relational terms: not a destination reached after death, but a knowing that begins now. Augustine wrote his immortal words seventeen centuries ago, and they have lost none of their power: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” The restlessness is universal. The remedy is singular.

This book is an invitation into that knowing. It is organized around ten essential dimensions of the knowledge of God. Each chapter explores one facet of this magnificent pursuit, drawing from Scripture, church history, and the great commentators of the Christian tradition. Together, they form a coherent vision of what it means to place the knowledge of God at the summit of human life.

Paul, who surrendered everything for this pursuit, declared: “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8, NIV). The word surpassing is deliberate. There is no comparison. Knowing God stands in a category entirely its own.

***The knowledge of God is not the reward of a spiritual life.
It is the meaning of life itself.***

Begin here. Begin hungry. Come with your questions, your doubts, your disappointments, and your longing. The God who made you is not put off by any of these. He is, as the prophet promised, found by those who seek Him with their whole heart (Jeremiah 29:13). This book is written in the confidence that you are such a person — and that the God you seek is faithful to be found.

What Does It Mean to Know God?

Moving from Information to Intimate Relationship

"I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

— **Philippians 3:10 (NIV)**

Beyond Head Knowledge

We live in the most information-saturated era in human history. More facts about more subjects are available to the average person today than the greatest libraries of antiquity could have held. Yet for all our information, we are not necessarily a people who know well. We have confused accumulation of data with cultivation of relationship. Nowhere is this confusion more dangerous than in the realm of our knowledge of God.

Many sincere people believe they know God because they know things about God. They can name the books of the Bible, recite doctrinal statements, describe the events of redemption history, and argue theological positions with confidence. This knowledge has genuine value — we will return to it throughout this book. But it is not what Scripture means when it speaks of knowing God. The knowledge the Bible invites us into is far more personal, more demanding, and more transforming than the accumulation of religious information.

Knowing about God is crucially different from knowing God. The difference between them is as great as the difference between knowing about a person and knowing that person. I may know all about the President without the President knowing me at all. Similarly, a person may know a great deal about God without God being a reality in their life at all.

— **J.I. Packer, Knowing God (1973)**

The Hebrew Depth of Knowing

The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *yada* to describe the knowledge of God. This is a remarkable word. It is the same word used in Genesis 4:1 when Adam “knew” his wife Eve — a word of the deepest experiential union. When God says through Jeremiah, “Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me” (Jeremiah 9:24, ESV), the word is *yada*. God is not calling us to an academic seminar. He is calling us into an intimate, lived union with Himself.

Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus' use of the Greek word *ginosko* in John 17:3 carries the sense of progressive, growing, experiential knowledge — the kind that deepens over time through shared life. It is not static data acquisition but dynamic, relational knowing: the kind that unfolds through every season of a lived relationship, through joy and loss alike.

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.

— John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536)

Three Dimensions of Knowing God

Biblical knowing involves at least three interwoven dimensions. The first is intellectual: knowing true things about God. The second is relational: experiencing God personally through prayer, worship, and the work of the Holy Spirit. The third is transformational: being changed by the encounter itself. True knowledge of God is never merely information — it reshapes the one who receives it.

Moses illustrates all three. He knew the Law (intellectual). He spoke with God “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11, ESV) — relational. And his face shone with the glory of God after each encounter (Exodus 34:29) — transformational. The goal for every believer is the integration of all three: minds that know truly, hearts that experience deeply, lives that reflect what they have received.

To know God is to be changed by God. Knowledge without transformation is mere information.

Moses and the Prayer That Changes Everything

After all the miracles of the Exodus — the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the sea, the pillar of fire — Moses still prayed: “Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me your ways, that I may know you” (Exodus 33:13, ESV). He was not satisfied with seeing God's works. He wanted to know God's ways — His character, His inner nature, His heart.

Psalms 103:7 offers the telling contrast: “He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel” (ESV). The people saw acts — spectacular miracles performed before their eyes. Moses knew ways — the character of the One who performed them. There is a world of difference between being a spectator of God's power and being an intimate of God's person.

Moses chose the latter, and God responded by declaring His own name and nature in breathtaking intimacy (Exodus 34:6–7).

“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

— **Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV)**

★ C H A P T E R S U M M A R Y ★

Chapter One establishes the foundational distinction between knowing about God and truly knowing God. Drawing on the Hebrew *yada* and Greek *ginosko*, we see that biblical knowledge is experiential, relational, and transformational — not merely intellectual. The example of Moses shows us a man not content with seeing God’s acts from a distance, but pressing in to know God’s very character. The three dimensions of knowing — intellectual, relational, and transformational — provide the framework for understanding what this pursuit involves and requires of us.

➡ R E F L E C T I O N & D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S ➡

1. In your own words, what is the difference between knowing about God and truly knowing God? Where would you honestly place yourself on that spectrum today?
2. What does the Hebrew word *yada* reveal about the kind of relationship God desires with His people? How does this change your understanding of what a relationship with God can actually look like?
3. Moses prayed to know God's ways, not merely to see God's acts. What does this tell you about Moses’ spiritual depth? What do your own prayers reveal about what you most want from God?
4. Which of the three dimensions — intellectual, relational, or transformational — is most developed in your life right now? Which needs the most growth, and what might cultivating it look like?
5. J.I. Packer writes that knowing about God is crucially different from knowing God. In what specific areas of your spiritual life have you confused the two? What would it take to move from information toward genuine intimacy?

The God Who Pursues Us

Understanding the Divine Initiative in Relationship

“We love because he first loved us.”

— 1 John 4:19 (NIV)

A God Who Seeks

Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the God of the Bible — when compared with the gods of every other religion and philosophy in human history — is that this God seeks. He does not sit in celestial indifference waiting to be discovered by the sufficiently enlightened. He moves. He speaks. He reaches. He comes. Long before any human soul turns toward heaven, heaven has already bent toward that soul.

From the first pages of Scripture this pattern is established. After the catastrophe of the Fall, when Adam and Eve had hidden themselves in shame among the trees, it was not they who called out first. It was God who came walking “in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8, ESV) and called: “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9, ESV). This is not a request for information. It is the first gospel call in history — Come out of hiding. I am here. You can be known and still be loved.

Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee. Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in Thee.

— Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (397 AD)

The Relentless Pursuit Through History

The narrative of Scripture is, at its core, the story of God’s pursuit of humanity. He called Abraham out of Ur. He wrestled with Jacob through the night at Peniel. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush on a lonely mountain. He thundered at Sinai to form a covenant people. He raised up prophet after prophet — not because He needed more spokespeople, but because He kept reaching toward a people who kept turning away.

The book of Hosea is perhaps the most dramatic portrayal of this divine pursuit. God commands Hosea to love an unfaithful wife as a living parable of God’s love for Israel: “The

LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they have turned to other gods’” (Hosea 3:1, NIV). God’s love for His people is not conditional upon their faithfulness. It is the love that keeps pursuing even when it is not returned.

The Hound of Heaven was after me. I was the most reluctant convert in all of England. I felt myself being pursued — not by a concept, not by a religion, but by a living, personal, pursuing God who would not let me alone. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.

— C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (1955)

The Incarnation: God's Ultimate Act of Coming

All of God’s Old Testament reaching culminated in one supreme act of self-revelation: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14, NIV). In the Incarnation, the infinite God entered the finite world. The eternal entered time. The invisible became visible. The incomprehensible became comprehensible — not by becoming less than He was, but by adding humanity to His divinity in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come primarily to deliver a new moral code or a superior religious system. He came to make the Father known: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18, NIV). The Greek word *exegeomai* — translated “make known” — means to lead out, to explain, to fully expound. Jesus is the exegesis of God. He is God explaining Himself in terms that human beings can understand, approach, and love.

Before we ever turned toward God, God had already turned toward us. The initiative in every relationship with Him belongs to Him.

The Gift of the Indwelling Spirit

Even the Ascension of Jesus was not abandonment but preparation for a more intimate presence. Jesus told His disciples: “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7, NIV). The Holy Spirit is the personal presence of God dwelling within every believer — not visiting, but inhabiting; not available by appointment, but perpetually present.

Paul makes the astonishing declaration: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, ESV). The God who once filled the Jerusalem Temple with His Shekinah glory now fills every surrendered human

heart with that same presence. The divine pursuit has arrived at its most intimate expression: Emmanuel, God with us, has become God within us.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

— **Revelation 3:20 (ESV)**

★ C H A P T E R S U M M A R Y ★

Chapter Two establishes that the knowledge of God begins not with human seeking but with divine pursuing. From the garden of Eden to the giving of the Law, from the prophets to the Incarnation to the gift of the Holy Spirit, God has consistently and relentlessly moved toward humanity. He called to Adam in his hiding, pursued Israel through centuries of unfaithfulness, and ultimately came Himself in the person of Jesus Christ to make the Father fully known. The culmination of this pursuit is the indwelling Holy Spirit — God not merely near us, but within us. The knowledge of God is first and foremost a gift, not an achievement we produce through our own spiritual effort.

➡ R E F L E C T I O N & D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S ➡

6. How does it change your understanding of your spiritual journey to know that God was pursuing you before you ever sought Him? How does this truth affect your sense of worth and belonging?
7. Reflect on the image of God calling “Where are you?” in the garden. In what areas of your life might God be asking that question of you today? What might you be hiding, and why?
8. John 1:18 says Jesus “make known” the Father. What has your study of Jesus’ life and character revealed about God that you might not have understood any other way?
9. What does it mean practically — in the decisions of your daily life — that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? How should this reality shape the way you think about yourself and your time?
10. C.S. Lewis describes God as the “Hound of Heaven” who pursued him relentlessly. Can you trace the ways God has pursued you through the events and people of your own life? What do you find when you look back?

The Supremacy of Knowing God

Why This One Pursuit Eclipses Every Other

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

— **Philippians 3:7–8 (NIV)**

Paul's Radical Revaluation

To understand the force of Paul's words in Philippians 3, we must appreciate what he was surrendering. He was not a man of modest credentials. Circumcised on the eighth day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, trained at the feet of Gamaliel, a Pharisee of Pharisees, zealous beyond his peers, blameless in legal righteousness — by every standard his culture used to measure a man, Paul was exceptional. His resume was impeccable.

And then he met the risen Christ on the Damascus road, and everything changed. Looking back at those impressive credentials from the other side of that encounter, Paul does not merely say they became less important. He says he “considers” them loss — present tense, ongoing evaluation. Every morning Paul woke up, he remade the calculation and arrived at the same conclusion: knowing Christ is worth infinitely more than all of it combined. The Greek word *skybala*, translated “rubbish,” is strong and visceral. Paul is not being polite about his former achievements. In the blazing light of Christ, they have become worthless by comparison.

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.

— Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (1865)

Why Knowing God Eclipses All Other Pursuits

God Himself provides the clearest statement of the case through the prophet Jeremiah: “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, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me” (Jeremiah 9:23–24, ESV). Wisdom, power, and wealth — the three great prizes

of human civilization, the goals that human beings have organized their societies around across every era — are placed beside the knowledge of God, and they do not compare.

This is not because wisdom, might, and riches are evil. They are not condemned. They are simply revealed as insufficient — insufficient grounds for ultimate boasting, insufficient satisfaction for the deepest human longing, insufficient foundations for a life that will endure. Only the knowledge of God belongs in a category of its own: producing genuine life, lasting peace, true wisdom, inexhaustible joy, and unshakeable security that no circumstance can erode.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.

— A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961)

Knowing God Brings Strength to Stand

Daniel 11:32 contains one of the most powerful promises in the Old Testament: “the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action” (ESV). The context is a season of intense pressure, persecution, and cultural compromise. Many around them capitulate. But those who know God — who have built their lives on intimate relationship with the living God — have resources of strength unavailable to others. They stand where others fall. They act with holy courage where others freeze with fear.

This is not because they are naturally stronger or more disciplined. It is because they have learned through experience that God is stronger, and their knowing of Him is not theoretical. When the storm comes, people who know God have already weathered smaller storms with Him and learned by experience that He is trustworthy. They carry a track record of divine faithfulness written in the personal history of their own lives, and that record holds them firm when everything around them is shifting.

Everything else fades. Every other foundation eventually cracks. The one who knows God has found what cannot be taken away.

The Danger of Good Substitutes

The most subtle and dangerous threat to the supremacy of knowing God is not gross sin but good things that quietly displace God from the center of our lives. Family, ministry, career success, theological education, social justice — all of these are genuinely good things. But any

good thing elevated to the supreme position becomes, in that moment, an idol. Martha's service was sincere and good. But it had displaced the one thing necessary: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:41–42, ESV).

The one thing is not laziness or mystical withdrawal from the responsibilities of life. It is the deliberate, sustained prioritization of knowing God — sitting at His feet, listening to His voice, ordering life around this supreme pursuit. From that center, all good works flow rightly and powerfully. Without that center, even the most impressive spiritual activity becomes anxious performance rather than grounded service.

"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

— Psalm 73:25–26 (ESV)

★ C H A P T E R S U M M A R Y ★

Chapter Three establishes that knowing God is not merely one worthwhile pursuit among many but the supreme priority that eclipses all others. Paul's radical revaluation of his impressive credentials, Jeremiah's declaration that wisdom, might, and riches cannot match the value of knowing God, and Daniel's promise that those who know God will stand firm all combine to make the case: nothing else occupies the same category. The chapter also issues a clear warning against the danger of allowing genuinely good things — including ministry, family, and theological study — to displace the one thing necessary.

➡ R E F L E C T I O N & D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S ➡

11. What in your own life might you be building your identity or sense of worth upon other than the knowledge of God? What credentials, achievements, or relationships compete most directly with this supreme pursuit?

12. Paul makes an ongoing daily calculation that knowing Christ is worth more than everything else. When was the last time you consciously made that calculation? What conclusion did you reach?
13. Daniel 11:32 promises that those who know God shall stand firm and take action. In what specific areas of your life right now do you need that kind of holy resilience? How might deepening your knowledge of God provide it?
14. Tozer writes that our idea of God is the most important thing about us. What does your daily life — your time, your money, your attention, your anxiety — reveal about your actual working idea of God?
15. Martha represents sincere but misplaced spiritual energy — busy for God in a way that crowds out being with God. Where in your spiritual life does this pattern show up? What would restoring the right order look like in practical terms?

Knowing God Through His Word

Scripture as the Living Voice of the Living God

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

— 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

God's Written Self-Disclosure

Imagine receiving a letter from someone you deeply long to know — written in their own hand, revealing their deepest values, describing their greatest works, confessing their love for you, and unfolding their purposes for your future together. Every serious reader of such a letter would approach it with reverence, patience, and genuine hunger. They would read it slowly, return to it often, and treasure it above every other document they possess.

This is precisely what the Bible is. It is God’s own self-disclosure in written form — preserved across millennia by His extraordinary providence, mediated through human writers moved by the Holy Spirit, and placed into our hands as the primary means by which we come to know the God who made us. The stakes of reading it well — or reading it carelessly — could not be higher.

The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. No book in the world comes as close to me as the Bible. The Bible is not antique, or modern. It is eternal.

— Martin Luther, Table Talk (16th century)

The Living Power of the Word

The writer of Hebrews offers one of the most striking descriptions of Scripture in all of Christian literature: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, ESV). The Bible is not a historical monument or a religious museum piece. It is a living voice. It is active — it does things. It illuminates, convicts, comforts, instructs, and transforms with a precision that no human author can match.

This is why reading Scripture is fundamentally different from reading any other book. When we open the Bible with honest, open hearts, we are not merely gathering information. We are positioning ourselves to be spoken to by the living God. The same Spirit who inspired the original writing of Scripture is present in its reading — illuminating what the mind might miss, applying what the intellect might dismiss, and making real to the heart what the words describe on the page.

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven — how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God!

— John Wesley, *Preface to Sermons on Several Occasions* (1746)

Reading Scripture to Know God, Not Just About God

Jesus issued a sobering warning to the religious leaders of His day — men who had devoted their entire lives to the study of Scripture: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40, ESV). The Pharisees were expert students of Scripture who had somehow missed the One to whom all of Scripture points. They had the map but missed the destination.

This warning has never lost its relevance. It is entirely possible to study the Bible extensively and yet remain a stranger to the God of the Bible. The letter can be mastered while the Spirit is grieved. The corrective is to approach every text of Scripture with the central question: Who is God revealing Himself to be on this page? What does this passage tell me about His character, His love, His purposes, His ways? Every page of Scripture is ultimately about God, and reading with that question keeps the pursuit centered where it belongs.

Open the Bible not merely to learn about God, but to meet Him. He has promised to speak through every word of every page.

The Discipline of Meditation

Joshua 1:8 commands: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (ESV). The promise of fruitfulness is attached not merely to reading but to meditation — the practice of turning a passage over in the mind, speaking it quietly to oneself, asking questions of it, and allowing it to saturate the soul until it becomes instinctive.

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible and devoted entirely to the glory of God’s Word, gives us the model: “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (v. 97, ESV). “My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times” (v. 20, ESV). “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (v. 103, ESV). The psalmist does not merely read the Word out of religious duty — he loves it, longs for it, and finds it the sweetest substance in his life. This is the posture that transforms Bible reading from religious discipline into spiritual feast.

| *“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”*

— Isaiah 40:8 (NIV)

★ CHAPTER SUMMARY ★

Chapter Four establishes Scripture as the primary written means by which God has chosen to make Himself known to human beings. Paul’s declaration that all Scripture is God-breathed positions the Bible as the authoritative self-disclosure of God — not merely inspired human religious writing but the very voice of God committed to writing for our benefit. The chapter explores the living power of the Word, issues a warning against the Pharisee’s error of studying Scripture without seeking the God of Scripture, and introduces the discipline of meditation as the practice that moves Bible reading from information to genuine transformation and encounter.

➡ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ➡

16. How would you honestly describe your current relationship with the Bible — is it more like an obligation, a resource, a textbook, or a meeting place? What would you like it to become?
17. Jesus warned that it is possible to search the Scriptures while missing the One they reveal. How do you guard against reading the Bible in a way that is more about information-gathering than genuine encounter with God?
18. What does the phrase “God-breathed” mean to you personally? How does believing this about Scripture change the way you approach a specific passage you find difficult or confusing?

19. The psalmist describes the Word as sweeter than honey. Have you ever experienced reading Scripture that way? What were the circumstances? What made it feel different from other reading times?
20. What practical changes could you make to your Bible reading to incorporate more meditation — slowing down, asking questions, listening? What book of the Bible might be a good place to start this practice?

Knowing God Through Prayer

The Conversation That Changes Everything

“Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

— **Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV)**

Prayer as Relationship, Not Technique

Prayer has suffered greatly from being reduced to a technique for producing results. In much popular Christian teaching, prayer is treated primarily as a mechanism — a set of words, postures, or formulas that, when correctly assembled, produce the desired spiritual outcome. This understanding, however sincere, fundamentally misunderstands what prayer actually is.

Prayer is relationship. It is the activity of a child with a Father, a subject with a King, a beloved with the Beloved. It is the most natural response of a creature who has come to know that God is real, near, and interested. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He did not give them a formula. He gave them a relationship — “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9, NIV) — and a conversation that flows naturally from that relationship of trust and love.

Prayer is not a little habit pinned on to us while we were tied to our mother's apron strings; neither is it a little decent quarter of an hour's piety stowed away somewhere between our dressing and our dinner. Prayer is the breathing of the soul, the voice of God in the heart of man, returning to its source.

— **E.M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer (1907)**

The Astonishing Privilege of Access

The New Testament uses language of extraordinary privilege when speaking of prayer. Paul writes: “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18, ESV). The word access — *prosagoge* in Greek — carries the image of being granted an audience with a king — not merely permitted to submit a written petition from afar, but actually ushered into the royal presence for personal conversation. Because of Jesus Christ, every child of God has personal, direct access to the Father of the universe.

The writer of Hebrews draws the practical implication with beautiful clarity: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16, ESV). The word confidence — *parresia* — means boldness, frank speech, the openness that belongs only to a relationship of deep trust and love. We are not to approach God as strangers hoping not to be turned away. We are to come as children to a Father who is eagerly waiting and genuinely delighted to hear our voice.

What doth it profit thee to enter into deep discussion concerning the Holy Trinity, if thou lack humility, and be thus displeasing to the Trinity? For truly, profound words do not make a man holy and upright; but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God. I had rather feel contrition than be skilled in defining it.

— Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (c. 1418)

The Many Voices of Prayer

The great tradition of Christian prayer recognizes that conversation with God has many dimensions, each of which deepens the relationship in its own way. Adoration is the prayer of pure attention — focusing entirely on who God is, not on what He has done for us or what we need from Him. This is perhaps the most neglected form in contemporary Christianity, yet it is the form that most directly cultivates the knowledge of God, because it requires us to think carefully and speak specifically about His character.

Confession is the prayer of honesty — bringing the whole self before God without pretense or self-protection. David modeled this after his devastating sin with Bathsheba: “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5, ESV). Thanksgiving is the prayer of memory — noticing and naming the specific ways God has been faithful, which builds a living history of experience with Him. Intercession is the prayer of identification — standing in the gap for others as Christ does, and in doing so, growing to share His heart for the people He loves.

Prayer does not change God's mind. It changes the one who prays — aligning our vision, desires, and heart with the God we are coming to know.

The Lost Art of Listening

Most believers understand prayer primarily as speaking to God. Far fewer practice the equally essential discipline of listening. And yet every genuine conversation requires both voices. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, ESV) — the Hebrew imperative suggests: let go of your grip, cease striving, release control. The stillness is not merely the

absence of noise. It is the posture of surrender and receptivity that makes genuine hearing possible.

God speaks — through His Word, through the interior witness of the Holy Spirit, through circumstances, through the counsel of wise believers, and through the quiet of a soul that has created enough space to actually hear. The cultivation of silence in prayer — waiting, watching, attending to the movements of the Spirit within — is one of the most countercultural and yet most necessary practices for any believer who genuinely wants to know God.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (ESV)

★ CHAPTER SUMMARY ★

Chapter Five explores prayer as the primary conversational dimension of knowing God. Moving beyond the popular reduction of prayer to a results-producing technique, the chapter establishes prayer as a relational activity — the natural speech of a child with a Father who loves them. The extraordinary privilege of access to God through Christ, the multiple forms of prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession), and the neglected discipline of listening are examined as pathways into deeper knowledge of the living God. The central insight is that prayer does not primarily change our circumstances — it changes us, aligning our hearts with the God we are learning to know.

➤ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ➤

21. How would you honestly describe the quality of your prayer life right now — is it more a duty, a discipline, or a genuine delight? What do you think most shapes how you experience prayer?
22. The word *prosagoge* (access) describes our entry into God's presence as an audience with a king. How does this image change the way you think about the moment you begin to pray?

23. Which form of prayer — adoration, confession, thanksgiving, or intercession — do you find most natural? Which do you most neglect? What might you be missing in your knowledge of God because of that neglect?
24. Psalm 46:10 commands us to “be still and know.” How much deliberate silence do you currently build into your prayer life? What makes silence difficult for you, and what practical step might help you practice it?
25. E.M. Bounds compares prayer to breathing — the essential, constant activity of the soul. What happens to a body that cannot breathe? What is the spiritual equivalent in a life with little or no genuine prayer?

Knowing God Through Worship

The Response of a Soul That Has Seen

*“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”*

— Psalm 95:6–7 (ESV)

Worship as Revelation's Response

Genuine worship is never the starting point. It is always the response. It begins with seeing — catching even a partial glimpse of who God actually is — and then responding to that vision with everything the soul possesses. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up in the temple, his response was not calm theological reflection. It was immediate, overwhelming, and total: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5, ESV). The vision of God’s holiness produced in Isaiah both devastating self-awareness and, immediately after, an eager willingness to be commissioned for God’s service.

This is the pattern of genuine worship throughout Scripture: revelation produces response, awe becomes surrender, seeing leads to serving. Worship is not a warm-up to the “real” part of the church gathering. It is the real part — or rather, it is the eternal occupation of every soul that has truly encountered God. The seraphim of Isaiah’s vision were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3, ESV) — and Scripture gives no indication that they ever stop.

Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth. It is not first a feeling; it is first a seeing. The seeing produces a feeling. And both together are expressed in genuine worship. Missions exist because worship doesn't yet exist among all the peoples of the earth. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.

— John Piper, *Desiring God* (1986)

Spirit and Truth: The Two Wings of Worship

Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 contains the most essential definition of Christian worship: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24, ESV). These two requirements are inseparable and mutually necessary. Worship in spirit without truth becomes mere emotionalism — sincere feeling

unmoored from the actual character of God, which can drift in any direction. Worship in truth without spirit becomes cold orthodoxy — accurate propositions delivered without life, warmth, or genuine love.

The growing knowledge of God provides the content of worship in truth: the more accurately we understand who God is — His holiness, His love, His justice, His mercy, His omnipotence, His faithfulness — the better equipped we are to worship Him as He truly is rather than as our sentiments prefer. And the Holy Spirit provides the dynamic of worship in spirit — bringing the truth alive within us, stirring genuine affection, producing the love that is not manufactured by willpower but received as a gift of grace.

Worship is to feel in your heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery, that Majesty which philosophers call the First Cause but which we call Our Father Which Art in Heaven.

— A.W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship* (1985)

The Worshipping Life

Paul's great call in Romans 12:1 gives us the full scope of Christian worship: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (ESV). The word translated "spiritual worship" — *latreia* — refers to the priestly service of a whole life offered to God. Christian worship is not confined to Sunday services. It is the direction of an entire existence oriented consciously toward God and lived for His glory.

This means that the growing Christian is not merely someone who worships well on Sunday but someone for whom all of life is becoming an act of worship — work done as unto God, relationships offered back to God, suffering endured in trust of God, joy received with gratitude to God. The person who is growing in the knowledge of God increasingly finds that the boundary between the sacred and the secular begins to dissolve, because every moment is lived in the awareness of God's presence and for the glory of His name.

Worship is not a warm-up to the real thing. Worship IS the real thing — the eternal occupation of every soul that has glimpsed who God truly is.

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness."

— Psalm 29:2 (NIV)

★ CHAPTER SUMMARY ★

Chapter Six establishes worship as the natural and necessary response of the soul that has genuinely encountered the living God. Drawing on Isaiah's vision in the temple, Jesus' teaching that worship must be both in spirit and in truth, and Paul's vision of the entire Christian life as an act of living sacrifice offered to God, the chapter expands the definition of worship beyond corporate gatherings to the whole of existence lived consciously in God's presence and for His glory. The chapter also establishes the vital connection between the depth of our knowledge of God and the quality of our worship — we can only truly worship the God we genuinely know.

➡ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ➡

26. How do you currently understand the relationship between the knowledge of God and worship? Does deeper knowledge of God naturally produce richer worship in your own experience?
27. Jesus teaches that worship must be both in spirit (genuine, Spirit-animated) and in truth (shaped by accurate knowledge of God). Which of these two do you think is weaker in your own worship life? Why?
28. Isaiah's vision of God produced both overwhelming humility and eager surrender. When was the last time you had an encounter in worship that affected you that deeply? What contributed to it?
29. Paul calls the presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices "spiritual worship." What would it look like for your work, relationships, finances, and daily decisions to be consciously offered to God as acts of worship this week?
30. Tozer describes worship as "admiring awe and astonished wonder." Does this describe your experience in worship? If not, what do you think is most getting in the way of that kind of encounter with God?

Knowing God Through Obedience

The Inseparable Link Between Love and Loyalty

“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

— John 14:21 (NIV)

The Obedience Paradox

One of the most challenging passages in the New Testament comes from the Apostle John: “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3–4, ESV). These words cut across much comfortable religion. They establish that the claim to know God carries a necessary implication: a life that shows it. Not perfect, flawless obedience — John is equally clear that we all sin (1 John 1:8) — but the general direction and orientation of a life shaped by loving response to God’s revealed will.

The paradox of obedience and the knowledge of God is this: we cannot earn the knowledge of God through obedience, yet we cannot deepen the knowledge of God while persistently, deliberately disobeying Him. Grace alone brings us into relationship with God. But obedience cultivates and deepens that relationship over time. The person who claims to know God while living in comfortable, unexamined rebellion against His revealed will has confused knowing about God with actually knowing Him.

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937)

Obedience as Love, Not Law

The entire framework for New Testament obedience is love, not legal obligation. Jesus frames the relationship with unmistakable clarity: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15, ESV). The obedience flows from the love — it does not produce it. This is the fundamental difference between the servant and the son. The servant obeys

because he must. The son obeys because he loves his father and trusts that his father's instructions are wise, good, and given for his benefit.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus to identify the greatest commandment, He replied with stunning simplicity: love God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–39). The entirety of the Law and the Prophets hangs on these two commands. Not compliance with an external code, but love — the love that keeps the commands not as performance but as devotion. This reframing transforms the entire question of obedience from “How much do I have to do?” to “How can I show the love I already have for the One who first loved me?”

Be killing sin or it will be killing you. The saints are not promised a life without the motions and stirrings of sin, but they are called to the ceaseless mortification of them. Unmortified sin corrupts the conscience, clouds the mind, and ultimately destroys the sweet sense of God's love in the soul.

— John Owen, *Communion with God* (1657)

The Extraordinary Reward of Obedient Love

Jesus' promise in John 14:21 is one of the most remarkable in all of Scripture: “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” The phrase “show myself to them” is the key. Jesus promises to reveal Himself more fully, more intimately, more clearly to the one who walks in obedient love. Obedience opens the door to deeper revelation of God. Deliberate, unrepentant disobedience closes it.

Psalm 25:14 confirms this principle: “The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them” (NIV). The word “confides” carries the image of intimate counsel — the secrets shared between two people who trust each other deeply. God reserves this kind of spiritual intimacy for those who walk in the reverent, loving obedience that Scripture calls the fear of the LORD. This is not a cramped, joyless obedience born of self-protection. It is the bold, free obedience of a person who loves God completely and longs to honor the One who has loved them first.

Every act of obedience is a vote of trust cast for God. And trust is the soil in which the deepest knowledge of God grows.

“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

— 1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV)

★ CHAPTER SUMMARY ★

Chapter Seven examines the inseparable relationship between knowing God and obeying God. John’s sobering statement that those who claim to know God but persistently disobey His commands are self-deceived is balanced with the recognition that obedience is the fruit of the relationship with God, not the prerequisite for it. The chapter reframes obedience within the framework of love rather than law — we obey not to earn God’s favor but because we love God and trust His wisdom. Jesus’ extraordinary promise to reveal Himself more fully to those who walk in obedient love provides the motivational center: obedience opens the door to ever-deeper knowledge of God.

➡ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ➡

31. Is there an area of your life where you know what God requires but have not yet surrendered to it? What is the real obstacle? What would change in your experience of God if you obeyed in that area?
32. How does reframing obedience as love rather than legal obligation change the way you relate to God’s commands? Which commands feel more like love to you now? Which still feel primarily like restriction?
33. Bonhoeffer distinguishes costly grace from cheap grace. Where do you see the assumptions of cheap grace operating in your own life? What would costly discipleship look like in your specific circumstances?
34. Jesus promises to “show himself” more fully to those who keep His commands. Have you experienced a season of greater obedience leading to a greater sense of God’s nearness and revelation? What did that look like?
35. Psalm 25:14 says the LORD “confides” in those who fear Him — like a close friend sharing secrets. What does this tell you about the relationship between holy living and spiritual intimacy? How does this motivate you toward obedience?

Knowing God in the Valley

What Suffering Reveals That Blessing Cannot

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.”

— Job 42:5 (NIV)

The Question That Suffering Asks

No honest discussion of knowing God can avoid the shadow of suffering. For most of us, our most testing season of faith — and often our most transforming encounter with God — does not come in the sunlit uplands of comfort and blessing. It comes in the valley. It comes through illness, loss, grief, betrayal, failure, and the collapse of things we had built our security upon. And in those seasons, a question that can be ignored in times of comfort becomes impossible to avoid: Do I actually know this God I claim to trust?

The book of Job is the Bible’s most sustained meditation on suffering and the knowledge of God. Job is introduced as “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1, ESV) — and he loses everything: his children, his wealth, his health, and ultimately his sense of God’s presence. His response to the initial catastrophe is breathtaking in its faith: “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21, ESV). But as the suffering continues, his questions grow more raw, more desperate, and more honest.

I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages. There is no attribute of God more comforting to his children than the doctrine of divine sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all.

— C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (1869)

The God Who Speaks from the Whirlwind

After chapters of raw lament, anguished argument with his three friends, and desperate wrestling with God’s apparent silence, God finally speaks — not with an explanation of Job’s suffering, but with a revelation of His own glory: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (Job 38:4, ESV). God does not answer the

question of why. He reveals who He is. And that revelation proves sufficient. Job's response, at the very end of the book, is the most important line in all of it: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5, NIV).

This is the testimony of suffering redemptively used. Job entered the trial knowing about God. He emerged from the trial knowing God. The suffering that appeared to be meaningless destruction was, in God's sovereign design, the crucible in which the deepest knowing was forged. He saw what comfort could not have shown him. He knew what prosperity could not have taught him. The valley became the place of the most intimate divine encounter of his life.

Suffering as the Refiner's Fire

Peter writes to believers enduring persecution: "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6–7, NIV). The metaphor of refining is precise: the silversmith's fire does not destroy the silver. It drives the dross to the surface so it can be removed, leaving behind what is pure, valuable, and genuinely beautiful.

Paul describes the cascade of transformation that suffering produces in the believer: "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3–4, ESV). Each step in the process deepens the knowledge of God's faithfulness, because faith is not really known until it is tested. The person who has trusted God only in comfortable seasons has a thinner, more fragile faith than the person who has trusted Him through devastation and found Him faithful there.

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God uses suffering to chisel us into the image of His Son, and the chisel is always held in the hand of a Father who loves us.

— C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940)

God can be known everywhere, but He is known most intimately in the valley — for it is there that we need Him most and find Him nearest.

The God Who Enters Our Suffering

The most important truth about suffering for the Christian is not that it produces character — though it does. It is that we do not suffer alone, and we do not suffer unseen by One who cannot understand. The God of the Bible is not a distant deity watching human pain from celestial comfort. He is the God who entered suffering. Isaiah prophesied that the Servant would be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3, ESV). Jesus wept at Lazarus’s tomb (John 11:35). He cried out from the cross with a desolation that still shakes the soul: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, ESV).

This means that when we suffer, we do not suffer with a Savior who sympathizes from a distance. We suffer with One who has felt what we feel, who carries our grief, and who promises: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5, ESV). The presence of One who truly understands and who walks through the valley with us transforms the experience of suffering from pure devastation into something the New Testament dares to call, impossibly, a gift — a means of knowing God in ways that nothing else can provide.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
— Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

★ CHAPTER SUMMARY ★

Chapter Eight confronts one of the most important and most avoided dimensions of knowing God: the knowledge that comes uniquely through suffering. Job’s journey from hearing about God to truly seeing God through devastating loss is the central case study. The chapter explores suffering as the refiner’s fire that purifies faith and deepens character, and presents the most important truth of Christian suffering: the God of the Bible entered human pain in the person of Jesus Christ. Because of this, no believer suffers alone, and in the valley, many find God more near, more real, and more personally known than at any other point in their lives.

➡ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ➡

36. Job says that through his suffering he moved from hearing about God to actually seeing God. Can you identify a season of difficulty in your own life that brought you into a deeper, more personal knowledge of God than you had before?
37. God speaks to Job not with an explanation of his suffering but with a revelation of His own greatness and sovereignty. When God does not explain Himself to you in a season of pain, how do you respond? What does your response reveal about your actual level of trust?
38. Spurgeon writes that he has learned to “kiss the wave that throws him against the Rock of Ages.” What would that kind of posture look like in your current circumstances? What would need to change in your heart to arrive there?
39. How does it change your experience of suffering to know that Jesus is personally “acquainted with grief”? Is this truth real and living to you in your pain, or does it still feel primarily abstract and theological?
40. Romans 5:3–4 describes a chain from suffering to endurance to character to hope. Where in that chain do you currently find yourself? What specific thing do you sense God is producing in you through your present circumstances?

Knowing God in Community

Why We Cannot Know God Fully Alone

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

— **Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)**

The Communal Shape of Knowing

The Christian faith is deeply personal, but it is not designed to be solitary. God has fashioned human beings as communal creatures from the very beginning — we are, by nature, relational beings, bearing the image of a God who is Himself an eternal community of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This communal dimension of the image of God means that we reflect it most fully not in isolation but in relationship with others who bear the same image.

The implication for the knowledge of God is profound and often overlooked: there are specific dimensions of God’s character and love that can only be discovered in community. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 is addressed to believers together — not to individuals separately: he prays that they “may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Ephesians 3:18, NIV). The phrase “together with all the Lord’s holy people” is not incidental to the prayer. There is a breadth of God’s love that requires the breadth of God’s people to fully comprehend.

It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There he finds his mission, his work. The Christian community is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (1939)**

The Body of Christ

Paul’s governing metaphor for the Church is the human body — organic, interconnected, every part necessary to the health and fullness of the whole. “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12, NIV). Each member of the body has received particular gifts, experiences, and dimensions of

the knowledge of God shaped by their unique history with Him. When we gather, we bring these to one another — and together we come closer to knowing the God who is too large to be fully known by any one of us.

The older believer brings the tested knowledge of God’s faithfulness forged over decades of experience. The younger believer brings fresh faith and unguarded zeal. The believer who has suffered brings the knowledge of God’s nearness in the darkest valley. The believer who has been forgiven much brings the knowledge of God’s grace in its depth and extravagance. None of us, alone, sees the whole picture. Together, in the body of Christ, we begin to see more of the infinite God than any one of us could ever perceive in isolation.

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ vere latitat — the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden. To treat each other well is to treat God well in the only way we can now access Him through human form.

— C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (1949)

Iron Sharpening Iron

Proverbs 27:17 captures the essential dynamic of authentic spiritual community: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (NIV). The knowledge of God grows through both the encouragement and the friction of living in close community with other believers. The person who challenges our comfortable assumptions about God, who calls us to greater faithfulness, who asks the question we have been carefully avoiding, who reflects back to us a dimension of Christ’s character that we have neglected — this person is one of God’s primary instruments for our growth in the knowledge of Him.

The Jerusalem church in Acts 2 gives us the model of what this looks like when it flourishes: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (Acts 2:42–43, NIV). Four practices, all communal: the Word, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer. The knowledge of God was not merely cultivated in private. It was shared, celebrated, tested, and deepened together in a community of mutual accountability, honest love, and radical generosity.

The person who loves God but neglects His people has misunderstood both. God loves the Church, and we cannot love what God loves while persistently ignoring it.

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

— Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

★ CHAPTER SUMMARY ★

Chapter Nine establishes that the knowledge of God has an irreducibly communal dimension that cannot be replaced by private spiritual experience alone. Drawing on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 (that believers grasp the dimensions of God's love together), the body of Christ metaphor, and the model of the Jerusalem church, the chapter makes the case that no individual believer sees the whole of God. We need one another's knowledge, experience, gifts, and perspectives to grow toward a fuller understanding of an infinite God. The isolated Christian is a diminished Christian, cut off from dimensions of the knowledge of God that can only come through genuine life shared in community.

➡ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ⬅

41. Do you experience your church community as a genuine place where you grow in the knowledge of God? Why or why not? What might need to change — in you, or in how you engage with your community?
42. Paul prays that believers will grasp the dimensions of God's love "together with all the Lord's holy people." What might you be missing in your knowledge of God because of limited engagement with the wider body of Christ?
43. Bonhoeffer writes that the Christian community is not an ideal to be realized but a reality created by God in which we participate. How does this shift the responsibility for community from God to you personally?
44. Proverbs 27:17 talks about iron sharpening iron. Who in your community genuinely sharpens you? Who do you sharpen? What does authentic, mutual spiritual friendship look like in your current relationships?
45. The early Jerusalem church devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer — all communally. Which of these four is most alive in your church experience? Which is most underdeveloped, and what would deepening it require?

The Eternal Reward of Knowing God

A Foretaste That Will Never End

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

— 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)

A Knowledge Without End

Every dimension of knowing God explored in the preceding chapters — through Scripture, prayer, worship, obedience, suffering, and community — is a foretaste. A beginning. The first paragraph of a story with no final page. The knowledge of God we cultivate in this life does not end at death. It expands. It deepens. It intensifies into something so far beyond our current experience that Paul can only gesture at it with the language of contrast: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV).

This is not the knowledge of exhaustive information — as though eternal life is an unending systematic theology lecture. God is infinite, and the knowledge of an infinite Being can never be fully exhausted — not even in eternity. The joy of heaven is precisely that there is always more of God to discover, always new depths to plumb, always further reaches of His glory to explore. The knowledge of God in eternity will not plateau. It will eternally increase, like an explorer who keeps finding that the ocean extends further beyond every horizon.

The happiness of heaven consists principally in love. There, the fountain of love, even God himself, is seen face to face. The saints shall be filled with love and shall be near and dear to each other as all are one family in God. The happiness of the celestial world consists principally in the love that reigns there — God’s love for His people, and their love for Him, ever increasing, ever deepening, without end.

— Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven Is a World of Love* (1738)

What Heaven Truly Is

Popular culture describes heaven primarily in terms of its amenities: no more tears, no pain, streets of gold, reunion with loved ones. All of these are genuinely promised and genuinely wonderful. But they are not the center. The center of heaven, the joy that makes every other joy possible, is found in Revelation 22:4: “They will see his face” (ESV). The beatific vision —

the direct, unveiled, glorious encounter with the living God that is impossible on this side of glory — is the supreme reward and the supreme joy of eternal life.

Jesus expressed His own deepest desire for His people in the closing words of His High Priestly Prayer: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24, ESV). The deepest desire of the eternal Son of God is that His people would be with Him — to see, to know, to be forever transformed by the vision of His glory. Every prayer offered in faith, every act of obedience chosen, every moment of suffering endured in trust, every Scripture meditated upon — all of it is preparation for this.

The resurrection of Jesus and the promise of our own resurrection are not about escaping the world. They are about the renewal of all things. God’s purpose is not to take us away from creation but to renew creation through us, filling all things with His glory. The knowledge of God that begins here is the seed of what will flower in the new creation, the first fruits of an eternal harvest.

— N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (2008)

The Urgency of Now

The eternal horizon gives tremendous urgency to the present moment. The habits of seeking God we cultivate today are forming us for an eternity of knowing God. The person who disciplines herself to seek God in the morning before the day’s demands crowd in, who turns to Him in the press of afternoon pressures, who listens for His voice in the quiet of evening — this person is being shaped for an eternity in which knowing God is the supreme occupation and the supreme joy of a glorified humanity.

We are becoming, by God’s grace, the kind of people who will be satisfied by God forever. Jonathan Edwards understood that the felicity of heaven will not plateau but eternally increase — that the joy of knowing God in eternity grows without ceiling, because God Himself is without limit. What begins now in the partial, flickering, glorious knowledge of a lifetime of seeking will expand into the eternal, face-to-face, ever-deepening knowing that God has always, from before the foundation of the world, intended for His people.

Begin today. Seek His face. Open His Word. Pray with honesty. There is no greater treasure, no higher calling, no more worthwhile investment of this fleeting, sacred life.

The Invitation That Never Closes

John, who knew Jesus more intimately than almost anyone, spent his final years writing of love — the love of God, the love we owe one another, and the life of knowing God that is both our present privilege and our eternal destiny. In the closing words of his first letter, he gathers everything into one magnificent declaration: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20, ESV).

He is the true God and eternal life. Not a path to eternal life. Not the condition for eternal life. He Himself is eternal life. To know Him is to possess the fullness of what human existence was always meant to be. Every human longing for beauty, meaning, love, justice, adventure, belonging, and joy finds its truest, deepest, most inexhaustible answer in Him — not partially, as these longings are met in the best this world offers, but fully, eternally, and forever.

The invitation stands. It has always stood. It stands today, extended by the God who has been pursuing you across every season of your life, who has left signposts in every good thing you have ever loved, and who has been calling your name since before time began. The only question is how you will respond — with your whole heart, your surrendered will, and your growing love — to the One who is supremely, endlessly, and gloriously worth knowing.

◆ Come. Know Me. I am worth knowing. ◆

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

— John 17:3 (ESV)

★ C H A P T E R S U M M A R Y ★

Chapter Ten draws the entire book to its eternal conclusion. The knowledge of God cultivated through Scripture, prayer, worship, obedience, suffering, and community in this life is not an end in itself but a foretaste of what awaits. Paul’s promise that we will one day know fully even as we have been fully known, and Revelation’s declaration that the redeemed will see God’s face, establish the eternal horizon of this great pursuit. The chapter closes by establishing the urgency of seeking God now — because the habits and character formed in

this life are forming us for an eternity of knowing God with ever-increasing joy and depth forever.

➡ REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ⬅

46. Paul says we currently know God “in part.” How does the promise of one day knowing God fully — as fully as He already knows you — affect the way you feel about your current struggles and limitations in the faith?
47. The center of heaven is seeing the face of God (Revelation 22:4). Is this what you most look forward to about eternity, or do other things rank higher? What does your honest answer reveal about your current priorities and affections?
48. Jonathan Edwards describes a felicity in heaven that eternally increases, never plateaus. How does the idea of an inexhaustible God — one who can never be fully known even in eternity — change your understanding of both heaven and the character of God?
49. Jesus prayed that His people would be with Him to see His glory. Knowing this is His deepest desire for you personally, how does it shape the way you engage with the spiritual practices and disciplines of this life right now?
50. Having read and reflected on all ten chapters, what is the single most significant shift in your understanding of what it means to know God? What one specific, concrete commitment will you make — beginning today — to pursue the knowledge of God more intentionally?

Conclusion: Begin the Journey

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

— **Ephesians 3:20–21 (ESV)**

A book about knowing God is only as valuable as the knowing it produces. Head knowledge about knowing God is not the same thing as knowing God. And so this conclusion is not a summary. It is an invitation into a journey that has no final chapter — because its destination is infinite.

Begin where you are. You do not need to clean yourself up before you come to God. You do not need a theology degree, an unbroken devotional record, or an impressive track record of faith. You need only desire. And if you find you do not yet have strong desire, begin with this prayer: Lord, make me want You. Give me the hunger to seek You. I cannot manufacture that longing in myself — but You can create it in me.

Then open the Bible. Read it slowly, looking for God — not just for information, not just for comfort, but for the God who speaks through every page. Ask as you read: Who is He? What is He saying to me today? Let the reading lead you to prayer, and let the prayer lead you back to the reading. Find a community of believers — imperfect, struggling, genuine people who are seeking God together — and give yourself to them fully.

Persevere. The knowledge of God is not achieved in a seminar, a retreat, or a single season of spiritual intensity. It is the work of a lifetime, and a lifetime is exactly what God has given you for it. Every prayer, every Scripture meditated upon, every act of obedience, every moment of suffering endured in trust — these are the daily currency of intimacy with God. They are the material from which the great knowing is built.

The prophet Isaiah heard God speak words of breathtaking tenderness to His weary, exiled people — words that ring across every century to every soul that longs to know God: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isaiah 40:28–29, NIV).

This God — everlasting, inexhaustible, unfathomable, and unendingly generous — invites you to know Him. He has pursued you with a love that preceded time itself. He has revealed

Himself at the most extravagant possible cost — in the life, death, and resurrection of His own Son. He has sent His Spirit to dwell within you as both seal and foretaste of the eternal fellowship that awaits. And He holds out His hand today, as He has every day of your life, with the same invitation that has always defined His relationship with humanity.

✦ ***Come. Know Me. I am worth knowing.*** ✦

May your answer be yes — today, and every day of the great journey ahead.

About the Christian Commentators

The following voices from the Christian tradition are quoted and referenced throughout this book. Each represents a lifetime of devotion to knowing God, and their works are recommended to every serious student of this pursuit.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD)

Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and one of the most influential theologians in the history of Christianity. His *Confessions* remains one of the greatest spiritual autobiographies ever written — a searing, honest account of his restless search for God and his discovery that the human heart finds its rest only in its Maker. His works profoundly shaped both Catholic and Protestant theology.

Thomas a Kempis (1380–1471)

German-Dutch canon and mystic, author of *The Imitation of Christ* — after the Bible, one of the most widely read devotional books in the history of Christianity. His emphasis on the interior life, humility, and practical holiness over speculative theology has guided countless souls in the quiet pursuit of knowing God.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

French theologian and pastor, principal architect of Reformed theology. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) remains one of the most comprehensive and systematically rigorous treatments of Christian doctrine ever produced. Calvin's opening observation — that all wisdom consists in knowing God and knowing ourselves — provides the epistemological foundation for the entire tradition he shaped.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

German theologian, priest, and professor, catalyst of the Protestant Reformation. Luther's rediscovery of the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone transformed the Western church. His *Table Talk*, a collection of his informal conversations and reflections, reveals a man of robust, earthy, and deeply biblical faith who loved the Scriptures with an infectious passion.

John Owen (1616–1683)

English Puritan theologian and pastor, widely regarded as the greatest English-language theologian of the seventeenth century. His works *Communion with God* and *The Mortification of Sin* provide unmatched theological depth and pastoral care for the interior life of the believer. Owen wrote with both rigorous precision and genuine spiritual warmth.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

American theologian, philosopher, and revivalist, widely considered the greatest theological mind in American history. His *Religious Affections* carefully examines what genuine spiritual experience looks like, while his sermon *Heaven Is a World of Love* paints one of the most beautiful and theologically grounded pictures of eternity in Christian literature.

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

English Baptist pastor and preacher, widely known as the “Prince of Preachers.” Spurgeon’s *Morning and Evening* devotional and his multivolume *Treasury of David* commentary on the Psalms remain beloved by believers around the world. He preached to thousands weekly at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London and left a literary legacy of extraordinary breadth and depth.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)

German Lutheran pastor and theologian who resisted the Nazi regime and was executed by the Gestapo weeks before the end of World War II. His *Cost of Discipleship* issued a prophetic call to costly, cruciform discipleship, and *Life Together* provided a beautiful vision of Christian community. His life gave his theology its most powerful credential.

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

British scholar, author, and apologist, perhaps the most widely read Christian writer of the twentieth century. *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Surprised by Joy*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Weight of Glory* represent only a portion of his remarkable contribution to Christian thought. Lewis wrote with literary elegance, intellectual rigor, and genuine spiritual warmth.

A.W. Tozer (1897–1963)

American pastor and author, often described as a twentieth-century prophet. His *Knowledge of the Holy* and *The Pursuit of God* are considered modern classics of devotional theology. Tozer wrote with a mystical depth and evangelical urgency that has challenged and inspired generations of believers to pursue God with wholehearted seriousness.

E.M. Bounds (1835–1913)

American Methodist minister and author, renowned for his writings on prayer. Bounds reportedly rose daily at 4:00 a.m. to spend three hours in prayer before his day began — giving his teaching on prayer an authority that comes only from long practice. *Power Through Prayer* and *The Necessity of Prayer* remain indispensable resources for anyone serious about the life of prayer.

John Piper (1946–)

American Baptist pastor and theologian, founder of Desiring God Ministries. His book *Desiring God* (1986) articulated the philosophy he calls Christian Hedonism — the conviction that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. His extensive preaching and writing ministry has helped millions connect the knowledge of God with genuine, sustained delight in God.

J.I. Packer (1926–2020)

British-born Canadian theologian and author, widely regarded as one of the most important evangelical theologians of the twentieth century. His book *Knowing God* (1973) is perhaps the most widely read modern treatment of the subject and is warmly recommended as a companion volume to this book. Packer combined scholarly precision with a warm, devotional spirit throughout his long ministry.

N.T. Wright (1948–)

British New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, one of the leading biblical scholars of our time. His *Surprised by Hope* (2008) and *Simply Christian* (2006) have helped a generation of believers recover a robust, resurrection-shaped, creation-honoring vision of Christian hope — understanding the knowledge of God not as preparation for escape from the world but as the foundation for its renewal.

Scripture Reference Index

All scriptures are drawn from the English Standard Version (ESV) or New International Version (NIV) as indicated. The following index organizes key passages by book for ease of reference.

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- Genesis 3:8–9 — God calls to Adam in the garden (ESV) — Chapter Two
- Genesis 4:1 — The intimacy of yada (ESV) — Chapter One

Exodus

- Exodus 33:11 — God speaks to Moses face to face (ESV) — Chapter One
- Exodus 33:13 — Moses' prayer: Show me your ways (ESV) — Chapter One
- Exodus 34:6–7 — God declares His name and nature (ESV) — Chapter One

1 Samuel

- 1 Samuel 15:22 — To obey is better than sacrifice (NIV) — Chapter Seven

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- Psalm 29:2 — Worship in the splendor of holiness (NIV) — Chapter Six
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- Psalm 46:10 — Be still and know (ESV) — Chapter Five
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- Isaiah 6:1–5 — Isaiah's vision of the LORD (ESV) — Chapter Six
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- Matthew 22:37–39 — The greatest commandment (NIV) — Chapter Seven
- Matthew 27:46 — The cry of desolation (ESV) — Chapter Eight

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- Luke 10:41–42 — Mary and Martha (ESV) — Chapter Three

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- John 1:14, 18 — The Word became flesh (NIV) — Chapter Two
- John 4:24 — Worship in spirit and truth (ESV) — Chapter Six
- John 5:39–40 — Searching the Scriptures (ESV) — Chapter Four
- John 11:35 — Jesus wept (ESV) — Chapter Eight
- John 14:15, 21 — Love and obedience (ESV/NIV) — Chapter Seven
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- Revelation 3:20 — Behold, I stand at the door (ESV) — Chapter Two
- Revelation 22:4 — They will see His face (ESV) — Chapter Ten



“He is the true God and eternal life.”

— **1 John 5:20 (ESV)**

Seek Him. Know Him. He is worth it all.