

# The People Who Know Their God

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[0:00] Amen. Last week we started a new series on Knowing God by J.I. Packer. I was reading through some of the blurbs at the beginning of at least my edition, and this is what the Church Times, I don't know anything about the Church Times, but this is what they said about Knowing God.

This book is strong meat. To read and digest it is an experience no discerning reader is likely to forget.

Knowing God, this book, is strong meat because it's about God. It's about studying and knowing God. And the study of God is food for our souls.

It's not like cotton candy, where it tastes sweet and it just melts in your mouth, but it has no nutritional value. This book is meat and potatoes.

There's nothing fancy here. There's nothing that you're going to, it's not going to blow your mind away with some new truth. This is the study of God in a very practical way.

[1:11] And so, if you grab a hold of this book, and you make its teaching yours, it will be strong meat for you.

It will infuse steel into your spiritual bones, and it will put the strong timbers of truth into your life. So, when the storms come, if you know you're God, it will make a difference.

So, if you haven't read this book, I would recommend that you pick it up. There's one on the bookshelf. And if you read it, chew on it, meditate on what's found here, there's no doubt in my mind that you will grow spiritually.

If you've already read it once or twice, maybe some of you have, maybe many of you have, go back and read it again. And just speaking from personal testimony, I've read the book probably five times in different situations, and I've never regretted it.

It always is good, and it's always refreshing. So, today we're going to talk about chapter two. It's entitled, The People Who Know Their God. The People Who Know Their God.

[2:27] And the question in this chapter is, what difference does it make if you know God or not? Or more specifically, does knowing God make any difference in the person's life or character of the person who knows God?

Does it make any difference in a person's life and character? The fact that we're answering this question shows you Packer's intention for this book.

This is not a speculative book. He's not writing a systematic theology. He's writing for a very practical purpose. The question is, what difference does it make in my life?

And some people look at the study of God and say, well, there's not very much practical value here. But J.I. Packer, and I think the Bible clearly says that if you know God, it's going to have all sorts of practical ramifications in your life.

Well, in his preface, Packer says that there's two ways to study God as a traveler or as an observer. And so he takes us out to a Spanish house with a balcony on the front, with a road traveling by the front of the house.

[3:43] And he's saying, he says that you can either be a traveler or you can be an observer. And listen to how Packer describes this.

The balconiers can overhear the travelers talk and chat with them. They may comment critically on the way that the travelers walk, or they may discuss questions about the road, how it can exist at all, or lead anywhere, what might be seen from different points along it, and so forth.

But they are onlookers, and their problems are theoretical only. The travelers, by contrast, face problems which, though they have their theoretical angle, are essentially practical.

Problems of which way to go and how to make it type problems, which call not merely for comprehension, but for decision and action, too.

Balconeers and travelers may think over the same area, yet their problems differ. Thus, for instance, in relation to evil, the balconeer's problem is to find a theoretical explanation of how evil can exist with God's sovereignty and goodness.

[4:59] But the traveler's problem is how to master evil and bring good out of it. Or again, in relation to sin, the balconeer asks whether racial sinfulness and personal perversity are really credible, while the traveler, knowing sin from within, asks what hope there is of deliverance.

And he goes on. And right from the very beginning, we do need to make this distinction that we can study God as observers, or we can study God as travelers.

So, the question is, what practical difference does it make for us who are traveling along this road, whether we know God or not?

We need to make another distinction at the very beginning of this series. We need to make the distinction between knowing about and knowing God.

So, knowing about God versus knowing about God. I may know your husband, wives. I might know your husband. I might be able to say, well, he's 5'10", he's 175 pounds about, he has a hooked nose, he has brown eyes, and blue...

[6:14] Let me say that again. He has brown hair, blue eyes. I was going to a place that... Most of you husbands have never had blue hair. He drives a Chevy, he has three children, and they're such and such an age.

He's married. He likes to golf, and on and on I could go. I can know all about your husband. And that doesn't necessarily mean I know him.

And you wives are saying, yes, I know all of that. I know that. But more than that, I know my husband. I know what he's going to say even before he knows what he's going to say.

I know how he reacts to losing a job or getting promoted. I know how he reacts in certain situations. I know how he feels and what he's passionate about.

And I don't have to ask because I know him. I know him. I know about him, but more than that, I know him. And you can know about God.

[7:22] And you can know God. There's a difference. And Packer says, you can know a great deal about God without knowledge of him.

You can go to church where the truth is taught and still not know God. So, you folks here, we hear sound, expository, doctrinal teaching every week from the pulpit.

And so there's lots of good books available to you. And you might have read a lot of those books.

You might have on your shelf Stephen Charnock's *The Existence and Attributes of God*.

And maybe you've done one better than me. I have it on my shelf. Maybe you've read it all 1,100 pages. And you might win Bible trivia every single time you play.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that you know God. Well, knowledge about God is necessary if we're going to know God.

[8:33] The wife knows the facts about her husband. And through the facts and through life experience with him, she comes to know him. So, knowledge about God is not necessarily knowledge of God.

But to balance that, if you don't know God, if you don't know about God, there's very little chance that you're going to really know him.

Do you see what I'm saying? Do you see the difference? If you look at books and if you look at the Bible and you say, you know what, I've already, I've read all that, I know all that.

And so, what's the point? I don't need to go any further. I know everything I need to know about God. If that's your attitude, where you're looking at your knowledge about God and it seems to be filled up and you don't care to learn anymore, then there's a good chance that you really don't know God.

You might know some things about him, but you don't really know him as a person. Just like if you don't care to learn about your wife, husbands.

[9:44] If you don't care to learn about her, there's probably very little chance that you really know her very well. Well, that's the first distinction. The second distinction we need to make is this.

You can know a lot about godliness and not know God. So think of some of the series that we've done in Sunday school within the last year or so.

Within the last year or so, we've had a heavy emphasis on practical theology in this class. So we've studied the book Practical Religion by J.C. Ryle. We talked about how people change, growing old gracefully, how to parent, the book A Quest for More.

All those books were practical studies of godliness. And Packer says that you can know all about that stuff. You can know all that practical godliness stuff and not know God.

So just think of all the books, all the CDs, all the sermons, all the lectures, all the resources available on the internet, everything available to you that talk about different aspects of living a godly life.

[10 : 55] So we have all that stuff and you can avail yourself of all that. There's books on how to raise children, how to read your Bible, how to tithe, how to be an old Christian, how to be a young Christian.

You name it. Every practical issue has been covered. How to be a Christian wife or a Christian husband and you've read Christian biographies that exemplify how to live a godly life.

You could have all of that and Packer says this, whatever else may be said about the state of affairs, it certainly makes it possible to learn a great deal second hand about the practice of Christianity.

Yet one can have all this and hardly know God at all. So just because you know how to live a godly life and you might even have a good deal of common sense and if someone asks you, you can give them good advice about how to live a godly life.

That doesn't mean necessarily that you know God. So we come back to where we started. We've kind of been circling around and saying we need to make some distinctions here about knowing God and what practical difference does it make.

[12 : 15] So the question is what marks the person who knows God? What are they like? Well, it's not knowing about God.

It's not having a head full of knowledge. It's not necessarily that. And this is where we need to look in the mirror, don't we? We need to see and examine ourselves to see if we just know about God or if we know God.

We put a heavy emphasis on learning about God and that is good and that is right and we should be doing that especially in this culture where doctrine is just poo-pooed and no one cares about it and it's all looked down on.

So we need to put a heavy emphasis on knowing about God but we can't let that emphasis fool us into thinking just because we know a lot about God that we actually know God.

Well, before we go into the four ways that we can know if we know God, is there any questions or comments or things that you want feel like you need to say?

[13 : 35] No questions. Okay. We'll just keep moving on. Anytime you want to raise your hand and interject, go ahead. So what is the person who really knows God?

What do they look like? Packer gives us four propositions to look at ourselves to understand what that is. And as we're doing this, let's look in the mirror and ask ourselves, is this me?

So four propositions. Proposition number one, those who know God have great energy for God.

Those who know God have great energy for God.

So turn in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 11. Daniel chapter 11, verse 32. We're going to look at the second half of verse 32.

Daniel 11, 32. It says this. But the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

[14 : 44] In the ESV, it says, the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. Now, that's just sort of cherry picking a verse.

So we need to look at the context of the verse. What's going on here? In what situation are the people who know their God standing firm and taking action?

It's the context of a culture and a government that is raging against the people of God. So these aren't the best times. These are the worst times. So verse 31 says, they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

And so, whatever that means, basically, in the temple of God, things are going completely wrong. Verse 32 says, the first half, then he will turn back, excuse me, with flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant.

But the people who know their God will firmly resist him. In the community, at the time, there is widespread covenant breaking.

[15:57] People are throwing off the shackles of their relationship with God. They don't care. They're doing away with all of that. There's widespread covenant breaking in God's community.

In other words, when everything is going against the people of God, the people of God who know their God stand firm and they take action.

That's what Daniel says. They are energetic for God in the face of adversity. The people who know God will stand for him. And so, when his church is under attack, they stand firm and they take action.

They go into defensive mode. They vigorously defend it. And when the culture is on the whole just jettisoning everything, abandoning righteousness, righteousness, they stand.

It isn't enough for the people who know their God to curse the darkness. And we often see in our own culture, you know, God's cause is just trampled in the dust.

[17:06] And justice, you know, has fallen in the street. And a lot of times, our only response is to talk about it, to talk about how bad it is.

But, if we know God, it's not enough for us to just say how bad it is. We are going to stand firm and take action.

Because if you know God, there's this inner compulsion that's put there by the Spirit of God. There's this inner compulsion to fight for righteousness, to defend righteousness.

It isn't enough for me to say, I don't like it. I have to do something in order to fix the problem. I have to do something to roll back the darkness that is going on in our culture and I have to stand against it.

And I will spend my money and I will spend my time and I will pray against the darkness. If I know God, then I'm going to be energetically defending God's cause.

[18:07] Packer says this about prayer. The invariable fruit of true knowledge of God is energy to pray for God's cause. Energy, indeed, which can only find an outlet in the relief of inner tension when channeled into such prayer.

And the more knowledge, the more energy. So the people that know their God have this inner compulsion, this energy that has to be let out in action.

Because things are not right. God's cause is not going well and so I have to stand and fight for it.

Well, do you show great energy for God's cause?

Do we? Do you know God? Or do you just know a lot about God? And Packer says this is one way that you can judge yourself.

Is your knowledge merely theoretical or do you know him as a person? God? The second proposition is this. Those who know God have great thoughts of God.

[19:17] They have great thoughts about God. The book of Daniel, if you look at it, is a book that's all about how great God is.

So turn to chapter 2. Turn to chapter 2. If we had time, we could go through every chapter and show how Daniel is bringing out how great God is.

Daniel, chapter 2. The whole chapter is about Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the kingdoms of the earth. Remember, he dreams this statue with different layers and there's a rock and it crushes the statue.

And so the whole question is, what does this dream mean? And so Daniel comes to him and he can't interpret the dream himself, but he says God can, so give me time.

And he comes back and God gives him the interpretation of the dream. And in chapter 2, verse 20, it says this, Praise be to the name of God forever and ever.

[20:27] Wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons. He sets up kings and deposes them. So, this is what the dream is about.

God is setting up kings and he's deposing them. God's greatness and his kingdom are exactly what Nebuchadnezzar's dream is about. And so there's that statue and then the little stone rolls and crushes the feet and then it grows into a mountain and demolishes the statue.

And Daniel says in verse 44, in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.

It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands, a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces.

So God is setting up his kingdom on this earth and no earthly kingdom will be able to endure. And that is the consistent message of Daniel, that God is great and he does whatever he wants in the earth.

[21:52] He rules the kingdoms of the world. So remember, when Nebuchadnezzar boasted, he was on top of his palace and he looks out and he says, isn't this Babylon the great that I have built for my own glory?

Just like that, Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and he's out in the field eating grass like a cow. Because God will not give his glory to another.

Chapter 5, Belshazzar dares to use the cups, he uses the cups of the temple for his own drinking party. And the hand appears, right?

And remember what it said, Belshazzar, you've been weighed in the scales and you've been found wanting. There you are, the greatest king in the whole world and I've weighed you in the scales and you're found wanting.

Within this night you'll be slain and your kingdom will be given to another. see, he, Belshazzar, lifted himself up above God and God immediately put him down.

[23:05] He sets up kings and deposes them. Well, the point of all this is the people who know God are filled with the thought of how great God is.

God is filled with energy. That's why they want to defend his cause. That's why they're giving themselves to prayer. Because they know what kind of God they serve.

And their thoughts are filled with the thought that God is the authority. He's in charge. And no one has the right to speak against him.

And so when I see people speaking against him and his law and his commands and his gospel, it makes your blood boil. Because you know God. You know how great he is.

And so he will have the last word in world history. That's what Daniel 2 is about. It's not man's kingdom that is final. It will be God's kingdom. And his kingdom and his righteousness will triumph.

[24:07] And neither man nor angels or anything else will be able to stop him. Will be able to hold back his hand. And so, ask yourself, what kind of thoughts about God fill my mind?

And I'm not asking you, you know, what you would sign your name to on a confession. There's a difference. I'm asking, what is the reality in your life? Do your prayers reflect the thought that I have a great God?

God. Because if we have small thoughts about God, we'll only dare to pray small things. Because we don't think he has the power, the authority to do what we ask. But if we have a great God, we will pray great prayers for him and to him.

And we will worship him because he's great. And that worship will overflow out of our hearts. God. So does your thought about God, your thoughts about God keep you humble and dependent?

Because if you have great thoughts about God, you'll see yourself for what you are. And you will trust him and you'll see how needy you are. So test yourself. Are your thoughts about God big or are they small?

[25:25] The third proposition. those who know God show great boldness for God. They show great boldness for God.

Can you think of any examples in the book of Daniel where the people who knew their God showed great boldness for him? There's several. Jim. Okay, talk about that.

Right. They knew they're God. They did. So there, I mean, there they are. They're standing in front of the king who holds their life in his hands. And there's respect for him.

They don't speak rudely to him. But there's no fear. What else? Who else can you think about?

Mike. Right.

Why does that show boldness? Right. So it was the question of who are we going to obey here?

Are we going to obey the king?

[26:31] Are we going to obey God? And to obey God, it might cost them everything. And they do it.

They're bold. What other situations do the people of God show boldness? Yes. They're one of the arts. Okay. Probably. He was building the arts for over a hundred years.

And people that day may not even see rain or oceans or rivers. And the whole time he's preaching to them. And what great boldness and thankful God to continue that every day out.

They're haunted by their neighbors and they thought of. But the great boldness is going to continue process.

Very good. Very good. Anything else? Yeah. It's something, you know, it's one thing to preach to the common man.

[27 : 35] It's something else to preach against the king, to the king's face. Can you think of another situation where Daniel showed great boldness? Stan. Great.

Right. So the order goes out, you shall not pray to any other, you know, any God except for me. What does Daniel do?

He goes home, he goes to the, you know, up on, I imagine, the second story or something, he opens the windows and he prays. And he prays towards Jerusalem.

And the point is, no order is going to stop me from praying. And, you know, Daniel could have kept his windows shut and God would have heard his prayers. But the point was, I'm doing something for God.

Nothing's going to stop me. So they showed great boldness. The people who know God to be trustworthy and gracious and sovereign are bold for him.

[28 : 38] Yes, dear. Okay. She did. God. Yes.

We can go on and on about the boldness of women. They put men to shame sometimes. arms. In April 1521, Martin Luther was summoned to the Diet of Arms and he was going to give his witness. He was going to be examined by the emperor, the most powerful man in all of Europe at the time. And everyone warned Martin not to go.

It was a trap. He was going to die. And to all that, he said, if there were as many devils at arms as there are tiles on the roof, I'm going.

I will enter the city. Because Luther knew God. And it didn't matter who stood in front of him. He had a superior fear that drove the fear of man right out of his mind.

[29 : 46] It was God. And that's the stuff, all that we've said, that's kind of the stuff of legends, isn't it? And I'm not saying it's not true. It's just, it seems distant to us.

And we say, you know, we commend their boldness, but we have a hard time imagining that we could ever be that bold. And we say, you know, that's great that they did it.

I just don't know if I ever could. But God is the same. yesterday and today and forever.

And so when I think about that, when I think about Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Noah, and Esther, and the apostles, and Martin Luther, all these people who showed great boldness, part of me, I think you know what I'm saying, part of me says, oh, I can never be that way. And then another part of me asks, why not? Why not? God is the same. What's the real reason I'm not very bold? What's the real reason that I have a hard time imagining myself going over to my neighbor's house and talking to them about Jesus?

[31 : 04] And when I ask myself that question, I begin to wonder if all my knowledge is not so much a knowledge of God, but a knowledge about God.

If I knew God as well as all the books on my bookshelf say I should, then I should have boldness.

So, brothers and sisters, we can't, I can't speak for you and your boldness and the reasons that we all struggle with that, but we do all need Jesus, don't we?

We need him to forgive us. In Revelation, those who are put outside, one of them, one of the groups of people who are put outside are the cowards. And they're cowards because they don't know God. Here's the fourth proposition. The third proposition was they show great boldness for God. The fourth proposition, those who know God have great contentment in God.

They have great contentment in God. So far, we've kind of been talking about really active things and bold things and taking, standing firm and taking action.

[32 : 19] This is something more passive. Those who know God have great contentment in God. So, Elizabeth is on one side of the mountains.

Jem is on the other side of the mountains. And Elizabeth and Jem are in South America for their first year as missionaries. Elizabeth's job, her primary job, is to learn a new native language called Tisviki.

I think that's how it's pronounced. It has a lot of consonants and not a lot of vowels. It wasn't a written language and her job was to learn the language, to alphabetize it, because it's never been alphabetized, to learn its grammar in order that she could prepare the way for the Bible to be translated into that language.

Now, Jim's task was different. He is building a station out of which other missionaries could go into the jungle and reach all the unreached peoples. And so, he spends his days cutting wood, planing down the lumber.

You know, they can't go to the lumber yard to pick up lumber, so he has to make the lumber. So, there he is. He hand planes all the boards. So, day after day, cutting and measuring and planing and stacking and repairing buildings.

[33 : 45] And, over the course of a year, he amassed 500 hand planed boards for the buildings. Now, at the end of the year, Elizabeth takes all of her notes and her alphabet and all the work that she's done, everything that she's been working on for a whole year, and she puts it into a suitcase.

She's going to send the suitcase to the United States. And, so there the suitcase goes away. And, along the way, someone stole the suitcase.

And, it was never seen again. They wanted the suitcase. So, I imagine what happened is they got the suitcase, emptied the papers, and they blew away, or they were thrown away. And, so a year of work, gone.

Just like that. Well, not soon after that, Jim's voice cackled across the radio. And, this is what he said. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.

The God of glory thundereth. The Lord sitteth upon the flood. The Lord will give strength unto his people. The Lord will bless his people with peace. Jim's station at Shandia was just totally wiped out in a flood.

[35 : 05] And so, all of his boards, when he radioed that in, were floating down the Amazon and out to the ocean. And a year of work, gone.

Just like that. Well, what was going on in Jim's mind when he saw a whole year of work float away? He said, the Lord who blesses his people with peace.

when he was put in a very difficult situation and when he saw all the work of his hands torn away from him and everything needs to be started over, he thought about God and the God who gives peace to his people and blesses them.

And as you know, Elizabeth's trial was preparing her for a bigger trial when her husband Jim was speared to death on a sandy beach by Aka Indians. And after it was all done, everything was all said and done years later, Elizabeth Elliott wrote this, I think there is a little lesson for all of us here. Christ is sufficient. We do not need support groups for each and every separate tribulation. The most widely divergent sorrows may all be taken to the foot of the same old rugged cross and find their cleansing, peace, and joy.

[36 : 28] Well, how could Jim go on finding contentment when he saw all of his work wash away? And how could Elizabeth find contentment when all of her work was thrown away in a trash can just so someone could have a suitcase?

And how could she find joy and contentment when everything was taken from her? Well, they knew God, didn't they?

Roger. Roger. Hmm.

So we could have contentment when everything is taken from us because we know God and we want God and we have God, don't we? So let me ask you, do you know great contentment in God? Is he the desire of your heart? Well, the people who know God have great contentment in God. And so let's look in the mirror and ask ourselves, am I content?

[37 : 45] Am I bold? Do I think great thoughts of God? Am I energetic for God? Because those are the marks of the people that know God. Knowing God is going to make all the difference in the way that you live.

Knowing about God will not do in the hour of trial. Because people with only head knowledge, when the day of trial comes, they're going to head for the hills.

They don't have any resources to deal with that. God. But when everything is washed away and you lose your husband and the government is against you and the culture is against you, if you know God, then you will be able to stand.

And so we can't satisfy ourselves with knowing about God. We must move on, move further up and further in into knowing God. So older folks, we're almost done.

you've been in the faith for years. Are you pressing on further up and further in into God, into knowing God? Paul says this, forgetting what is behind and straining for what is ahead, I press on.

[ 38 : 59 ] Older believers, forget what was, what's past. Let's strain for what's forward. Younger believers, I guess if you're 40 or younger, have you made it your number one priority to know God, to become intimate with God.

And there's all sorts of things going on in this world. People are busy, busy, and you're busy, busy people. And just remember what Jesus said to Martha.

Martha, Martha, you're worried about lots of things, but only one thing is needful. And younger people, it's a very hectic time for you. You're planning your career, you're raising your children, your job is in full swing, your career is in full swing.

Remember that knowing God is the most important thing. It's the one thing needful. And so let's all strive for it. While our time's up, let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we ask that you would help us to forget everything that has gone behind us and to strain forward, strain for the things that we do not know about you yet.

[ 40 : 14 ] Thank you that we will be forever growing in our knowledge of you, that you are infinite and eternal and unchangeable in all that you do. And because we are finite, that means we have an infinite ocean to swim in and to enjoy.

And we love you. Will you open up our eyes, open up our hearts to pursue you, to make you the first thing? Will you forgive us for all that we have done?

Forgive us for being puffed up in our knowledge about God and not humbled that we have been called the children of God. And that is what we are by your grace.

Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.