

Knowing and Being Known

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[0:00] Well, the lesson this morning is going to be three points, maybe four, if we have time. The first is the importance of knowing God. And for those who are visiting, we are going through J.I. Packer's book, *Knowing God*.

And we're in chapter three this morning, *Knowing and Being Known*. And so we want to look at that chapter from the importance of knowing God, the privilege of knowing God, the involvement in knowing God, and then if we have time, we'll look a little bit at the practice of knowing God. But first, the importance of knowing God. What gives life meaning? God created us as immensely complex creatures, and it may be foolish to attempt to bake down what makes us tick into a single point.

Nevertheless, if you could name the single most fundamental aspect of life that gives meaning to our existence, what would it be? Think about that for a moment.

Without meaning, life becomes unbearable. And internal misery often leads to the ultimate action, which is suicide. But many more people seek to just drown out their hollow existence through drugs, through drugs, hedonistic living, activity, noise, and the like.

[1:24] They can't stop for a moment lest they regain consciousness of the knowing fact of the meaningless of life, even as we've been going through in *Ecclesiastes*. God created us to feel purpose and joy, even in our fallen state.

God created us to feel purpose and joy. So more than anything else, what makes life worth living? God created us to feel purpose and joy. God created us to feel purpose and joy. God created us to feel purpose and joy. God created us to feel purpose and joy.

God created us to feel purpose and joy. What transcends culture and time? And to give a hint, although there is an ultimate realization of the answer I'm looking for, when possessing it, even the godless can experience some measure of satisfaction and joy.

Anyway, so I've babbled on for a couple minutes to give you time to think. What do you think? What say you? If you could boil it all down to one statement, what would it be?

Knowing God. Okay. That's cheating, Lou, because that's our subject. But the ungodly can't enter into that.

[2:34] Those who have rejected God. So is there an answer below that that would apply to all mankind? What did God create us to need?

A lot of people would say that it's living for something beyond themselves, like something great or some great purpose for society. You were at a commencement yesterday at all states, and a lot of things were spoken about purpose, achieving excellence, et cetera, et cetera.

You know, there was no ultimate reason for achieving excellence. There was kind of a humanistic answer. So a lot of people, and I know I have struggled this my whole life, would put purpose, living beyond myself, for something bigger.

I think that's partially what I'm thinking about. Chuck? To glorify and enjoy Him. Okay, but that's focusing on God again. We're going to get to Him.

Certainly to enjoy God, but yes. Impress others. Impress others. Okay, we're getting very warm. Yes.

[3:59] Family work and to feel good about ourselves. Family work and to feel good about ourselves. Now you're really getting hedonistic. Let me give the answer that I'm thinking of, and this obviously isn't necessarily the correct answer.

I'm not a full... I don't believe in philosophy of man. But relationships. Relationships. I think there is an element of what everybody said is involved in relationships.

I mean, living for something bigger than myself ultimately comes back to relationships. I mean, if I was on an island all alone, there'd be nothing bigger to live for.

So it necessarily requires relationships. God made us relational creatures. And I would submit that even the atheist can experience relative fulfillment by living his life for people rather than power, fame, and pleasure.

And we read of it often. Unfortunately, all earthly relationships will eventually be shattered by sin and death, won't they? And none of us can escape the ultimate vanity of everything about this life, including relationships, when viewed purely at the horizontal level.

[5:18] Thus enters God. God graciously introduces meaning to rebellious sinners by offering the only thing that can make sense of our existence both now and for all eternity.

A relationship, but with himself. If you're anything like me, you just don't get this most of the time. You don't feel its reality.

So let me try to illustrate. I have two children who now have friends. Very good friends. I would venture to say that their lives are filled with more meaning today than at any other time in their brief existence.

Why? Because they've been captivated by the process of getting to know another very special person. How many times have we heard the touching sentiment and love stories?

It doesn't matter what I'm doing or where we go, just so I'm with you. All jesting aside, it's true, isn't it?

[6:22] Anyone who has ever been in love appreciates the enthralling, enchanting, gratifying, rewarding, and fully satisfying experience of ever-growing a knowledge of the most delightful person in the universe, at least from their perspective.

Stop for a moment and think of a person with which you've been so entranced. Do you have them there in your mind? Now let me ask, while attempting to separate any infatuation part, aspect of that relationship, can you submit Jesus' name for that person and feel the same delight and wonder?

If not, I would venture that we've just identified what I'd like to call our knowing God gap. Also note that by using this illustration, the gap of which we're speaking has more to do with one's level of delight and love for another rather than understanding certain academic facts about them.

Packard concludes this point in this way, what makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance.

And this the Christian has in a way that no other man has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God? So how can our relationship with Jesus be so impactive?

[7:53] Well, returning to my illustration, when a person falls in love, what doesn't it impact? Your future hopes and plans are all wrapped up in that person.

Have you ever noticed what a young man or woman talks about before and after they meet the one? A guy may be focused on his favorite sports teams or an athlete.

Now it's her that he always talks about. The glory of their life is now that person. This isn't some academic exercise.

It's called a relationship. The agenda in life has been radically transformed by a single relationship. They cannot contain their desire to live for the other person's pleasure.

They are plotting how to bring the greatest joy into the life of that other person. So it ought to be with our relationship with God. This relationship should change everything.

[8:57] Please turn to Hosea 6.6. Hosea 6.6. While you're turning, listen.

What should it change? It should change our hope. The essence of eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, John 17.3 tells us.

It should change our glory. The glory of our life is now him. He defines our values and our joy.

Listen to what the Lord says in Jeremiah 9.23 and 24.

Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches. Let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord.

Finally, it should change who and what we live for. Namely, God's pleasure. Hosea 6.6. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

[10:11] Do we plot? Do we manipulate our time to figure out how we can please him? Ephesians 5.16 exhorts us to redeem the time because the days are evil.

But we can approach this command, redeeming the time, coldly, as a project manager like I often do, or as a lover. plotting how I can next please Jesus.

In Hosea 6.6, we hear God's longing for relationship rather than dead obedience. And yet, I'm perplexed by the NIV translation of this verse. Every other translation I could find besides the NIV translated acknowledgement as the knowledge of.

Every dictionary and commentator that I referenced universally unpacked this Hebrew word to indicate knowledge of God. For example, the word is used a couple hundred times in the KJV and almost every time it's translated knowledge or know.

The New American Standard translates it in some of these ways. Knowledge, 81 times. Know, three times. Pre-meditation, two times. Concern, one time.

[11:23] Skill, truth. So why am I wasting time on this little technicality? Because the nuance of the meaning between acknowledging and knowledge accents the central theme of this lesson.

There's a vast eternity changing difference between acknowledging God and knowing God. at least as I understand our English meaning for the two words.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines acknowledge to admit the existence, reality, or truth. To recognize as being valid or having a force or power.

Whereas it defines knowledge as the state of fact of knowing, familiarity, awareness, or understanding gained through experience or study. I can acknowledge you that you exist.

as a response to a question or command from you while having no desire or making no effort to come to know you personally. And here's the damning point.

[12:33] My human heart is all too content to acknowledge God while shunning any pursuit of knowing God. Knowing God rather than simply acknowledging Him, as Packer puts it, provides at once a foundation, shape, and goal for our lives, plus a principle of priorities and a scale of values.

Relationships, again, are what make life worth living. And to know God is the ultimate crowning, peerless, of all relationships. Which begs the question, is having a relationship with God a given? is it a right or is it a privilege? And that brings me to the second point, the privilege of knowing God. Many of our young people just came through exams.

And hopefully, in preparation for those exams, they were required to come to know the material that was going to be on them to a certain extent. And how do you go about doing that?

Well, you need to familiarize yourself with the material. You need to study it. You need to memorize it, possibly. You need to practice certain applications of it.

[14:00] What about coming to know an animal? Does anybody here who owns a horse, could you tell me how long it took you to come to know your horse?

How long did it take before you could say, I know that horse? Anyone? How many years? Okay. An animal becomes more complex, doesn't it?

You can't just study like for an exam and instantly know it. But if you spend enough years getting to know the animal, you start to see how it acts and reacts in certain situations, you will come to know it better and better.

So what does it require to come to know a human being? Well, now it gets a lot more complicated, doesn't it?

We can spend time with a person. We can spend lots of time with a person and yet come away without really knowing them. I mean, we have the expression, they're a closed book.

[15:01] You see, for us to come to know another human being, they must be willing to open themselves up, to let themselves be known. So now, what is required to develop a relationship with someone that we feel is greater than us, highly more exalted than us?

People like the governor, the president of the United States, depending on who's in office. For sports fans, maybe Peyton Manning.

would you feel you had the right to drive up to Peyton Manning's house, knock on the front door, invite yourself in to spend the evening talking about the next season? If you're ever to get to know a person like that, what's the first requirement?

Well, they must desire to get to know you. They must initiate the relationship. So if you're a rabid Peyton Manning fan and you bumped him to him in the mall and he were to initiate a conversation with you and then invite you over to the practice and start inviting you over to his house and enjoyed spending time with you and took you on trips, do you suppose the topic just might come up as you're casually talking to his friends?

I'm sure it would. I'm a friend of this highly exalted man. Now, do you have the picture in your mind of the privilege it would be to have a relationship with someone famous or someone that you love and respect?

[16:36] Now, listen to this verse, Jeremiah 9, 24. But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord.

We can't imagine having a sequence of events like I described with a Peyton Manning of the world and not be constantly talking about it with friends.

We would glory in that fact. We'd be proud of the fact that he has come out and decided to know us. How much more our God truly, if we're going to boast, we need to boast about this, that I understand and know him.

Well, what is required to know God? Again, God must desire to know me. Please turn to John 10, 14. John 10, 14.

Galatians 4, 9 says, but now that you know God, or rather are known by God, and then it goes on, the most awe-inspiring reality about my relationship with God is not that he knows everything about me.

[18:03] This fact is true of every atom in the universe. That's A-T-O-M not A-D-A-M. but rather that purely because of his sovereign purpose and grace, he has chosen to initiate a personal, intimate relationship with me.

Listen to God's personal tone when speaking of his children, a spirit that goes far beyond any academic knowledge of their existence. Exodus 33, 17.

And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name. Or how about when speaking to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1, 5.

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. And now look at the passage I asked you to turn to, John 10, beginning in verse 14.

Jesus speaking, I am the good shepherd. Lord, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

[19:15] Now jump down to verse 24. The Jews gathered around him, saying, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

Jesus answered, I tell you, I did tell you, but you do not believe the miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. J.I. Packard summarizes our relational privilege with God in this way.

What happens is that the Almighty Creator, the Lord of hosts, the great God before whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, comes to him and begins to talk to him through the words and truths of Holy Scripture.

[20:21] Perhaps he has been acquainted with the Bible and Christian truth for many years, and it has meant nothing to him. But one day he wakes up to the fact that God is actually speaking to him, him, through the biblical message.

As he listens to what God is saying, he finds himself brought very low. For God talks to him about his sin and guilt and weakness and blindness and folly and compels him to judge himself hopeless and helpless and to cry out for forgiveness.

But this is not all. He comes to realize as he listens that God is actually opening his heart to him, making friends with him, and enlisting him a colleague.

In Barth's phrase, a covenant partner. It is a staggering thing, but it is true. The relationship in which sinful human beings know God is one in which God, so to speak, takes them on to his staff to be henceforth his fellow workers and personal friends.

The most fundamental, foundational, life-changing word that can be spoken on the entire subject of knowing God is the fact that the child of God, as a child of God, he has chosen us.

[21:38] He's chosen me. And not just academically, but in a personal, relational way. Isn't this the very call of the gospel?

and yet an element that I know I have so often not emphasized as I should? An appreciation for the significance of this reality will change us forever.

It will radically alter our affections and passions. It will fill us with hope that cannot be quenched. It will energize us with purpose and zeal. Packer goes on, this is monumental knowledge.

There is unspeakable comfort, the sort of comfort that energizes, in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for his good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me.

There is certainly great cause for humility in the thought that he sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow men do not see, and I am glad, and that he sees more corruption in me than what I see in myself, which in all conscience is enough.

[23 : 05] Well, knowing God means getting involved with God, and this is our third point. When we get involved in God, I'd like to put it under two heads.

First, knowing God involves interaction with God. What do I mean by interaction with God? I'm going in a place I've never gone before, but one that I need to go desperately.

Listening for the Spirit's personal application of his word to me. It's not that I've never gone here, it's not that I don't tickle a little bit in it here and there, that I haven't had times of weeping before him, but it's so precious little, and I don't look for it as I should.

As I read the Bible, God is applying his words to me, if I'll just listen. They aren't dead letters on a page written two, three, or four thousand years ago.

The living God is a word for me today. But I also must be willing to experience God through life's circumstances. Certainly we can become obsessed with trying to read signs and experience God, as some have falsely gone down a path of.

[24 : 28] As Packer puts it, it is constantly needful to stress that God does not exist for our comfort, or happiness, or satisfaction, or to provide us with religious experiences, as if these were the most interesting and important things in life.

They're not. It's knowing him that's the most important. It's his glory that is the most important. And yet, as we've been unpacking this morning, there is no element of knowing him that doesn't talk about experiencing him.

Can I use the word? About feeling him. About emotion. Packer goes on, if the decisive factor was notional correctness, then obviously the most learned biblical scholars would know God better than any of us.

But it is not. You can have all the right notions in your head without ever tasting in your heart the realities to which they refer. Echoing the psalmist in Psalm 34, 8, taste and see that the Lord is good.

So how does one taste in his heart the realities of this relationship with God? Well, by seeing God in life's events. Is it possible for the God who actively and meticulously orders every detail in his universe and has preordained the works I am to do for him in this life is also not intimately involved in the detailed circumstances of my life?

[25 : 54] If not even a sparrow can fall to the ground apart from God's will, if even the very numbers of the hairs of my head are known to him, why am I not more actively crediting him with and looking for him in the very details of life?

My wife and I have been reading through the biography of George Mueller recently, and I could think of no better way to practically illustrate this point than through an example from that biography. But before I read an extended portion, I want to note that George Mueller was not one who blindly stepped out in faith, as we might say. In fact, he never went forward with a single plan until all the money was in the bank, literally, which is a conviction I greatly admire and believe our borrowing crazed generation could probably do well to consider today.

He was a model of one who submitted himself to God's purposes through life's many twists and trials. Where God led, he followed, but he was always watching for God's leading in a relational, personal kind of way.

So we pick up the story with him moving the orphanages to Ashley Down, for those of you who are familiar with his life. It happened after another window had been broken and a neighbor wrote him a letter, basically telling him to get out or else.

[27 : 22] And George, again, reasoned from God's word that since he was to do good to his neighbor and the houses on this neighborhood street was causing tremendous difficulty for his neighbors in many ways more than just breaking windows, that he'd either have to close them down

or move them somewhere.

He saw God's word in that letter from that angry neighbor. And so he began praying. And we pick up the story with George taking a walk with his daughter and mauling over what he should do next. George looked at his daughter, weighing stones, playing a game carefree. Amused at her and not caring about her answer, he asked lightly, where would you want to live? Another stone fell into the gorge before she answered.

Then she waved her hands in a vague wide gesture toward the north and chalky treeless downs on the edge of the city. Oh, daddy, she said, I'd want to live in a wide open place with lots of breeze, a place where you can smell the sea once in a while, a place with fields for playing.

Daddy, that's why I'm glad about Wilson Street. Her exuberance pulled his mind from his problem. Why is that? Because that's the kind of place we'll all live in when you move the homes, a wide open place with lots of breeze.

[28 : 43] Lydia, Lydia, living with your father has turned you into an impractical dreamer. Don't you know, girl, we'll thank God if he finds houses in the slums for us? She turned to him and her eyes were dreaming.

If God gave us so much already, why won't he give us a little more? This wide open place, I mean. All right, suppose he did. What would we do with it?

Build a home, she said simply. See, I'm not impractical. So from those words of his daughter, he saw a possibility that maybe was from God.

And again, he didn't just go out, seek to borrow today's money, I don't know, a few million dollars, and start building. No, he prayed. And he asked God, if this was his will, that he would bring along what was needed, including the money, the land, and the architecture.

So we now pick up the story with his wife's sister returning from London, and yet she had seen an architect there, and they were having conversation over breakfast.

[29 : 55] And his sister-in-law rushes right on, oh, I forgot to say, this man is an architect, and he said he'd help you. She stood back from the table, her hands on her hips, a satisfied smile on her face.

Well, George, this man said he'd build your orphanage for you. Before he spoke, he thanked God over the porridge. Thank you, God, for taking my boldness in your stride and giving me what I asked for in a way I never dreamed of.

Four months later, after much more prayers and having received a thousand pounds in the bank, a seven-acre plot of land came up on Ashley down for sale.

So the next day, pulling a little in the February wind, he walked out to the down. Seven acres from there to there, room to build here. But how could he be sure that this was what God wanted?

Suddenly, he found himself remembering Devon, and then he realized that for the first time in months, he was smelling the sea. Down in the hollow of Bristol, especially on the wharves, the saltiness was blurred by Spanish tobacco, West Indian rum, and filthy harbor water.

[31 : 08] As he sniffed, he heard Lydia say as clearly as if she's been standing there, a wide-open place with lots of breeze, a place where you can smell the sea once in a while, a place with fields for playing.

Yes, God, I heard. Thank you. It will be Ashley down if I can pay the price, was the earnest response. And it goes on to another whole set of events in which, listening to God's leading, combining the word of God with seeing God in his circumstances.

God miraculously provided the price for the amount of money he had for that land. Again, God is a relational God.

And you cannot know somebody by simply coldly understanding him or knowing what he says. We have to experience that person.

And God wants us to experience him through his word, overseeing it all, but then applying it in our daily circumstances, seeing him in every event.

[32 : 27] Well, knowing God also involves tender affection for God. Tender affection for God. Yes, feelings are the caboose, not the engine.

Faith is what drives the train. However, the one who never feels any emotions for someone is either dead or his relationship with that person is dead. When they hurt, we hurt.

When they are going through difficulty, we enter into it emotionally with them. When they become excited about something, we share in their joy. Please turn to 1 Corinthians 16.22.

God made us emotional creatures. after his own image and calls us to emotional interaction with others and himself. Listen to the plea for emotional involvement in the following verses.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

[33:51] The heady, professing Christian who refuses to allow feelings to play any part in his faith should seriously examine his relationship with God. These aren't my words.

Look at 1 Corinthians 16 22. If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him. If you're like me, you've been brought up with a teaching that the love of God is divided and compartmentalized. You know, we've got agape love. That's God's love. It's a love of choice and of action. And we are to love now with God's love, to choose to love.

And then there's phileo love, which that's tender affection. We may or may not have that. But after a conversation this week with Pastor John, whom I'm deeply indebted with, and reading part of a book he gave, I'm coming to realize that the rigid distinction and the meanings of those Greek words just don't stack up in Scripture.

They can't be supported because they're used many times interchangeably. We're told that the feeling of tender affection, phileo love, is not commanded in Scripture, something I just read in Vine's Expository Dictionary this week.

[35:23] But in true love, Jim Renahan documents the conclusion love, the biblical usage of love, and God's love for us, is something that encompasses all aspects of our being, our mind, our will, and emotions.

You can't compartmentalize it. To love is going to involve all of us. So when we're commanded in Scripture to love, we should understand it in its fullest meaning, not in a compartmentalized way, depending on the Greek word used, but as an action and an attitude and an emotion that involves our whole being.

And as a side note, in 1 Corinthians 16.22, even if we were to try to compartmentalize love, it's interesting that the word phileo is used here. And so for those who would view it that way, if anyone does not love, have tender affection for the Lord, a curse beyond him.

So we can't get left off the hook, no matter how we want to approach it. We must love God in knowledge and in truth and in action and in emotion.

To not do so is demonstrating that we are missing something drastic in our love for God. Is there any excuse for not feeling tender affection for Jesus?

[36:54] Does not such coldness speak of an academic Christianity that is void of life? As 1 Corinthians 16.22 warns, how can I not feel something for my all-glorious creator, savior, king, and God?

Regardless of the reasons for my coldness, there is much reward for provoking an inward emotional response toward my savior. John 16.27 I find is an amazing verse.

Know the father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. God chooses to love his elect even when we were unlovely.

This was not the result of his knowing we would respond to him, for none of us would have ever responded to him had he not moved us to follow his decrees and to be careful to keep his laws. Nonetheless, John 16.27 speaks of an amazing cause-effect relationship. His heart will run out in tender affection and in love toward us because we love Jesus and we believe Jesus is his son.

[38:14] You mean by me loving God in the fullest meaning of that term that that provokes a response in my God to heap more love on me?

Why should that surprise us? Isn't that what relationship is all about? What happens when somebody loves you?

Doesn't your heart go out to them? Doesn't that provoke more responsive love? Again, we are in a relationship with God. Knowing God is relational and he's made us like himself apart from our own going our own way in sin.

And so as we look at how we respond to other people relationally, this should be our goal for the kind of walk we have with God. love. I think I'm going to stop there.

Maybe just give a few brief comments. I wanted to open it up and just talk a little bit about the practice of love, of how we invoke actual emotional responses to God.

[39:27] And I focus and I focused again beyond my comfort level and I pray not too much on the feeling side of love this morning, on the feeling side of knowing God.

And I do so because, number one, I need it. And I feel as Reformed Baptists, we are far too often focused on the mental side, as I am, to the exclusion of having true emotional dealings with God. And so I would challenge you as you think through this in the days ahead, and you think about how can I know God better? How can I love God more?

Since we are so doctrinally correct here, to ask the question in this way, how can I provoke, foster emotions of love for my God?

Because if I'm asking and answering that question, as I'm sure you're running through in your own mind, there's a whole litany of answers that are going to involve doctrine, that are going to involve truth, that are going to involve memorization.

[40:53] It will all be run through scripture and by the word of God. It starts in our minds. And yet, if I simply asked, how do I know God better? If it were me, I'd stop with my mind.

But asking the question of how can I emotionally become relationally involved in God more, I know I've got to start in my mind, but I won't be satisfied to stop there.

I must go on. I must say, okay, yes, I need to memorize scripture. But now, as I'm in life and a circumstance happens, I need to let that verse come to my heart and to my mind and hear God speaking it personally to me and then respond emotionally to that incredible passage.

And it is my belief that is ultimately how we develop this emotional response relationally with our God. Let's close in prayer. Lord God, Lord Jesus, we stand in awe that you would desire a relationship with us.

that you stooped and even came to this world and died an unspeakable death, rejection by your Father, that we could actually know you.

[42:22] Oh, please help us to get our arms around this, not just the facts of the cross, but for your love for us that provoked those actions and would you give us a heart that goes out after you and desires a walk with you that is precious and beautiful and that would carry us through everything in life.

We pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Okay.