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# 1 THE STUDY OF GOD

It's hard to know where to begin when your subject is God Himself, a subject more important than anything else we could ever study. Everything else in life emanates from the knowledge of God.

Even coming up with a title for this book was difficult, because nothing can fully express the subject, especially since God is more than the sum total of His attributes. David said, "Such knowledge [of God] is too wonderful for me" (Psalm 139:6). But God invites us to know Him. He wants us to contemplate all that He is, because nothing else matters without Him.

In order for life to be meaningful something must be big enough to warrant our commitment and our affections. The only thing that fits this qualification is God Himself, not only because of who He is, but because *knowing who He is defines who we are*. Much of the confusion about day-to-day living comes because we only see the trees and miss the forest of the great God whom we serve.

I like what the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon told his church one Sunday:

I believe . . . that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. 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.<sup>1</sup>

I pray that by the time you put down this book, you will agree with Spurgeon—and more important, you will know a little bit more about our great God.

My purpose in this opening section is to set the stage, so to speak, by considering some important and foundational truths about God. In Part Two, I want to deal with the perfections of God, known as His attributes or His characteristics; that is, *Who is God and what is He like?* Knowing this is critical: If you misdefine God you've misdefined everything else, because everything emanates from God. You can literally make sense of *nothing* if you have not first made sense of God.

No study of God can be said to be comprehensive for three reasons: The first has to do with the sheer limitation of the human mind. A finite mind cannot fully grasp an infinite being. Second is the moral problem. The presence of sin even in our converted state has limited our capacity for understanding spiritual truth. Third, we have a resource problem. God has simply not told us everything about Himself. What He has told us we can know, but He has not revealed everything.

Because of the greatness of our subject, I will be taking you to many portions of Scripture. But due to the limitations of space and my own finiteness, we will neither exhaust the subject nor be able to give equal attention to all of these Scriptures. I hope that this study will be sufficient to help you taste and see that the Lord is good. I will not be spending time trying to convince atheists of the existence



of God. This book is not the setting for that.

As I begin I feel a little bit like the late Art Linkletter, who saw a little boy drawing a picture and asked, “What are you doing?”

The boy replied, “I’m drawing a picture of God.”

Mr. Linkletter said, “Well, I thought that no one knew what God looked like.”

The boy looked up confidently and said, “They will when I get through.”

## THE STUDY OF GOD

It’s true that we don’t know what God looks like, but I hope by the time we finish I will have painted a picture of God both definable and defensible. My thesis in this introductory chapter can be stated simply: The study of the knowledge of God is the most important pursuit in life. Absolutely nothing is more important.

Of all the things that matter in your life and mine, to know God through a purposeful study of His nature, His character, and His perfections should be our driving force. Only then will we be able to define everything else accurately. But let me make three clarifications right now before we get into the heart of this chapter and the book.

### ***More than Awareness***

First of all, when I talk about the study of the knowledge of God, I am not referring to an awareness of God. Simply to say there is a God doesn’t say a whole lot about Him, because it would be hard to miss Him entirely when you understand that He is an all-encompassing Being. So when I talk about knowing God, I mean more than that you are aware He exists.

### ***More than Information***

Second, when I talk about knowing God, I mean more than that you have information about God; that is, knowing that He is the

Creator or powerful or big or grand or majestic. Those are all true, but they're not sufficient when we talk about knowing God.

### ***More than Religion***

Knowing God also means more than having a religious experience with God or saying that we feel Him. It is valid to have an emotional and religious experience with God, but to know Him involves more than that.

Knowing God involves more than awareness, more than information, more than a religious experience. To know God is to have Him rub off on you, to enter into relationship with God so that who He is influences who you are. One of the great tragedies today is that you can go to church and be aware of God; you can go to church and have information about God; and if your church has a great choir, you can even go to church and “feel” God; but you can leave church with Him never having rubbed off on you.

So when I talk about knowing God, I am talking about having the awareness, the information, and the “religious experience” rub off on you and become part of who you are. With this in mind, I want to communicate four things about the study of the knowledge of God.

### **LIFE'S MOST MEANINGFUL PURSUIT**

The study of God is the most meaningful pursuit in life. Jeremiah 9:23–24 expresses the importance of knowing God better than I ever could:

Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me.”

### ***The Right Kind of Bragging***

It's amazing how many things we brag about. Some of us can brag about our educational achievements. We've gone through school and we've done well. We've got a bachelor's degree. We've earned a master's degree. Perhaps we even graduated *magna cum laude*. We get recognition for that achievement. People call us by name, they give us titles, and, if we are not careful, we might boast about that.

Perhaps you started on the bottom rung of the ladder at your company. You've grown up through the company and now you've become a supervisor, you've "graduated" to become a manager. You own your own business, your own success. Now extra money is in the account. The home looks nice. The cars are modern. The suits are authentic. All the data necessary to indicate that you are successful might tempt you to brag.

But God says, "If you are going to brag, if you really want something to shout about, can you brag that you know Me? Because if you can't talk about that, then it doesn't matter how much money sits in your account, what degree hangs on your wall, or what position you hold in the company. You don't have much to brag about."

A lot of us have pride about the wrong thing. Pride is like growing a beard. It just keeps growing and needs to be shaved daily. Every day, you and I need to get up and look at our degrees, our careers, our money, and then say, "If it were not for the grace of God . . ."

The fact that we don't do this means we don't really know God, because if we knew God we would understand that we have the ability to get up in the morning, go to work, and spend money only because God is God. The knowledge of God affects your self-interpretation.

### ***Hitting the Right Target***

A man once went to visit a farmer and noticed something very odd. On the side of the farmer's barn were a number of targets with

holes dead center in each bull's-eye. Evidently, his farmer friend was an excellent shot, a tremendous marksman. The visitor said, "My goodness! Every single hole is right in the center of every single bull's-eye! I didn't know you were that good."

His farmer friend said, "I'm really not."

"Wait a minute. I see a hole in the center of every single bull's-eye. How could you not be that good and shoot that well?"

The farmer replied, "It's like this. I shoot the hole into the barn first, then I draw me a bull's-eye."

That's the way a lot of us live our lives. We shoot for riches and then draw the meaning of life around it. We shoot for power and draw the meaning of life around it. We shoot for education and draw the meaning of life around it. Then we go around saying, "I hit a bull's-eye!" We give the impression that we know how to shoot, making our friends think we know what we are doing, making the people we come in contact with think we have been successful, when in actuality we don't know what in the world we are doing. We are as confused as those around us. Why? Because we hit a bull's-eye shooting at the wrong target.

### ***Having the Right Focus***

But God says, "If you are going to brag, can you brag on the fact that I have rubbed off on you; that My thinking has become your thinking; that My way of living and walking and moving and functioning has become your way? Only when that happens can you say that you know Me."

So the question is simple. Can you brag that you know God? Can you brag that not only have you come into a relationship with God, but that you *know* Him, that you have entered into intimacy with Him, that He has rubbed off on you? That's the question, and I want you and me to experience God in such a way that He rubs off on us. Then we'll have something to brag about.

I like the story of the woodpecker who was pecking on a tree. Just as he flew away, lightning hit the tree and split it right down



the middle. The woodpecker heard the noise, turned back, and said, “Look what I did!”

A lot of us are spiritual woodpeckers. We are like King Nebuchadnezzar, a man we’ll run into in a later chapter. We say, “Look at this Babylon I have built. Look at this home I’ve built. Look at this car I drive. Look at this school I went to. Look at this job I have. Look at what I have done.” But the only reason we have anything is that God let lightning strike. So God says, “Brag that you know Me, the God of lovingkindness.”

The Hebrew word translated *lovingkindness* in Jeremiah 9:24 is *hesed*. It means “loyal love.” It means, “I have hung in there with you. You didn’t hang in there with Me. I stuck with you. I am a God of justice, I rule in fairness, and I am righteous. I have a standard on earth and I delight in these things.”

You see, the knowledge of God always rubs off in history. He delights in displaying His lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth. Therefore, you cannot say you know God unless it’s rubbed off in your history; unless it has affected how you treat your husband or your wife, how you raise your kids, how you spend your money, and how you relate to people. Unless the knowledge of God has changed you, you don’t know Him.

### LIFE’S MOST AUTHENTIC PURSUIT

The study of God is not only the most meaningful pursuit in life; it is also the most authentic pursuit. I want to look at John 17, Jesus’ high priestly prayer in which He prays on behalf of His disciples, including you and me:

These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” (vv. 1–3)

### ***Authentic Life***

According to Jesus, authentic life is eternal life. Please do not misread me here. Jesus is not referring to everlasting life; that is, He is not talking about how long you are going to live. He's talking about a *quality* of life in verse 3. Eternal life means knowing God. Life can never be what it was intended to be for you or me unless that life consists of God's life being lived out in us.

Jesus says in verse 3 that the only way you will get eternal life experience in this life is in the knowledge of God. Do you see that to know God is to live life authentically? To know God is to live life as it was meant to be lived. That's why Jesus said He came to give us life and to give it to us more abundantly. Life can never be lived like it was meant to be lived without the knowledge of God.

Yet many of us attempt to live our lives our way, using our puny brains to figure things out. We want a quality life without a quality God dictating it. We can't have it. Our brains are too small, our knowledge too limited, ourselves too finite to live life the way it was meant to be lived apart from the knowledge of God.

When my daughter was growing up, she liked to work puzzles. So one day, I gave her a thousand-piece puzzle. But she came back sometime later, very frustrated. I asked her, "What's wrong?"

She said, "Dad, this puzzle has too many pieces. I can't put it together."

Life, like that puzzle, has too many pieces. It looks too difficult. Well, I can tell you someone who can put the puzzle together: the Puzzle-Maker. God is the Puzzle-Maker who knows what protrusion matches with what indentation so as to connect the parts of the puzzle.

To understand this, you have to understand a very simple principle: Eternal life, or the quality of life that God has intended for us, equals the knowledge of Him. Jesus makes a comparative statement in John 17:3. If you want to live, He says, don't go looking for life. Look for the knowledge of God, because authentic life means knowing Him. If you are not succeeding in life, it is because you

are not succeeding in the knowledge of God. What you need is not to look for life, but to look for Him who can locate life for you.

Many of us who are alive have never yet learned how to live. We think living is wrapped up in the things I've already mentioned—money, education, prestige, or power—when living really should be about the knowledge of God. That's why studying the Scriptures is so important. In John 17:17 Jesus prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth."

### ***Telling the Truth***

Only one standard of information clarifies what life is all about, and that standard is the Word of God. If we are going to live life authentically, we need someone who will tell us the truth. We don't do that with each other. We don't tell people the truth because we don't want to offend them. We don't tell them the truth because we don't want them mad at us. We don't tell them the truth because people like being lied to. No woman wants to ask, "How do you like my new dress?" and get this response:

"Worst thing I ever saw in my life."

Even though we may think a piece of clothing or a hairstyle must be the worst we have ever seen, we aren't about to say so, because people don't want the truth. Therefore, our relationships are often shallow and never get to where they are supposed to be.

You don't have that problem with God. God calls it as He sees it. He will not tell you, "I'm OK, you're OK." He tells you, "You were dead in your trespasses and in your sins, and you lived according to the flesh, according to the lust of this age." He's not going to make it comfortable or convenient for you. He doesn't even worry about damaging the "self-esteem" you've built apart from Him. He will tell you the truth, like a good doctor. He's going to tell you that you are sick so you will know what treatment you need.

### ***The Real You***

That's the downside of our study. When God unveils who He is, the knowledge will also unveil who we are. We're faced with the problem Peter had when he ran into Jesus Christ and found out who he was. The revelation of Jesus Christ made Peter fall on his face and say, "I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

The prophet Isaiah saw the Lord and cried out, "Woe is me!" (Isaiah 6:5). Why? Because if you want the real deal, if you really want the truth, God will give you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and some of it will not be pleasant.

That's why not all church services and sermons are designed to make you shout. Shouting has its place, but some sermons should make you cry, gnash your teeth, and fall prostrate on your face before God. Because when you see God as He is, when He unveils Himself, when the true knowledge of God is revealed, it shows you for who you are.

### ***The Real World***

The knowledge of God also shows the world for what it is. People spend much time analyzing our world. Philosophers analyze society because people want answers to the fundamental questions of life such as, Who is man? Where did man come from? Where is he going? People dissect the thought of great philosophers like Schleiermacher, Hegel, Kant, and the philosophical thinkers of our age, as they study the development of man and how he relates to the universe in which he finds himself.

So people sit on the floor with their legs bent and their eyes closed, trying to get into a metaphysical state to come to a philosophical understanding of who they are. But when you have the Word of God, you can bypass all that.

Other people pursue the social analysis of man: how man functions in communication and communion with others, how people relate to each other, how people can stop themselves from hurting



one another, and how they can live in peace with one another. The result is often political attempts to make the world right. But when you have the Word of God, you understand the rules of society because God tells the truth about the world.

God also tells the truth about sex, about money, and about all the ingredients that relate to life. He tells the truth about who you are. He is the greatest psychologist in the world, for He knows what makes you tick (John 2:25). And so who you are, where you came from, why you are here, and where you are going all come from the knowledge of God.

We have many college graduates in our church in Dallas. This means they spent twelve years in primary education and four years in college. We also have a number of people who have their master's degrees. Depending on the type of degree, that was two to four more years of study. Still others have their doctorates, which means another two to four years. That's anywhere from twelve to sixteen years studying to be what they intended to be for the rest of their lives, and everyone along the continuum said, "It's absolutely necessary."

When you thought about dropping out of high school, some mother, father, aunt, or uncle said, "You can't do that. Boy/girl, get your education."

When you didn't want to go to college, the person said, "No, if you really want to get a decent job, you've got to go to college."

Then in college you saw how little you really knew, so you went on to get more information. And if you're like me, with a doctorate, you are downright ignorant because you find out how much you have yet to learn. If we are willing to spend that kind of energy to have a decent career, isn't it more important that you spend time knowing God so you can have a decent life?

And by the way, you won't discover the knowledge of God just by going to college. When we took our daughter, Priscilla, to a major secular university in Texas, she walked into her dormitory room and began to meet some of her dorm mates. After about twenty hours on campus, she called the hotel where my wife and I were staying and

said in her own inimitable way, “Daddy, I’m in hell.”

The very first person she met said, “There is no God. There has never been any God. If there is a God, I am he.” What a great introduction to college!

The first class she attended, one of her professors announced, “I want to serve notice on you right away that the idea of God is obsolete.”

So while you won’t necessarily find the knowledge of God on a college campus, it still needs to be your lifelong pursuit.

You’d better get used to it down here, because the knowledge of God is the focus of heaven. Let me tell you something about heaven. Only one thing happens there: People get to know God. You will spend eternity in heaven getting to know God.

You may say, “How boring.”

I say no, how exciting. You see, there’s only one difference between earth and heaven. Heaven holds the perfect knowledge of God, while the knowledge of God keeps getting interrupted down here. For example, you have to go to sleep. So for eight hours, you are not conscious of God. Or you have problems that distract you from God. In heaven God takes away all the negatives so that you have uninterrupted knowledge of Him.

In fact, you will be part of so much activity in heaven related to the knowledge of God that He won’t even let you go to sleep there. Heaven has no night. God will not give you eight hours to take off, but He will give you a brand-new body that won’t get tired so you won’t miss sleep and you won’t miss anything. Unlike a good TV program that gets interrupted by the commercials, in heaven no “commercials” will interrupt the excitement of God’s revelation of His knowledge.

I’ll see you at the corner of Gold Street and Silver Boulevard and you will say, “Hey! Do you want to know what I found out about God just now?” Heaven will be the uninterrupted knowledge of God. But He wants us to get in practice before we get there by making the knowledge of Him our priority in life.



## LIFE'S MOST BENEFICIAL PURSUIT

The study of God is not only the most meaningful and the most authentic pursuit in life; it is also the most beneficial. Nothing will benefit you more in day-to-day living than the knowledge of God. Daniel 11:32 says this: “The people who know their God will display strength and take action.”

Daniel was a captive in Babylon, an ungodly nation that was turned over to the Medes and the Persians. Daniel was constantly under oppression. He was constantly being victimized, but he says, “The people who know God even in the midst of a bad situation will know the right steps to take in confronting the issues of life.”

### **Confidence**

The knowledge of God gives the ability to make the correct response to the circumstances of life. The people who know their God shall be strong. They will have the confidence and ability to do the right thing. You see, the problem today with people who want to correct the social or political order, who want to change this and fix that, is that they want to do good things, but they don't know the right way.

But the people who know their God shall be strong, move forward with confidence, and take action. Knowledge of God is not passive. It's not something you do on the sidelines. It really frees you up to do something, but to do the right something.

Simply because of the size of our church and the exposure God has given my ministry, I'm constantly being called on to get in this or that movement, to endorse this person, to stand with that cause, to march on this thing and to do that thing. Many of these things are fine, but some are not consistent with knowing God. So I have to say, “That's not consistent with the biblical approach.”

I have to say that because some people don't want to hear that there is a biblical approach, or that their approach is wrong. I'm saying that when you know God you can be confident about your

approach. You don't have to waffle back and forth and be inconsistent and in and out and up and down and go with what everybody thinks.

The world is filled with ideas, but the people who know their God can stand firm, be confident, not be budged, and at the right time, take action. But only the knowledge of God produces that kind of confidence in the circumstances of life. Earlier in the book of Daniel, his Hebrew friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego got thrown into the fiery furnace. The Babylonian officials came to these three and said, "Look, if you don't change your view, if you don't bow, then you are going to burn."

But these three men knew their God, so their answer was, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this" (Daniel 3:16). In other words, these men were saying, "We will not take a lot of time to debate this. We know you are the king and the head of the company, and we know you can fire us (literally!), and we know you can make life really bad for us, but let us explain something to you. The God whom we serve can protect us."

These guys were speaking to an unregenerate leader, but he was the greatest political power of the day. When you know God, you can be strong even if it's with the president. While I would respect the president's position because God calls us to, I would have no problem telling the president that he's wrong on this and on that because God said so. Why? Because when you know God, you can be strong. You can be confident. But with that strength and confidence comes proper humility—after all, you are merely passing along what God said, not your own ideas.

So these three Hebrew young men said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (v. 17). They knew that because they had studied Moses and the Red Sea. They figured any God who could open up the Red Sea could take a little water and put out Nebuchadnezzar's fire. They knew their God, so they were strong and took action, and God honored that action.

Many of us are spiritual wimps because we don't know God, so



we don't know the right thing to do. Many men can't lead their families because they don't have the divine grit to take hold of a biblical approach. Many women are spiritual wimps too. They don't have the divine wit to believe that God can do more to change men through wives on their knees than women can do with their words.

### ***Security***

The knowledge of God also gives security in life. Look at Psalm 46:1–3:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.

The psalmist says that even when earthquakes shake things up, those who know God will take courage. They will be secure. When the ground under you starts shaking, there isn't much around you to hold onto. Just ask the people who have survived California earthquakes.

### ***Wisdom***

The knowledge of God not only gives security, but it gives wisdom. Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17 “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.” Wisdom is spiritual insight for earthly application, the ability to know what God wants and the know-how to apply it where you live. Wisdom is to truth as a shoe is to shoe leather. Wisdom means the ability to take a divine, spiritual perspective and turn it into an earthly, functional application. Wisdom brings the application of truth to life. Paul says the knowledge of God gives wisdom.

Proverbs 9:10 puts it this way: “The fear of the Lord is the begin-

ning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Solomon says God will show you how to live a wise life. A lot of us have book sense, but we don’t have common sense. A lot of us are smart, even brilliant, getting all A’s on our report cards, yet in life we go from failure to failure.

It’s not that we don’t have information; it’s just that we don’t have wisdom, the ability to apply the knowledge we have. But the knowledge of God can give us wisdom, Proverbs says, the ability to make the right decisions in life.

### ***Order***

The apostle Peter says the knowledge of God can give you a well-ordered life:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:2–3)

Peter says the knowledge of God will give you *grace*, *peace*, and *power*. What more could you ask for? A grace life, a peace life, and a divinely powerful life is a pretty good life! It’s a well-ordered life, but Peter says it only comes by the true knowledge of God.

As God rubs off on you—not just as you become more aware of Him, not just as you get more information about Him, but as He rubs off on you—He gives you grace, peace, and power for all of life.

### ***Spiritual Fruit***

Not only that, but if in fact you allow God to work in your life, if you allow Him to transform your life, He will give you spiritual development. Colossians 1:9–10 are two verses worth memorizing:

• • • • •

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Paul says that the knowledge of God will change the way you walk. The familiar gospel song puts it this way: “I looked at my hands, my hands looked new. I looked at my feet and they did too.” That’s what these verses talk about. When you know God you walk differently. You move differently. You act differently. You think differently. Why? Because you are filled with the knowledge of God. With this knowledge comes the knowledge of His will, and the knowledge of His will transforms your life. As He transforms your life, you bear spiritual fruit.

Fruit has two characteristics. First, it always reflects the character of the tree of which it is a part. When you bear spiritual fruit, you begin to look like Christ. Second, fruit is never borne for itself. It is always borne so someone else can take a bite. When you start bearing fruit, other people want to take a bite out of your life. Other people want to be like you, because you are a productive person for the purposes of God. That’s spiritual development.

**L I F E ’ S M O S T C H A L L E N G I N G P U R S U I T**

Finally, the study of God is the most challenging pursuit in life. Look at the following verses:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

### ***An Eternal Challenge***

Do you want a challenge? Decide to get to know God. It's a challenge for a number of reasons. It's a challenge first because verse 33 says getting to know God will never end. God is never, and will never be, fully comprehensible to man, not only in time, but in eternity. Do you know why you will live with God for eternity? Because that's how long it takes to understand Him.

Any married person can relate to this. You can live with a woman or a man for fifty years and still discover new information. Now if you can do that with another person over a lifetime, think about our infinite God. It will take eternity and then some to understand Him. The knowledge of God will always be a challenge because you will never learn it all.

### ***A Revealing Challenge***

Second, the knowledge of God challenges us because getting to know someone demands that he reveal himself to us and grant us the privilege of that knowledge. It's like a guy who comes up to a lady and says, "My name is John. What's your name?"

Now John may want to get to know her, but another question stands on the floor. Is she as interested in knowing his name as he is in knowing hers? In other words, the knowledge of another person is not just contingent on one person's desire to have that information, but on the other's desire to reveal it. God has made it very clear that He has a passionate desire to reveal Himself to us. In Hosea 6:6, God Himself says that He desires us to know Him more than He desires our offerings.

So if you do not come to know God, it is not God's fault because He has made Himself available to be known. And although we can never know God exhaustively, we can know Him intimately. That's challenge enough! Anyone who has ever dated and gotten serious with someone knows that as two people get to know each other, a growing process of intimacy develops. A transformation occurs over

time. That's what happens with God. As you come to know Him, you will discover a growing process of intimacy, a closeness where you feel that you know Him and you want to know Him more.

***A Priority Challenge***

Knowing God is also a challenge because it must be your priority. Deuteronomy 4:29 says that you must search for God with all your heart if you would find Him. The sage says that the knowledge of God is like a man searching for silver (Proverbs 2:4). Where can silver be found? Underneath the ground, so dig.

Why has God not made it easy? Because He wants to know, "How serious are you? You get up and work out because you're serious. But when you've got to get up and spend time with Me, you're too tired. You need that extra fifteen minutes of sleep. Are you serious? You have time to watch your favorite TV show, but you are always too tired to spend time with Me. Are you serious?"

Getting to know God is a challenge because it's hard work to make it a priority. So where do you start? First of all, you must start with a desire to know God. Moses said in Exodus 33:13, "Let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee."

David said, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God" (Psalm 42:1).

Paul said his greatest longing was "that I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10).

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

All of them say the same thing. God only feeds hungry people. If you are not hungry, you are spiritually starved. You might say, "I want to be hungry, but I'm not. How do I get to be hungry?"

***fwThe Place to Begin***

That's easy. Just hang around food. No matter how recently I've eaten, I always get hungry when I'm around fried chicken. I'm certain

that when Mary and Martha fed Jesus and the disciples, they served some fried chicken. It's just logical. They couldn't eat chitlins or pig feet. Chicken was easily available, and after all, they were preachers!

If you want to get spiritually hungry, even if you are not hungry now, get around someone who's cooking something. Get around someone who preaches and teaches God's Word faithfully. Get around someone who feasts on God, and you'll get hungry.

So it has to start with an appetite. Not only that, but you can't enter into the knowledge of God until you have accepted His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your personal Savior. Unless you are a Christian, unless you have faith in Christ, you can never get to the knowledge of God. You can only be on the awareness and information level.

If you are not a Christian, if you've never received Jesus Christ as your only Savior—as the only One you are depending on to give you a relationship with God—you can never know God. Once you are a Christian, relationship is going to require time with God. You never get to know anyone without spending time with him.

The Scripture says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10 KJV). Knowing God requires time alone with Him. Back up from the frantic rat race and "be still." The biblical word for being still is *meditation*. It means reflecting on who God is, what He has said, and what He has done.

That's why prayer is so hard sometimes, because prayer involves entering into another realm that we are not used to going into. But we've got to be still. We've got to spend time with God. During the preaching of these messages and the writing of this book, I asked God to help me get to know Him.

I can't fully explain what it means to know God. I can use the terms, but it's like defining a kiss. Webster has the terms. He calls it "a caress with the lips; a gentle touch or contact." But anyone who has kissed someone knows that a kiss is really much more than that. You can't fully explain it, but Lord have mercy, it's good when you get it! I can't fully explain what getting to know God will feel like, but I know that you will like it when it happens.

# RESPONDING TO THE STUDY OF GOD

**S**ince it's true that nothing else in life will come into proper focus until you understand and know God, it is never too early to begin aligning your life with Him. Here are some ideas to help you start the process:

**1.** As I said above, the true beginning point in knowing God is entering into relationship with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, or if you are unsure of your standing before God, all you need to do is admit that you are a sinner (see Romans 3:9–10, 23) and cannot save yourself (Acts 4:12). Acknowledge that Jesus paid for your sin on the cross (Romans 5:8), and put your faith in Him alone to save you. Call upon Him to save you today (Romans 10:13), receive Him as your Savior (John 1:12)—and welcome to the family. Be sure to tell your pastor or a Christian friend about your decision.

**2.** All of us cling to things that give us a sense of identity and importance, whether job titles, family heritage, bank accounts, or material possessions. List three of the things that are most important to you, and ask yourself what would happen if you lost them. Could you give them up and still say things are OK because you know the true God and that's enough? It's worth thinking about as you read this book.

**3.** Perhaps you know a step of obedience and faith that God wants you to take, but you're holding back for fear of what people will think or what the outcome might be. If so, remember that the people who know their God can be strong and take action. Take that needed step, and trust God for the consequences. He will bless you for taking Him at His Word.

**4.** Speaking of the Word, there's no better way to know God than to hide His Word in your heart and mind. Proverbs 9:10 would be a great verse to memorize over the next few days or weeks: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." It captures the theme of this book. If it helps, write it on a card and carry it with you for review until you know the verse well.