

Knowing God *Study Guide*

Section One: Know the Lord **Teacher's Edition**

**An Exercise in Spiritual
Growth and Discipleship
Using the Book *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer**

by

William G. Meisheid

For Leading Study Groups or Personal Self-Study

A prayer for this study

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Notes for the Teacher's/Self Study Edition Section One

Welcome to the Teacher's/Self-Study Edition of the Knowing God Study Guide for Section One: Know the Lord. I pray that God blesses your efforts to assist others and yourself in coming to know Him. I produced this edition to assist those who are leading groups through the book using my study materials or for those who can only do the study on their own.

Important: It is essential that you initially approach each lesson like your students or if you are studying alone without the aid of this additional material. After you have worked your way through the Chapter and the lesson, writing down your answers, you can use these materials to help you prepare for the group or, if alone, to give you feedback on what you thought and wrote. Without this important step, the effectiveness of your study will be reduced considerably. This is an aid to your work, not a means to avoid it.

All of the additions to the text in the standard Knowing God Study Guide Section One are in the blue text and the font (Calibri) used for this section of notes. The difference is distinguishable even when printed in black and white. This color was chosen so that people with one of the various color blindness issues would still be able to distinguish the color difference (<http://www.mrexcel.com/forum/showthread.php?t=374530>). If this color is inappropriate for you, let me know and I can produce a different version. (KnowingGod@meisheid.com)

As you work through the study, you should always remember that these additions are my insights and suggestions. While these are gleaned from many years of teaching Knowing God, this effort is designed to be an inductive study. That means drawing out the meaning of Dr. Packer's text to assist you in better apprehending and understanding his arguments about the truths he presents about God. So take everything in *blue* as **suggestions**. Dr. Packer's arguments and my suggestions are meant to be a beginning point for discussion and further study. *Knowing God* was written as a deep primer for the everyday Christian about the meat of the Gospel (Hebrews 5:14-6:3). There will be things you disagree with, but there is one thing I can guarantee: when you complete this study, you will never be the same, AND you will have a well-rounded understanding of the fundamental meat of the Christian Gospel. Where you go from there is up to you, but I have found repeated study of these materials to be one of the most important things I have done in my Christian life.

At the end of each chapter lesson, there is a meditation taken from the time I went through this study on my blog, Beyond the Rim... (beyondtherim.meisheid.com). These meditations, which serve as a review of the lesson, have been edited for inclusion in this edition. I pray they are an asset to your study efforts.

The fundamental thing to keep in mind throughout this study is that we can come to *know God* because He wants us to do just that. He is our eternal Father who loves us, knows everything about us, the good and, yes, the bad (all of it, even the deepest secret bad things), yet still pursues us as a true Father who pursues, loves, and cares for his beloved children. No matter how alone we may feel, He has not forgotten us; He is always one fervent prayer away. This study is a fulfillment of God's earnest desire for us—to know Him. May God bless your efforts. Grace and peace.

In closing, please consider helping me. I am always looking for feedback to make this study more effective for both you and your study partners. Therefore, it would be a big help to my efforts if you could send me your experiences with the study and any suggestions for improvement. Nothing is too small or insignificant.

Thank you

Grace and peace,

William Meisheid (KnowingGod@meisheid.com)

Preface

While many books and authors have passed through Christian awareness over the centuries, periodically, a book comes along that strikes a chord deep in the Christian community. *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer is one such example. This insightful book has stood the test of time and has challenged Christians at every level of maturity not only to know about the God they profess but to get off the balcony of observation, get onto the road of discovery, and come to know their God intimately and personally.

For a detailed view of James Innell Packer's life, see Alister McGrath's biography. But to help you get started, here is a quick overview.

Packer began life in the working-class neighborhood of Gloucester, England. He never quite fit in, which is not unusual for a bookish child with an intellectual bent, but a “violent collision with a bread van” at the age of seven set him on the course his life would follow. While running away from schoolboys who were taunting him, he ran out into the street and was hit by a van, resulting in a severe head injury. A metal plate was inserted into his head. Exposed and with rubber softening its edges, Packer felt like “A speckled bird,” making it even more difficult to fit in. The restrictions the accident placed on his teenage life, which meant no sports and limited physical activity, steered him instead to a life of reading and intellectual curiosity. At the age of eleven, expecting a bicycle for his birthday, he instead got a typewriter. That, coupled with the results of his accident, sealed his life’s direction. While he had, in many ways, an extremely difficult life, he had an innate pluckiness that served him well over the years.

His faith, initially the product of parents with whom he regularly attended church, took a personal turn in secondary school (what we in the U.S. would call high school). In college, reading C. S. Lewis, among others, and his studying the Bible brought him to a point where, at a meeting of the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (OICCU, or CU), he finally made “A personal transaction with the living Lord, the Lord Jesus.” His newfound faith did nothing to mitigate his sense of isolation, and that might be why he began to appreciate and study the great Puritan authors, who were isolated from the mainstream of English society in their lifetimes. Several quotes illustrate his attachment. “The Puritans answered those questions that perplexed me. From the Puritans, I acquired what I didn’t have from the start—a sense of the importance and primacy of truth.” Unlike his Puritan mentors despite his own isolation, he was ordained in the Church of England. However, it was at an accidental speaking engagement that the course of his life would change. He met his wife Kit and, at the same time, broke through his long-standing fear of being in large public situations. They were married in July of 1954.

After writing his first book, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, a critique of Christian Fundamentalism, in 1958, he went on to author over forty books (and still counting) and edited countless others. However, he is best known for the book we are studying. Packer is also well known for his linear “habit of mind” and style of communication. Once he starts speaking on a thought, he cannot stop until he has carried the thought to its logical conclusion. This predilection has led to many difficulties for Packer over the years. I have a very similar bent and fully understand the problems this state of mind causes to oneself and those you interact with.

While reading through Packer’s *Knowing God* can be memorable, and has been for uncounted numbers of Christians, studying the book chapter by chapter changes lives. I have seen those changes happen again and again over the years as I have led cover-to-cover studies using a one-week per chapter format. While this takes about twenty-eight weeks to complete (twenty-two chapters, introductory material, section reviews, and follow-up), it allows ample time for the contemplation of each of the truths that Packer introduces, time to delve into the scriptural references supporting those truths, and the space to consider the depths of each claim that Packer makes. As faithful Christian students, our goal is to be like the Bereans, to question everything that is said to see if it is true. This study should be no exception.

In addition, let me say that while the study of good books can help to focus the growth of a Christian, I

A prayer for this study

have always thought that discipleship can only be successful if it is centered squarely on the Cross of Jesus Christ and its true meaning of sacrifice, the “not my will, but thy will be done” that lies at the root of Christ’s sacrificial decision. My goal for everyone who uses these materials to study *Knowing God* is that they will find the Cross of Jesus Christ taking its rightful and necessary place at the center of their lives. If that happens, then I will have been a “good and faithful servant.”

A prayer for this study

Every meaningful endeavor in life should be grounded in prayer, and this is no different. May this prayer aid you in your efforts as you go through the study.

Dear Lord God, you have challenged us in your Word to study to show ourselves approved and you told us to leave aside the milk of the Gospel and mature into its meat. Open our hearts, O Lord, and prepare us to learn of you, to drink deep of your revelation of yourself. And as we come to know you better, O Lord, may we also know ourselves better. Grant us, by your grace, success in our efforts.

May your Holy Spirit, by his witness, authenticate what we study and learn, and may we always remember that the Spirit testifies and leads us into all truth and knowledge of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we struggle to apprehend the faith once delivered to the saints, we thank you, O Lord, for your mercy and patience with us as we endeavor to better understand you and ourselves. May everything we do be done to your eternal honor and glory. Amen.

William Meisheid

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Preview of Knowing God

As we begin this study, let's look at how Packer structured his material and why this book is worth studying repeatedly. Some of you may rightfully ask why this book is worth all of this attention; maybe we could just read it once or twice, but why study it over and over again? Well, it is worth it for several reasons:

1. As a study of the nature and person of the Christian triune God, its subject matter is inexhaustible.
2. Its arguments are firmly rooted in scripture and touch almost every area of the Bible dealing with the nature of God.
3. Every time I have gone through it, I have discovered something different about the God who redeemed me and have been confronted with the decision about how to respond to that knowledge.
4. Some things need to be done repeatedly to keep us on track. This book is like going to theological spring training, and as a biblical athlete, I want to get ready for each new season of Christian challenges God brings into my life.

That being said, I just enjoy the way Packer writes, his turn of phrase, his insights. In addition, as I have gotten older, I have begun to appreciate John's statement at the end of his Gospel, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

With John's statement as a backdrop, there will always be a new book with a new slant, focus, or insight. To the writing of books, there is no end. So now, when I find a good book that might be worth studying, I read it, and if it is as good and timeless as I had hoped, I will add it to my list and probably study it several times in the time I have left on this earth. I am reminded of the song that Franco Zeffirelli has St. Francis sing in his movie *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. The refrain goes as follows: "Do few things, but do them well, take your time, go slowly." That thought has stuck with me, and as I approach the third stage of my life, rather than rushing around trying to do all the things I think I have missed (the proverbial bucket list), I am actually slowing down and cutting back. I am trying to do fewer things but to do them well. As to this book, I have decided that knowing a book worth studying very well is better than knowing a lot of books poorly. If you are wondering what books I consider worth studying repeatedly, I will note them at the end of this entry. For now, let us focus on this book.

Dr. Packer divides his book into three main sections:

Section One: Know The Lord. Packer begins by dealing with the nature and focus of the study. He looks at theology and the people who study it. He discusses the nature of knowing and being known and how that applies to our relationship with God. Then he looks at God himself and his revelation about himself as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He introduces the Trinity by way of the incarnation and fleshes it out with the one who testifies to the Holy Spirit. This section is the foundation for the other two sections.

Section Two: Behold Your God! After building his foundation in *Section One*, Packer now addresses the substance of who God is by examining his attributes, both communicable and incommunicable and why the difference matters. For example, in *Chapter 10: God's Wisdom and Ours*, Dr. Packer notes that we are created in the image of God, possessing only his communicable attributes, while one of the roots of sin and pride is our (and Satan's) desire to possess God's incommunicable attributes. Packer continually grounds the attributes of God in our relationship with Him, which makes it much easier to understand them, and the God who possesses them.

Section Three: If God Be for Us... In his closing section, Packer applies the knowledge gained in the first two sections to living out the Christian life. He addresses the heart of the gospel and how that allows us to become Sons of God. He explores how God leads us through life and gives insights into dealing with the trials and tribulations that will eventually come our way. He closes with our blessed assurance, the adequacy of God for the Christian.

One of the problems I have seen over the years of teaching this study is that people find the end of *Section One* and most of *Section Two* difficult and demanding, so if they stay with the study, they begin to skim and skip. They pass the time to the “good stuff” in Section Three, where we deal with our redemption and God’s grace and love. However, they do so at a terrible price since, without a firm grasp of who God is, they fail to build the foundations of their understanding on solid rock, ending up with a haphazard and weak footing for their faith.

Please believe me when I say that a diligent study of the first two sections brings several orders of magnitude greater appreciation and understanding of the blessings and truths in *Section Three*. I remember a biting critique of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians that I heard in the early ’80s. The minister, a Scottish Presbyterian, said that maybe one of the reasons people go flitting from place to place seeking a new and exciting experience of God is because they have failed to know and understand who this God they seek really is and to appreciate the marvelous gift of salvation and new life in Jesus Christ, He has given them in the first place. Being charismatic, I took that admonition to heart, and it energized my second effort to study knowing *God*.

In closing, I will tell you what books I believe are worth repeated study. Other than the bible, four books besides *Knowing God* have been significant for me. They are:

- [Knowing Scripture](#) by R.C. Sproul and Robert Wolgemuth. This short book helps you examine how you approach the bible and introduces hermeneutics in a way almost anyone can understand.
- [A Long Obedience in The Same Direction](#) by Eugene Peterson. Eugene is best known for his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*. In this book, he addresses the failure of Christian discipleship due to the corroding effects of our instant society, where instant gratification and immediate results are expected. Eugene uses the Jewish Psalms of Ascent as his source material to emphasize obedience and the length of the quest. It is hard for many Christians today to grasp the idea of Christianity being a long quest, but Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey, not a point of arrival.
- [Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible](#) by James Sire. James examines the common methods used to distort the scriptures. This helps us see when others are “twisting scripture.” It also confronts us when we twist or distort the Scriptures to meet our prejudices.
- [The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog](#), 5th Edition by James W. Sire. Sire examines the “set of presuppositions we hold about the basic makeup of our world.” Our “worldview,” or as I like to say, the water in which we swim, colors everything we know and understand about the world. Each new edition of this book adds new and important material and insights.

There you have it. May God bless your efforts as you engage in this study. May you have grace and peace on your day, and please keep me in your prayers.

Preface: The Postmodern World

The water in which we swim, which, after a while, we forget that it and its influences are even there.

Today's theme: Pushing back the void (God-shaped hole*) with anxious activity.

We avoid the *God-shaped hole in our heart (or you can say the void in our lives) by keeping ourselves busy, never allowing ourselves to look to become bored. That would leave time for thinking too deeply, especially about primary or eternal things.

***God-shaped hole:** It has been said, starting with Augustine (Confessions), that we all have a "God-shaped hole" in our heart, the center of our being, which for the lost soul is a terrifying bottomless void that they would do anything to fill. For the spiritual searcher, the unquenchable yearning drives the quest for meaning, seeking something to fill the emptiness. For those who try to avoid the spiritual quest, it demands some way to quiet the longing thirst, either by drowning it in sin or numbing it through drugs, alcohol, sex, and/or adrenaline abuse.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a Christian mathematician, wrote the following in his *Pensées* (thoughts/musings):

What else does this craving and this helplessness proclaim but that there was once a true happiness in man, of which all that remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.

Earlier Saint Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*:

You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

[Additionally] What place is there in me to which my God can come, what place that can receive the God who made heaven and earth? Does this mean, O Lord my God, that there is in me something fit to contain you? ... Or, since nothing that exists could exist without you, does this mean that whatever exists does, in this sense, contain you? If this is so, since I too exist, why do I ask you to come into me? For I should not be there at all unless, in this way, you were already present within me.

Scriptural background: [Luke 12:29-31](#), "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."

Remember also [Acts 17:27-28](#) where Paul told the Athenians "...so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'"

We should live our lives seeking God and his kingdom. **Nothing else matters.** All the other things in life are temporary, and in the end they are the wood, hay, and stubble of our lives that have no meaning when death comes knocking and we have to pass through the fire of cleansing (see [1 Corinthians 3:10-15](#)).

Quotes for the week

"The 'system' must have freedom; it must have abundance, and it must have infinite variety. Profit is the aim, happiness the desire, and consumption the means. Hollywood manufactures dreams and models for us to mimic or wish for. Desire is awakened, stimulated, encouraged through the perpetual bombardment of images and wishes." "What is Good and Who Says?" Stuart McAllister,

Preface: The Postmodern World / Concern: How modern influences may affect this study

Just Thinking, Spring/Summer newsletter 1998, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

Our whole culture, the system that supplies us with the external things we seek and validates the internal goals we set, is geared to progress, novelty, and experiencing the new thing that excites and helps to drive away the void. The next movie, book, TV episode, sporting event, or gadget is what you should want. It will change your life. After all, don't you want what is new, exciting, and maybe this time, satisfying? Remember, amusement is a (not) muse (think) ment (action or process of).

Concern: How modern influences may affect this study

We are all affected by the “water in which we swim” or the gestalt (integral pattern, form, shape) of our daily lives. We cannot avoid the time in which we live and how it influences who we are and how we think.

This is the nature vs. nurture argument – however, if God can mold our hearts, so can the world, the flesh, and the devil ([Ephesians 2:2-3](#)).

1. Considering the above quote and the pervasiveness of modern influences and their intrusions into our lives, how will you find quietness, clarity, and perseverance to pursue this study?

We need to consciously choose to limit that influence and make a “God space” in our day dedicated to “knowing God.” We need to do that every day.

We will also need to break some of our old habits and create new ones to succeed in this study. Otherwise, our old habits will steer us toward failure. We need to carve out a regular quiet time for our study, for our “God space,” and make sure we do not break the commitment to read the text and answer the questions early enough to allow time for our hearts to engage the issues (not just before the study or during the study). We must focus, turn off the noise, and listen to what God is trying to say to us. Our eternal destiny depends on it.

Interacting With the Text: Knowing God: The Prefaces (1993 and 1973)

If these challenges excite you and rouse the best in you, then you are a prime candidate to take this journey with us.

In Packer's 1993 Preface, he says the editor who commissioned the original articles that became *Knowing God* wanted something for “readers who were fed up with facile Christian verbiage” [simplistic or too simple explanations]. In effect, Packer was told to write Christian theology for ordinary people who wanted to dive below the surface and see the glories that resided in the deeper waters of the Christian faith. This is the approach to Christian study for people who take Hebrews 6:1-3 seriously.

“Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this ***we will do if God permits.***” [Hebrews 6:1-3](#)

A good illustration of the difference between apprehending the milk and meat of the word is looking at snorkeling (barely or only intermittently breaking the surface) and scuba diving (going deep down). However, in the end, God gives us the grace to know Him and sustain the effort we are starting. It is his will that accomplishes ([Phil. 1:12-13](#)). Remember, as we travel on this journey, there are two road builders: God and Satan. Whose road have you been on?

1. With that as background, what things might make it difficult for you to “leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity?” ([Hebrews 6:1](#))

Not having good study or support programs in our church leaves us on our own. External support helps us overcome the hard times that always come with this study.

We all have fears of having our sin exposed and of having to deal with our pet areas of sin—we hide them. We are afraid that God will expose them if we look too deep.

I believe we all have an ingrained *fear of knowing* - if I don't know, then I have an excuse, but if I know, I don't have a leg to stand on.

Everyday distractions and eventual lack of focus—We have not been trained to sustain an effort over the long haul. This study requires us to learn perseverance, and it will definitely teach us about commitment and long-term obedience in the same direction.

Rationalizations and excuses – ***everybody falls*** or fails one or more times during this study. Believe me, I know. However, you have to drop the rationalizations and bury the excuses. Part of Christian maturity is to admit failure and then pick yourself up and get on with it. It is what God expects you to do.

2. In Packer's 1973 Preface, using John Mackay's illustration, he talks about the difference between a person who merely observes events and one who participates in them. Have you been mostly a balconeer/watcher or a traveler/walker in your life? What is the essential difference between the two ways of living?

Everyone admits to being or having been a balconeer or having areas in their lives where this is still true, bringing up an important point. We all seek to be pure, not double-minded, but because of this question, one of the first things we deal with is that we are divided; part of our lives may be on the road, while other parts are left behind on the balcony.

Kibitzers vs. doers—James said that we should be doers, and that is our goal. While doing this study, you have to remember that you are on the road, not sitting on the balcony talking about being on the road.

Passive vs. active – think about [Philippians 2:12-13](#) "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.***" It is time to accept your responsibility **to be active**; it is time to get to work. Think about [James 1:22-25](#) and [2:14-26](#).

Balconeers/spectators take no risks. This is much easier, at least for a while. Travelers get blisters, get lost, need a map, and need care and nurturing.

3. Packer considers the "spirit of the age" to be a spirit that magnifies the human race and its achievements while relegating God to an afterthought. Think about why or why not the "spirit of the age" has affected you in the various areas of your Christian life. If you have been affected, how has it affected you?

It makes me depressed to think about this since I have to admit I am not who I think I am. This has encouraged me to subtly slide down the slippery slope by making little compromises that lead to bigger ones later.

It frequently entices me to make *<insert item here>* the most important thing, at least at the moment (that is how it begins), rather than God.

I have to admit that I want to matter and be significant...underneath it all, it is me, me, me, no matter how hard I try to expunge my narcissism. It is a virtual epidemic in our modern society.

I sometimes see God as a tool to meet specific needs, someone to call on when I am in trouble, but not as a person with whom I have an intimate ongoing relationship. In effect, I tend to **use** God.

What do I treasure; what do I hold on to? Where is my treasure? Read [Luke 12:19-31](#).

Preface: The Postmodern World / What to Do Next

4. According to Packer, the naturalistic leaven in the Renaissance ushered in an era of skepticism in which naturalistic thought denied God's direct and complete control of this world. How do you think this skepticism has affected you?

It makes it seem that God never had or lost control of his creation and that he cannot be depended on.

It erodes my faith and constantly batters my trust in God and anything absolute.

It makes me wonder what I know or if I can know anything at all. Maybe all I can do is just experience the world around me, and that is all that has meaning.

It challenges the Bible as truth, removing its authority in my life and its guidance in my decisions.

It says maybe there is no meaning to anything, and life and existence are all one big joke.

It erodes the Christian mind, eating away at my/our resolve, my/our steadfast faith.

5. Why is theology important for the Christian Church, and how has it failed us?

It is supposed to correct the Church (and me) when it (and I) drift away from the truth.

It is the legend for our map; it should explain how everything fits together.

It has not done its job; instead, it panders to the "spirit of the age."

It has left behind the common believer and, instead, pimped itself out to the intellectuals and the elite.

It failed us at the most basic spiritual level and even encouraged us to wander. It has watered itself down to the point that it has lost any substantive meaning. In some cases, it actively denies, even attacks, the basic historical truths of the faith it is supposed to serve.

Remember this prayer from the Book of Common Prayer: *Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ.*

6. What care must we take when we read books like *Knowing God*? Do you think this is a problem for you personally? Why or why not?

We must be careful we don't fool ourselves into believing that we are traveling when we are just watching the real travelers go by.

We should not delude ourselves into thinking that we are much farther down the road than we are.

We must not pretend or delude ourselves that we know more than we do. Humility is a paramount virtue to a traveler.

We must guard against the temptations of pride, smugness, and looking down our nose-ism.

Remember to know and understand the limits of your faith ([Romans 12:3](#)). Humbly ask God for more faith. He will give it to you as he has promised. Oh, Lord God, please increase my faith.

Anyone who denies they have or will have a problem is fooling themselves. I fight problems all the time and have struggled during all of the studies I have been part of, even while writing this.

What to Do Next

You are now ready to dive into our study. Begin *Section One* by reading *Chapter 1: The Study of God*. Please do not let this slide. The earlier you start your readings, the better your results will be. Waiting until the last minute before the next class diminishes God's time to affect growth on the issues this lesson will raise in your life. Do not hamstring your effort.

Goal: Never forget the task at hand

Think about how the “spirit of the age” and skepticism might affect your efforts as you read and think about what is being said. Also, remember C.S. Lewis’ sobering words on imagined success as you move forward (see the end of the 1993 Preface).

Be sober, be vigilant, and don’t waste your effort by going through the motions and deceiving yourself.

Meditation on the Preface Lesson

I added the meditations for each lesson to the Student version to assist them in their preparation. This was a major change during my last two in-person studies.

Of all the books I have read since becoming a Christian, apart from the Bible itself, one book has consistently both reinforced and challenged my ongoing efforts to become the Christian I have always desired to be. That book is *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer.

I have recently concluded that though this is one of the most purchased books in the Christian community since its release in 1973, it may be, by comparison, one of the least studied. I say that from experience, having studied the book with many groups. I believe it is because the book confronts what you believe and understand about God, creating a waning interest in many (but not all) and a declining interest in putting in the effort to study. Let me say without reservation that it is impossible to study through this book and not be changed. In your walk (as a traveler, not a balconeer) through the challenges of this book, you will not be the same person at the end of your adventure as the one that started traveling the journey that Dr. Packer has enticed you to make.

I believe the reasons for the change in each traveler are as varied as the people who make the journey, but I expect the root of each transformation to be found in Packer’s simple yet profound title, *Knowing God*. Chapter by chapter, paragraph by paragraph, we as readers are confronted with two inescapable things: the true nature of the God with whom we have to do and our understanding, opinions, thoughts, and even prejudices regarding that nature. Over the years, this modest book (it is not overly long and is written in a popular style for the average Christian) has caused me more than a little heartache as I came face to face with the God of Abraham and Moses, as well as the Trinitarian understanding of His nature which is most fully expressed within the writings of the New Testament.

I have read many esteemed theological works, but this “popular” book has challenged my heart and soul (not just my mind) in ways those highly regarded works did not. I am not completely sure why this has been so. It may be related to the insight of an old favorite, but now deceased, radio preacher, J. Vernon McGee. Dr. McGee liked to concentrate on what he said were the practical and common-sense Gospel issues of where the “rubber meets the road.” I would give Packer’s book that abiding compliment. It touches me where my daily life intersects my understanding of God and, in doing so, changes me, or maybe it is better to say that the Holy Spirit uses the book’s simple directness to challenge and change me as the scriptural arguments it presents find their touchstone in my everyday experiences. To use Dr. McGee’s aphorism, it touches me where God’s rubber meets my daily road.

You are welcome to use these materials as you see fit, respecting my copyright as noted in the Copyright Statement. I covet your comments and observations, desiring anything that will make the study a better tool to assist those who willingly take on Dr. Packer’s challenge.

Think on [Isaiah 65:10-12](#) and take to heart its admonition.

“Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me. But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, *when I called, you did not*

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answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in."

There is no fortune or destiny outside the will of God. None.

May God bless you in your transition from balconeer to traveler and may you, along with all those who came before you, be granted the exceptional privilege of coming to know your God.

May God bless you and keep you. May His grace be upon you today and every day going forward. Amen.

Section One: Know the Lord

In [Exodus 5:2](#), the Pharaoh of Egypt said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."

The world always asks this question in one form or another. Why should it give up control of our lives to this God it doesn't know or respect? Nothing changes in the dominion of Satan. He only has one game plan.

In [Hebrews 8:11](#) it says, "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."

We all long for the arrival of that day, and this is how it should be within the Church, the family of God. Sadly, this is not yet true.

The following is taken from a poem by Edward William Bok (1863–1930). *The Americanization of Edward Bok. 1921. XXXV. At the Battle-Fronts in the Great War.*

I include this because everyone who becomes a child of God and then seeks to know him becomes a soldier in the fight for the Kingdom of God, a warrior standing against the forces of darkness.

This is even more so as we approach the end, I believe. Have you put on God's full armor? Are you embracing his call to enter the battle?

"For the passing souls we pray, (those dying)
Saviour, meet them on their way;
Let their trust lay hold on Thee
Ere they touch eternity.

Holy counsels long forgot (train up your child in the way he should go...)
Breathe again 'mid shell and shot;
Through the mist of life's last pain
None shall look to Thee in vain.

To the hearts that know Thee, Lord, (in this context not an intellectual exercise!)
Thou wilt speak through flood or sword; (those who know You can hear You in the midst of trial)
Just beyond the cannon's roar,
Thou art on the farther shore.

For the passing souls we pray,
Saviour, meet them on the way;
Thou wilt hear our yearning call, (those You know, You listen to)
Who hast loved and died for all."

Chapter 1: Theology and the Study of God

Today's theme: The difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God

There is a difference between *knowing about* and *knowing*, and that is what this book is about. We mix it up when we say we know so-in-so when, in reality, we only have had a casual acquaintance with and know little about them. No, this is about where, to paraphrase J. Vernon McGee, the rubber of understanding meets the road of relationship.

Scriptural background: [Psalm 119:105](#), "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path."

We need to constantly remind ourselves that *the Word (God's self-revelation) guides us into knowing Him. It alone informs and sets the parameters and boundaries of our journey; it alone is the sourcebook for all disputes. While experience can flesh out our understanding, it cannot go where the Word does not support or allow. Anything else is a slippery slope to error and heresy.*

Quotes for the week

"To know God better is only to realize how impossible it is that we should ever know him at all. I know not which is more childish—to deny him, or define him." Samuel Butler (1835–1902), British author. First published in 1912. *Samuel Butler's Notebooks*, p. 194, E.P. Dutton & Company (1951).

You should take Butler's warning with a grain of salt while not missing the contradiction in his argument: *to know God better is to realize...* Underneath his dismissal is the realization that we can know God, but as the Apostle Paul says, only through a mirror darkly – not yet as Moses desired, face to face. That joy comes after. Ultimately, we must never forget that *we do not define God*; He defines us and is self-defining through his Word and actions. He is the "I AM WHO I AM."

"I know things. For instance, there are 108 beads in a Catholic rosary, and there are 108 stitches in a baseball. When I heard that, I gave Jesus a chance. But it just didn't work out between us. The Lord laid too much guilt on me. I prefer metaphysics to theology." Annie Savoy in the movie *Bull Durham*, 1988.

This is a common trap and rationalization for most people. It is one of the tricks that the enemy uses to keep you a balconeer: use anything to avoid facing true theology and the Word. Annie exposed the key issue—avoid guilt at all costs since biblical theology and the Word will only foster that guilt until you deal with it. To know God is to know sin and, therefore, to know guilt. It is unavoidable and an essential part of coming to know the ONE with whom we have to do. Dealing with your sin is probably the second biggest hurdle you will face on this journey. The first is God being who he is, not who you want him to be.

"Theology, not morality, is the first business on the church's agenda of reform, and the church, not society, is the first target of divine criticism." Michael Horton, Reformed theologian and culture critic.

This is a true admonition and also the first agenda of self-reform. Without a solid foundation, any house crumbles, and looking at Scripture, God seems to spend much time chastening those called by his name. Correcting his followers appears to be His first order of business. He expects the world to be disobedient. We who claim to be Christians are supposed to repent our sins and be willing to change.

Concern: The effects of existentialism

Each lesson will include a section that looks at a concern related to that particular chapter. This first concern is existentialism and how it affects our understanding of ourselves and God.

Existentialism pervades our postmodern, post-Christian world and seeps into our thinking through education, media, music, friends, and our general life experience.

Existentialism: *n. Philosophy.* A philosophy that emphasizes *the uniqueness and isolation* of the individual experience in a *hostile or indifferent* universe regards human existence as unexplainable, denies biblical revelation, God, and an ultimate purpose, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility, *which is to its good* for the consequences of one's acts. Its adherents argue anything spiritual is unknowable and irrelevant to life. Adapted from the American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000.

1. How does existentialism influence you? If you think not, why not?

We all are influenced to some degree. It is part of the American ethos, the lone hero, the essence of Westerns, science fiction, and comic book heroes. It causes us to distrust authority and to depend only on ourselves. It pervades the American Dream and influences every aspect of our culture. It tempts us to be our own god (we are the arbiters of our fate) and not submit to God and his Word, because even if he does exist, he is unknowable and doesn't care about us as individuals. It erodes all trust and diminishes the reality of God's self-sacrificial love (agape) in Jesus Christ.

2. How could existentialism influence our thinking as we study God, and how would that be a problem?

When the going gets tough, existentialism tempts us to think that God is distant, so why bother? He's not concerned with my problems; I am not Moses or David. It gives us an excuse to give up on the daily struggle to know Him. We concern ourselves only with the big items of salvation and serious sin, and our spiritual growth grinds to a halt.

It argues for no absolutes, enabling us to avoid black-and-white issues when that is convenient. With this mindset, embracing the grays or being inclusive is much easier and culturally acceptable.

It denies the essence of the Christian community (we are not alone) and forgets the real love (agape—self-sacrifice) that is so essential to the Church's reality. Instead, it tells us we are separate and alone, which strikes at the heart of the Trinity and its relational essence, which is the foundation of our Christianity. The ground of our faith is our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters.

It leaves me alone to paddle my own boat, to choose where I want to go, without any external correction (or real guidance). Remember, the existentialist believes he is the captain of his soul, while the Christian believes he is only the steward and **God is the captain**. I am willing to bet that if you look deep into yourself, you will find that you believe you are more than just a steward. Repentance calls you.

Existentialism destroys hope, erodes belief, and helps us forget about God (at least not during our normal day). Job 8:13 says, "*Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish.*" We must make Him immediate and relevant to every moment of our existence.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To understand why studying God (theology) is necessary, not just what God asks us to do (biblical ethics - what Christians refer to as holiness or righteousness and is worked out in discipleship). FYI: Page numbers for where the text references the answer will be noted. **Note:** all editions in my library have the same page numbering.

Note: The first two questions address issues leading up to the questions for Chapter 1 of the book.

1. We all want to understand ourselves better and know why we do what we do, so why is it necessary to study God?

He, God, created us. He is the author and finisher of who we are and created us in his image. We share his attributes in a limited way. He made us for a purpose, and that is tied to his character and

Chapter 1: Theology and the Study of God / Interacting With the Text

nature. He rules everything in time and space, including our existence and purpose.

He alone knows and understands the human heart, our heart. Jeremiah 17:9-10 "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.*"

I like to say that God shares (think of the relationship of the Father-Son-Holy Spirit) and created us to share with Him (3) and to fellowship with Him (3). Understanding God means understanding the nature of that perfect relationship and how it relates to us and our deepest desire to have that perfect relationship with God and with those who are our Christian brothers and sisters.

2. What does theology mean to you? With that in mind, how does "theology" relate to studying God?

This question has no wrong answer. Think of this modern aphorism, "What is, is." Before plotting a course to go somewhere else, we must know where we are. **Newsflash:** where you are is no surprise to God since he already knows everything about you: past, present, *and future.*

Modern theology, where mental speculation and novelty drive the process. It doesn't relate to a true study of God. Modern theology knows no limits or boundaries and presumes it can apprehend anything or speculate about it. The famous story about Saint Augustine is apropos here:

Augustine was walking along the beach contemplating the nature of the Trinity when he saw a young boy who had dug a hole in the sand, running back and forth to the surf, filling a bucket, and pouring it into his little hole. He approached the boy and asked him what he was doing. The boy replied, "I am putting the sea in my hole." Augustine told the boy that his quest was impossible; the vast sea could not fit in his little hole, to which the boy replied, "It is the same about which you are pondering," and disappeared.

If you look at theology from a biblical perspective, with the text driving the process and being the touchstone for all of theology, we should proceed using an orderly, disciplined process, or as the Apostle Paul would say, "...in decency and order." We should recognize that there are limits and boundaries and some things we will not and should not know or understand in this lifetime (the secret things belong to God). However, good biblical theology provides a framework/language/discipline for our study. Remember, the theology of God is the theology of life and how to live. It is guided by the one who created us and has a purpose for us, individually and corporately.

3. Have you ever thought that God is hard or impossible to know? What is Packer's solution to this problem? What is necessary for you to take his advice?

(p.19) Yes, often. Encountering God is like entering a great storm, a hurricane over which I have no control. God also does not answer our beck and call. He frustrates our demands and often leaves us, like Job, in the dark about what is happening to us. Sometimes, we feel alone, but Job was never alone, and neither are we. Jesus promised us that he would never leave or forsake us, no matter how we feel.

If we want to succeed in our effort to know God, we have to admit where we are and start from there. God has assured us that he will meet us when we begin to seek him. Since we must start somewhere, we should borrow the effective Nike slogan, "Just do it!"

Do a candid self-assessment of where you stand with God and how well you know him.

Be internally honest and consistent. Remember, the first person we try to lie to or fool is ourselves.

With that in mind, we must stop listening to everything and everyone telling us not to take this journey and step out in faith—faith that the journey is doable and faith that God is there waiting for us.

4. Packer claims that if you are a Christian, you know five basic things (foundational truths) about God, and he says that these should guide our study. Are any of these beginning assumptions a problem or difficulty for you, or do you lack a basic understanding of them? Which ones and why?

(p. 20) Your responses to the five truths are personal. However, we know that God:

- **Has spoken to us/the Word** – do we listen or like to shade and twist his words to justify our pet concern? It is the rock on which we are broken, or it will crush us.
 - **Is Lord and King** – this is easy when the demands are easy, but hard when the demands get hard. The common refrain is, “No one is going to tell me what to do.”
 - **Is Savior** – I sometimes wonder, why me; why this way? If only...why can't he...etc., etc.
 - **Is triune/Trinity**—While I accept it, I struggle with the wording in some passages. However, I have found that this book's emphasis on the nature of relationships at the core of the Godhead helps immensely.
 - **Demands godliness** – it seems what we think is Godly is so much less than what earlier saints strove for or what, if we are honest, God expects. We often forget the second part of the Confession of Sin, which is the most important part: *Forgive us for what we failed to do.*
5. For Packer, the study of God requires the study of what source materials? Do you think these source materials are adequate? What others would you add, if any?

(p. 20) Bible – both Old and New Testaments- is the only way to arrive at a balanced, unified, true knowledge of God.

Tradition – the accumulated knowledge of the Church (e.g., doctrine, catechisms, Creeds). None of us start from scratch, and we are foolish to think we can since we will end up making many of the same mistakes earlier Christians did, and we should instead learn from them. However, we *always* take tradition with a grain of salt and submit it to the authority of the Word.

These helps are necessary, but I would add to them good teaching, preaching, books (such as this one), commentaries, etc., but only with a Berean eye (Acts 17: 10-11), testing everything to see if it is true and remembering they are always subservient to the Word itself. These resources have often helped us with the hard work of organizing effective thinking and study. Lastly, I would add the important resource of good spiritual friends who will keep you honest by challenging you. They don't always have to be right, but their willingness to ask questions and challenge us reflects Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron...”

6. While studying God, Packer will use three basic themes about God to approach God. As we begin this study, express these themes in your own words and explain what they mean to you.

(p. 20-21) These responses are personal.

Godhead of God—the Trinitarian nature of the relationship between each person and the Godhead as a whole is paramount. It helps me understand the fundamental nature of all relationships since the entirety of creation (material and spiritual) reflects the character of its creator.

Powers of God – his attributes, how he has defined himself in revelation and action, and what that means to my understanding of who he is in each person. God's power keeps me humble and on balance.

Perfection of God – his moral nature and how that demands from me an utterly moral response, without any equivocation or excuse. It explains how to please God and when I have succeeded or failed and need to seek repentance.

7. Why are our motives and attitudes for pursuing this study important? What, according to Packer, should be our motives and our goal? What are some of the dangers we face?

Chapter 1: Theology and the Study of God / What to Do Next

(p. 21-22) Our motives and attitudes affect and color everything we do, for good or ill. Our intentions are our natural compass, which can lead us to truth or error, so always question it.

We should desire to know God in the right way for the right reasons and guard our hearts. While our spiritual health depends on biblically sound doctrinal knowledge (body of teachings— “faith once delivered” (Jude 3), doing the right thing for the wrong reasons will not move us closer to God. God looks at our hearts and motivations, not just our actions, but for others, our actions demonstrate our hearts.

Throughout this study, we will face the dangers of conceit, self-righteousness, and self-satisfied self-deception, which can make us prideful and Pharisaic. They are all waiting at the door of our easily accessible arrogance and self-importance. God doesn't like a self-righteous know-it-all any more than we do, and if you are really a Christian, expect Him to take out the whip of chastisement. [Hebrews 12: 5-7](#).

8. [Psalm 119](#) (126 verses) contains some important wisdom that can help us understand our pursuit of God's knowledge. What is that wisdom?

(p.22) Psalm 119 shows us that our pursuit of God is not theoretical but practical so that we can be conformed to God's image with a heart open to him. We need to *know God* better, not *know about God* better. The whole purpose of our study is “to be led to God,” to further our living a life of godliness, not to sit off in the distance and think we have encountered Him with whom we have to do.

9. Why does Packer consider Christian meditation important?

(p. 23) He considers it the practical method we can use to reach our goal. To quote: “...we turn each truth that we learn *about* God into matter for mediation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God.” In other words, it means growing from knowing about God to knowing God.

10. How does Packer's definition of meditation differ from other forms, such as those practiced in Eastern religions? Can you think of any synonyms that might apply to your “meditating on the truth”? Which synonym works best for you and why?

(p. 23) Calling to mind, thinking about the meaning, and considering the application of what we are focused on, not the mindless repetition of powerful phrases, is what Packer considers Christian meditation. It could be described as *Holy Thought* since its root purpose is to engage God in reasonable discussion, as He suggested in Isaiah 1:15-20 (the “Come let us reason together” passage).

Proper meditation humbles us before God and man as we contemplate his “greatness and glory and our littleness and sinfulness.”

Think, reason, weigh, brood, contemplate, and ponder. While the answer is personal, I like the idea behind ponder, which is weighing in the mind with deep, serious, and thorough thought.

11. After studying this chapter, how do you think knowing God will be different from knowing about God? Can you do this on your own? Why or why not?

It is like the difference between reading about something versus going out and doing it. It is the difference between looking at the diving board versus taking the plunge. There will be an experiential completion that goes beyond mere mental activity.

Yes, but it works better with help since that will supply correction and support when needed, giving us less chance of going off course where our ingrained prejudices reinforce any error.

While help is good, sometimes you also need to be alone to allow God to confront you, correct you. I believe any choice made in a group setting needs to be confirmed in the privacy of one's will, one's internal decision process (when no one is looking over our shoulder) to become real and true. Otherwise, where is the evidence of your change of heart?

What to Do Next

Continue *Section One* by reading Chapter Two: *The People Who Know Their God*. Think about how

existentialism or self-satisfaction might be affecting your efforts. Begin this week by practicing your Christian meditation using the truth you have learned in Chapter One.

For many people doing this study, beginning Christian meditation will be something new and possibly unsettling. Despite Packer's support of the practice, its modern linkage to Eastern mysticism and practice is a concern. It may make seeing the differences difficult, though, except for Yoga, things Eastern have waned in recent years. That said, one of Satan's great successes is to taint legitimate Christian practice, so it is generally abandoned. This is a prime example. Study leaders should do all they can to encourage those on this journey to reclaim the proper exercise of this spiritual discipline.

Goal: Meditation as a habit

Remember, for something to become a habit, you have to do it every day for twenty-one days or three weeks. This is a well-established brain model for effective rewiring of any habit you are trying to establish. One of our primary goals in this study is for *proper Christian meditation* to become a habit and an integral part of our discipleship walk.

Teachers should remind their group each week about this. I have reinforced the materials to point this out for the next two lessons with a reminder in the fourth lesson that they should now notice a breakthrough in their efforts. If you ingrain Christian meditation in your life, your life **will** change.

Meditation on Chapter One: Theology and the Study of God

In this first chapter, Packer discusses the critical difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Knowing about God is the essence of theology, which literally means "study of God" (theo = God, ology = study of). However, it is possible to know quite a bit about God but not really know him at all, by which Dr. Packer means personal, intimate knowledge, as a child knows a parent or a person knows a brother or friend, two images we have in scripture. The Bible shows us God as Father and Son.

Many Christians and others have a firm grasp on what God has told us to do or not do. The Pharisees of Jesus day are a good example. They knew all the laws and their requirements, down to the minutia of contrasting interpretations. However, Jesus chastised them in [Matthew 23:23-24](#).

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."

While they knew their theology, it had not permeated and changed their hearts; it had not guided the intimate actions of their lives. They knew about God, about his law and his demands, but despite their knowledge, they were blind when it came to really knowing God and his fundamental demand on their lives, as expressed in [Deuteronomy 6:4-6](#) and reiterated by Jesus in [Mark 12:29-31](#).

"The most important one answered Jesus, is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

You cannot love (agape in this instance, a self-sacrificial love) what you do not really know, what you only know about.

This is especially important today as the effects of existential thinking and post-modernism seep into the fabric of our lives. Its effects are all around us, in music, movies, television and all forms of media, in the opinions of respected commentators, even in those we love and cherish. You may say, "That hasn't affected me." Well, whenever you feel isolated, as if you are facing a hostile world

almost alone, where your personal freedom and autonomy of action drive most of your decisions (be honest), where no one is going to tell you what to do, then you are being affected and will have a problem in coming to know God intimately.

Don't worry. This is not a unique problem. From my experience, our churches are filled with essentially lonely people who, when push comes to shove, will admit that for them, God is hard or practically impossible to know. It seems that even when we want to know him, we don't know where to begin. We admit that it is a difficult task. To this, Dr. Packer replies, start where you are. Do a sincere self-assessment of where you stand with God and how well you know him. Be brutally and authentically honest, and trust that God will meet you where you are.

Dr. Packer also makes it very clear that theology and biblical ethics (knowing the demands of holiness and righteousness in thought and action), while intrinsically important, are not enough to know God. He goes even further, saying that if we want to know ourselves, we must study and come to know God, for we are created in his image. That said, we must begin with theology.

Theology

Most regular Christians (discounting clergy, other religious vocations, and professors and other teachers) consider theology something foreign, confusing at best, and, for them, generally unapproachable. However, Dr. Packer argues that:

The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way, you can waste your life and lose your soul

OK. Let's say you accept that, and you agree that for even the common Christian, some form of theological studies is both necessary and valid; what then? Dr. Packer argues there are five basic truths and three basic themes all Christians should know and understand.

Truths

1. God has spoken to man; the Bible is his Word.
2. God is Lord and King over his world.
3. God is the Savior; he alone and no other.
4. God is triune; there are three persons within the Godhead.
5. Godliness means responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service.

Themes

1. We have to deal with the Godhead of God.
2. We have to deal with the powers of God.
3. We have to deal with the perfections of God.

These three themes also make up the three major divisions of this book.

I will be the first to admit that these eight items Dr. Packer places in front of us are not simple. Getting our minds around them will be hard work, very hard work. They will require a study asking what source materials we should use. The first and foremost source, says Dr. Packer, is the Bible, and since most of us do not read Greek and Hebrew, it would be useful for us to have multiple

translations. In addition, catechisms and other codifications of the faith—the accumulated wisdom of the Church—are helpful, as are other mature Christians. As Proverbs 27:17 tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

We must admit that no journey is without risks. As we follow God’s path onto the plane of theology, we face many dangers. Chief among these is our attitude. Dr. Packer stresses that theology has to be a practical matter to help us know how to live and interact with God, not as an end itself. We are not pursuing knowledge for knowledge’s sake. We are not pursuing it as a means of building ourselves up or a way to impress others with how much we know. No, besides the joy that comes to all those who come to know their God, our goal is to facilitate the living of a Godly life in the service of our Lord and Savior, that is, to answer the call of discipleship.

In this effort, we will need to learn a skill that might be new to some of you. It is meditating on the truth that God has revealed about himself. We are not talking about the common Eastern definitions of meditation, of emptying your mind or numbing the thought process through repetitively reciting a mantra. We are talking about a guided effort to turn our growing knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God. As Dr. Packer says, we mean “calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God.”

If meditation is a word that doesn’t work well for you, then think instead about chewing on, musing over, analyzing or reasoning through, or just plain talking to God. After all, God did say, “Come let us reason together,” so he has already invited us to do this very thing. That means he is there already in, through, over, and under all that happens as we make an honest effort.

The last thing we need to address as we begin this journey is whether we can do this on our own or need help. By this, I do not mean the help of other writers or the historic efforts of other Christians mentioned above. No, I mean, can we do it as a solitary effort? While many have tried, including myself, I would note that it is a truly rare and blessed person who can do it all alone. Not only laziness and distractions but a lack of focus and time will sabotage your efforts. We all need the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ to hold us accountable and to be a place to bounce our ideas and thoughts. Christians are part of the Body of Christ, not isolated cells. We need those around us to help sustain our efforts, correct our drifting off course, and just be there when a significant discovery or revelation cuts to the bone, as it will. I guarantee it.

However, don't give up if you cannot study this book with a group of people. I will do my best to be your study partner despite the distance. Email me with your questions, and I will try to be there within the time I have. You need not be alone.



Chapter 2: The People Who Know Their God

Today's theme: Pharisees as porch sitters, not travelers

These self-righteous observers enjoy picking apart those who "know" less about the letter of the law than they do. This is not the required and balanced judgment of [1 Cor. 6:3](#) and [Mat. 7:1-2](#).

Scriptural background: [Jeremiah 9:23-24a](#), "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, but let him who boasts boast about this: *that he understands and knows me...*"

There are three types of people: those who rely on their minds (academics, technologists, pastors, teachers), their bodies or talents (athletes, tradesmen), and those who rely on their assets, their riches (investors, people with good-paying jobs, successfully retired people). They all have the wrong focus. Their focus should be on Jesus Christ and him crucified as the author and finisher of their salvation, a gift of grace from our heavenly Father.

Quotes for the week

"Knowing trees slow, generational, I understand the meaning of patience. Knowing grass includes weeds, I can appreciate persistence." Hal Borland. *Countryman: A Summary of Belief*. Lippincott, 1965. We need both patience and persistence to know God. This is not a one-and-done, and we are finished.

"But, with care, knowing danger [Heb. 10:31](#), I looked at him and saw marriage on his hand [2 Cor. 11:1-2](#)." Patricia L Brueckner. God is dangerous, but our betrothed in Christ. The surrender of the betrothed is always a dangerous choice utterly dependent on trust in the beloved.

"Writers and travelers are mesmerized alike by knowing of their destinations." Eudora Welty. *One Writer's Beginnings*. Harvard, 1984. If you don't know where you are going, there is nothing to build your joy around, such as Jesus did, as shown in Heb. 12:2: "...for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross..."

Concern: That I might be a Greek rather than a Hebrew knower of God

There is a difference between Greek and Hebrew concepts of knowledge. Greeks felt *no obligation to or for* what they knew; Hebrews did. To know for a Hebrew meant knowing brought responsibility for what you know. This is the underlying fear of those who take this journey, the responsibility this study will bring into their lives.

Knowledge is Greek for the sake of knowledge—and much of the basis of our current thinking in science and technology. With statements like, "Let it take its course" or "It is not my concern; I am merely an observer," the Greek view avoids responsibility. The epitome of this paradigm is the news/journalistic cameraman or photographer who records the horror in front of him without doing anything about it. This is the essence of balconing, being passive observers.

For Hebrews, knowing something meant they had the moral and ethical demand to act on that knowledge. This is the basic premise underlying God's revelation of Himself in scripture and how we must use that revelation (what responsibilities that knowledge imparts to us) as we study to show ourselves approved. How can we truly know God without taking the Hebrew approach? We cannot!

1. Have you been Greek or Hebrew in your past approach to knowledge? What can you do to become more Hebrew in your thinking?

The first part is personal. I have been Greek when I don't want to face the consequences. However, our modern media inundation and the rapid increase of general knowledge about the world with the constant influx of "news" overwhelm and numb us, fostering the distant Greekish observer attitude,

which then begins to permeate all of our thinking. Out of self-preservation, we begin to pick and choose what we will "react to." We must break that conditioning to come to know God.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: You must know your starting point/beginning reference to chart your course direction/goal. To come to a usable knowledge of God and what He demands from our lives, we first have to come to terms with whether we know Him at all and, if we do, how well we know Him. In addition, we must accept responsibility for what knowledge we have and what knowledge we acquire.

We need an honest assessment of our current successes and failures and a willingness to deal with the increasingly scary demands of what we come to know so that we don't abandon the road. **We need to become a road warrior.**

1. This section begins with a charge against the church as a whole, and specifically against evangelicals. Summarize the accusation. Does it apply to your current church? How? Does it apply to you? If so, how?

(p. 25) We tend to focus on what we have lost or what could have been rather than what we have in Christ (see Philippians 3:7-10). We champion our orthodoxy, our knowledge of the right doctrine, but where is the joy unspeakable, the Spirit, the power, the **Hallelujah!**

The second part is personal; any answer is acceptable, but you may have to draw people out. Have the group read aloud the middle paragraph on page 25 that begins, "But whatever..." Note: The Greek term translated rubbish or dung in the Philippians passage was a coarse, ugly, vulgar term for the excrement and muck often found in the street. It is only used here in the NT and shows the seriousness of the Apostle Paul's statement that he would use such a disgusting word in Scripture.

2. According to Packer, what is the difference between knowledge **about** God or what God *expects* and knowledge **of** God?

(p. 26-27) It is the difference between being a firsthand (of) and a secondhand (about) Christian. The problem is giving God "his due" or "his place" when, in reality, it is ALL ABOUT HIM, not us! We want to major (not just study) to show ourselves approved and secure our place in Christ and his kingdom.

We need to remember that "to know" biblically is to have an intimate experience with, not merely knowledge or godliness, which does not mean we biblically know. Remember, we, the Church, are the bride of Christ. Think here of godliness as right acting, doing for God, or, as has been popular recently, being purpose-driven, though I believe that theology has, in the end, wandered off the reservation.

3. Think about the Pharisees of Jesus' time. What did they know about godliness? How does Packer's concern over this issue, and using the Pharisees as an example, relate to this study?

(p. 26) They knew how to act godly. Look at the list of items in [Colossians 2:16, 20-23](#) for the kinds of things the Pharisees would have thought would make them godly Christians. It is very easy to slip into a pharisaical viewpoint about our Christian life and forget that God looks upon the heart.

4. List the four characteristics Packer says is common to those who know God. Are any of these areas of weakness or strength for you? Explain?

The answers will include personal assessments. (p. 27-31) Those who know God have:

- Great **energy** for God.
- Great **thoughts** of God.
- Great **boldness** for God.
- Great **contentment** in God.

Chapter 2: The People Who Know Their God / Interacting With the Text

5. Why would knowing God create great energy for God? How does the prophet Daniel illustrate this fact?

(p. 27-28) Because Scripture says that people who know God will be strong/stand firm and do exploits/take action ([Daniel 11:32](#)). Examples: Noah built the ark; David slew Goliath; Moses sent the plagues and crossed the Red Sea; Elijah destroyed the priests of Baal; Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem; Judah Maccabee liberated Israel.

Daniel prayed, fasted, interceded, and stood in the gap for God's people. That took great energy for and trust in God. Daniel and his friends Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego, illustrate the public risks those who know God are willing to take to challenge false religion and stand for God's truth, even at extreme personal risk.

6. Where does Packer argue that the real prayer energy comes from? What test can he say we can apply to our prayers to check out how well we know God?

(p. 28-29) It comes as the fruit of the true knowledge of God and uses the zeal and energy for God's glory that flows from that knowledge to express itself in prayer.

The better you know God, the more energy you have for prayer and to stand for God's cause. Packer argues that if you have little energy for prayer, it is because you scarcely know your God.

Do not be discouraged when you discover how lacking you are when put to the test. This is why we are engaged in this study, and one measure of our progress will be the growth in our prayer life. Persevere to the end.

7. What core truth does the Hebrew prophet Daniel illuminate for us? Why is this important?

(p. 29-30) God's sovereignty! God is almighty, not impotent. "The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men." ([Daniel 4:25](#), [1 Corinthians 10:13](#)) What God promises, he delivers. Nothing can thwart his intent. **NOTHING!**

Because God is sovereign, he will have the "last word both in world history and in the destiny of every man...neither men nor angels shall be able to thwart him." His people, you and me, rest in his "everlasting arms," giving us, as Paul noted, "peace that passes understanding," as well as the long list of things at the end of [Romans 8](#) that cannot separate us from Him, in essence, nothing.

8. Packer argues that your prayer life is a window into your relationship with God. What do you see through your prayer window? What can you learn from Daniel to help you?

(p. 29-30) The first question is personal and while the second relates personally to Daniel, it will cover the things discussed on those two pages that boil down the fact that we can trust God.

9. What separated Daniel and his three friends from the rest of Israel in Babylon? How are they different from someone who is just acting foolhardy?

(p. 30) Their boldness for God separated them from their fellow Israelites.

They understood what would happen to them; they knew what they were doing, counted the cost, measured the risk, and were convinced that their stand was right. This is reminiscent of the Apostles' response to the Sanhedrin, "We must obey God rather than men!" God intervened, and their decision would not have been changed even if he hadn't. They were willing to die for their beliefs. Are you?

10. We live in a world that cries out for peace: political peace, social peace, and, most of all, personal peace. What, according to Packer, is the source of genuine personal peace, and what is its true measure?

(p. 31) Knowing and being known by God is the source of true peace in whatever circumstances we find ourselves (see [Romans 5:1](#), [Romans 8:1](#), [Romans 8:28ff](#), [1 Corinthians 10:13](#), [Philippians 3:7](#)).

Its true measure is the comprehensiveness of our contentment and our discontent shows us how it is

missing. We are not talking about righteous upset but misgivings, worry, anxiety, fretting, fear, and apprehension.

11. Every journey has a starting point. Packer suggests two things that are necessary to begin this journey. What are they? If you let go of these two things, your way ahead will darken. How can you keep these two things with you for the whole voyage?

Recognize our lack of knowledge of God. We must begin to change how we measure ourselves (remember Mary [at the feet of Jesus] and Martha [busy doing]) from what we do, our gifts, our calling, and our responsibilities (while important). Examine our prayer life and what happens within our hearts. Ask God to show you (which is dangerous, by the way—see [Hebrews 10:31](#)). Remember, we see darkly at best, so humility is absolutely necessary.

Seek the savior. God has promised us that if we seek him with all our hearts, we will find him. Use this unique opportunity, this study, as your chance to seize hold of God once and for all.

What to Do Next

Continue *Section One* by reading Chapter Three: *Knowing and Being Known*. Meditate on what it means to know God and the importance of prayer in your journey.

Begin using your new tool of Christian meditation to help you encounter God personally and energize your prayer life. Constant daily practice will build up your “meditation muscles,” and I think you will be surprised at the changes you will see.

Goal: Keeping the two things that are necessary ever before us.

Remember, for something to become a habit, you must do it every day for twenty-one days. For the next twenty-one days, meditate on the answers to question 11.

To borrow from a well-known commercial: “Just do it!” Sometimes, direct is best.

Meditation on Chapter Two: The People Who Know Their God

Packer begins this chapter with a personal anecdote, a vivid example of the difference between knowing *of* God and knowing *about* God. It is the touchstone premise for the whole book, an appeal to a practical relationship with God that informs the place where we “live and move and have our being.” It is the essence of Jeremiah’s entreaty in [Jeremiah 9:23-24a](#).

“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, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.”

Jeremiah hits the two key issues: understanding, which harkens back to Chapter One and the concern with proper theology, and knowing, the relational center of the interaction between God and the people he has called to himself, which is the concern of this chapter.

Several quotes address the concept of knowing in the study materials for this chapter. I include them here for simplicity of discussion.

“Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience. Knowing grass, I can appreciate persistence.” Hal Borland. *Countryman: A Summary of Belief*. Lippincott, 65.

“But, with care, knowing danger, I looked at him and saw marriage on his hand.” Patricia L Brueckner.

“Writers and travelers are mesmerized alike by knowing of their destinations.” Eudora Welty. *One Writer’s Beginnings*. Harvard, 84.

Borland's quote is especially poignant considering our earlier argument that to know ourselves, we must first come to know God since we are created in his image, and as the psalmist said, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Like Patricia Brueckner, facing the truly dangerous prospect of surrendering to another, we see God and see everything in his hand, including the wrenching loss of our spiritual rebellion. The rending prospect of this surrender is wonderfully captured in C. S. Lewis' allegory, *The Great Divorce*. A ghostly visitor, visiting the outskirts of heaven bears, affixed to his neck and back, a reptile of sin and deception. The ghostly visitor is confronted by an Angel of God who offers to kill the beast, but only with the Ghost's permission. A momentous struggle ensues in the heart of the Ghost, who finally relents, accepting the fearful danger from the hand of the Angel. As the reptile is killed and wrested from its prey by the Angel of God, the Ghost lets out a scream of burning pain and agony beyond all screams yet heard by man. Yet, facing the pain, danger, and death, the Ghost is free and alive. The reptile of sin is transformed into a bright and glorious steed, which the Ghost, now a redeemed man, mounts and, as master of all that is transformed, orders the stallion forward into the brightness of the eternal morning.

Yes, transforming what we fear is at the heart of knowing God, but how can we be mesmerized by our destination if we have no sense of what it truly is? Packer repeatedly asks us how to love the God we do not know.

The difference between the two schools of knowledge is at the root of the issue facing us, which we discussed earlier. A quick summary is that Greeks felt no intrinsic responsibility to or for what they learned or knew; Hebrews did. Our goal in this study is to be Hebrew in our approach to the knowledge of God. For Hebrews, knowing something meant they had moral and ethical responsibility, the necessity even to act on that knowledge. This is the basic premise underlying God's revelation of Himself in Scripture and how we must use that revelation (what responsibilities that knowledge imparts upon us) as we study to know our God.

Knowing Versus Knowing About

We have a goal for this chapter. However, to chart a course to our destination, we must know where we are and our starting point. We must come to honest terms with our current spiritual condition, whether we know Him at all, and if we do, how well do we know Him? Not only that, but we also have to accept responsibility for what knowledge we currently have and for what knowledge we will acquire. One person who previously took this study sent me an email that spoke to this point. They said, "I have to admit that I am almost afraid to commit because 'to whom much is given, much is required'. But I'm doing this anyway – with a prayer in my heart."

That's the stumbling block. When all illusions are stripped aside, we are forced to see both God and ourselves as we really are, and then, yes, we are required to act on that knowledge. We instinctively know, like the Ghost in Lewis' allegory, that it will be a painful and difficult effort, but like the one in whom we trust, Jesus Christ, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." ([Hebrews 12:2](#)) We too have a joy set before us, a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." ([1 Peter 1:8b](#)). Let's get on with it and embrace it.

Early in this chapter, Packer goes to the heart of the difference between *of* and *about*. Most people can talk about what God says and demands. We all know the Ten Commandments. However, it all comes down to the fact that "the unpleasantness we have had, or the pleasantness we have not had," does not matter to those who know God. They are the momentary cracks in the road. Packer argues that if every problem or disappointment is a major issue to you, God is further from you than you may suppose. Then using the Prophet Daniel as an example, Packer enumerates four characteristics that are easily seen in those who know God. They are:

1. Great energy for God. This is dramatically noted in [Daniel 11:32b](#) "...the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." We also remember what Isaiah told us, "...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint." ([Isaiah 40:31](#)).

Packer argues that this energy begins with prayer as it did for Daniel. The prophet tells us, "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." ([Daniel 9:3](#)) Martin Luther, in his treatise *A Simple Way to Pray For a Good Friend. How One Should Pray, For Peter, the Master Barber*, written for a friend exiled for killing his son-in-law in a fit of drunken rage, says:

"It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, 'Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.' Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day."

and

"Tomorrow I plan to work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

These are powerful words that we should all take to heart.

2. Great thoughts of God. We must allow nothing to diminish the glory and sovereignty of God. Daniel even gets Nebuchadnezzar to admit that God had gotten him to the point where "he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes." ([Daniel 5:21](#)).

Daniel's prayer says it all.

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him."

3. Great boldness for God. When I was growing up, every child knew the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were stalwart examples of stepping out in great boldness for God. Their images of placing it all on the line for God stirred the hearts of countless missionaries through the millennia. Their words to Nebuchadnezzar are singularly instructive.

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. *But even if he does not*, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." [*Emphasis added*] ([Daniel 3:15-18](#))

Their own lives were not their primary concern. They knew their God, and they would never worship anything or anyone but Him.

4. Great contentment in God. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he assures them that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus," reminding them that the assurance of their salvation cannot be taken from them, that as he told the Roman Christians, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," so they can rest in that blessed assurance. Packer then quotes the first two verses of Richard Baxter's 1681 hymn.

Lord, it belongs not to my care

whether I die or live;
to love and serve thee is my share,
and this thy grace must give.

If life be long, O make me glad
the longer to obey;
if short, no laborer is sad
to end his toilsome day.

If you lack this contentment, then draw nigh to your God, for he desires to draw nigh to you.

Lastly, Packer argues that if we really desire knowledge of God, then two things will naturally follow:

- **We will recognize our lack.** We will never have enough knowledge of our God. The person taking their first step on this journey and the mature saint having spent a lifetime walking with their Lord are both beginners on an eternal journey of coming to know an eternal God. Let us acknowledge our impoverishment and draw closer to Him by opening our hearts and bending our knees in prayer.
- **We will seek the Savior.** When Jesus walked the earth, common people walked with him, ate with him, touched and talked with him, and came to know him. The writer of Hebrews said it, “Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6b) Now risen and ascended, Jesus encouraged us with the promise that “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” ([Matthew 18:20](#)).

So, seek the Lord while he may be found. Open your heart, bend your knees, and seek God, beginning in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In closing, try this week to keep those two necessary things foremost in your thoughts and, subsequently, in your prayers. Next week, we will look at Chapter Three: Knowing and Being Known. It is one thing to want to know God, and quite another to come to terms with the fact that he truly and completely knows us.

Grace and peace be to you all.

Chapter 3: Knowing and Being Known

Today's theme: The purpose of our existence is revealed. The great question: Why am I here; why do I exist?"

Scriptural background: [1 Corinthians 13:12](#). "For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then (when is that?) face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am known." God alone knows us now, completely, absolutely.

Quotes for the week

"We call that person who has lost his father, an orphan, and a widower that man who has lost his wife. But that man who has known the immense unhappiness of losing a friend, by what name do we call him?" Joseph Roux It is surprising how many things do not have a name or label. What do we call a person who has not yet known God? Should we have different names for the unbeliever (atheist, agnostic), the one in rebellion (backslider), and the one who believes but does not yet know his God (...)?

"Conversion for me was not a Damascus Road experience. I slowly moved into an intellectual acceptance of what my intuition had always known." Madeleine L'Engle. *Anglican Digest*, Pentecost 1983. While I agree the moment of conversion may be stretched out and quietly gradual, at some point, Madeleine had to realize she was different and reject or accept (which she did) that change, that conversion. For many who have these quiet conversations, it comes when someone challenges your faith, and you are forced to take a stand. It is then you decide to embrace what you become or reject it. We all, at some time or another, make that choice. If you have yet been forced to make it, you will.

"Is it sufficient that you have learned to drive the car, or shall we look and see what is under the hood? Most people go through life without ever knowing." Dr June Singer. *Boundaries of the Soul*, Doubleday, 1972. Even those who don't look under the hood must understand routine maintenance, refueling, and the other basics of a vehicle and its operation. We will not all become theologians, but we don't drive God; we come to know him and love him. If you "love" your car, it is because you have become intimate with its unique peculiarities and have embraced them. Would all Christians become as intimate with the God with whom they have to do.

Concern: There are no secrets from God

(That is scary.)

"For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor nothing applied here also hidden that will not be known." [Luke 12:2](#)

Knowing God and being known by Him is a two-way street; He reveals Himself to us, and we expose our innermost fears, desires, thoughts, and feelings to Him. We often act as if we could hide these things from God, but ultimately, that is impossible. Part of the journey of discipleship is coming to terms with our inherent nakedness before God and learning to give Him ready access to what He already knows. This is important for us, for our growth, not for God. In the end, everything God does is for us, not him. He does not need us to do anything. It is all for our benefit, growth, and maturation into what he has created us to be. I have met people for whom this is overwhelming. Sometimes, they rail against God, lamenting that they were ever born, feeling his demands are too hard, and the pain of compliance is too much. I guess it is the greatest question, "Why me?" Let me say that I believe only the chosen go through this agony. The lost don't care.

1. Why do we try to hide something from God?

Shame and fear. We are ashamed of our sins and embarrassed to ask for forgiveness. We are afraid

Chapter 3: Knowing and Being Known / Interacting With the Text

that God will just tire of our failures and be done with us. As to shame, God already knows, and I guess it is hard to be around someone who knows, but it can also be freeing. As to fear, perfect love (isn't this a definition of our God?) casts out/removes fear. Yes, it does hurt to deal with sin and failure (remember the Ghost from C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*), but the joy set before us is way worth it. Just ask Jesus.

2. What do you think God would do if you changed your heart and openly shared with Him what you are hiding?

We could not surprise him. Like a true father, he would be happy for us if we had grown, taken, or retaken that step. The nice thing about our infinite God is that he is patient. He never gets tired of waiting. He will always be there when we are ready.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To come to terms with what it means to be a creation (think on that) of God. He created us for a purpose. Can we embrace that purpose with every fiber of our being? Are we willing to be as much a God-designed human being as an oak tree is willing to be a God-designed oak tree? We rebelled; creation was subjected to futility for us. It never rebelled. (Think also about that!)

1. What is the main business of the Christian life? What thing, though true and not specifically stated but only inferred in Packer's text, is a staggering revelation to those who learn it?

(p. 33) To know God. Eternal life is defined as knowing God (John 17:3): "This is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Once you know God and are known by him, he cannot *unknow* you. At the last judgment, Jesus will say to the lost, "Depart from me, you accursed; I *never* knew you." ***That can never be said to you!*** This truth sustains me through the difficult and dark times, the dark nights of the soul. Jesus knows me, and that is enough. I hold onto that with all that is within me.

2. What does Packer say exposes whether a person is unregenerate (unsaved)? Do you agree?

(p. 34) The thought of knowing God does not move their heart. That is because, as Packer says, knowing God "provides at once a foundation, shape, and goal for our lives, plus a principle of priorities and a scale of values." This is all anathema to the unregenerate, where all of the elements of living are self-driven and narcissistic, not God-driven.

While agreeing or disagreeing is personal, people in the group should be able to articulate why they agree or disagree. Not knowing why you think or believe something makes growth difficult.

3. From what ills infect the world today, should Christians be immune, except for the occasional derangement? What should this immunity mean when dealing with the problems of daily living, the briars and brambles of the human condition?

(p. 34) Christians should be free from the wasting disease that plagues humanity, and many have noted throughout history, from Marie Antoinette's fever ("nothing tastes") to Albert Camus's absurdism ("life is a bad joke"). This disease removes all meaning and overriding purpose from life, leaving only the pleasure of the moment (sex, food, sports, entertainment), which helps hedonism to run rampant. It also fosters the pursuit of power to push back the sense of hopeless impotence.

Packer noted that everything else falls into place when you have a big enough objective. Knowing God is the biggest objective; everything else pales by comparison.

4. What, according to Packer, does "knowing God" involve?

(p. 35-36) It is similar to knowing a person but more complex because God is infinitely complex. With people, we understand that it includes the past, our history with them, and how they react and behave under specific circumstances, of which we can have first-hand knowledge. Most importantly, learning

about a person and the three persons within our God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) depends on them revealing themselves to us. What we know of them directly relates to what they allow us to know. It is their decision. Friendship and knowledge of another are things given, not taken. It is the same with God, who has said he stands at our door and knocks.

God has revealed himself to us in his Word, which the Holy Spirit interprets for us. The interpreted Word reveals God's nature and character. It also reveals his invitations to us and what He commands from us. As a result, we rejoice and respond to the love He has shown us in bringing us close to him in divine fellowship.

5. What is the significance of a covenant partner? Why does this matter to our journey of coming to know God?

(p. 36) Barth uses the phrase to express God enlisting us as colleagues and friends. Jesus told his disciples in John 15:15, *"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."*

It transforms our lives, similar to how Joseph's life was transformed from prisoner to prime minister. We who were once Satan's prisoner in sin are forever changed into trusted members of God's family. There is a commitment to one another, and God has my back.

6. How does the Bible "flesh out" the picture of God for us? Is this enough to know Him like we know other people in our lives? Why or why not?

(p. 37) The Bible uses pictures and analogies to flesh out the bare bones, using four approaches:

- Son knowing his father
- Wife knowing her husband
- Subject knowing their king
- Sheep knowing its shepherd

These analogies are relationships in which the one knowing looks up to the one known, as we do to God. In each, the one known loves and cares for the one knowing.

It is not enough, in and of itself. God is so different and not limited in time and space like other people. He is always with us, available to us, ready when we are a mere breath away.

7. How is knowing God intertwined with knowing Jesus Christ? Why is this important?

(p. 37-38) We must go through Jesus Christ to know the Father, as the Spirit reveals the truth. **Note:** John 14:6, "...no one comes to the Father except through me." He also said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9b. Jesus reveals both himself and the Father to us.

"My sheep listen to my voice...I know them, and they follow me." He claims us and offers us rest for our weary bones. His claim is his offer of eternal life, to be safe in his hand, and his hand is in his Father's hand, out of which no one can pluck.

8. What special insight does Packer give us about the resurrection of Jesus (think about the original disciples)?

(p. 38) It has freed Jesus to have the same relationship that was limited to the disciples during his earthly ministry with everyone everywhere throughout all of history. It is as definitive a personal relationship as it was for the twelve, and even more so, since it lasts for the believer's whole life and into eternity, not just three short years.

9. What three things compose the knowing of God? How are each of these important?

(p. 39-41) Knowing God is composed of:

Chapter 3: Knowing and Being Known / What to Do Next

- **Personal dealing.** To quote Packer, "you can have all the right notions in your head without ever tasting in your heart the realities to which they refer."
- **Personal involvement.** Consider the first commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We have to engage God in a deeply personal, all-encompassing way. Note the caution about allowing religious experience to trample the demand for obedience.
- **Grace is the key.** God initiates, and we respond. Know, with God, is a sovereign grace word describing God's initiative in grace to love, choose, redeem, call, and persevere with us.

10. What separates those who relate to God directly (know Him) from those who have correct notions about him?

(p. 39) Those who know Him through intimate interaction with the Word with the aid of the Holy Spirit have a far deeper acquaintance with God than the scholar who seeks God through theological understanding and correctness. The intimacy of what we learn by Word and Spirit will demand the practical application of these discovered truths to every aspect of our lives. That is personal. Theological study does not require that, especially if the person swims in the water of the Greek understanding of knowledge (see [page 19](#) in this guide).

11. What are the three aspects of a relationship that enter into knowing God? Which one has been least accepted throughout the history of the Church?

(p. 40) The three aspects are:

- Emotional
- Intellectual
- Volitional

The emotional and experiential aspect of knowing God has been least accepted because it appears on the surface to be the most dangerous and often falls into maudlin self-absorption or serious error. We can begin to look at God only as an emotional experience. However, a lack of the emotional aspect of knowing God would mean that one has not yet known the God with whom we must live. There is a balance since all real relationships have an emotional component.

12. What is unique about our relationship with God, and how does grace figure into it?

(p.40-41) God alone initiates. See Galatians 4:9 "*Now that you know God—or rather are known by God.*" It by grace we are saved into relationship with God, not by any action or effort on our part. His choice of us began at the beginning, "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.*" (Jeremiah 1:5) There is nothing we can do to earn this relationship. As Isaiah said, "*We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.*" Isaiah 64:6

13. What is the most important thing happening here which brings utter humility to all who confront it?

(p. 41-42) God knows me! And He has chosen to do this. He has graven/carved me on the palm of his hands. His knowledge of me is utterly realistic. I can hide nothing from him. I cannot disillusion him; through it all, he is determined to bless me. This is unfathomable!

What to Do Next

Continue *Section One* by reading Chapter Four: *The Only True God*. Meditate on what it means to believe that there is only one true God. Don't forget to consider your improper images/notions about God as being an untrue God, an idol you need to repent of and cast away from you. Consider the relevance of the second commandment to your efforts at knowing God.

Goal: Never forget that God first loved us.

Remember, you did not first seek out God; He sought out you, and the fact that you are graven on His palms should forever be part of your understanding of who you are and who He is.

He did this, and He will not abandon you. He has always known you, and you have never been alone.

Meditation on Chapter Three: Knowing and Being Known

In this chapter, Dr. Packer moves into the intimate area of knowing and being known, the area in which we examine the root purpose of our existence. One of the fundamental questions in life is, “Why am I here; why do I exist?” Most of us want to answer that question without having to expose ourselves too much or put too much on the line to get the answer.

Packer’s simple and direct answer is “to know God.” Pounding home that thought at the beginning of this chapter, he defines the best that we can experience, the biblical definition of eternal life. Yeah, even the thing that brings the most pleasure to God himself is our “knowledge of God.”

It is one thing to say all of the above, yet quite another to experience it. So, Dr. Packer asks what a true experience of God is and not some counterfeit of it. He asserts that according to Scripture, this is an area in which we can easily be fooled into thinking we know God when we do not.

Packer also reminds us that knowing God and being known by Him is a two-way street; God reveals himself to us, and we expose our innermost fears, desires, thoughts, and feelings to Him. That is very scary stuff.

I believe that we have a deep fundamental fear of nakedness, just as Adam and Eve did after they sinned when they attempted to cover themselves. One of the most difficult aspects of discipleship, at least from my perspective, is coming to terms with our inherent nakedness before God. It appears to be exceptionally difficult for us to willingly give God ready access to what he already knows.

However, God does not leave us to our own devices. Instead, He reaches out to us. Packer notes that God goes so far as to make us, borrowing a phrase from Karl Barth, a covenant partner. Yet even more than a partner, Jesus told his disciples in [John 15:14-15](#)

You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

This is similar to God taking Joseph from the depths of prison to the exalted position of Prime Minister. For us, he transforms our lives from unregenerate sinners and prisoners of Satan to covenant partners and friends.

Still, the question of how we know God remains. Packer argues that the how comes down to four things:

- **First** - listening to God’s Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself
- **Second** - noting God’s nature and character, as his Word and works reveal it
- **Third** - accepting his invitations and doing what he commands
- **Fourth** - recognizing and rejoicing in the love that God has shown us by drawing us into this divine fellowship.

You could say that the how of knowing God is founded on the traveler's having a spirit of attentive yet humble thankfulness.

Chapter 3: Knowing and Being Known / Meditation on Chapter Three: Knowing and Being Known

It is important to understand that we are not just left with God's commands or his interaction with those in biblical history, such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Nehemiah. God also gives us the analogies of a son and father, wife and husband, subject and king, and sheep and shepherd to aid us in understanding what it means to be the knower and the known.

For Jews seeking their God up to the Roman era, that was enough, but then the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob went even further and put flesh on the bare bones of those analogies in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God made flesh/man. Jesus told his disciples:

“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on, you know Him and have seen Him. Then Philip told Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

[Jesus, sounding somewhat exasperated at Phillip's problem of not seeing the obvious, replied]

“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me *has* seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father? Do you not believe that *I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?*’” ([John 14:7-10a](#))

From this, Packer explains that three things comprise what it means to “know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

- Knowing God is a matter of *personal dealing*.
- Knowing God is a matter of *personal involvement*.
- Knowing God is a matter of *grace*.

Let us focus on Grace. It is so important. For J.I. Packer, knowing God is first the consequence of God knowing us, in that God acts using his sovereign grace in loving, choosing, redeeming, calling, and preserving us solely by his initiative. We can only know God because he first knew us.

Packer closes the chapter, glorying that the almighty God of all creation has chosen to know us, and he wants us to relish the unspeakable comfort, power, and energy that knowledge should bring into our lives. Packer says one thing has become a watershed moment for every group with whom I have studied this book. Packer says:

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.

I consider that statement so significant that I have turned it into a bookmark that I give to all of my study groups. I never want to forget it. I never want you to forget it. Think about it. God already knows what I have done, what I am doing, and whatever I will do, and with that knowledge still loves me and has made me his own.

If that isn't a cause for a top-of-the-lungs hallelujah, I don't know what is!

In closing, I would like you to remember this week that you did not first seek out God; He sought out you. I want you to remember that you are graven on His palms, and that fact should be forever a part of your understanding of who you are and who He is. ([Isaiah 49:15-16](#))

Chapter 4: The Only True God (Only, only, only!)

Today's theme: To God alone be the glory.

By definition, there can only be one God with a **capital G**. Even polytheists have a chief god. It is like there can only be one king.

Scriptural background: [Exodus 3:14](#). "And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."

There are many ways to look at this Scripture, but one important way for our study today is that **God defines himself; he is self-defining – I AM WHO I AM**. That is an important distinction, because he who defines is above, he who is defined. There is no one above God. In addition, it obviates anyone (e.g. theologians) from presuming to "define" God. Apprehend how he defines himself, yes; define him, NO!

Quotes for the week

"The God of Moses IS God." The Pharaoh Ramses (Yul Brenner). *The Ten Commandments*, Paramount, Cecil B. DeMille, 1956 This is so cool! I have always loved that line from the movie. It goes so well with our Scripture.

"God is in the details." Mies van der Rohe. *New York Times*, August 19, 1969. This is what separates the pretenders from the real thing. When you start looking at religion, getting down into the details, that is where things start falling apart for every other religion except biblical Christianity.

"God creates, I do not create. I assemble, and I steal everywhere to do it—from what I see, from what the dancers can do, from what others do." George Balanchine. *New York Times*, 16 Dec 63. Explains the fundamental difference between us and God. We discover, manipulate, assemble, and recreate in a new form. Solomon argued that there was nothing new under the sun. Some today will argue technology is creating, but in the end, it is only a unique assembly based on what is already there – the laws and building blocks of the natural realm.

"...he wanted to know the names of the things he loved...Taking the trouble to know the names of things was a way of paying them respect." Dean R Koontz, *Breathless*, Bantam Books, New York, NY, 2009. Our God has ONE revealed name (though many titles and offices), and we pay Him respect by remembering the difference between YAHWEH and everything else. In addition, Jesus is not the NAME of the eternal Son, only the name of his human existence. When it says in Philippians that the name of Jesus doesn't mean the word Jesus, it means the hidden name of the eternal Son, whom Jesus we see as the Incarnation of. In [Revelation 19](#) it says the name of the Son is known to Him alone. The words called names of God are often really titles or descriptions, just as I am a writer, teacher, father, and husband. Those are not my names.

Concern: I have not apprehended the uniqueness of God

Unique is a word that has lost its power and finality, so we add modifiers to ramp up the significance. God is very unique, the most unique, etc. Unique means there is no one like him, and I guess it is fair to say that as far as the category of uniqueness goes, looking at everything that is unique in any way within all the things that are unique, God stands alone. That about says it all.

God is. God is before all else, the first cause, the first mover, the first everything. Consider God the apriori of apriories (the root or foundation of every other logical assumption. It all begins with him.)

"He created all that is, seen and unseen." Nicene Creed. One of my pet peeves is how we drop the comma when saying that line in the Creed. He created all that is.....seen and unseen. Dropping the pause from the comma strips the power of the statement and belies its significance.

Chapter 4: The Only True God (Only, only, only!) / Interacting With the Text

1. Do you ever doubt the existence of God? When? Why? Be honest.

This is a personal response, and there is no wrong answer, only a dishonest one. My answer is yes, when my trust quotient is diminished, and that is usually correlated with my failure to deal with sin and my dire need for repentance and revival.

2. What is the difference between doubt and unbelief? Why is this distinction important?

Honest doubt is a question seeking understanding, while unbelief is denial, embracing rejection, and eventually rebellion. Job questioned but did not sin and learned, becoming an example for us all. The fool denies God ([Psalm 14:1-3](#)) and is left to his rapidly diminishing resources and dead-end path. Satan, from the beginning, leads the rebellion, dragging all who join his quest down with him. At the same time, many of those are brutalized beyond recognition, finding they have become fodder for his and his minions' appetites.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: We all need to come to terms with the idolatry in our lives (while we may not worship the pagan idols Israel contended with, we do "worship" many things that are not God). Then, we can grasp how this failure separates us from the intimate relationship we seek to have with God and how coming to terms with our idolatries is an important step as travelers along the road of discipleship.

Before we start, did you find something unique about this chapter's focus? Was it different than you expected before you started reading it? Almost everyone taking this course comes face to face with idols they never knew they had, but realize that God is demanding they shed those false gods out of their lives, something that is often hard to do. In addition, those things give Satan purchase in our lives until we divest ourselves of them.

1. According to Packer, what are the two parts of idolatry?

(p. 45-47) It is often a surprise to many taking the study that two parts make up our idolatry, which sadly we are all guilty of at one point or another:

- **Obscuring God's glory** – we do that in so many ways, dishonoring him on so many levels.
- **Misleading false ideas about God** – they distort everything about our relationship with God and leave us adrift in the wilderness with a broken compass.

2. How can something be OK and not be idolatry unless it is part of worship?

(p. 44-45) Packer takes the stand that the second commandment relates to worship, quoting Hodge, "Idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods but also in the worship of the true God by images." Media and movies are good examples of where something would be OK but become idolatrous when used in the context of worship. Take Mel Gibson's *The Crucifixion*. Showing portions of that as part of a service would be idolatrous, whereas as a movie, it stands on its own with no apparent problem (see the next question that addresses this further). Packer argues it breaks the second commandment whenever any representation of God or Christ loses its fundamental disassociation from worship and becomes part of the worship experience. This causes a lot of people to stumble on this study.

Furthermore, Packer only slightly hedges against using images in teaching and instruction, i.e., Sunday school. The problem is that when you use images to help someone understand God or Christ, you endanger the first commandment by fixing their mental "image" of God with that chosen representation. You create that "God" in their mind. In addition, later in worship, these mental pictures will impose themselves into the situation, whether wanted or not.

Another question to consider is using Bible films, especially the Jesus film, for evangelism. Fortunately, earlier Christians did not even have to think about these things. God does not compromise his law for utility; just because something appears to work doesn't mean we are allowed to do it.

3. Think about music videos and how they affect your mental imagery when you later hear the same music without the video (this could include music used in movies). With this in mind, what inherent dangers are there in these images?

This is a follow-up to question 2. Multimedia images (something Israel and Christians until recently did not have to deal with) have a power that is unique in the world and our minds. Especially when combined with music, they touch a part of us that gives them unprecedented access to our inner being. Motion and music combined penetrate the deepest reservoirs of our soul. This is a serious issue. The advent of computerized projection systems used in churches during worship has brought this issue to the fore. This is something that affects more and more churches every day. But leaving that aside, these images will be seared into our innermost being and will intrude on our worship, unwanted or not. They are our creation, not God's. They are not part of his revelation of himself. They are OUR effort to define Him in some way. I am constantly dealing with how this works itself out in my life and the life of my church. It is not something I can shrug off.

4. In what ways might images dishonor God?

(p.45-46) The argument is that they diminish or obscure his glory and are impious by their very nature. They are a corruption that adulterates our knowledge of God and retards the journey which is the purpose of this study. Why allow anything to conceal anything about God from us or limit His nature to a specific, self-created rendition?

Packer makes a convincing argument about crucifixes, the key point being what they **fail to display**.

His use of Isaiah 40:18 is effective: "To whom will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?" However, read through the end of the chapter to get the full effect. This is pretty explicit.

5. In what ways might images mislead us?

(p. 47) They pervert our understanding of God, distort our thinking, and falsify theological truth, trapping our thoughts of God with the limitations of the image. Remember that all images are expressions of the artist's personal view, reflecting his thoughts, biases, and understanding of what he is representing, frozen in a moment. The crucifix is a good example, freezing Christ on the cross in the moment of his agony, which for many people becomes their dominant image of who Jesus was/is.

When you think about polytheism/paganism and step back from the myriads of gods represented, one way you can look at each deity is as the representation of a godly attribute, however anthropomorphized and debased, freezing in that deity one aspect of the nature of true godhood, e.g. Minerva as wisdom, Venus as love, rather than seeing all of the attributes combined into the single God of creation. It is so hard for our minds to apprehend the fullness of God. It is easier to focus on a limited view that encompasses what we like about God, his love, his mercy, something that comforts us. Images lead us into that trap. Every time. I include icons in this, which for our Orthodox brethren is probably anathema.

6. How can metaphors and mental images (our private imaginings) be dishonoring to God?

(p.47-48) Packer argues that just as the Bible forbids us to make physical images of God, "so it forbids us to dream up mental images of him." He is referencing the common statement, "I like to think of God as..." By its very nature, this will eventually fall into the trap of limiting our view of God, leading to the next common statement, "I don't think of God as..." God is not a superman, a perfect man." As Packer says, "We were made in his image, but we must not think of him as existing in ours." Metaphors are used throughout the Bible to demonstrate God's attributes, not his likeness. E.g., he is like a mother hen protecting her brood under her wings.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "The world by wisdom knew not God" ([1 Corinthians 1:21](#)), so our imaginations are not a vehicle to apprehend God, but to distort and create a false mental image of him, an idol made by our own intellectual speculation that will eventually lead us astray.

Let me give you a simple example. The use of the masculine pronoun for God throughout the Bible

has nothing to do with God being male and denigrating females. It has to do with the masculine principle of initiation and creation. God is masculine to the whole of creation, the creator, and the first mover, which is feminine to Him in all aspects. Masculinity, in this sense, is a primary aspect of the nature of God, not a glorification of man.

Packer doesn't deal specifically with metaphors, which the Bible does use at various points to express something about God, e.g., [Psalm 17:8](#) reflected in [Luke 13:13b](#): "Keep me as the apple of thy eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings" and "how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" I mention this because even these metaphorical expressions can easily be misused and carried too far. They talk about one aspect of God's nature. While they serve an important purpose, we must leave them where they are, in their limited context. We have to leave them to the narrow purpose they were intended for. Otherwise, we stray into very dangerous territory.

7. Explain this statement and its significance: "God is not the sort of person we are."

(p. 48) [Numbers 23:19](#) reminds us that "God is not a man..." and Isaiah 55:8-9 points out "For my [God's] thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." We need the constant reminder that God is so unimaginably different from us in every way that we can only truly know what *he* reveals to us about himself, and even then, it is like looking at him through a straw. Only through the revelation of holy Scripture can we even begin to know him at all. So, seriously applying the argument of this chapter concerning the second commandment, *no other source whatsoever is acceptable*. It is the Word alone on which we stand, or our lives are built on shifting sand.

8. What test can we apply to ourselves to judge whether or not we are keeping the second commandment?


(p.50) Packer asks, "Do I look habitually to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as showing me the final truth about the nature and grace of God the Father? Do I see all the purposes of God as centering on him?" This goes back to Jesus' statement to Phillip in [John 14:9-10](#), "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me Phillip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works."

We have the same problem as Phillip. We must look to Jesus Christ to see the Father, and we apprehend Jesus through the Word. In doing so, we use the only image God has given us of himself, his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Any other is or will become an idol.

I love how Packer closes the section in his original edition. "I can know that I truly worship the true God and that he is my God, and that I am even now enjoying eternal life, according to our Lord's own definition, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" ([John 17:3](#)).

Note: The following two questions deal with the additional note Packer added in the 1993 edition. You will not have this information if you have an earlier version of the book.

9. How can you reconcile the second commandment and Christian art that attempts portrayals of God and Christ? What is meant by symbolic, rather than representational, art?

I can't. If you accept the argument, then you have to separate symbolic art, e.g., the Celtic triune,  or the Chi Rho symbol (✠) [This is on my wife and my wedding rings] and representational art, which attempts to capture in an image a specific presentation, feeling, or attribute of Jesus or God: Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. I consider all divine representational art dangerous at best, including such beautiful works as the Sistine Chapel's panoramic of the creation of man. As a modern aphorism states: "They are an accident waiting to happen." They are fundamentally idolatrous.

In the end, all representational art becomes an attempt to demonstrate a theological statement in a way that is condemned theologically by the Second Commandment. Remember that while the Ark of the Covenant had two cherubim on its cover, which I assume was accurate because God commissioned it, it never had any representation of God himself.

10. How would you relate a movie like *The Passion of the Christ* or the recent *The Nativity* to the concerns of this chapter?

This is a hard one. I have seen the movie several times and own the DVD. I remember how much I was moved the first time I saw the movie; it was so close to a worship experience that it would have been hard to separate. Later, images from the movie became so ingrained in my mind that it was hard to read about or think about the crucifixion without Mel Gibson's images overriding everything. This is exactly what Packer is getting at when he warns about the danger of representational art, whether the pictures, images, or statues are still or moving.

What to Do Next

Continue *Section One* by reading Chapter Five: *God Incarnate*. Meditate on what it means when we say God becomes flesh in Jesus Christ, the only true icon or representation of God. Think about the meaning of the Christmas hymn O Come All Ye Faithful verse: "Lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb." That verse has always blown me away.

Goal: Strive never to fall into the trap of idolatry.

Remember, when God told Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," He meant it. He is not who we think He is, no matter how lofty our image is. He is who He says He is, and that has many ramifications for us.

Meditation on Chapter Four: There Is Only One God

Some will praise this chapter, and others will hate it. It has even caused some to abandon the study. I believe it goes to the heart of worship and tradition, even though some of Packer's conclusions will be dismissed outright.

With that in mind, I have always liked how Packer's chapters build on each other and how each new one creates a foundation of understanding for the next revelation. In the last chapter, we examined knowing God and his knowing of us. Packer closes the chapter with a remarkable statement I would like to repeat so it is driven home.

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.

Having said that, God knows me completely, and I argued that God wants us to know him intimately; as a child knows their father, we now move on to an issue that can sidetrack those efforts. If we attempt to know God improperly, in ways that, instead of revealing more about him, actually obscure who he really is, we move on to idolatry.

When most people hear the word idolatry, they think of the pagan or non-Christian worship of false gods. They think of monks prostrate before a golden Buddha or remote jungle tribesman bowing to a stone idol. They may even consider the talismans some people wear around their neck and stroke in times of stress or danger. They don't think of themselves or anyone in a Christian church. Yet that is Packer's focus in this chapter. He confronts Christians trying to worship the true God by creating images of him to "assist" them in their prayer and worship. Packer argues, talking of the second commandment:

The commandment thus deals not with the object of our worship but with its manner; it tells us that statues and pictures of the One whom we worship are not to be used as an aid to worshipping him.

Note at this point the distinction between illustrations of God the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, and *aids to worship*. We will look at this more later, but by way of example, the second commandment has been one of the reasons that Protestants have crosses rather than crucifixes in their churches. Aside from focusing on the risen Christ, it prevents even the possibility of crossing that line of using an image, even one so sacred as Christ on the cross, to aid Christian prayer and worship. There are two basic problems that Packer addresses:

- How images dishonor God.
- Why we seem to want an image, even if it is only one in our mind.

The question for me is not if we have any idolatry in our lives but what we will do with it when we find it.

Dishonoring God

God is so glorious, so wonderful, that any image we might construct of him would only obscure that magnificence. This is where things like the crucifix come into play in Packer's argument. He says:

...the pathos of the crucifix obscures the glory of Christ, for it hides the fact of his deity, his victory on the cross, and his present kingdom. It displays his human weakness, but it conceals his divine strength; it depicts the reality of his pain, but keeps out of our sight the reality of his joy and his power. In both these cases, the symbol is unworthy most of all because of what it fails to display. And so are all other visible representations of deity.

It should be noted that the last phrase applies to all attempts to represent God in any way, including the beautiful creation scene in the Sistine Chapel, a place of worship. But, you argue, surely art is not a problem. That depends because even when not used in worship, there is a danger of images fixing within our minds a sense or idea of God that limits who and what he is for and to us. In worship, this is a serious problem, especially in churches with stained glass windows that represent various aspects of God or historical events in the life of Christ. Packer uses Isaiah 40:18 to address this context.

“To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?”

We already start with the problem that it is very easy for us to be led astray into false ideas about God, and images have a unique ability to do that. Packer discusses Aaron, who, contrary to some misunderstandings, was making an image of God, not a false god. The bull-calf was meant to represent the true God, to help lead the Israelites forward, and to give them something they could see, a rallying point. Instead, it facilitated turning the “festival to the LORD” into a shameful orgy and brought condemnation, fire, and judgment down on the people of God. Jesus told the woman at the well that the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Focusing on an image as an aid to worship prevents that since they can never tell the truth about God.

Packer next takes us from actual physical images to mental images of God. He notes that people say things like, “I like to think of God as [*insert favorite image here*].” Or they use the negative, “I don't like to think of God as a judge [*or some other image*].” What this does, Packer argues, is anthropomorphize God with the limited characteristics of men. While God made us in his image, we must not try to make him over in ours.

Packer now makes an important point, arguing that speculative theology, theology relying on philosophical reasoning or, I will go even further, rational, logical deduction, is wrong and is addressed by the Apostle Paul:

“For since in the wisdom of God **the world through its wisdom did not know him**, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” 1 [Corinthians 1:21](#)

We have to remember what God has told us:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” [Isaiah 55:8-9](#)

Mental idolatry is a trap that leads to pride and arrogance, believing, no matter what we tell ourselves, that we can define God, forgetting that only God defines himself. “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” Paul asks in [Romans 11:34b](#).

In the end, it boils down to respect—respect for God and respect for ourselves. Yes, ourselves. When we elevate our thinking beyond its place and try to usurp what God has left to himself, in essence, we don’t respect ourselves, thinking instead that we are better than what God has made. We fall anew to Eve’s temptation; we try to be like God in knowing, deciding, and defining what is.

Packer closes with an addition for the 1993 version, in which he addresses using images for devotional or didactic (instructional, such as for children) purposes. He points out that he is not speaking against symbolic art, only representational art. On that thought, I needed to say something. Some people are so fearful of symbolic art that they forbid things like the chi-rho symbol. Christians have used this symbol since time immemorial. It combines the Greek letters that begin the words Christ the King.

My daughter was making decorations for a St. Patrick’s Day-themed singles evening at her church and came up with the idea of having a large Chi-Rho symbol suspended from the ceiling over the food table in the center of the room. She also was going to screen the Celtic triune symbol, representing the Trinity, on all the tablecloths. The young pastor-in-training, who oversaw the details for this large monthly gathering (over a thousand singles), nixed the idea since he was concerned some people might find it idolatrous. He told my daughter, “Have you ever read chapter two of J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*?” She told him she had read it over six times and had studied it with her father but thought that maybe he meant chapter four. Rather than argue with him, she abandoned all her work and settled on using only the 400 shamrocks they had made attached to four artificial green garlands, creating a tent-like effect over the food area. The five-foot Chi-Rho hanging in the center and the tribunes on the tablecloths would have completed the design.

These representational, not devotional, images posed no threat to idolatry and would have actually been a good way to spark conversation. Even the shamrocks, which she was allowed to use, have a spiritual context, as Patrick used the three-leaf clover to explain the Trinity to the Druids who controlled Ireland during his initial period of evangelism.

Yes, it is important to be faithful and true, but on the other hand, it is just as important to be balanced and reasonable. One of the issues that came up during one of the discussions on this chapter (it became the tenth question on my study notes) was how you would relate a movie like *The Passion of the Christ* to the concerns of this chapter. The crux of the discussion centered on the problem of all films being representational, not symbolic, while, on the other hand, the possibility of it being used for worship was extremely low. We all had mixed feelings since it took almost a year before I got the overwhelming image of [James Caviezel](#) out of my head when I thought of the crucifixion. It still, at times, impinges on me to this day.

I know this chapter touches on sensitive issues, ones that many from liturgical, Orthodox, and Catholic backgrounds will find too stringent. I only ask that you approach the arguments Packer makes with a spirit of humility and discernment. Remember, God will never ask you what [insert

Chapter 4: The Only True God (Only, only, only!) / Meditation on Chapter Four: There Is Only One God

church authority here] or Dr. Packer said for you to do or think; he will ask you what you did and thought after your own honest study of scripture to show yourself approved.

Grace and peace be to you this day.

Chapter 5: God Incarnate

Incarnation means being embodied in flesh or taking on flesh. It refers to the conception and birth of a sentient creature (generally a human) that is the material manifestation of an entity, god, or force whose original nature is immaterial.

Today's theme: The Word became flesh. Deity + humanity without sex (Mary is, and was afterward until Jesus was born, a virgin) = unique in all religious expression. All pagan examples were a result of sexual interaction. It is very important to note that God did not have sex with Mary. I once had a Catholic woman argue with me about why Mary remained a virgin since, after God, no man was good enough. She did not see the contradiction in her statement.

Scriptural background: [John 1:14](#). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Think briefly about the concerns expressed in chapter four about God's glory.

Quotes for the week

"I have always had a dread of becoming a passenger in life." Princess Margrethe of Denmark. "On necessity of independent achievement." *Life*, January 12, 1968. She was concerned over the loss of control over her life that the demands of royalty required. Jesus had no such concerns. He frequently told his disciples what his position demanded and that nothing could sway him from his path, which was to do what the Father directed and becoming the Lamb of God required him to do.

"Charm is a glow within a woman that casts a most becoming light on others." John Mason Brown. *Vogue*, November 15, 1956. Christ's glow casts the light of the Spirit on all mankind, showing them what is in their heart as they interact with him, then and now.

"You can get help from teachers, but you are going to have to learn a lot by yourself, sitting alone in a room." Theodor Geisel ("Dr Seuss"). "On becoming a writer," *NY Times*, May 21, 1986. In the same way, you will have to decide for yourself, "alone in a room," who Jesus is and what you believe.

Concern: Do we understand who Jesus is?

"True God, from true God." Nicene Creed: Not made, begotten, the begotten Son of God. We are not begotten; we are born again of water and the Spirit.

Theologically, we could say he is the human expression of all that is knowable of the Godhead. At least this side of eternity. One day, we will know as we are known and no longer see through a mirror darkly.

1. Do you ever doubt that Jesus is God? Why do you think some people claiming to be Christians do not accept his unique divinity?

No. I will never forget the only three options that exist, which were presented by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: Jesus was a liar, a lunatic, or God. Any other choice does violence to the evidence and demonstrates one's unwillingness to face the fundamental issue. He is not a good Rabbi or teacher, though he was. He is not a good example to follow, though he was. He either lied, was crazy thinking he was God, or he was indeed God.

I think they fear the demands that such an acceptance would put on their lives and actions. If Jesus was indeed God, then one can't pick and choose which of his requirements one wants to follow. You have to follow them all without limitation. He did say, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

2. What is the difference between being divine and being God? Why is this distinction important?

Chapter 5: God Incarnate / Interacting With the Text

We have to look at two definitions that matter:

- Being an expression of the deity – e.g., our new nature in Christ, being “one” with Christ.
- Being in union with the deity – e.g., our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit

See [John 17:20-23](#) “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that *they also may be one in Us*, that the world may believe that You sent Me. *And the glory which You gave Me I have given them*, that they may be one just as We are one: *I in them, and You in Me*; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

This is a serious mystery, but this passage explicitly states that there is a divine aspect to our rebirth in Christ. We are children of God (John 1:12). We are not gods; there is only one God, and his name is Yahweh (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but there is a divineness to our inheritance in Christ. That mystery is yet to be revealed, but it is a mystery, and as such, it is to be left alone and accepted as is. We must respect the limits to our desire to know and remember how Eve and Adam fell.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To come to terms with the greatest mystery of creation, that God should become part of creation for any reason, not the least of which was to die for me.

There is no way to your mind around the idea that Jesus is simultaneously a man born of a woman and God the Son, eternal, begotten of the Father from before time began. There are so many things that God expects us to accept. That is why I believe the primary sin is always the same one Eve fell to...you can know; you have a right to know. NO, WE DON'T! The secrets belong to God alone; ***we have no right to tread on that sacred ground.***

1. What four difficulties does Packer argue are not the real issue? Are any of these a problem for you?

(p. 52) The four difficulties are:

- **Atonement** – How can the death of one man deal with all sin?
- **Resurrection** – Maybe it was temporary resuscitation.
- **Virgin Birth** – God as his Father, sounds like it was borrowed from pagan myths.
- **Gospel Miracles** – Incredible stories for, it is argued, easily duped people.

The answers will be personal and do not need to be resolved; they are only admitted to. The rest of the chapter addresses the root cause, which is discussed in the next question. You may want to revisit these answers at the end of the lesson.

2. What is the supreme mystery of the Bible and the centerpiece of the New Testament? What does this mystery uniquely reveal about God?

(p. 53-54) The supreme mystery is the **incarnation**; in Jesus of Nazareth, God became man; the Son became the second man. “The first man is of the earth, earthy [Adam]; the second man is the Lord from heaven. [Jesus Christ]” ([1 Corinthians 15:47](#))

This mystery reveals the plurality of persons within the unity of God. The divine Son became the human Jesus by the will of the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. The incarnation is the real stumbling block in Christianity; it is the root of the previous four difficulties and the additional issue of God's triune nature.

“Lo, he abhors not the womb” from *O Come All Ye Faithful*.

Revisit C. S. Lewis' [Mere Christianity argument of liar, lunatic, or God.](#)

3. Why is this mystery the cornerstone of Christian belief?

(p. 54) The mystery of the Incarnation is the wellspring of every Christian doctrine and all Christian theology. Without it, the New Testament makes no sense and loses all coherency. It is where all those who reject or seek to change Christianity stumble, whether Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians or liberal "Christians" who seek to water down the impact of the demands God the Son makes on them. No matter where the attack or denial starts, its real target is the Incarnation.

4. How is the Sonship of Jesus unique? Why is it important to understand the distinction?

(p.54-55) Jesus was God, the Son of God, God the Son. He was *the* Son, not a son. He is the only begotten – *there is no other*. Being the Son means he is not part of a class of created beings. You have to address his uniqueness. I am a son of God, born again through the sacrificial death of THE Son of God. I am a man born again through the touch of divine love. He is God, begotten by the Father by the Spirit, the eternal Son made flesh.

However, the phrase Son of God was tainted. Pagans used it to describe supermen (e.g., Hercules) born of the union of a god and a human woman. Jews used it to describe a human messiah, anointed as a sort of Über David. In his famous prologue (John 1:1-18), the Apostle John deals precisely with these issues and carefully puts them to rest. You have to do severe violence to his words to avoid the obvious – Jesus is the uniquely begotten Son of God, God made flesh.

5. What seven things are revealed about the **Word** in John's prologue that enlighten our knowledge of incarnation and Jesus' Sonship? Why are these things so important to our understanding of the second person of the Trinity?

(p.56-57) The use of the Word validates Jesus' unique Sonship in John's carefully crafted prologue. He is seen as God's creative utterance and power in action. These seven points explain the basic aspects of the nature of the second person of the Trinity: the Son, the Word. The Word was:

- **In the beginning** – From all eternity the Word was preexistent.
- **With God** – The Word has a separate personality. This exposes the separate persons within the Godhead.
- **God**—The Word is the same as God. He is not a created being. This is the unity of the Godhead.
- **Through whom all things were made** – The Word is the creative agent of the Godhead. This statement also supports his procreative being.
- **In him, life** – It is only in and through the Word life exists.
- **The light of men** – The Word reveals the light, the knowledge of God to mankind.
- **Human became flesh** – The incarnation wraps up this unique expression of the Word.

The section closes with the second half of verse 14: " We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," putting all of this revelation about the Word into the Son, the only begotten.

6. What is the fundamental reason for the incarnation?

(p. 57-58) The debt for man's sin had to be paid by man, who was like a man in every way but without sin. Only God could accomplish that. But this God-man was born to die (see [Philippians 2:6-8](#)), to **atone** for sin. Bethlehem (the Incarnation) is the doorway to Calvary (the Atonement), the reason for the Incarnation. As Paul says in [1 Corinthians 1:23a](#) "But we preach Christ crucified..." and later in 2:2 "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

It can rightfully be said that the cross is the nexus point of all of human history, all creation even. It is the singularity on which the whole drama of existence turns.

7. What biblical passage best interprets the incarnation? Explain?

Chapter 5: God Incarnate / What to Do Next

(p. 59) Packer argues that [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) is the most comprehensive statement concerning the Incarnation. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." This statement states the meaning of the Incarnation as the wonder of grace.

8. Why is the incarnation important to us? What relevance does it have in your daily life?

(p. 59) God cared enough to send the very best, his own Son. That gives meaning to everything in my life since everything that happens is part of the outworking of His Godly care and grace for me. There will also be numerous personal relevancies individually and uniquely for each person.

9. Why is the kenosis theory a problem? What important consideration did it attempt to address? What is the solution to the problem it raises?

(p. 60-62) It diminishes the deity of Christ. It addresses the possibility that Jesus erred in his belief in the authority of the Old Testament and its authorship. It also explains his apparent lack of knowledge about certain things (e.g., who touched him). What the Son laid aside was his divine glory. There is no Scriptural support for the idea the Son shed any aspect of his deity. The solution is that Jesus chose to limit the use of his full divinity. He acted only as his Father directed. "The Son can do nothing by himself...By myself, I can do nothing...I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me...I do nothing on my own...I always do what pleases him."

Jesus Christ, the God-man, did not know or act independently from what the Father willed, any more than the eternal Son acted independently from the Father within the economy of the Trinity.

10. How does how we view Jesus' "emptying" determine our view of scripture? Why is this important?

(p. 60-63) How we view this aspect of who Jesus was can determine the authority of Scripture for us as a whole or only "in part." Choosing "in part" opens up the problem of which part to pick and choose, allowing us to avoid the "parts" we don't like. That is the historical precedent of what has happened again and again and again to water down the clear demands of Scripture.

The question is whether or not the Bible is inerrant. Do we, as Jesus said, trust every jot or tittle? If not, we are in serious trouble and open to man's unending manipulation of Scripture.

11. What is the significance of the incarnation to the celebration of Christmas? Why can't it just be a pretty story filled with "Christmas spirit," whatever that is?

(p. 63-64) "That there is hope for a ruined humanity—the hope of pardon, peace with God, the hope of glory." That what began in a stable was destined for the cross, that the AGAPE expressed in the Incarnation is supposed to become incarnate in us, whereby we also make ourselves poor so that our lost fellow humans might become rich. Our attitude should reflect Christ himself. His attitude (see [Philippians 2:1-11](#)) should become incarnate in us, even if our personal Bethlehem leads to our personal Calvary.

What to Do Next

Continue *Section One* by reading Chapter Six: *He Shall Testify*. Meditate on the "three in one" and what that means to the Christian's understanding of God's nature, especially the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, we act as if we think the Holy Spirit can act on his own volition (unilaterally) and not as the agent of the Father and Son.

Goal: Never diminish the incarnation's significance or the awe it inspires.

When the Apostle Paul suggests that we should have the same sacrificial attitude as Jesus Christ who laid aside his Godly prerogatives, how can we deny anything that he asks of us after considering what he was willing to do for us? We obviously cannot, but then that is the rub, isn't it? We have to

be like John the Baptist. He must increase while we must decrease, which goes against our fallen nature, the old man of [Romans 7](#).

Meditation on Chapter Five: God Incarnate

For those of you who love dealing with the hard questions and the deepest mysteries, chapter five of Knowing God addresses the greatest mystery of the Christian faith, the incarnation of God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, as the son of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, and the man not who would be, *but is* God.

The Word became flesh. These are the four most important words in the history of the human race. The apostle John spoke them midway through the prologue of chapter one of his Gospel.

Packer begins this part of his study by pointing out the historical problems people have had with the gospel of Jesus Christ: his virgin birth, the miracles, atonement, and resurrection. But, the biggest stumbling block, the bite that won't go down, dwarfing all the others combined, is the claim that Jesus is *God made man*. Somehow, the infinite Son expressed himself in the finite body of a human being, born of a woman, as a dependent baby who grew and matured and eventually became a man. That is just too hard for much of humanity to accept.

Even for believers, the Incarnation is beyond imagining, and the more you think about it, the more difficult it becomes, with “what abouts” and “but hows” springing up at every turn. It is here, on this rock of Christian theology, that the Jews, various heretics, Muslims, and most of all, secular Enlightenment mankind breaks, losing any possibility of belief. It is here they are confronted with what C. S. Lewis addresses in his famous arguments in *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of thing Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to...

...There is no halfway house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and said 'Are you the son of Bramah?' he would have said 'My son, you are still in the veil of illusion'. If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'Are you Zeus' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked 'Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius 'Are you heaven?' I think he would probably have replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.' The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man. If you think you are a poached egg, when you are not looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane, but if you think you are God, there is no chance for you. We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects — Hatred — Terror — Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.'

No, Jesus was a liar, a lunatic, or the Son of God. **You only get to choose one.**

However, that brings us to another problem. The phrase “Son of God” carried baggage, tainted in the minds of those who interacted with Jesus and later with John through his gospel. As a result, John

Chapter 5: God Incarnate / Meditation on Chapter Five: God Incarnate

begins his gospel with the famous prologue ([John 1:1-18](#)) in which he tries to pin down beyond misinterpretation the eternal deity of the Son in Jesus Christ. Packer spends several pages expounding on those verses, ending with:

The Son of God is the Word of God. We see what the Word itself is; well, that is what the Son is. Such is the prologue's message.

When, therefore, the bible proclaims Jesus as the Son of God, the statement is meant as an assertion of his distinct personal deity. The Christmas message rests on the staggering fact that the child in the manger was—God.

From there Packer deals with the fact that the Son was a real baby, made like his brothers (all of us) in every way, but pure and without sin. He quotes Wesley's words:

Our God contracted to a span; Incomprehensibly made man.

Why? Well, to die. To bring salvation to the unsavable, redemption to the unredeemable, to do what only God could do, and to know that while we were still sinners, he died for us.

Packer then deals with the problem and misuse of kenosis and the various theories of what the Son left behind (if anything) when he took on flesh in time and space. He quotes part of Anglican Article 2 of the Thirty-nine Articles, which says in its entirety:

II. Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man.

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

The problem at the root of Jesus' "emptying" goes straight to the heart of everything he did and said. Either we give complete divine authority to all of his statements and actions, accepting what he said about the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament, or we have to call everything into question, which is what modern critics have done. Packer tackles these issues carefully and comprehensively and rejects the kenosis theory in the end.

From there he talks about the poverty of Jesus and the "Christmas spirit." He proclaims that "Spending and being spent" is what our goal should be. Do this and you will get the spiritual quickening so many seek after. He closes with three biblical quotes:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

Let this same attitude and purpose of mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus... [Philippians 2:5](#)

I will run the way of Your commandments when You give me a heart that is willing. [Psalm 119:32](#)

There you have it, the great mystery and the stumbling block addressed. Remember, on this one point, all other points hinge. If you cannot accept this keystone in the arch of the Christian faith, nothing else makes much sense, and the Gospel is reduced to a pile of rubble; with it, everything else fits and works and falls into place, arching over you in glorious splendor, holding up the vast weight of the faith once delivered unto the saints.

Grace and peace and understanding be yours.

Chapter 6: He (Holy Spirit) Shall Testify

Today's theme: Giving a proper place to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the least understood of the three persons of the Godhead. The New Testament has much to say about the Spirit if we would only listen. We need to listen since Jesus told us the Holy Spirit would lead us into truth. He is our sure anchor in a sea of lies.

Scriptural background: [Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 20](#); [3:6, 13, 22](#) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The same phrase is repeated seven times. It is a form of emphasis that demonstrates the revelatory nature of the Holy Spirit. If we are willing to listen (have an ear), the Spirit has important things to say to us.

Quotes for the week

"The Holy Spirit makes a man a Christian, and if he is a Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit draws him to other Christians in the church. An individual Christian is not Christian at all." John Rudolph Brokhoff, Author, seminary professor, and pastor.

As Christians, we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church. We are one in the Spirit. We are never alone (we are the temple—our physical body) of the Holy Spirit) and if we try to be a Christian alone, we have to resist the Spirit who draws us together and deny Christ, who said where two are more are gathered in his name he is in their midst. Remember the Apostle Paul's argument to the Corinthians that we are all joined together so that whether we suffer or are joyful, it affects the entire Body of Christ. We do nothing alone. We are the Body of Christ, not a single cell in Christ. Single cells die on their own or become cancer.

"When God knows, I'm toss'd about
Either with despair or doubt;
Yet before the glass be out,
Sweet Spirit, comfort me!"

From *Litany to the Holy Spirit*, Robert Herrick. 1591–1674

Jesus promised his disciples they would not be alone, that the Father would "send them another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby), that He may *remain with you forever.*"

Concern: The Holy Spirit will either be too important or not important enough

Too important: many Pentecostals; not important enough: most mainline non-charismatics.

We err when we elevate the Holy Spirit too highly or reduce his stature and ministry. For some Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is all that matters, while for many liturgical Christians, it is almost an afterthought if thought about at all.

I remember that Thomas Smail, an Anglican Charismatic theologian, titled his book on the Holy Spirit, *Reflected Glory*. He argues that the Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son. "He glorifies not himself, but Christ, and therefore his mission is to reveal the full glory of Calvary and to bring us into possession of all the blessings that by his death on the cross Christ has won for us. Here also the work of the Spirit is to take the things of Christ and show them to us, so that, in the way appropriate to us, we may reflect his glory and be shaped into his likeness."

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son." Nicene Creed (see [Resources](#))

There is a proper balance in all things in our Christian life, or, to use the Apostle Paul's way of saying

it, decency and order in what we do.

1. Why is a balanced view of the Godhead important? Have you been able to maintain that balance in your own life? How or how not?

Since God is three persons—a triunity, we must deal with God accordingly and appropriately. God's (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) self-revelation of his three united personalities is difficult enough for us to comprehend and deal with without adding to the problem by getting our understanding and worship of God in his unique persons out of proper balance.

I have not always been successful. It is hard for me to get my mind around the triune nature of God and how to relate to each person of the Trinity. Better men than me have tried to get their minds around the Trinity. You may remember the story I told in Chapter One:

Augustine was walking along the beach contemplating the nature of the Trinity when he saw a young boy who had dug a hole in the sand, running back and forth to the surf, filling a bucket, and pouring it into his little hole. He approached the boy and asked him what he was doing. The boy replied, "I am putting the sea in my hole." Augustine told the boy that his quest was impossible; the sea was so vast it could not possibly fit in his little hole, to which the boy replied, "It is the same about which you are pondering," and disappeared.

It is hard to know how to give each person of the Trinity their proper due, and historically, there has been very little guidance on maintaining this balance. However, that has changed in recent years, and there are a lot of helpful materials on the Internet (though there are a lot of errors and heresies there). Usually, we can keep a decent balance between the Father and the Son, but when it comes to the Holy Spirit, it is typically too much or too little attention. Many commentators have noted that Christians (even denominations) tend to play favorites regarding the Trinity, emphasizing one over the other two.

What I can say is that balance at the church level comes over time, over the course of the liturgical year. While on any given week, the assigned readings and subsequent focus may favor one person of the Godhead, it should balance itself out as the year progresses. Discuss it with your pastor if your church is seriously out of balance. If there is no desire to correct the lack of balance, you may need to consider another church.

Balance at the personal level is harder, but it is something we must all strive for. We must also be careful that a lack of balance doesn't become one more idol we have to deal with.

2. When did the Holy Spirit become personally real for you? What prompted this beginning?

This is a personal answer and will be different for each person. There is no *right* answer. However, we are not talking about the salvation experience itself since that is focused on the person of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. This kind of question will help people discover what they already believe, even though they may have never thought about it. You have to know where you are to adjust, if necessary, your course.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To learn about the Holy Spirit to grasp His purpose and activity in the life of Christians.

If there is one member of the Godhead that most people have the least knowledge about, or even erroneous opinions of, it is the Holy Spirit. You may want to look at the Holy Spirit portion of the Nicene Creed, if you didn't earlier. It is in the [Resources](#) Section at the end of this workbook.

Note: Since we are discussing the nature of God, I want to say something about the term Jehovah. In Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses his name is I AM WHO I AM or in Hebrew, Yahweh, which is written as the four consonants YHWH. Jews never inserted the vowels and refused to even say the name of God after the Hellenistic period (beginning around 300 B.C.), though it is agreed that Yahweh was the original spoken form. Jews instead substitute Adonai (my LORD) wherever they have to use the name

of God in prayers and biblical readings and where YHWH was in the biblical text.

In English, in the **Middle Ages**, the vowels for Adonai were substituted to come up with Yehowah or, as we know it, Anglicized to Jehovah, just like Yeshua is now Jesus. It was not until the printing of the King James Bible in 1611 that Jehovah became entrenched as the name of God within Protestantism and the English-speaking world.

While some will disagree, I consider this change fundamentally wrong. It changes the only revealed name of God to something far different than what God revealed and, I believe, intended. Jehovah is not the same name as Yahweh. Supporters point to Jewish practice and prefer the three-syllable Jehovah since it coincides with a three-person trinity as if that is a valid argument.

I admit that I have a serious problem with anyone changing God's definition of himself and the way he spoke his name to Moses. As a result, you will never see me use the word Jehovah except in discussions of how it is improper to use this word.

You should know that most biblical translations insert LORD for Yahweh. At the same time, the new English Standard Version and the Catholic New Jerusalem Bible use Yahweh in the text instead of a substitute.

1. What unique doctrine of God does Christianity rest upon? Why is this doctrine important to the church? Why is it important to you personally?

(p. 65-66) The Trinity or triune nature of the Godhead in which one God in three persons is the mystery revealed in the Incarnation and where all three persons were present at Jesus' baptism.

Without it, no one can understand the words and work of Jesus.

While the third part has a personal answer, one thing that is utterly important about the Trinity to me and most people is that it demonstrates perfect relationships, leadership, and submission. It demonstrates the true nature of fatherhood, sonship, and self-sacrifice, both in the cross and the Spirit's willingness to point always to the Father and Son and never to himself.

2. According to Jesus, when he promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples, he said the Spirit was not *the* comforter but *another* comforter. What is the importance of Jesus calling the Holy Spirit, "another comforter?" What does this description of the Holy Spirit mean to us?

(p. 66-67) It makes the Spirit a person on par with the Son. What Jesus did to comfort and care for his disciples, the Spirit will continue to do that and more: he is the Spirit of truth and the Holy Spirit.

It means that we are never alone, even when we are alone. God, as the Holy Spirit, is always there to comfort and care for us in our times of need and utter loneliness. Remember, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He resides in us.

3. Is it necessary to see a distinction between the work of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

(p. 67-68) Yes. While the Spirit is "another comforter" continuing the work Jesus had started, he is also different in the way that the "word" of God is different from the "breath" of God. While they have places that overlap, they are also different. Just as the Son came from (para) alongside the Father, so the Spirit comes from (para) alongside the Father. Each person in the Trinity has a purpose in the divine economy.

4. What is the significance of the Old Testament parallels between the word and breath of God? Think about hovering and falling upon (OT) and indwelling (NT). Why is this distinction about the activity of the Holy Spirit important?

(p. 67) The Spirit was active in creation (hovering, making the starry host – [Psalm 33:6](#)), and throughout the OT. He fell (like a cloak) upon the prophets, and in the NT, he indwells the believer; indeed, we are his temple (1 Corinthians 6:19), and he dwells within us.

Chapter 6: He (Holy Spirit) Shall Testify / Interacting With the Text

In the OT believer, since they were still mired in their sin and not yet born again (Christ's sacrifice still future to them), there was no place for the Spirit to indwell, no new creation to take up residence in. So, the Holy Spirit acted upon, not from within as in NT saints. That is why it has been said that the weakest saint in the Kingdom of God is more powerful than the greatest OT believer; yes, even Elijah or Moses. How little we understand what God has given us, even though we only have the first fruits of our salvation.

The distinction is important because it demonstrates a fundamental difference between the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is with us, but the Holy Spirit is within us, which is a *profound* mystery.

5. How is the Holy Spirit related to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? e.g. see [Lk 12:12](#), [Jn 14:26](#), [16:7-8](#). What phrase in the Nicene Creed codifies this relationship?

(p. 68) Spirit does the will of the Father *and Son*. He reveals the Son and gives voice to those who witness about him before men.

When someone is sent in someone's name ("whom the Father will send in my name"), they are that person's representative, not their own. The Holy Spirit was sent to us in the name of the Eternal Son of God, this Son who is Lord of Lords, King of Kings ([Rev 17:14](#)). The Holy Spirit was not sent in his own name.

Nicene Creed: "Who proceeds from the Father and Son..."

6. Packer claims the Holy Spirit is "divine yet ignored." Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you or your church "ignore" the Holy Spirit in any way?

(p. 68-69) This is a personal response. However, Packer's argument needs to be understood.

Packer argues that the person and work of the Holy Spirit is "largely ignored" and is the "Cinderella of Christian doctrine." He believes the average Christian is in a "complete fog" regarding the work of the Holy Spirit. He is astounded at the great care about Christ and the so little care about the Holy Spirit, and Christians have almost no idea what difference the Spirit's absence would make in the world.

As an aside, one EXTREMELY important work of the Holy Spirit is the restraining of evil and lawlessness. [2 Thessalonians 2:7](#) "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way." No matter how evil we think the world is, even at its worst, the restraining power of the Holy Spirit prevents it from its full expression. That will truly be "hell on earth."

7. According to Packer, can you be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit? Why is his argument significant?

(p. 69-70) While he does not state it in such an explicit manner, he does say without the Holy Spirit, conversion is impossible, "without the Holy Spirit there would be *no faith and no new birth—in short, no Christians,*" so the answer is NO!

The whole argument of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit comes down to having a new life (conversion) versus being empowered by an infilling of the Holy Spirit (Baptism of the Holy Spirit). For liturgical churches, this infilling/empowerment was the purpose of Confirmation. Believers, standing before the congregation, "confirmed" their belief in Christ and asked for the empowering of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for their ministry in the church, which was symbolized by the laying on of hands (the Bishop).

While over the centuries, this powerful act became institutionalized into a rite of Christian passage and lost its spiritual drama and power, it was and is for many today no different than seeking the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for empowerment and gifts that goes on in Pentecostal and Charismatic groups. The primary difference between Pentecostal and some Charismatic circles is the focus by many on the gift of tongues, which for me was majoring in the minors, and even Paul says all do not speak in tongues. If God so wills, so be it, as it is with any gift.

This argument is significant because it goes to the heart of the Spirit's activity in salvation and the fact of the logical fallacy of POST ERGO PROPTER HOC ("after this, therefore because of this" a logical fallacy where one assumes that one thing happening after another thing means that the first thing caused the second) within the Pentecostal movement. I am speaking of the evidence of gifts, specifically tongues, as evidence of salvation, and if you do not have tongues or some other demonstrable gift, then you are not saved. While it is true that on two occasions in Acts (Cornelius and the Ephesians), there is a connection between belief and tongues, it was to demonstrate a change on both occasions. For Cornelius, Gentiles could become Christian believers, and for the Ephesians, it was necessary to be baptized in the name of Jesus (they had only John's baptism for repentance).

8. what would you say from this chapter is Packer's opinion of Apologetics? Why?

(p. 71) He doesn't believe they can "prove" Christianity. Based on John 16:8, Packer believes that only the Holy Spirit can prove the truth of Christianity. It is part of his "work of renewing the blinded heart."

He points out the Apostle Paul's statement to the Corinthians, claiming he came to them "not in plausible words of wisdom, *but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, that your faith might not rest in the *wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*"

I guess you could say that argument may destroy faith if someone chooses to allow that, but only the Holy Spirit can create faith, something no argument in and of itself can do.

9. How do we honor or dishonor the Holy Spirit in our daily walk? How should we relate to the Holy Spirit?

(p. 71-72) Packer addresses three areas that are the work of the Holy Spirit where we can either honor or dishonor him.

- **Faith** – Faith is biblically based, and the Holy Spirit inspires its authority and content. If we reject the authority and reliability of the Bible, we dishonor the Holy Spirit.
- **Life** – What guides our life? Do we rely on the Bible and use it to guide our life choices? If not, we dishonor the Holy Spirit.
- **Witness** – Do we remember that our words have no power without the Holy Spirit, or do we resort to human cleverness and psychological manipulation? If we do, we dishonor the Holy Spirit.

We relate to and honor the Holy Spirit through recognition and reliance. We need to take him seriously. He is our teacher, our source of life. He fills us, empowers us, and comforts and helps us. All our spiritual gifts come from him. We should strive never to quench or grieve the Spirit but instead to seek to enable him to fill us to the fullest.

10. Explain the Trinity in your own words. Try to use plain English. Why is it important for you to try and do this?

This will be personal, but you must ensure everyone does it. The Trinity will not be real to you until you can put it in your own words.

For me, the Trinity is all about relationships in a multidimensional being. The relational interconnectedness, mutual submission, and willing sacrificial love expressed within the Godhead are why creation and my existence have any real meaning. To have become part of that eternal togetherness is mind-boggling, and all I can say is, thank you, Lord God.

What to Do Next

Review *Section One: Know The Lord*. Consider what God has revealed to you about Himself in your study of this section and how it might change your life going forward. Everyone needs to do an honest review. Go back over your answers to all of the questions so far. Would you change any of them? Do you have any new insights? Remember, this is your foundation for Section Two. Make sure it is the best one you can make it.

Goal: Always give the Holy Spirit His proper place in the Godhead.

Remember, Jesus called the Holy Spirit counselor, the one who would guide us into all truth. How can He do his proper work within us if we do not respect him and listen to Him?

That is the question, isn't it. If we have not learned to hear Him when he guides us, how can He perform the task the Father and Jesus have given Him, to empower us and lead us into all truth? Consider this: if we are not listening to His still, small voice, are we then quenching the Spirit who resides within us, in our temple, not made with hands?

Meditation on Chapter Six: He Shall Testify

As Christians, we believe God has revealed himself to us through many vehicles, primarily through his Word. In chapter six of *Knowing God*, Dr. Packer addresses the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who testifies to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son among his other functions.

Having introduced us to the incarnate Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, in the last chapter, Dr. Packer now looks to the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost in older translations), the third person of the Godhead. As an aside, I would like to say that I prefer using the Holy Spirit to the Holy Ghost.

Ghosts generally are considered the spirit of a deceased person or other entity, which could never be applied to the third person of the Godhead. Spirit does not carry that linguistic/sociological baggage.

Dr. Packer starts by quoting the Lesser Doxology (Greater Doxology, the Gloria in Excelsis Deo):

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

This prayer of praise (re: [Mathew 28:19](#)), which has been used within various Christian liturgies for almost two millennia, makes a definitive statement about how the Christian church views the Godhead, not as three Gods, but as one God expressed as three persons; as St. Patrick used to say, as one clover with three leaves. According to tradition, Patrick used the Shamrock to explain this Christian mystery to the people of Ireland. For many people, the Trinity is a complicated doctrine they could do without. However, rather than being a stumbling block, it is *central* to understanding the very nature of our God, our salvation, and our relationship with each.

Over the history of the Christian Church, believers have generally fallen into the extremes of elevating too highly or reducing too much the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed expresses a balanced view in formulating the third person of the Trinity.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

While also Lord, the Spirit proceeds from and is tasked by the Father and Son. In his work, He witnesses not to himself but to those who sent him, thus the title of this chapter: He Shall Testify.

Dr. Packer wonders aloud why we don't recite the Athanasian Creed in public worship today as we did in the past. Rather than linking to this great creed of the faith, I believe it is important to include the whole creed so that the rest of our discussion can be informed by it. It is also in the Resources Section.

The Creed of Saint Athanasius

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise, the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almightyies, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise, the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord, So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.

So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved is must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood; Who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

Central to Packer's argument in this chapter is John's Gospel. John presents the Spirit as the Holy Spirit ([John 14:17, 26](#)) and it is in [John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7](#), that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a comforter, a divine personage who will act, abide, remind, teach, and testify.

The work of the Holy Spirit is so important that Packer bluntly says:

Why, were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit, there would be no gospel, faith, church, or Christianity in the world at all. In the first place, without the Holy Spirit, there would be no gospel and no New Testament.

Chapter 6: He (Holy Spirit) Shall Testify / Meditation on Chapter Six: He Shall Testify

Over the history of the church and even today, despite the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the Holy Spirit, though divine and a member of the Holy Trinity, is largely ignored. Despite that, the abiding ministry of the Holy Spirit within the church is to testify to, for, and about Christ, the Son of God, by:

Illuminating: opening blinded eyes, restoring spiritual vision, enabling sinners to see that the gospel is indeed God's truth, Scripture is indeed God's Word, and Christ is indeed God's Son.

Often, apologetics is presented as a means to rationally state the gospel in a way that breaks down all barriers to belief. It is said to be a way of proving the truth of Christianity by logical argument.

Packer counters with:

Nobody can prove the truth of Christianity except the Holy Spirit, by his almighty work of renewing the blinded heart. It is the sovereign prerogative of Christ's Spirit to convince men's consciences of the truth of Christ's gospel. Christ's human witnesses must learn to ground their hopes of success not on clever presentation of the truth by man but on powerful demonstrations of the truth by the Spirit.

How, then, should we respond to the Holy Spirit? One way, Packer argues, is to acknowledge, apply, and authenticate our witness with the Holy Scriptures, which are the work of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, "he shall testify," and as the angel speaking to John said seven times (the number of perfection):

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The real question, then, is, are we listening?

Review of Section One: Know the Lord

Today's theme: Pondering the significance of knowing the Lord and not just knowing God.

We begin this section with God as Lord (the Yahweh of Moses). If He is not Lord, which requires our full submission, then nothing else in our Christian life will work properly, including fulfilling our desire to "know God," which is why you are doing this study.

In our modern, existential, self-actualized, be-all-you-can-be world, we resist the thought of full submission to anyone or anything. We are influenced by the water in which we swim, and, in our age, the William Henley poem, *Invictus*, has a line two lines that illustrate how that water is polluted.

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.

For the Christian, the realization that God is the master of my fate, God is the captain of my soul, comes at a difficult price: complete submission to the Lord of All. This goes against our fallen nature (the old man), and it is only through the new man, the new born-again creation in Christ, that we can even attempt to go down this path of humility and prostrate ourselves before the Lord of Creation.

When all is said and done, we come to the two defining questions of our existence: if God is not Lord, what is He? What are we?

Scriptural background: [Psalm 89:8](#) "*O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.*"

For me, the key part of this verse is God's faithfulness. It surrounds Him and is part and parcel of everything He does and is. I remember [Numbers 23:19](#) "*God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*" Trust builds relationships and God is totally trustworthy. That can be both comforting and scary.

Quotes for the week

"The Holy Spirit makes a man a Christian, and if he is a Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit draws him to other Christians in the church. An individual Christian is not Christian at all." John Rudolph Brokhoff, Author, seminary professor and pastor.

"An individual Christian is not Christian at all." We are, after all, part of the Body of Christ. We are not Christian cells, off alone. Those die or become cancer. This quote does not speak to salvation but the living out of the Christian life. While the Apostle James argued that he would see your faith, your Christianity, by your work, Brokhoff is saying that he will see your Christianity by your working within the Body of Christ. Jesus said we will be known by the love we share amongst the body. We are saved into the community of faith, the Church universal, not as lone wolves.

"If there is one God and one Lord, then those who celebrate and worship this one God and Lord become one people, transcending differences of race, gender, class and geography." N. T. Wright, *Ex Auditu*, "Christology and the Incarnation." Volume 7, 1991

While we have different roles and tasks within the body (see [1 Corinthians 12:4-31](#), especially verses 28-29 in this context), there are no distinctions and we are all one in our salvation in Christ. ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

Concern: That we never forget God's Lordship

Remember that among all of God's truths is the primary fact of His Lordship. It is interesting that we call the prayer that Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer. While it is true that Jesus is Lord, the prayer itself harkens not just to our Father but also to He who is hallowed, who is coming, and to whom and whose will we need to submit ourselves, in essence, the *Lord of Lords*.

Without getting sidetracked, the phrase Lord of Lords implies a multiplicity of Lords, a hierarchy of leadership of which God is the supreme Lord. It is something to think about. Along this line, you can consider the parable Jesus told to Zacchaeus ([Luke 19:12-26](#)) about the benefits of proper submission and different levels of rulership under the Lord.

1. When you think of the Lord, have you always thought of Jesus in that category or considered the Father to be the Lord? Has your view changed as you have studied this section?

This answer will be personal. Try to get more than a yes or no. Get the group to flesh out their response. It is important to think past the immediate reaction continually. If you need to stimulate discussion, look at 1 Corinthians 15:28 "*Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*"

Remember what separates us, we who believe, from Satan – we submit to His Lordship.

Satan and the lost will not.

In Review of chapters One through Six

Many of the responses in this review will be personal, some extremely personal. Hopefully your group will have developed the trust necessary for the members to begin sharing about their journey and this is an opportunity to see how far they all have come.

1. Do you now consider yourself a traveler? Why or why not?

This is a personal question. Experience has shown that most of those I have studied with admit they are a mixture (or yo-yo). Sometimes, they travel the road, and sometimes, they climb up on the balcony. Eventually, they will have to confront that dichotomy and fully commit to the road. Yes, it is a dangerous and often painful journey, but it is also filled with unspeakable joy, and the goal more than makes it worth it. Remember how Jesus met his goal with the joy set before him.

2. Do you know any balconeers? What do you think makes them that way?

Most of us know many balconeers. Why they remain there is a great question. What turns the heart from complacency to action? It is the mystery of the ages, the balance between our responsibility and God's intervention. I often think about [Romans 9:20-24](#).

Somewhere at the root of the problem of our lack of engagement is a lack of trust, which expresses itself in fear. What if I put everything in God's hands, and He lets me down? He isn't who the Scriptures claim He is. Faith is trust in action, which appears to separate the travelers, those of us who become pilgrims on our journey, from those who do not, who stay aloof and distant, unwilling to commit themselves fully to the task.

I thank God for the gift and measure of faith he has given me, and I pray for those whose trust bucket is empty that God may fill it with the water of eternal life.

3. Is your theology view any different from when the study began? Why or why not?

Very few people say no, and most are not being honest with themselves. My view of theology is fleshed out every time I do this study. For some, while it may not cover anything they have not heard before (rare for I get something new every trip through), this may be the first time their understanding hit home in the form of demands on their discernment of what it all means to live out their Christian life as a practical, real journey. This effort they are making has eternal consequences.

For many, this study will make theology more personal, more practical, more relational, less academic, and more grounded in where the rubber meets the road of their life.

4. What is your current view on meditation: is it necessary for a Christian? Why or why not?

It is necessary if you mean to deeply contemplate something God is showing me about my Christian life and walk. It touches on the essence of being on the road: being committed, real, and in-depth in our approach to what we are doing. Without meditation, we will drift through our Christian life, with things often going in one ear and out the other. If it stops on the passage through and has any effect, it will be because our Christian meditation apprehended it and made it real for us.

Studying, beyond memorization and seeking pat answers, requires meditation and deep contemplation in search of understanding. It is part of the heavy mental lifting required to study to show yourself approved ([1 Timothy 2:15](#)).

5. After completing this section, what is the difference between knowing God and knowing about God from your perspective?

This will be a personal answer. For most students, it centers around dealing with the relational aspect of their Christianity (vertically with God and horizontally with fellow believers) as it reflects the perfect example of a relationship within the Trinity itself. This will involve becoming responsible for what they see, learn, and come to know about God and what he demands from their life.

6. How strong is your immunity to the briars and brambles of the human condition? Explain.

This will be a personal answer. Most students feel them more deeply, but are able to cope with them better, though at times, like Elijah, events get them down. It helps to gain a more eternal perspective on things. Some have noted that as they mature in their Christian life, they get tired of failing God, but at the same time grow more dependent on and confident of His mercy.

7. What do you now consider idolatrous? Why?

This will be a personal answer. Almost anything can be idolatrous if it becomes something that rules our lives. One thing that has come out of previous discussions is how the concept of idolatry has expanded for those who have done this study. While many disagree with Dr. Packer over things like stained glass windows and icons, the concept of idolatry has expanded to include things that begin to take over their lives, lording over them, if you will. This can be as diverse as food, entertainment, politics, cars, or other possessions, especially collectibles and sports. From a Christian context, their favorite pew or place to sit in church, as well as how "they" do things, can become rigidified and an idol of sorts.

Even those who disagree with the "iconoclastic approach" can see the danger these things might become and do for many who should know better.

8. Is there anything you used to think was idolatrous that you now believe is not? Why?

This will be a personal answer. The most common response concerns those who started out iconoclastic and learned for the first time the difference between representational and symbolic art. Learning that important distinction is often very freeing. Realizing how easy it is to become pharisaical on this issue is often an eye-opener.

9. What new aspect of the Incarnation is now part of your thinking? Explain.

This will be a personal answer. Common responses are how most prayer in the NT is to the Father, not Jesus. Most students finally understand the issues Kenosis causes, how that should be interpreted, and why. For some, the bringing of humanity and our humanness into the Godhead through Jesus Christ is mind-boggling. They had always considered being a child of God in an abstract sense, but the Incarnation made it real and personal. The Hebrews passages about having a savior who understands us take on added and intensely personal meaning.

Review of Section One: Know the Lord / What to Do Next

10. How has the meaning of Lord changed for you? If it has not, why not?

This will be a personal answer. The phrase Lord of Lords has taken on an expanded meaning for some. Some have expressed that it is hard to fully understand the concept since we do not live under a monarchy, and the almost feudal concept of submitting to your lord is difficult to relate to in our modern democratic context. The closest thing most people come to experiencing something close to this is at work and dealing with a boss or owner of a business.

11. Have you learned anything new about the Godhead: Father, Son, Holy Spirit? If so, what?

This will be a personal answer.

One common surprise for many people is the centrality of prayer to the Father because both the Son and Spirit operate according to the will of the Father. This especially applies to the Holy Spirit because while he helps us to pray ([Romans 8:26](#)), there are no commands or examples of prayer *to* the Holy Spirit. I have witnessed many people prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to fill them when they should be entreating the Father instead. In addition, Jesus tells us to pray to the Father *in Jesus' name*. However, there are biblical examples of prayer to Jesus, the most famous being the entreaty "Maranatha" or *Our Lord, come*. These examples are few, and when his disciples asked how to pray, he commanded them to pray to the Father.

It should be noted that there is no direct restriction anywhere against praying to either the Son or the Holy Spirit; just that when Jesus had the opportunity, he never suggested it. I personally consider talking with Jesus or the Holy Spirit to be separate from prayer. While I ask the Holy Spirit all kinds of questions related to this study, I pray to the Father that the Spirit might enlighten my understanding.

I hope that helps.

What to Do Next

Begin *Section Two* by reading Chapter Seven: *God Unchanging*. Meditate on what it means when Scripture says that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Think about how this truth should impact your daily life.

We are going to shift our focus from knowing the basics about God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to exploring God's attributes, the things that make Him unique.

Goal: Always remember that God "is" and the beginning of His *isness* is His Lordship.

Remember, fear of the *Lord* is the beginning of wisdom. For any of the other aspects of God, His relationship, and His revelation to have meaning in our lives, He must first be our Lord.

Hopefully, by this time, we will be beginning to develop a healthy "fear of the Lord," more so than when we began this study. I pray that He is truly beginning to become the Lord of our lives and beings.

Review Meditation for Section One: Know the Lord

Packer's first section states, "Every Christian desires to *know the Lord*." The word "know" in the Bible connotes both understanding and intimate experience, so it is a good choice for the beginning section of Knowing God. In addition to introducing us to the concepts of knowing, Packer applies that knowledge to the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Triunity of Christian belief.

I want to add one thought about the intimacy of knowing. The Bible usually applies to how husbands and wives know each other and requires certain rules and limitations to be observed, such as only after marriage and not restricting access. These concepts can be carried through to our knowing God since it can only occur after salvation (the unsaved cannot know God, only about Him), and access is not restricted because, in Christ, we can boldly approach the throne of grace. Keep this analogy in

mind as you grow in your knowledge of God.

Earlier, in the introduction to Section One, I noted that Dr. Packer begins by dealing with the nature and focus of the study. He looks at theology and the people who study it. He discusses the nature of knowing and being known and how that applies to our relationship with God. Then he looks at God and his revelation about himself as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He introduces the Trinity through the incarnation and fleshes it out with the one who testifies the Holy Spirit. This section is the foundation for the two following sections.

I would add that Section One is also challenging but brings with its completion several orders of magnitude greater appreciation and understanding of the truths and blessings that follow. Section One is the foundation for Section Two: Behold Your God, and Section Three: If God Be for Us...

It is important to remember that Packer does not title this section *Know your God*, but *Know the Lord*. [Psalm 89:8](#) speaks to this:

O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

Many people believe in God but have difficulty accepting Him as Lord. They have a “He does his thing, I’ll do mine” attitude. They are not agnostics or even deists who generally believe that God is irrelevant to their personal lives. No, they have a problem with anyone, including God, telling them what to do. Because of that, intimate knowledge of their Lord and God is not a high priority, if any priority at all.

Turning to the book itself, it is hard to summarize the richness of the Preface and the first six chapters in one short post, but there are several high points we need to remember. But before we get specific, I would like to say that I find it very revealing that we call the prayer that Jesus taught us, ***The Lord’s Prayer***. While it is true that scripture portrays Jesus as Lord, the prayer he used to model all prayer harkens not just to our heavenly Father but also to the One who is hallowed, the One who is coming, and the One to whom and to whose will we need to submit ourselves. It is a prayer to the Lord of Lords, to the “who is like you?” of Psalm 89.

Let us start our review by remembering that we are called to be travelers, not balconeers, walkers, not watchers. Jesus desired those who called upon him to take up their crosses and follow him. You cannot do that sitting on your rump in some safe, dispassionate place, unengaged and uninvolved. You must step out into the world, yet as Jesus cautioned, being in but not of the world. Putting our foot upon the road is both dangerous and consuming, but remembering Jesus’ admonition in the Sermon on the Mount, what does it profit you to gain anything (safety, peace, quiet, whatever) and, in the process, lose your soul? So, we begin by getting on that narrow road and following in the Master’s footsteps.

Once committed to the road, we must embrace the need for and practice of theology. We study God to know him like a husband studies his wife or parents study their child to know them. This is where the Scriptures and meditation come into play since our direct contact with God, by design, is limited. (Yes, it is a mystery why, but that is the way He wants it, and his direct intercession is rare and never guaranteed.) We read, mark, and inwardly digest (meditate on) the scriptures to progress from knowing about to knowing of our God, the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

As we come to know our God better, we come to trust him more completely. And because of that, we, like the Apostle Paul, can meet every circumstance of life, good or ill, because we too can do all things through Him who gives us strength. We are not alone on our journey. He is there to share our joys and support us in our sorrows, to correct us when we fall and make mistakes, and to tell us well done, calling us good and faithful when we are obedient.

As we come to know God and seriously embrace the journey, we begin to throw off anything that

would prevent our continued progress, especially the problems of idolatry. Nothing can replace the God we are coming to know. We distrust all non-symbolic representations of God since we immediately see the limiting factors these depictions place on the reality of the God with whom we have to do. We cannot box him in or limit him by our representations, no matter how lofty or seemingly effective they appear to be. Ultimately, they are what they are, limits on those who cannot be limited.

In addition, we lay aside all of the other things that become *little idols* for us, whether they are possessions (house, car, clothes (shoes for some women), church buildings, anything material), associations (our degrees, accomplishments, sports teams, even family and children within proper context), or desires (entertainments, drugs, alcohol, whatever ensnares us). God is our Lord and our focus, number one in our life. Everything else is in second place.

However, speaking of icons, the Father, executing his plan of redemption, did give us one icon, one representation that is always permissible: Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son. Jesus is the Icon of God the Father. Our Lord told his disciples, in response to their request to show them the Father, “*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*” Yet this incarnation of the Word, the eternal Son into human flesh and human frailty carried his problems for our understanding and knowing of our God.

The incarnate Son introduced into the theology of God the concept of multiple persons in the one God of Israel. The famous passage from [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” is only apparently in opposition to the idea of a Godhead of multiple persons as one God. The Hebrew word one (*echad*) in the passage can also mean unity, which is one of its meanings, harking back to the words of God at man’s creation: “Let us make man in our image.”

However, while we are still coming to terms with that profound revelation, Dr. Packer introduces us to the Holy Spirit, the one who testifies to, counsels, teaches, and comforts us, the third person of the Godhead. Nevertheless, despite definitive church counsels and creeds (Nicene and Athanasian), this understanding of our God’s multiple yet singular nature has been a historic object of contention, both within and without the Church. I believe that Dr. Packer does an excellent job of making this doctrine, which is foundational to the heart of our faith, both understandable and believable.

For many people studying this book, this initial section is the first time they have ever had to fully and without evasion address the nature of God, the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This section prevents them from letting the issues slide by, instead forcing them to address the triune nature of God head-on. That doesn’t mean that Packer overstresses difficult theology. He doesn’t, yet he finds a way to present the issues clearly and effectively to even the least studious Christians.

There is no way to complete this first section, read the arguments in the text, work through the study questions we have used, and still be the same person at the end. Each time I do this exercise, it changes me, and I have seen it change everyone who goes through this effort with me. It will change you. You would have to fight it and abandon the study so it does not affect you to prevent this. Please embrace the changes God is working within you, remembering that we all are growing children in the faith, no matter how far we think we have come.

Congratulations! Having accomplished this first section, we now have a foundation to proceed to in section two, which covers the attributes of God. It is aptly named Behold Your God. Behold is an interesting word encompassing both seeing *and* understanding something. Isn’t that what we want? Don’t we want to both see our God and to understand Him; don’t we want to know him? With that purpose in mind, we are prepared to move into the second section of Knowing God: ***Behold Your God***

Resources

Lord's Prayer

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom
and the power and the glory. Amen"

Nicene Creed

I/We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I/we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I/we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I/we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I/we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Creed of Saint Athanasius

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is

Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty's, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord, So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.

So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved is must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood; Who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.