

Our Knowable God

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Rev. Brian Bill

June 30-July 1, 2018

How do you really know what someone is like? You can start by looking at what their interests are. For instance, it would be very easy to conclude that I'm a Packers fan by looking at the sweet swag I've accumulated over the years.

I received this Green Baby Bobble Head that actually has my head on it from Cory McAnally for my birthday a couple months ago. On Sunday afternoon I was gifted with some more gifts (hold up chair, picture and book). On Wednesday I found additional Packer memorabilia on the table in my office (hold up sports cards).

Unbelievably, I experienced some Packer persecution when I posted a few of these images on social media. Here are some of the shots I took...

- *Is that fire-starting stuff?*
- *Boo! Go Bears!*
- *Yard sale?*
- *So sorry*
- *Go Geneseo! Starting early for the high school season?*

For many of you, knowing I'm a Packers fan tells you way more about me than you wanted to know. But actually, this is just part (a big part) of who I am. I have a lot of other interests and attributes. But the only way you would know them is if I chose to reveal them to you.

In a similar way, the way we get to know God is by studying His interests and attributes, His character and His characteristics. An attribute is what you "*attribute to someone.*" Specifically, God's attributes are those character qualities that uniquely define who He is and what He is like.

Depending on how you count them, there are about 20 attributes of God found in Scripture. We're only going to tackle 7 of them this summer – God is *knowable, holy, omnipotent, faithful, just, unchanging and loving*. While this series will not be exhaustive, it's my prayer that it will be inspirational and will motivate us to a lifelong pursuit of knowing and growing in our love for God. May we conclude that there is no one else like Him as we read in Exodus 15:11: "***Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?***"

May God stop us, stir us, and strengthen us during this series. There is nothing more practical than beholding and believing God – for until we know Him, we haven't even begun to live. This series will help us not only know *about* God, but to actually *know* Him more intimately and personally than we ever have before. I like Charles Spurgeon's perspective: "*Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the deity*"

If you want to go deeper in your knowledge of God, I recommend five books. I've posted links to them on the Sermon Extras tab on the website and app. The first two are classics and the last three are more contemporary.

Knowledge of the Holy by A.W. Tozer

Knowing God by J.I. Packer

Awe: Why it Matters for Everything We Think, Say and Do by Paul David Tripp

None Like Him by Jen Wilken

The Real God: How He Longs for You to See Him by Chip Ingram

Here are just a few quotes that capture both the gravity and the gladness of knowing Him.

Perhaps the most profound quote I've heard is from A.W. Tozer: *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...the heaviest obligation upon the Christian church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of him...the gravest question before the church is always God himself."*

I've also pondered this statement from J.I. Packer: *"What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God...once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord."*

Let's keep three truths in mind:

1. **All of God's attributes are eternally permanent with God.** They have always belonged to Him and they will always belong to Him.
2. **All of God's attributes are inseparably interconnected.** Each attribute is part of the whole nature of God. They are not like a slice of pie where we can just choose one we like but more like a tapestry that is woven together. God's love *and* wrath, His mercy *and* justice, His holiness *and* patience are continually functioning in a perfectly integrated yet infinitely complex way.
3. **Some of God's attributes are unique to Him while other characteristics can be passed along to us, though in a limited way.** A few of God's incommunicable attributes include His self-existence, transcendence, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Some of His communicable characteristics include love, grace, mercy, justice and goodness.

Amazingly, the Bible teaches that God *can* be known. That's astonishing, isn't it? The God of the Universe has chosen to reveal Himself to us. He longs for us to know Him more *fully*, more *accurately* and more *personally*. As a way to make theology (the study of God) not just theoretical, Jen Wilken suggests that we answer this question: *"How should the knowledge that God is _____ change the way I live?"* We could say it like this: *What measurable change should occur in my life as a result of meditating on God's immeasurable attributes?*

Grab your Bibles and turn to Isaiah 40:9: ***“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”***

The word **“behold”** has a number of nuances. It means, *“to perceive through sight, to peer, to spy out, to gaze intently upon, to observe fully”* and expresses strong feelings of surprise, hope, expectation and certainty. To **“behold”** has the idea of vividness and emotional involvement and is used in the imperative, meaning it’s a command. It is variously translated as *“Lo! Behold! Look! Note!”*

I keep coming back to a phrase I heard at a conference in April: *“We become what we behold.”* Here’s what I wrote down: *Tell me what you’re beholding and I’ll tell you what you’re becoming.*

It’s fascinating how the rest of Isaiah 40 celebrates God as both transcendent (far away) and immanent (close by). Tozer challenges us to see God in His immensity and in His immanence. Listen to how verse 10 describes Him as powerful, sovereign and judge: ***“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”*** In verse 11 we see Him as personal, shepherd and gentle: ***“He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in his arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”*** These are comforting words for young moms, aren’t they? God is majestic and yet I can call Him ‘mine.’

I love how the “Indescribable” song we sang earlier brings these two truths together:

*You placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name.
You are amazing God
Incomparable, unchangeable
You see the depths of my heart and You love me the same*

Isaiah then asks us to ponder two questions in verses 12-13. Question #1: ***“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?”***

Question #2: ***“Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel?”*** Who has measured everything? *God has.* Who has measured God? *No one.*

Chip Ingram writes: *“What you think about God shapes your whole relationship with Him. What you believe God thinks about you determines how close you will grow toward Him.”*

Here’s how I want to say it: *A high view of God leads to holy living and a low view of God leads to low living.* Paul David Tripp makes the point that spiritual growth is all about recapturing our sense of awe of the Almighty: *“We don’t have a contentment problem. We have an awe problem...once awe of God is lost, the loss of heart to obey isn’t far off...if awe of God does not grip your heart, the anxieties of this life will likely influence how you live.”*

Knowable Yet Incomprehensible

The Bible is clear that we can have a true and personal knowledge of God and yet we will never totally understand Him exhaustively. Jen Wilken adds, *“He is infinite – immeasurable, unquantifiable, uncontainable, unbound, utterly without limit. God is incomprehensible. This does not mean He is unknowable, but that He is unable to be fully known.”*

Listen to how Solomon says it in 1 Kings 8:27: **“Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!”** David declares in Psalm 139:6: **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.”** Psalm 145:3 explains: **“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”** Job 26:14: **“Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?”**

And as Paul concludes His glorious exposition of the gospel, he breaks out into praise in Romans 11:33-34: **“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’”** [That’s a quote from Isaiah 40]

Erik Thoennes is spot on when he writes: *“Not only can we never know everything there is to know about God, we can never know everything there is to know about even one aspect of God’s character or work.”* He gives some reasons for this:

- **God is infinite and we are finite**
- **Because our minds are affected by sin, we are clouded in our ability to know God.** Our tendency is to distort, pervert and confuse truth and to use, or rather abuse, it for selfish ends rather than for God’s glory.
- **God has chosen to not reveal some things** as Deuteronomy 29:29 says: **“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”**

Here are some implications of the incomprehensibility of God.

- This should cause us to be humble as we realize we always have more to learn
- We must respond with wonder and awe

Having said all that, God has made it possible for us to know Him. There are two ways that people try to do so today.

1. Our imagination. Each of us carries around a mental picture of who God is. That picture is a collage of a lifetime of experiences, impressions and assumptions. The process begins early in life as we observe our parents – those seemingly all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present beings who rule the cosmos of our home – for better or for worse. As children, we instinctively project our view of our parents onto our impression of God.

As we grow up, other information is added to our imagination of God. These include our experiences with churches – all the sights and sounds and symbols and sermons. As we mature,

we keep updating our Deity database, by accumulating inferences from our teachers, from movies, from music, from current events, and from our own observations about life.

Everyone has an image of God. Some of us view Him as a robo-cop God, a deity with a big stick who runs around policing the universe. Others envision a Mr. Goodwrench kind of God, who just fixes problems. Others imagine a Grandfatherly God, from whom seldom is heard a discouraging word. Still others view God like a vending machine, thinking He's there just to give us what we want.

Chip Ingram writes: *“Our distorted view of God is at the root of all of our problems. We've created a god in our minds who only faintly resembles the God of Scripture. These mental idols comfort our emotions, but they are powerless to deliver us from evil or transform our lives. Left to ourselves, we tend to reduce God to manageable terms. In other words, we shrink him. Faced with this awesome, all-knowing, all-powerful, holy God, the exposure makes us so uncomfortable that we turn on our mental compactors and shrink him...we try to tame him, or we seek to manage him...we invent a new deity who will submit to our wishes...instead of falling down as servants before this awesome God, we try to get him to be our servant so we can use him for our purposes...we make him accountable to us rather than humbly realizing we are completely accountable to him.”*

Our personal picture of God may be *factual* or *faulty*. When we rely on imagination alone, we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we really know God, when we don't.

2. God's Revelation. Our imagination is always inadequate. The only way to know God is for Him to reveal Himself to us. Apart from His revelation, we could never know the things that concern Him, the things He hopes for, and the things that bring Him joy. Thankfully, God has revealed Himself in at least three ways.

- **Through Creation.** Romans 1:20 says, *“For his **invisible attributes**, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”* Psalm 19:1: *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”*

But, this natural revelation of God is limited. We can know the *power* of God by observing His creation, but we can't know His *personality*. We can know He is *creator* but we won't know His *character*. While we see evidence for His existence by looking at His world, we won't know what He's like without His Word.

- **Through the Bible.** God has supernaturally revealed Himself through the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:16: *“All Scripture is **breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.**”* If you want to get to know God, you do it by getting to know this book. If you want to hear from God, then read this book. The Bible is bursting with direct statements from God about God – and it reveals His mind, His heart, and His will for us.

God reveals Himself through His world, through His Word and most clearly through THE WORD, His Son Jesus Christ.

- **Through Jesus Christ.** Hebrews 1:3 says: ***“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”*** Jesus reveals who God the father is. As Jesus said in John 8:19, ***“If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”*** Once we get to know Jesus, we get to know the Father. John 17:3: ***“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”***

Bragging Rights

Have you ever noticed how much we like to brag? We like to brag about our degrees or our promotions, or our cars, or our kids, or about how many important people we know. It’s almost as if we have to validate our own existence by boasting about what we have, who we are, or who we know.

When Muhammad Ali was the current reigning world heavyweight champion, he was on an airplane preparing for takeoff. The flight attendant came by and reminded him to fasten his seat belt. Ali said, *“Superman don’t need a seat belt.”* To which the quick-thinking flight attendant replied, *“Superman don’t need an airplane, either.”* Ali buckled his seat belt.

In Jeremiah’s day, the situation was similar to ours today. People had turned away from God and were trusting in themselves and in their own efforts. Listen to Jeremiah 9:23: ***“Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches.’”*** The word **“boast”** means *“to shout, to shine.”* We are prone to boast about these three things – wisdom, power and wealth. In Bible times as well as today, the important people included the scholar, the athlete, the politician, the warrior, and the wealthy.

Verse 24 tells us that if we want to boast or brag, then we should tell others that we know God: ***“But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”*** The word **“understands”** is the idea of having insight and the word **“knows”** refers to having an intimate relationship. We must have facts *and* friendship, revelation *and* relationship. We’re called to know His character and to grow in his characteristics! Since God ***“practices steadfast, love, and righteousness,”*** He is pleased when we practice loyal love, when we stand up for justice and when we live righteously. God is delighted when we know Him and when we grow in Him. *We know that we know God when we grow in God.*

What then should we do? Listen to the challenge found in Hosea 6:3: ***“Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”*** To press on means to move toward the goal with undiminished vigor. It has the idea of *“pursuing and chasing after,”* to set our focus on knowing our Knowable God – and letting nothing get in our way.

Do You Know Him?

J.I. Packer issues a challenge for us as we consider the attributes of God: *“It is possible to know about God without knowing God intimately. This is the danger of sterile intellectualism. It’s easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking that since we know a lot of things about God, that we must know Him well.”*

My view of God growing up was that He was big and mighty and mad at me. He was distant and disappointed in me. I’ll never forget attending my first Bible study when I was a sophomore in college. There were about 12 guys crammed into a small dorm room with Bibles on their laps. I didn’t say a word the whole night but was impacted by one overwhelming observation. These guys talked about God like they knew Him as a friend. Several weeks later, I entered a relationship with God by trusting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You too can begin a friendship with God. He is the creator of the world but He is also close right now. He sent His Son to die as your substitute so that your sins can be forgiven. Reach out and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and begin a relationship with Him.

Communion

It’s obvious I’m a Packer Backer by what I have, what I talk about and what I do. We can learn about God by what He does and by what He talks about as well. He’s revealed who He is and what He’s done in His Word. All of this revelation is designed to lead to a relationship.

A great way to get to know someone is to have a meal with him. Research has confirmed what we already know to be true: We may think that the biggest benefit of eating together as a family is to ensure everyone has food in their stomachs. However, sharing meals does more than feed each person physically; it also feeds them emotionally and draws them together.

On the night before He was betrayed, Jesus had a meal with his friends. This meal was filled with revelation and relationship. He invites us now to this supper. If you don’t know Him, now is the time. If you do know Him but have drifted, use this time to confess any sins. Determine to get to know Him better than you ever have before.

It’s important to have good manners when you have a meal. The Apostle Paul gives us three ways to demonstrate good manners from 1 Corinthians 11.

1. Look up. Verse 23: *“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”*

2. Look within. Verse 28: *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

3. Look around. Verse 33: *“Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”*

Listen to these words:

²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Knowing You

We're going to sing the song, "Knowing You" while the elements are distributed.

*Knowing You, Jesus, knowing You
There is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
Now my heart's desire is to know you more
To be found in you and known as yours*