



THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

PART 1 : KNOWING GOD

CORNERSTONE
CHURCH

EQUIPPING
COURSES

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD PART 1 : KNOWING GOD

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PART 1 : KNOWING GOD

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Preface

INTRODUCTION TO DOCTRINE

Doctrine is a summary or set of teaching on a certain subject in Scripture. You create a doctrine by accumulating all that is revealed in the Bible about a certain topic and drawing it all together to form a conclusion.

The many broad topics which form a doctrine are what will be discussed in this course. Understanding the many subjects in the Bible is a very important part of the Christian life.

The purpose of this course is not to teach a particular set of doctrines as much as to teach how we can come to form solid, good, liveable, Biblical doctrine. This is about strengthening our faith and using the Scriptures in the way God intended. It's no good learning set out doctrines from a textbook at a theological seminary. Sooner or later in our Christian life, we will be faced with many other doctrines, and if we don't have a solid conviction of our own, these other doctrines can undo us and perhaps even shipwreck our faith. (See 1 Timothy 1.)

In Acts 20:27, the apostle Paul explains that forming solid doctrine is the exact task that he gave himself to in his ministry.

Acts 20:27

...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

From this Scripture we can see that:

- There is such a thing as “the whole counsel of God”.
- This is the understanding and proclamation of God's entire plan and revelation.
- It has to come from the Scriptures.
- The Church and its leaders are to make it their duty to declare it.
- This task is a battle that should not be avoided.

Why study the doctrines of the Bible?

- Because the Bible promises that people will easily be led astray from sound teaching and into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4) - this puts us all at risk.
- Because everyone should know what their Bible teaches.
- Because Christianity is about *knowing* and *doing*. Doctrine tells us what to know and what to do. It's not about head knowledge - it's about *living*. It's very practical.
- Because doctrine teaches us more about God.
 - Doctrine should combine both the mind and heart.
 - It teaches us about God so *that we may live with Him* (and in Him) better.

There are eight generally accepted branches of doctrine:

1. **Revelation** - the doctrine of the Word of God
2. **Theology proper** - the doctrine of God
3. **Cosmology** - the doctrine of creation
4. **Anthropology** - the doctrine of man
5. **Soteriology** - the doctrine of salvation
6. **Pneumatology** - the doctrine of the Holy Spirit
7. **Ecclesiology** - the doctrine of the church
8. **Eschatology** - the doctrine of last things

Different writers will group these general teachings in different ways. There is no exact right or wrong way.

Danger

When approaching doctrine a *real danger* should be acknowledged before we begin.

In today's world, knowledge is praised above practical skill. For example a person with a degree is thought of as intellectually superior to a person with a learned practical skill - for example, a psychologist vs a plumber.

This places the person who approaches doctrine in a position where they may be tempted to become clever, but not much else. There is very little point in getting to

know about God if there is no attempt to *know* Him personally. There is a difference. Likewise, there is no point learning about the teaching of prayer in the Bible if there is no attempt to actually pray.

Therefore, *beware*: This is a trap that you should not fall into. **Spirituality and knowledge are not the same thing.** When it comes to forming and having good, solid doctrine, we have to first actually know God. We have a *living* faith and worship a *living* God. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is *alive and active*. Therefore, we start by knowing God so we can form good doctrine that helps us to know God even further. Knowing God, living with Him and in Him, is the point of doctrine and theology.

Part One

KNOWING GOD

Welcome to the first part of the course on Bible doctrine. This course is on knowing God and is intended to do three things:

1. Explain and summarise the Bible's teaching about God
2. Put it in such a way so that this is not simply about knowing a whole lot of facts. Instead, we will get to know about God to actually get to know Him better!
3. Provide us the important stepping blocks that will help us to use the Scriptures to know God better.

KNOWING THAT GOD EXISTS

Knowing that God exists is the logical place to start on your journey of knowing God. Can we know for sure that God exists? How can we know for certain that we will find the right God?

Many people claim to have knowledge of God or god(s). Many people claim to serve and receive power from God or a god. Many others claim that God is not a person but there is only matter and spiritual energy, or what we might call God exists within matter (pantheism). Others claim there are many gods (polytheism - for example, the Hindu religion) and, of course, others claim there is no god but only matter (atheism).

This study is important as it will allow us to answer the following questions:

1. How we know God exists
2. How we know the God of the Bible exists
3. How we may answer others on the existence of God

We are to start with assumption that God exists, is knowable and we can know things about him.

Since we are studying the Bible, this is an important point.

- The Bible assumes the existence of God and makes no attempts to prove His

existence. (See Genesis 1).

- The Bible claims all people have a sense that God exists.

Romans 1:19 – 20 talks about how everyone has been given an innate knowledge of God. Acts 17:22 – 30 talks about how God is not far from anyone. He has made it that He can be known if people look for Him.

Romans 1:18 says it is possible to ‘suppress’ the knowledge of God with wickedness.

1. There are people who claim they are sure that God doesn’t exist and deny that all people have an innate knowledge of God.
2. While we can sympathise for someone like this, it is simply not true. People are not born atheists.

At one point in history it was possible, when studying doctrine, to move directly into teaching about who God is, but in today’s world an understanding of His existence is important because many deny this fact.

Are there any arguments proving the existence of God?

There are in fact no logical arguments that can prove without any doubt that God exists. This doesn’t mean we can’t rationally show that God must exist. Conversely, there are no logical arguments that can prove without any doubt that God doesn’t exist.

However, there have been at least four arguments used in history to show that God most likely exists, all of which have flaws. This all falls into the realm of ‘apologetics’ but any good theologian needs to be well versed in apologetics.

The reason God cannot be proven is because He has existed before us and actually proves the existence of everything else. For example, it can be proven you exist because your parents can confirm it. But we can’t do that with God.

Here are these four arguments:

1. **The Cosmological argument** – This argument follows that everything in the universe has a cause. Thus the universe itself must have a cause and such a great

universe can only be caused by God.

2. **The Teleological argument** - This argument follows that there is such intricate, complex and astoundingly rich life on the earth and that can only be explained by an appropriate God.
3. **The Ontological argument** - This argument is philosophical. It says that the idea of God is one that is 'greater than which nothing can be imagined'. It then argues that God must exist because it is greater to exist than not to (and that since there is the idea of something greater in this world, God must exist).
4. **The Moral argument** - This argument follows that man's sense of right and wrong, which is innate, proves a creator.

All of these proofs for God are generally more effective for someone who already believes. They are useful for unbelievers too as they do provide good answers for questions.

At this point, then, it's important to remember that the only way for a person to come to know God exists is by a work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the only real proof of God

If we were alive two thousand and some years ago in the middle-east we would have seen God because we would have seen Jesus. The only real way to prove God exists is to come to a conclusion about Jesus.

- Jesus was a figure of history - an actual man.
- Jesus was powerful - even His critics never denied this.
- Jesus claimed he was God - He either lied or didn't.

If your belief is that Jesus was (and is) who he says He was, then Jesus is the best proof for God. Jesus is a man in history who was God on the earth.

Part Two

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

People have different ways of getting to know God or their god. But the God of the Christian Bible has His own way to get us to know Him.

Why is this important?

- There are wrong methods for knowing God.
- We need the right perspective on the Scriptures and their revealing of God.
- Pluralism is rampant (this refers to the idea that there are many ways to God).
- We are to be certain that we can truly know God.

People's own methods for getting to know God

A peripheral examination of religious efforts in the world will reveal a number of ways people attempt to come into contact with God. The letter to the Colossians actually highlights some of these ways:

1. Gnosticism

Some people believe that there is special knowledge to be obtained that will lead to a knowledge of God. Various groups claim to have this 'special knowledge'.

Modern spiritual teachings show how to find this knowledge within. Others teach it is gained externally.

2. Legalism

Vast numbers of people create for themselves a pseudo-Jewish-Christian mix of religiosity. Some people lean to a hyper moralism to know God. These people believe that impeccable morals are the answer.

3. Asceticism

Many people are brutally hard on themselves. People deny themselves all sorts of things and even punish their bodies with intensely painful, regular and harsh treatment in vain attempts to know God.

4. Mysticism

A large number turn to searching for spiritual experiences that will lead to God. People like this are always looking for 'the meaning of life', are undergoing endless spiritual journeys and continually searching and researching another avenue.

All of these attempts are a response to the innate desire to find God. But none of them can bring anyone into a real knowledge of God. They all fail because they do not include the Holy Spirit's intervention. Without that intervention, people are forever blinded by the devil.

2 Corinthians 4 : 4

In their case the god of this world [the devil] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The God of the Bible is knowable at an intimate level

- Jesus says to his disciples, *"I no longer call you disciples... I now call you friends."* (John 15:15)
- Abraham is called the friend of God. (Isaiah 41:8)
- Galatians 4:6 says we may call God 'Abba Father'.

The only way to know the God of the Bible in a deeper way is when He reveals himself

God reveals himself in His way to everyone.

- This revealing is in the depth of the conscience (Romans 1:20)
- This revealing is insufficient to save (Romans 2:12)
- This revealing is sufficient to condemn (Romans 2:15)

God can reveal himself in a deeper way.

- This only happens by a working of the Holy Spirit. John 16:8 says, *"He will convince the world..."*
- Hebrews 6:4 says, *"...having once for all time been enlightened.."*

This convincing happens when people hear the gospel of Jesus.

- Only Jesus really knows God, only Jesus can reveal Him to us.
- The hearing of the gospel is a general call and can be a particular call (see Matthew 22:14).

The convincing takes root when people affirm the gospel.

- They believe it in the heart which leads to a confession (Romans 10: 9-10).
- This is by grace through faith only (Ephesians 2:8).

The convincing of the Spirit leads a person to know by revelation that:

- Jesus of Nazareth is God. Jesus is the saviour that God promised.
- Jesus is the only one who can atone for sin.
- Faith in Jesus alone is what is required for a person to be made totally right with God.
- Jesus has power of over death and life (Romans 4:25).
- Jesus defeated sin, death and the devil (Hebrews 2: 14,15)

God will only be known through the Lord Jesus Christ

John 14 : 6

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

- There is no other way to know the God of the Bible other than through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Knowing God starts with Jesus making you acceptable to Him.
- Knowing God continues by Jesus mediating our relationship with God.
- Jesus, by the Spirit, is the only one who teaches us about God.

Even though God can be known, he will never be fully known

- God is infinite and incomprehensible. (Psalm 145:3.)
- He is beyond knowing. (Psalm 147:5.)
- His thoughts and ways are above ours. (Isaiah 55:9.)

Question: Sometimes people think that heaven will be boring. What do you think of

that in light of Him never being fully known?

Our knowledge of God is true

What we can know about God is true.

- All that the Bible reveals about God is true – we can know facts about God.
- The Bible is the collection of God’s words to us.
- It reveals the ways, character and what we are to know about Him.
- It always applies, has no mistakes, is sufficient for life, and has all authority.

We don’t have to know everything to relate closely with Him.

- We can know God himself.

John 17 : 3

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. There is a difference between knowing the facts about someone and actually knowing them personally.

Our knowledge of God can and should grow

Our knowledge of God can increase.

Colossians 1:10 *“Increasing in the knowledge of God”.*

Getting to know God in a deeper way requires at least the following:

- Giving God time
- Reading the Bible
- Prayer
- Listening to teaching / preaching
- Breaking bread
- Getting involved in a local church
- Fellowship with God by the Holy Spirit
 - Walking with Him (Galatians 5:16).
 - Listening to the Holy Spirit
 - Being honest with God – confessing sin, instant obedience
- Allowing / Being open to Him to lead you into more true fellowship

Questions:

1. In what ways have you tried to get to know God? Have they worked as you had hoped?
2. Why do you think God decided to reveal himself to us?
3. How can we be sure that what we are learning about God is in fact right and when we get to heaven we won't have to change a whole lot of our thinking?

Part Three

KNOWING WHAT GOD IS LIKE - PART 1

Scripture reveals a great deal about God. Again, just as there was a difference between knowing about God and actually knowing Him, there is a difference between knowing what God is like and beginning to 'live on God'. For example someone may know that God reveals himself as merciful, but never come to the place where they experience (and receive) forgiveness from Him.

It is possible to worship a god other than the God of the Bible. Surprisingly, some people worship the God of the Bible but have actually made up a god all of their own. Knowing what God is like means we are to understand clearly what He has revealed about Himself and relate with Him accordingly.

Why is knowing what God is like important?

- It's hard to relate to someone if you know nothing about them.
- Not all we come to think about God is right.
- There are lots of wrong thoughts about God in our world.
- Knowing what He is like will help mature our relationship with Him.

HOW SHOULD WE DESCRIBE WHAT GOD IS LIKE?

There are no specific rules that we need to follow in describing God (ie. We can use our own language) but it does remain important to be able describe properly what God is like and how He is towards us. That's why we read the Bible, to see how God has revealed Himself.

Remember the reason we learn about the aspects of God, His nature and His character is that we may come to 'live on God'. The God who is the Great Shepherd needs to become your shepherd every day. Jeremiah 2:5 says, "*They worshipped vanity and so became vanity*". We become like the god we worship. This is a very practical matter.

In these notes all the aspects of God cannot be covered.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT GOD IS ONE

Although we can meditate on different aspects of God He is not separate in being. He is all of His attributes and characteristics at the same time and thoroughly so. No one attribute overrides another, none are ever hidden or not expressed. We are discussing what makes Him, Him.

We should always keep in mind that we are to live in the light of what God is like.

FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS OF GOD'S NATURE

The following is taken from Michael Eaton's book *Experiencing God*.¹

God is Spirit (John 4:20-24)

- This means that God is invisible (1 Timothy 1:17).
- This affects our worship and approach to Him.
- The only way to see God was to see Jesus (John 1:18).
- God is everywhere, at the same time, at all times.

God is three-in-one

The common word for this aspect of God is "the Trinity". This is one of the most difficult aspects of God to understand.

God is revealed in Scripture as three people and one person. Let's take a look at some of the scriptures that address this:

There is only one God

- Deuteronomy 6:4 "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*"
- Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 2:5

¹ Michael Eaton 1998. *Experiencing God*. Cumbria, UK: OM Publishing

God is presented as three distinct people

- The Father is distinct
 - Jesus calls God his Father (Luke 2:49; 12:32)
- The Father is not the Son, nor is He the Holy Spirit
 - The Son is distinct
 - The Son is not the Father, nor is the Son the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit is distinct
 - The Spirit is not the Son nor the Father

Each person is presented as being God

- The Father is God (2 Peter 1:17)
- The Son is God (John 1:18 talking of Jesus)
- The Spirit is God (Acts 5:3,4)

These statements together form the belief of the three-ness of God. God is three distinct people, each person is God, and there is one God.

Sometimes we could say that the Father is the planner, Jesus is the mediator, and the Holy Spirit is the executive. But, like most explanations of the Trinity, this will fall short somewhere.

Throughout Church history there have been heresies that have misunderstood the Trinity. It's good to be aware of these.

1. There are not three Gods - this is known as "tritheism". There is only one God.
2. There is not one God who takes different forms at different times - this is known as "modalism". It is one God, three different persons.
3. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not 'less' in any way than God - this is known as "subordinationism". All three persons of the Trinity are God and equal as such.

God is to be experienced as three people but one God.

God has a never-changing character

See *Malachi 3:6*

What this doesn't mean

- He is cold and unbending
- He is unaffected by us and doesn't engage with us or take any of our decisions or desires into account.
- That the future and all of our lives are subject to fatalism. This is a very destructive idea of God. God is a relational Father, not a dictatorial, cold tyrant; and he is not like a machine or a clock. In philosophy, this idea of God is often called "deism".

What it does mean

- His *character* does not change (Hebrews 13:8)
- His *promises* do not change
- His *habits* do not change
- His *purposes* do not change
- His *salvation* is always reliable and He will always do what He promised to do
- He is *always good* and *always loving*.

Question: What do you make of scriptures that say that God '*changed his mind*'? (Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10).

God is totally independent

- He is utterly self-sufficient (Acts 17:25; Job 22:2)
 - He does not need anything from us, but we need Him.
 - He is totally self-sufficient and sustains not only himself but all things (Psalm 55:22; Romans 11:36).
- He does according to His will all that pleases Him (Daniel 4:35).
- People are to him like clay in the hands of a potter (Romans 9:21).
- "*His counsel and pleasure is the final explanation for everything that happens or is allowed to happen.*" - M. Eaton.
- This makes salvation glorious - He saved people just because He wanted to!

Questions:

1. Is there any point disputing with God?
2. Do you sometimes feel as though you are doing God a favour by being obedient?
3. Many people feel as though God needs some help at times. Can you see how wrong this is?

God is alive

(Hebrews 9:14)

- He is regularly called 'the living God'.
- He is not cold or immovable but responds to our lives.
- He is not an idol - there is a distinct difference! (1 Thessalonians 1:9)
- Life with Him is not static.
 - He responds to our sins and our obedience.

God is powerful

(Luke 1:37)

- Creation helps us to understand God's power.
 - He needs nothing to work with
- God demonstrates power in taking care of world history
- God demonstrates power in dealing with people
- God has power over Satan
- God has the ability to do as he pleases

1. KNOWING GOD'S CHARACTER

This list is mainly taken from RT Kendall's "Understanding Theology, Vol. 1"² with some changes.

1. God is a personal God

This doesn't only mean that he is knowable personally but that He is a person.

- He is not a force or power in the sky
 - He has feelings, mind and will
- He is never 'it' but always 'He'
- He is essentially masculine

The word 'personal' is not used exactly in the Bible to describe God but the teaching is evident throughout.

- God is often described as though He were a normal human person.

² RT Kendall 1996. Understanding Theology Vol. 1. Ross-Shire, UK: Christian Focus

- This language is not literal but does show that there is something personal about God.
 - He has human parts: face (Genesis 4:14), ears (James. 5:4), a nose (Psalm 18:5), arms (Isaiah 52:12)
 - He has a human emotions: love (John 3:16), jealous (Exodus 20:5), angry (Exodus 4:14)
 - He performs human actions: sees (Genesis 16:13), speaks (Genesis 8:15)

We resemble Him in a personal way. (Genesis 1:27.) Although He is God and His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9) He does sympathise with us (Hebrews 4:15). It's also important to remember that Jesus was a man - God became a man. He is intimately personal.

Questions:

1. How does God being personal affect how we are to relate to him?
2. Do you find yourself treating God as far removed and unconcerned?
3. Do you think you can be over familiar with God?

2. God is a holy God (Exodus 3:5)

- There is nothing quite like Him (Exodus 15:11)
- God is without any sin, fault or defect (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- Gods holiness means we need a saviour to relate to him (Hebrews 4:15)
- Holiness means “set apart for a purpose”. God Himself sets Himself apart for a purpose. He has purposes and will bring His purposes about.
- People are to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16)
 - Sanctification is the process of each believer becoming more holy (1 Thessalonians 4:13) - becoming “*fully grown*” and “*mature*” in Christ. The Bible sometimes calls this maturing “*perfecting*”, depending on the translation. (See 1 John 4:12; Matthew 5:48; 2 Corinthians 13:9; James 1:1-27; and many others.)
 - God sets us apart for His purposes of righteousness, justice and love. As His people, we are not becoming holy for the sake of becoming holy, but for the sake of humankind and God's purposes for humankind. Holiness is about God's mission of love to bring others to Him. It's not about becoming some holy, wise, ascetic man on a mountain. Martin Luther's “Third Use of the Law” is particularly helpful in understanding this.

3. He is a merciful God (Exodus 34:6)

- It was His choice not to punish but to save people (2 Peter 3:9)
- His mercy is seen in His choosing people before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4)
- Jesus died when people were opposed to God because of His mercy (Romans 5:6)
- His mercy is seen when He saves people by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8)

4. He is a just God (Exodus 34:7)

- This means He is just and fair (Psalm 89:14)
 - This is not human fairness
 - It is God's perfect dealings with people according to what is right
- This means He must punish sin (Exodus 34:7)
 - He punishes sin by death (Romans 6:23)
- This means He disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:7-11)

5. He is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5)

- He will not tolerate any rivals (Exodus 34:14)
- He hates any form of idolatry. It makes something other than Him worthy of worship, which He hates as it is totally untrue.
- He is jealous for His people (James 4:5)

6. He is a faithful God (1 Corinthians. 1:9)

- He will never leave us or write us off (Hebrews 13:5)
- He will supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19)
- He makes a way of escape in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)

7. He is a truthful God (Titus 1:2)

- He requires truth in our dealings with Him (Psalm 51:6)
- His Son is truth (John 14:6)
- His Word is truth (John 14:16-17)
- His Spirit is truth (John 17:7)

Part Four

KNOWING WHAT GOD IS LIKE - PART 2

There is so much to know about God that we will continue to grow in our knowledge of Him for the rest of our lives. Here is more to consider.

KNOWING GOD BY NAME

The Bible has a lot to say about the name and names of God.

- God's name is his character, His being, His nature
 - Genesis 4:17 - to call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon Him to be who He is and act as He has revealed Himself to act.

The Bible has a lot to say about how we should treat God's name

- We may call upon His name
 - Asking Him to act as His character permits
- We pray in Jesus' name
 - Our prayers are backed by who Jesus is
- We gather in His name
 - Believing He is present
- We proclaim, confess, magnify, exalt, cherish and seek His name.
- We are not to use His name in vain (Isaiah 52:5)

What do some of the names of God mean?

Elohim - simply means God. It appears 2570 times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the Greek equivalent is **Theos**. It could mean any god, but it means the God of the Bible in the context of His actions.

LORD - Yahweh. This name was taken by God during the Exodus. It simply means 'watch what I am doing now, that is who I am'. It's the name used most commonly in

relationship with God. When used it always carries these three connotations ³

1. The God who redeems people by the blood of the lamb.
2. The God who steps into lives in bondage to bring release.
3. The God who chooses people and becomes their God.

Lord - Adoni. It simply means king or sovereign, Lord or master.

Lord of hosts – or, the “Lord who is hosts”. This refers to a multiplicity of all power and resources and potentialities.

El Shaddai – the God who comes down to rescue people when they are helpless. He takes you from the dungeon to the throne in one step.

El Elyon – We first see this in Genesis 14 and it means “God on the throne.” The God above every other god who claims deity. Everything else is subject to Him.

El Roi – We see this first in Genesis 16:13 – 14. This means “the God who sees me.” He sees every failure, jealousy, sinfulness; everything. Yet still treats us with mercy and kindness.

El Olam – We see this first in Genesis 21:22-34. It means that God is the everlasting God. He will always be there.

El Bethel – God took this name when we read about Jacob. It means God is the “*God of Bethel*”. This refers to Jacob’s story where God revealed himself to Jacob, intervened in his life, and made promises to him, despite Jacob’s sin and purposeless wandering. God has a habit of intervening in lives that people have ruined by their own senselessness. He saves them, rescues them and then uses them.

El Jirah – the Lord will see to it, He will get it done.

El Nissi – This means “my banner”

El Shalom – This means “my peace”

El Rapha – This means “healing” or “my healing”.

3 Michael Eaton 1998. Experiencing God. Cumbria, UK: OM Publishing

El Tsidkenu - This means the “Lord my righteousness”

Jesus - the Lord will save!

Immanue-El - God is with us! (Isaiah 7:14).

There are more than what is listed here. We would do well to develop a habit of meditating on the names of God as we will learn what God is really like. It is too easy to assume what God is like and so, rather, we are to know Him as He reveals himself to be.

GOD THE FATHER

“Father” is not a technical name for God but rather a metaphor that shows some important meditations of God.

God is the Father to everyone in one sense

- He is the creator, life-giver, protector, law giver

God is the Father to Israel

- By covenant (Exodus 4:22)

God is Father to Jesus

- Matthew 3:17

God is the Father in a special way to His children

- Those who believe in Jesus (John 20:17)
- The believer can call him ‘ABBA’ (a reverent way to say ‘Dad’) Father.
- Contains affection, security, care, authority and more.

Believers are adopted to be part of Gods family

- Galatians 4:5
- We are made heirs along with Jesus (Romans 8:17)

Believers will be treated by Him as a Father should treat his children

- Provide direction - 1 Thessalonians 3:11
- Discipline - Hebrews 12:7
- Care - Matthew 6:32
- All that is contained in His names and characteristics

Part Five

KNOWING THE WAYS OF GOD

In the Scriptures we see two people where God offers them anything they would like. Solomon asks for wisdom and Moses asks that he could “*know God’s ways*” (Exodus 33:13). Moses was essentially asking if he could know God’s mannerisms, His habits, His behaviour. Why is this important? Hebrews 3 tells us that God wanted Israel to know His ways, but they failed to understand His behaviour.

Hebrews 3 : 10 - 11, 19

¹⁰ *Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’*

¹¹ *As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”*

...

¹⁹ *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

Israel not understanding God’s ways cost them dearly. They didn’t get where God wanted them to go. They complained, moaned and fell into unbelief. We are warned that the same thing could happen to us:

Hebrews 3 : 12

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Getting to know the ways of God is part of seeking to know Him.

Remember what seeking him entails:

- Coming in faith
 - Believing that you are accepted in Jesus
- Being honest in your dealings with God
- Learning to enjoy His presence more and more
- Giving God time
 - Seeking with all your heart

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS OF GOD?

God is always working out a bigger plan.

(Isaiah 55:8, Habbakuk 1:5)

Large scale

- God has a plan He has been working into history
- His plan is to save as many people as possible
- He is the God of all nations and in charge of world history Psalm 47:8
- He knows more than us. He will bring world history to the correct closure in the perfect way.
 - This may not make sense to us all the time.

Godliness

- God saved us so we could be like Him in holiness. 1 Thessalonians 4:7
 - He is active in our lives to achieve this end alone
 - He is not out to destroy us
- Suffering
 - 2 Timothy 4:5, Hebrews 2:10
 - Even suffering has a purpose in God's greater scheme.
 - Suffering is one of His ways to produce what He wants in us.
 - Through suffering, God refines our faith in Him and this results in us producing steadfastness and becoming "*perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*". See James 1: 1-27

Questions:

1. Have you found yourself complaining that it feels as though God has forgotten you? Is this true at all?
2. Have you believed others when they say 'God is dead' because He doesn't act when or how you think He should?

God doesn't want people to forget about him

- He led Israel in the wilderness to learn that man doesn't live on anything but God.
- He warns Israel that when things go well, they will tend to forget Him.
- He will not let this happen.
- See Deuteronomy 8:1-20.

Question: Do you think rich people can fall into some kind of suffering if they don't acknowledge God?

God has a habit of putting people into crisis.

(Exodus 16:4.)

- God will put us into a crisis to reveal what is in our hearts.
- He tests us through different situations and ways.
- We have to learn not to panic.
- The testing is to refine and perfect our faith, so we may lack nothing in godliness (James 1: 1-27.)

Question: Do you believe that God's desire is that people live a life void of crisis? Why?

God sends help in time of need, but never before the time is right

- He will give us grace to help us (Hebrews 4:16).
- This forms part of the testing.
- He will not stop the test too early, but it doesn't last forever.

God works all things together for good

- Romans 8:28
- Michael Eaton says, *'When everything is going wrong, everything is going right!'*
- He works everything (present suffering, trouble, weakness) for good.

God delays answers to prayer

- God does answer prayer
- But he often delays His answer
- Sometimes He wants us to get ready for the answer before He gives it

God works slowly according to human perception

- 2 Peter 3:9
- God is infinitely patient. We like this in some respects (His judgement and

punishment) but not in others! Learn to enjoy God's patience.

He does not always act according to human logic

- His ways are not ours! We think He should do things in a way that seems right to us that He simply won't do.

God has many mysteries surrounding Him

- Some things we will never know. At times we will ask 'why' and He will not tell us in this life.
- Some things about Him and about life we will never know for sure.
- Deuteronomy 29:29.

Israel grumbled because they did not know God's ways. They never knew His habits. They complained and accused Him of forgetting them. They failed. We are to know His ways, it will help us relax and enjoy God as He is. It will keep us from panicking and move joyously through our life in relationship to a God who has ways all of His own.

Questions:

1. Have you noticed more of God's ways in Scripture?
2. Have you noticed how knowing His ways and telling others can help in the Christian walk?

Part Six

LIVING WITH THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

The reason we want to know about God is so that we know God himself!

All the aspects of God are to affect how we relate to him. There is a big difference between getting excited about theology and living with God!

There are a few things to know about God when wanting to live with Him:

He wants to be believed and worshipped

- God cannot lie. Hebrews 6:18
- He is truth.
- Everything He ever says can be taken as fully trustworthy.
- He wants people to believe Him above everything else they will ever hear. No one can know God unless they are willing to take Him at His word. Hebrews 11:6.
- He loves praise
- He will tolerate no rivals
- He tells us how to worship Him

His will and ours

- God has a will and so do we. These may differ. See Luke 22:42.
- He does not tell us to destroy our will and put it aside, but rather to love laying our will down to take up His better will. This takes great trust from our part.

The God of the Bible wants to be talked to

- He wants us to access Him - prayer.
- He wants us to be honest with him, let him know our needs and share our hearts with him.

Openness to His Word

- Many people profess to love the Word of God.

- The Word of God is however not always 'nice'. At times it can cut, tell us the brutal truth, make us angry, tell us to do things that are not easy.
- It is easy to close ourselves off to His Word.

James says this is not a good idea:

James 1 : 19 - 21

¹⁹ *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* ²⁰ *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

²¹ *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

Michael Eaton calls this aspect "Living on God".

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE ON GOD?

We get to know God as he reveals himself

All that has been written above:

- God is a Father
- God is one
- God's character is never changing
- God is the ultimate power

We realise He will be God to us

- God is our Father
- God is one to us
- God will never change His character when we deal with Him
- God will work His power on our behalf

The reality of who God is begins to actually change our lives!

- Because God is our Father we can feel secure. We need to begin to experience acceptance. We need to begin to relax because He will take care of us.
- Because God is one we can be assured of our salvation. God removed our sin,

God removed His own anger, God gave His own sacrifice, God chose a people for Himself, God says we can not be stolen, Jesus says He loses no-one who is His!

- Because God's character never changes we need never feel like we have to hide. We can tell God anything. We don't have to walk on eggshells around God. He is slow to anger - always!
- Because He is ultimate power. When we pray, He can make anything happen. At any time in our life God can step in to change any situation. Nothing can stop God. God is on your side. This power is there to work for you. Because nothing is impossible for Him, nothing he wants you to do is impossible for you!

See Mark 9:23.

We are to learn to live on God. His character needs to affect our thinking and behaviour. It has to penetrate anxiety, fear, confidence, identity - everything! It is a step too short only knowing about God - God's character is practical and has practical consequences for us.

Enjoy Him; live on the glory of God!

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