

Knowing the God You Worship

Jeremiah 9:23–24

Knowing God Gives a Sense of P_____

“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;
But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,

That I am the Lord, exercising
lovingkindness, judgment and
righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight,” says the Lord.
Jeremiah 9:23–24

In what do you boast or brag? Money? Intelligence? Popularity? Wisdom? Accomplishments? Jeremiah says don’t boast about any of those things. Boasting is not wrong as long as we boast in the right thing: that we understand and know God. We find more than one person in the Bible boasting about knowing Him.

The apostle Paul would boast in nothing except “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). And Hosea the prophet wrote that God delights more in people knowing Him than in making sacrifices to Him (Hosea 6:6). Worship is important, but knowing God is the most important thing of all.

When Paul was in prison in Rome, writing to the church in Philippi, he said that the ultimate purpose of his life could be summarized this way: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). When you read Paul’s letters, it is easy to see that this one thing was the focus of his entire life; it was his passion and reason for living.

Paul also writes that every Christian will one day “know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). That will require a serious adjustment for many Christians, but it shouldn’t. We ought to know God so well when we die that our transition to heaven goes off without a hitch. A speaker at the funeral service of Dr. Raymond Edmund, former president of Wheaton College, said, “Ray Edmund’s transition to glory will be the smoothest thing that ever happened” in the history of people entering heaven. That is, his knowledge of God was so intimate while on earth that his adjustment to knowing and being known fully in heaven would be minimal—just a different location.

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In a wonderful passage in 1 John 2:12–14, the apostle Paul describes stages of spiritual growth and maturity that believers go through. There are spiritual “children,” “young men,” and “fathers.”

Spiritual children are those whose “sins are forgiven.” They are people who don’t know any more than that they are born again and have eternal life. Some people have been Christians for 10 or 20 years but are still spiritual children. They don’t know anything about Christian truth or doctrine and they don’t know much about God. Spiritual infancy, just like physical infancy, is to be expected. But it should transition into the next phase at the appropriate time.

Becoming a spiritual young man, or adolescent in the faith, should follow infancy. This is the time when your faith is tested and you must prove what you believe. You begin to learn truth about God and see it validated in your own experience; you win more spiritual battles than you lose.

Then you become a spiritual adult, or a “father,” because “you have known Him who is from the beginning.” There is a big gap between being a spiritual child and young man, but an even larger gap between being a young man and a father. Why? Because being a spiritual adult means you move from knowing about God to knowing Him personally.

Where are you on John’s continuum of spiritual growth and maturity? If all you know is that you’re saved, you need to take it to the next level. If you’re a spiritual adolescent, you need to focus on knowing God. This is not a matter of pride but a matter of purpose in our lives so that we ultimately come to know God, not just know about Him.

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In Daniel 11:32 we read that those “who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits.” Daniel was an unwilling resident of Babylon when he wrote those words, having been taken there in the exile of Jews from Jerusalem. He was in a setting where his faith was opposed by the culture around him. But he found strength in his knowledge of God.

When he first arrived in Babylon as a prisoner, he was chosen to serve in the king’s court. When told he must eat from the king’s dining room, which would violate his Jewish dietary standards, he refused. Daniel knew His God and gained strength from his covenant commitment to honor God’s Word. Daniel and his three friends were the only Jewish hostages mentioned as standing firm instead of violating their conscience and God’s standards (Daniel 1).

Daniel’s three friends found themselves in yet another challenging spot when they refused to bow down before the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar. When the king heard about their refusal, he was furious and threatened to throw them into a furnace of fire. Their answer to the king went like this: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:18). Whenever I read this account, I am encouraged to know God better because I want that kind of power in my own life!

Christians are guilty of playing the role of victims—we live with a mentality of being the persecuted victims in this world. But we are not victims—we are the victors! And knowing God will give us the power to live like it. Those young Hebrews in Babylon could stand up to the king because they knew God and knew they were in the center of His will. They weren’t afraid of anything or anyone, and were not about to defile their consciences or lower their standards just to please a pagan king. Maybe if we knew God as well as those young Hebrew men did, we would live with that same fearless power.

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It’s easy to read the paper and watch the news on television and fall into a sense of despair about conditions in this world. We wonder if God really is in control. We find out in Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar discovered who is really in charge of the affairs of this world. In Daniel 4, the king had a dream that he called upon Daniel to interpret for him. The essence of the interpretation was that God was going to depose the king for a period of seven years, during which time he would act like an animal, grazing on the grass of the field. At the end of the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar made a statement about what he had learned in his crash course about who’s really in charge in the world: “I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is

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from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?' " (Daniel 4:34–35).

Nebuchadnezzar, who had maintained a lofty view and opinion of his role and influence in the world, had come to understand who truly is in charge. After being humbled by God for seven years, there was no question in His mind about the power of God to work out His will. He learned that God is in charge.

When we know who our God is and transfer our head knowledge to a level of trust, we can live in peace. We can sleep soundly at night and not worry about what we read in the paper that day. We learn that His sovereignty, holiness, justice, omnipotence, and omniscience will guard us daily. But if we don't know Him, the affairs of this world will keep us in a constant state of fear and anxiety.

The prophet Daniel foretold a time when God will establish His kingdom on the earth and destroy all other earthly kingdoms in the process. The certainty of that future reality should also translate into a certainty about the present day. Just as God knows the future, He knows the present as well. There is nothing you are experiencing that He is not fully aware of. God is never taken by surprise, and He never goes on vacation. There is no reason for you not to live in perfect peace when you know Your God.

Do you know God, or just know about God? That answer can be determined by the sense of pride, purpose, power, and peace that others see in your life. When we know Him, not only are we prepared to live each day, but we are preparing ourselves for a seamless transition into eternity: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).