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# WHAT MATTERS MOST?

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## The Importance of Knowing God

by Jeff Lind

# WHAT MATTERS MOST?

## Life's Most Basic Question...

What's the best thing that YOU can do for You today, or this week or this year? How can you best take care of yourself, treat yourself right, give yourself a break? What's God's highest calling for you?

Some people would suggest that the best thing that you can do for you is to go to school and get smart, others would sincerely urge you to go to a gym and get fit, others would advise you to start a new business and get rich. Still others would tell you to look inward, find yourself and be who you are.

But today, no less an authority than the Lord God Himself, through His word, reminds you and I that the best thing you can do for you today and everyday is to seek to know Him more deeply and personally than ever before. Seeking to know Him better than any friend here on earth. One of the clearest statements of this fact is in Jeremiah 9:23-24. A passage written to help people put first things first. It speaks to us FIRST of the URGENCY of Knowing God, SECOND of the MEANING of Knowing God, and THIRD of the MEANS of Knowing God. Let's study it and see what we can learn...

*To begin,,we need to understand...*

## I. The Urgency of Knowing God

Why is it so important to know God? Jeremiah tells us... **Jeremiah. 9:23-24** **"This is what the LORD says: "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, (24) but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. "**

You'll get many suggestions in our world for what you should do to help you. Get smart, get fit, get rich. You deserve a break today, you need a vacation, you need a facelift, you need a new home, you need a cool car. The Lord knows that we are easily turned aside from what we really need to things we merely *think* we need. But God says it quite simply,: "You need Me." Don't settle for cheap substitutes. God says "I am the ultimate goal of your life", when all the rest of life is set aside like the shell from a grain of wheat, and all that you have left is what really matters, what you will have left is your relationship with God.

A well known Theologian, J.I .Packer, says it this way: ***"What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To KNOW God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? To KNOW God. What is the best thing in life? Knowledge of God. What in a man gives God the most pleasure? Knowledge of God Himself.***

Jesus expressed this same urgency to his disciples in **John 17:3**, the only passage in which Jesus defined for us the essence of what eternal life means:

**"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."**

***THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE! TO KNOW GOD!*** A songwriter composed these words over 100 years ago,

***"My goal is God Himself, not life or peace, nor even blessing, but thyself my Lord."***

You see, ultimately, if we put our stock in any other goal, we are throwing our time and our energy away. The ultimate goal is to know God. The Westminster Catechism declares:

**"What is the chief end of man? To know God and enjoy Him forever."**

The substitutes are many. The diversions are attractive. But God says, set your heart on one thing and one thing only, to know the Lord your God. Set your heart today on this one goal.

Occasionally God uses a small child to teach us a lesson about what single minded devotion looks like. Our daughter is 4, but recently her spiritual interest has been activated through a simple video tape by Steve Green that helps children to learn scripture, I'd highly recommend it if you have small children. A few nights ago she found a small booklet in our home that explains the gospel so children can understand and she asked us to read it with her. She had us read it each night for three consecutive nights and each time when we came to that prayer she automatically folded her little hands and said, "I want to pray that prayer". Thinking she was too young to understand, we put her off for three nights, but on the fourth night, she looked us straight in the eye and insisted "I have decided that this is what I want to do TONIGHT!". And then she expressed her desire to receive Jesus Christ in four year old's words with four year old's body language. Curled up in a little ball, hands clenched, face down in her pillow, knees bent. She took the first step in the journey of which I speak, the journey of knowing God.

The journey begins with a simple commitment, one small step, but in time it transforms us. A child can begin the journey, so can an adult. It's not too complicated. One writer said "Christianity is just one great big YES to God, followed by a whole lifetime of little yes's". If you've already entered into that relationship, then today there is no greater object for you to pursue than to know God with single minded devotion. If you've never started this journey, it is extremely important that you do, and you can do it today the same way people have for two thousand years or more. This is step one. In response to the urgency of knowing God, each of us needs to take this simple step of faith.

Bottom line: Knowing God is the object and purpose of our lives. It is the highest occupation to which any man or woman can aspire. It is in short, the meaning of life. This is the urgency of knowing God. The next thing we need to understand is...

## **II. The Meaning of Knowing God**

Jeremiah says "let him who boasts boast that he knows and understands me, that I am the Lord God who exercises lovingkindness, and justice, and mercy..." We can draw from this a basic 3 part definition of what it means to know God:

<p>1. "that he KNOWS Me"</p>	<p><b>FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE</b></p>	<p>Factual knowledge refers to intellectual knowledge about Him. Of what he is like. all those nuts and bolts basic facts we learn about God throughout the Bible. It is the truth about Him. It is head knowledge. Now, some Christians think head knowledge is all bad, something to avoid, but head knowledge is truly good and necessary, it's just incomplete without the second kind of knowledge, which is found in the Hebrew word later:</p>
<p>2. "that he UNDERSTANDS Me"</p>	<p><b>PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE</b></p>	<p>This comes from the Hebrew word meaning "to ponder or contemplate" something. Like when you focus in and meditate on a thing. This is where I move in and get to know God as a person and understand something of His heart. This is personal or experiential knowledge of God.</p>
<p>3. "that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, and justice, and mercy"</p>	<p><b>CONTENT</b></p>	<p>The third part of what it means to know God is THE CONTENT ITSELF, and it's found in the phrase "that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, and justice, and mercy"</p> <p>This phrase points to the nature or attributes of God which are revealed throughout Scripture both by the things He tells us about Himself, and in the actions He takes in Scripture which actually shows us what He is like.</p>

That's a three part definition of what it means to know God. He wants us to have a factual knowledge of him, and a Personal knowledge of Him, the content of both is His attributes and actions.

So, we've seen the Urgency of Knowing God, and the Meaning of knowing God. Now, we need to focus in on the MEANS by which we know God.... "If it's so important HOW do I do it?" The means are all around us, and they're really obvious, but sometimes we just sort of sit around waiting for God to kindof *zap us*, and force us to grow without our every picking up the tools and seeking Him. These tools lie rusty in many of our lives and yet they are our means to know God. **There is a great difference between ACTIVE and PASSIVE posture toward knowing God.** Author John Piper describes the Christian who cries out to God, "PLEASE LORD, COULD YOU SEND DOWN ANOTHER PILLOW?" That's PASSIVE Christianity .



Active Christianity says "Lord, I want to see your face and know your ways and your path and I WILL NOT leave this place until I have encountered you and moved into your presence". This is the attitude with which the means become truly MEANS by which we know God.

But don't even bother if you're passive, apathetic, aloof or take him for granted. Using these means passively is like trying to operate a row boat without pulling on the oars. If we pick up any one of these tools for knowing God with a passive heart, then we'll be disappointed. But if we pick up with an active seeking heart after God, then we'll grow like we never dreamed possible. The sky's the limit.

Let's look at four basic means to knowing God...Let me say up front these aren't the ONLY means to knowing God, but these four stand out most in Scripture):

### **III. The Means of Knowing God**

#### **1. Through Learning and Obeying the Scriptures.**

The word of God is the most basic dietary requirement of the Christian life. Jesus said it was the bread God provides for our souls. And yet how easy it is for us to let this basic part of our diet fall aside. We are repeatedly urged in Scripture to "eat" and live.

**I Peter 2:2 says "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby."**

Jesus connected knowing him and the Father with knowing and receiving the word,  
**John 17:6,8 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. (8) For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. "**

**OBEYING:** It would be really easy if all we had to do is JUST read the Scriptures once and be done. But this isn't the case. Many Christians treat the Bible as if it is some sort of magic book that changes us without any effort to understand it and apply it personally to our lives. This won't wash. The Scriptures are powerful, but if we choose not to obey them we short circuit their intended effect. God speaks to us in the Scriptures so that we will know how to live our lives in accord with the Scriptures. This is called obedience. Jesus said in

**John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."**

As we take the truth of Scripture and wrestle through the steps to live it out, we get to know God, we meet him in the obeying.

We get to know God through consuming the word of God. The second way we get to know God is:

#### **2. Through Spiritual Disciplines such as Worship, Prayer, etc.**

We could spend a lot of time studying each of these, but the key to keep in mind is that these are far more than mere religious acts, they are tools through which we come to know God better and better, day by day, over the course of a lifetime. And these tools

have a full lifetime warranty. They don't wear out, break, or become obsolete. Sometimes, however, we become dry and passive in our approach to them, don't we? For example...

**a. We get passive about prayer** ...Jesus said "**When you enter into your closet (your quiet place to pray) shut the door and when you have spoken to your Father in secret....**" (Matt 6:6) The key item here is that he assumes we take a little time regularly to get alone with God our Father. There is a secret fellowship that is the privilege of every child of God. It's what we need. And God desires our presence there devoted wholly to Him. **Psalm 62:8 urges us to "pour out your hearts before Him, for He is our refuge"**. What a shame to walk around every day with a heart that is heavy and not ever take time to pour it out to the Father. He really does want to listen to our concerns and struggles. We **need** to pour our hearts out to Him and meet Him there. **Andrew Murray** said that the Father love of God is to be "the air we breathe" when we come into His presence in prayer.

**b. We get passive about worship.** Do you ever pause and ask yourself, what you are doing when you sit in church? We do a lot of interesting things at church, some of them are entertaining, some of them make you cry or laugh. They're all good things, but ultimately the audience of our worship time is God and we as children of God gather together to pour out our worship for His pleasure, not ours. WE are not the audience in the church, we're on the stage before God, honoring him with our praise and attention, We gather in church for His pleasure. Even the basic meaning of the word "worship" demands His pre-eminent place as THE focus of what we do when we do church. The word means "to bow low" before someone, as in flat on our faces on the ground. When we worship we bow low before Him and acknowledge Him for who He is.

Yet how easy it is for us to let the means become ends in themselves and forget the very purpose of the acts of worship, **Hosea 6:6 says "For I delight in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings"**. God wants us to know Him, without this our acts of worship become empty.

So, one of the best things you can do for you is to set your heart to pray and worship and fast and give and meet God in these simple spiritual disciplines. God is more than willing to meet you there.

The third means through which we get to know God is:...

### **3. Through Fellowship with Other People Who Seek God with All Their Heart.**

There is a special fellowship of kindred hearts who seek God together. This fellowship is described in **I John 1:7**

**"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin."**

Implication: If we walk in the light (God's path), we have fellowship with God AND with one another. Likewise, **I John 4:7 says**

**Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (8) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. "**

One of the ways we get to know God is through loving one another, in the Bible this means more than emotion, it means serving one another sacrificially. **1 John 4:10-11 says**

**"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."**

In a very real sense as I fellowship with you and serve you sacrificially, I experience fellowship with Him. We used to sing a song "I will love you with the love of the Lord". That's exactly right, when we love and serve one another, it is Christ's love we're passing on, Christ is the source, he is in us, and we know Him better.

So one of the best things you can do for yourself is to set your heart **and your schedule** for fellowship with people who are seeking Him as well, whether in a small group, or a prayer group at work or in ongoing discipleship, or whatever, you and I need this fellowship of kindred hearts.

The fourth means by which we get to know God is...

#### **4. Through the Experiences God Allows to Come Into Our Lives.**

This is perhaps at times the most difficult and yet very important, for this is the one that pulls all the others together.

Our God allows us to go through many things, and each of these can be part of getting to know Him. Sometimes he really stretches us, beyond what we think we can bear, we say "Lord, how can you allow this to happen to me." Sometimes he stretches us so far that all we're left with is a huge mystery we cannot answer, a hole in our soul that makes us throw ourselves upon Him in utter dependence.

**Isaiah. 43:2 says "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.**

Notice, He does not promise that we'll **never** pass through the water or the fire, but promises to meet us there, to be there with us **IN THE FIRE**, in the water.

We've observed one of these experiences recently in the lives of some of our best friends. Seven months ago we shared the joy of helping them find and adopt their first and only child, a son. Five weeks ago he was dedicated to the Lord before their church family. And two weeks ago that same congregation met to grieve the death of that much loved, much anticipated baby son. Their only son, died at seven months because of a rare genetic condition. And try as we might to fully answer that kind of grief theologically,

it still is beyond our ability to answer and leaves a huge hole, a mystery only God can resolve. A puzzle only He can arrange. At those times we cling to God. A few days ago she called on the phone and even as she expresses the deepest pain, yet expresses that God is very close and she feels teaching her, even in the pain and grief. We get to know God through the experiences he allows to come into our lives.

Dr. Regier, a wise old professor from Dallas Theological Seminary had taken care of his wife through years of debilitating illness, he spoke to me at age 17 when my family was enduring ongoing sickness. And this is the lesson he said he had learned through it all: "Never be surprised"...never be surprised at what God may allow and actually use in your life. Never be surprised, God can use it all.]

One of the best things you can do for you today, is to view your life experiences as means to knowing God, some of them terrible and some of them wonderful, but all of them purposeful. Paul said

**"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things, I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ." Philippians 3:8**

## Where should we go from here?

We've seen the Urgency, the Meaning, and the Means of knowing God. The English language used to wrap all of these ideas together in an old word we need to bring back. That word is "**pilgrimage**". In earlier centuries, Christians seem to have had a strong sense that the life God gives us is a "pilgrimage". Today we don't use that word very often, perhaps because we picture people with funny hats and stern faces, but in fact, a pilgrimage is exactly what you and I are on as we seek to know God over the course of our lives. A pilgrimage is a journey taken step by step with a view to getting closer to God. And "pilgrim" is what you are in your life's journey. A pilgrim is a person who's decided where they're going, who won't be turned aside and who doesn't carry too much extra gear on his or her back. Only what he can carry without slowing his pace or breaking his stride.

How about you and I? Is my goal "God Himself" today? Are we easily distracted from that goal? Are we carrying just what we need for the journey, or packing a whole bunch of extra stuff? Are we actively pursuing or waiting for God to magically make us grow despite our disinterest? I believe God calls us to drop the weights, set the course and press forward in our journey after Him every day of our lives. The next step is up to you.

*A Prayer: Lord of all our days, help us to lay aside everything that gets between us and you. Help us to seek you with hearts fully focused to know you, understand you, and follow you. Help us to take up the disciplines through which we draw near to you. Help us to be people of one central purpose. We love you Lord. Amen.*