

# Theology Proper (Week 1) – How can God be known?

How can God be known? How can you know God? It's a tricky question. It both assumes and presumes a few things. First it assumes there is a God and then presumes God can be known and finally supposes we all understand and agree on some singular definition for what *knowing* might be. This isn't a simple question. I mean I guess on the one hand it is. **Yes there is a God and yes He can be known and that knowledge is derived naturally through his created order and spiritually in a saving way by His Spirit through His word.** It's as simple as that and yet there is a depth of context here that's worth harvesting here which will prove tremendously valuable to you as you encounter a world of doubts and difficulties. Having a framework and foundation for your faith is important. Solid simple answers propped up on toothpicks is both unappealing to unbelievers and unstable against your own weaknesses. Thankfully it's also unnecessary. The simplicity of the answer for How can God be known has a fortress of reason which I hope to unearth in some small measure over the next two weeks.

This first week we'll look into 3 contextual questions leaving the actual singular meaty question for next week. So today our questions are:

## 1. Why does it matter?

Why even ask the question? Is the answer actually worth anything?

## 2. What does it mean to know God?

What exactly are we talking about when we say knowing God?

## 3. Can God be known?

Importance and definitions are all well and good but what confidence should we have in our actual capabilities to know God?

These are big questions but I trust you are smart people. So I'm pleading with you to engage your minds and think with me for a bit. Turn off your distractions and rouge thoughts and wrangle your attention with me to grapple with these critically important questions.

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## 1. Why does it matter?

Before delving in too deeply it is worth touching on if such a time investment into how we can know God is even worth our time. There are plenty of people in the world who just coast through life never really thinking deeply about God or striving to discover Him. They would attribute the legitimate chasm between the being of God and the being of human, how could something so finite and created seek to know and understand something infinite? Others would simply say it's irrelevant. God's gonna do what God's gonna do and knowing this or that won't change a thing so just stay in your lane and don't waste your time.

However Scripture is clear that a knowledge of God is not only worth while it is the difference between eternal life and death.

### A.W. Tozer

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

Acquiring knowledge of God is not an after school optional elective for the Christian. It is in fact what makes you a Christian. Of all the things you believe to be important to know, spend time on, acquire and master, none are so chief as your knowledge of God.

Scripture is absolutely brimming with passages on the knowledge God and we'll cover a number of them over these next two weeks but I'll start off with three here to highlight three key reasons why it matters that we be able to answer definitively the question: "How can God be known?"

## 1. It is how we know to do good



Jeremiah 4:22

22 "For My people are foolish, They know Me not; They are stupid children And have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, But to do good they do not know."

At a most basic human level God is creator, he knows what is good and what is bad, he is the inventor, he makes the rules. To know God is to know the rules. Books like Psalms and Proverbs (though really the entire Bible) is jam packed with practical knowledge for living well in the world.

The curse of sin has brought a deep depravity and disturbance to the perfect world but even in that knowledge comes resources for making sense of evil and the insanity we see around us. So much heartache, questioning and despair becomes clear and acceptable if we seek out the truth of God and the history He has crafted and the future he has planned.

Do not be foolish, know God and do good.

## 2. It is how we avoid enslavement to worthless idols



Galatians 4:8–9

8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

The knowledge of God sets us free from the deadly deception that we are independent, free, innocent creatures. We are not. We are deeply enslaved to all manner of worthless, foolish things and ultimately enslaved to the sinfulness of our own dead hearts. Without the knowledge of God there is no hope and thus a framework or means for the acquisition of such knowledge becomes a prize of highest price.

## 3. It is how we attain to the resurrection



Philippians 3:7–11

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

If you had any lingering doubts about the value of the knowledge of God let these words of Paul set your mind at rest and allow this topic your full attention. Indeed though you have to loose every other earthly thing the price would be worth it. Life itself is not sufficient to forego this chief priority. Eternal life is at stake and surely mortal life and all its trinkets is worth such a reward. To echo Tozer again, though it be the only thing about us, our thoughts about God truly are the most important thing about us.

So to recap **1. Why does the knowledge of God matter?**

1. It is how we know to do good
2. It is how we avoid enslavement to worthless idols
3. It is how we attain to the resurrection

## 2. What does it mean to know God?

So the knowledge of God is of chief importance. Life's greatest prize. Yet what specifically is it? What is knowledge? What is the knowledge of God? What exactly are we knowing?

The image shows a screenshot of the Oxford English Dictionary entry for the word "knowledge". The page has a dark background with white text. At the top, it says "Dictionary" and "Definitions from Oxford Languages · Learn more". Below that is a search bar with the text "Search for a word" and a magnifying glass icon. The word "knowl·edge" is displayed in a large font, with a speaker icon to its left. Below the word is its phonetic transcription "/ 'näləj/" and the part of speech "noun". The first definition is: "1. facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject." followed by the example "a thirst for knowledge". Below the definition is a "Similar:" section with a list of related words in rounded rectangular buttons: understanding, comprehension, grasp, grip, command, mastery, apprehension, expertise, skill, proficiency, expertness, accomplishment, adeptness, capacity, capability, savoir faire, know-how, learning, erudition, education, scholarship, letters, schooling, science, wisdom, enlightenment, philosophy, familiarity with, acquaintance with, conversance with, intimacy with, information, facts, data, intelligence, news, reports, lore, info, lowdown, gen. Below this is an "Opposite:" section with buttons for ignorance and illiteracy, and a small upward arrow icon. The second definition is: "2. awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation." followed by the example "the program had been developed without his knowledge". Below this is another "Similar:" section with buttons for awareness, consciousness, realization, recognition, cognition, apprehension, perception, appreciation, cognizance. Finally, an "Opposite:" section with a button for unawareness and a small upward arrow icon.

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Search for a word

 **knowl·edge**  
/ 'näləj/  
noun

1. facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.  
"a thirst for knowledge"

**Similar:** understanding comprehension grasp grip command mastery  
apprehension expertise skill proficiency expertness accomplishment  
adeptness capacity capability savoir faire know-how learning  
erudition education scholarship letters schooling science wisdom  
enlightenment philosophy familiarity with acquaintance with conversance with  
intimacy with information facts data intelligence news reports  
lore info lowdown gen

**Opposite:** ignorance illiteracy 

2. awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation.  
"the program had been developed without his knowledge"

**Similar:** awareness consciousness realization recognition cognition  
apprehension perception appreciation cognizance

**Opposite:** unawareness 

According to the Oxford Dictionary knowledge really has two definitions. Facts and Awareness. Comprehension of information and familiarity of a situation. The Oh and the Ah as I like to say. The Oh of education as you digest the static information around you and the Ah of realization as you exist in the environment around you. The knowledge of God principally involves the first as we read Scripture but is also gained at a surface level as we observable and exist within the created order. This differentiation is important. Far too many people believe God is known chiefly through experiences, the environment, emotions and they downplay the static facts of Scripture as dry and uninteresting. This is a deadly danger for without the Oh of Scripture the Ah of Creation would leave us ultimately lost and far short of resurrection from the dead.

So that is what knowledge is but what exactly are we knowing when we say "know God"?

## 1. We know what He reveals



John 16:12–15

12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

15 "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

This is not introspective, experiential, mountaintop knowledge. These are the cold hard facts of the Spirit of God revealing the truth of God's word to a hearts that has been made alive in Christ. We are hopelessly lost on a mission critical mission without the Spirit of truth. Have him as your guide however and all you must know is readily available.

## 2. We know His character



Jeremiah 9:23–24

23 Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;

24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

The most important facet of the knowledge of God is unsurprisingly it's object. God Himself. These aren't life hacks, they are factual informational Ohs of the being of God Himself. They aren't debatable, they aren't changeable, they are there to be accepted and worshiped. This is the boast of the passage. It is a honoring and a lifting up of the qualities of God. This is the ultimate end of the knowledge of God, really of human life itself, to worship God for who He is. So know Him as he reveals himself through both his word and his world and from that arsenal of information explode in praise and worship, a boast in the Lord.

So then **2. What does it mean to know God?**

1. We know what He reveals
2. We know His character

## 3. Can God be known?

Give the importance of knowing God and the parameters of such knowledge the final boss to beat before addressing how to acquire such knowledge is quite simply "can God actually be known?" Before you jump to the yes gun I want you to think about that question for a minute. How sure are you that you do or can know God? It's just your brain after all. A clump of tissue, electrical impulses and last nights Totinos pizza rolls. You really think you know the Creator of the universe? You really

think somewhere in your tiny, finite blob of cells there's is the true knowledge of God Almighty the infinite Creator of heaven and earth?

Is knowing facts about God really knowing God? Is your idea of who God is really sufficiently accurate to say that you "know God"?

You see it's not quite so simple. The fact is naturally no you cannot know God. Naturally you can observe the world around you. The Ahs of Creation and derive from that some knowledge of accountability and a hierarchy of which you are not on top but truly God cannot be known by you outside of His own revelation and that revelation is only acceptable in those who have His Spirit. Only the saved can know God. It is a new covenant revelation.



Hebrews 8:10–12

10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

11 "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM.

12 "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."

Only those who's sins are removed may receive the revelation. The word of God lies open and available to all but its truths lie mute and dark until the Spirit through the new covenant of grace cast the light of its glorious knowledge deep into the heart bringing understanding, acceptance and worship.



2 Corinthians 5:16–17

16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Prior to salvation we know Christ experientially, insufficiently, unto death. For those made alive by God in Christ through the new covenant we know him factually, actually, his character and nature. We know him as he is. This is a knowledge that transcends while still including our physical brains. It's what it means to know and be known by God. The insufficient one way street of mortal knowledge becomes the two way street of both knowing and being known. Of being made alive together with Christ such that we can truly and now in a saving way, know God.

### So 3. Can God be known?

Yes, but only in a saving way through the new covenant of knowledge imparted as a gift of the Spirit to an awakened heart.

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I hope this excites you to open your Bible, to search out the depths of God. For those alive in Christ the Spirit waits ready to reveal unto true knowledge the real, actual one true God. The knowledge that saves, the knowledge worth losing all else to obtain.