

Five Levels of Knowing God: From Information to Intimate Relationship

There are four levels of knowing someone. First is information - like knowing about George Washington as our first president. Second is association - a coworker or neighbor you recognize. Third is companionship - family or friends you do life with. Fourth is communion - intimate knowledge like with a spouse, knowing their strengths and weaknesses.

The question is: where are you in your relationship with God? God wants to take you beyond mere information about Him to intimate communion - knowing Him deeply and experiencing the joy of not just walking with Jesus, but being used by Him.

Paul's Journey: From Persecution to Proclamation

In Acts 17, Paul travels from Philippi to Thessalonica, about 100 miles to this Macedonian harbor town and cultural center. As was his custom, Paul went to the synagogue and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from Scripture.

Paul did three important things: he expounded on the Messiah using over 300 Old Testament prophecies, he examined Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, and he expressed the point clearly - "This Jesus, whom I preach to you, is the Christ."

Lesson 1: How Do I Know God Personally?

Knowing God intimately means knowing His Son, Jesus personally. There's no other way. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" - John 14:6. The very next verse adds, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. And from now on you know Him and have seen Him" - John 14:7.

Paul understood this drive to know God intimately. In Philippians 3:10, he expressed his desire "that I may know Him." The Amplified version beautifully captures this: "that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly."

What Happens When We Stand for Christ?

Paul's message received two responses in Thessalonica. Some were persuaded and believed, including many devout Greeks and leading women. But unbelieving Jews became envious, gathered a mob, and attacked Jason's house where Paul and Silas were staying.

When they couldn't find Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason before the city rulers, accusing Christianity of "turning the world upside down" and proclaiming "another king - Jesus." This led to our second lesson.

Lesson 2: Are You Willing to Suffer for Your Faith?

Knowing God means I'm willing to suffer with His people for His name's sake. When Paul said "that I may know Him" in Philippians 3:10, he continued by speaking of "the fellowship of His sufferings."

There's something profound that happens between head knowledge and heart knowledge. We can know about God intellectually, but does it sink into our hearts and get lived out? Sometimes that living out means knowing God is real through our situations and sufferings - feeling His strength, hearing His Word, experiencing His power and presence.

Believers worldwide suffer for their faith, standing with Jesus Christ through trials, persecution, even death. The depth of knowing God means being willing to say, "I know too much about His grace and power to stop sharing Jesus, even if it costs me my life."

A Different Reception in Berea

Paul's next stop in Berea, about 50 miles away, brought a completely different reception. The Bereans "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" - Acts 17:11.

The Bereans showed two important qualities: readiness to receive God's Word with open minds and eagerness to learn, plus discernment - they searched the Scriptures daily to verify what they heard.

Lesson 3: How Important Is Bible Study?

Knowing God means I'm becoming a student of God's Word. We must take everything we hear back to Scripture to ask, "What does God's Word say?" In our world of "that's just your opinion" or "that's your truth, not mine," we need the anchor of God's Word.

Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" - 2 Timothy 2:15.

Reading the Bible cover to cover, book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse helps us know the whole counsel of God. Even after decades of walking with God, the Holy Spirit continually applies His Word to our hearts in fresh ways each day.

Lesson 4: Who's Leading Your Life?

When persecution followed Paul to Berea, he was sent to Athens while Silas and Timothy remained to strengthen the church. Paul later sent word for them to join him, showing strategic ministry thinking.

Knowing God means allowing Him to lead my life. I want Him to direct me step by step. I'm not in charge - He is. We need sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, staying when He says stay, moving when He says move.

Paul's heart was always to strengthen believers. He positioned Silas and Timothy to help the church grow while he moved on to new ministry opportunities in Athens.

Reaching the Intellectuals in Athens

Athens was the Harvard of its day - a top educational and religious center. But Paul discovered a city "given over to idols" with over 3,000 altars to various gods. One historian said there were more idols in Athens than all the rest of Greece combined - "it was easier to find a god than a man."

While many would be impressed with the culture, arts, and intellect, Paul's "spirit was provoked within him." The word means to be sharpened, exasperated, grieved. He saw how lost people were and how sin had worked ruin in their lives.

But notice Paul's response: he didn't start petitions or protests. He went to tell them about Jesus Christ - bringing light into darkness.

Going Where People Are

Paul reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and Gentile worshipers, and "in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there" - Acts 17:17. He went where people were - religious folks at the synagogue, everyone else at the marketplace.

The Agora was their shopping center, farmer's market, and social hub. Sometimes the most natural places become supernatural places for God to work - your neighborhood, grocery store, bank. God sets up divine appointments when we're willing to engage people where they are.

Engaging Different Worldviews

Paul encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Epicureans believed truth came through experience, abandoning hope that pure truth could be found through reason. Their motto was essentially "eat, drink, and be merry" - ancient YOLO philosophy.

Stoics were pantheists believing everything is god. They were fatalists practicing stern self-repression of emotion - what we call "stoic" today.

Paul came with a different message: life has eternal meaning because Jesus was raised from the dead. This piqued their curiosity enough to bring him to the Areopagus (Mars Hill), Athens' highest court where intellectuals gathered.

Paul's Masterful Approach

Paul's approach wasn't condemning but calculated. He noted their religiousness and mentioned finding "an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" - Acts 17:23.

The Athenians had this altar to cover all their bases - making sure they hadn't missed any god. Paul used this as his inroad, not to put down their false gods, but to reveal the unknown one.

Lesson 5: How Do We Share Our Faith?

Knowing God leads to making Him known to others. Paul showed us how: we need hearts stirred for the lost, willingness to step out in faith and go where people are, and wisdom to build bridges rather than walls - finding common connections to lead people to Jesus.

Six Truths About God

In his brief sermon, Paul revealed six truths about God:

God is Creator - He made the world and everything in it, showing His omnipotence and omnipresence.

God is Provider - He doesn't need our sacrifices but willingly gives life to His creation.

God is Ruler - He's sovereign over mankind, setting times and boundaries, yet drawing people to Himself.

God is Sustainer - "In Him we live and move and have our being" - Acts 17:28. He daily sustains the life He created.

God is Forgiver - Though patient with ignorant worship, He now "commands all men everywhere to repent" - Acts 17:30.

God is Judge - There's a day of accountability when He will judge the world through Jesus, proven by His resurrection.

Three Responses to the Gospel

Paul's message received three typical responses we still see today:

Mockers - Some mocked the resurrection concept. The message of the cross seems foolish to those perishing, but it's God's power to those being saved.

Procrastinators - Others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." The danger in delaying God's conviction is developing a hard heart. When God convicts, the best response is immediate surrender.

Believers - Some heard, received, and owned the message, including notable figures like Dionysius and Damaris, plus others whose names weren't recorded but whom God knows.

Life Application

How do you know God? You know Him personally through Jesus, deeply through fellowship in His sufferings, mindfully through studying His Word, daily by letting His Spirit lead your life, and powerfully by witnessing to others about who Jesus is.

This week, challenge yourself to move beyond mere information about God to intimate relationship with Him. Choose one area where you can deepen your knowledge of God - whether through personal Bible study, allowing Him greater leadership in your decisions, or looking for opportunities to share His love with others.

Ask yourself: Am I content with just knowing about God, or do I truly know Him personally? Where is God calling me to step out in faith this week? How can I be more intentional about studying His Word and allowing it to transform my heart? What opportunities is God giving me to share His love with others around me?

God wants to be known intimately by you. He's calling you from information to transformation, from distant knowledge to close communion. The question isn't whether God wants to know you - He already does. The question is: do you want to truly know Him?