

Do you believe?

Dear listeners,

I'd like to start off this broadcast with a personal question: Do you believe in God? If you answered "yes" did you say this because you believe some higher being exists? Maybe you are thinking: "I'm fine with believing in God. I just don't want to be forced into a religious box and made to believe in the God of the Bible. Quite frankly, why should I believe in a God who has allowed so much misery in this world and in my own life?" A while back a late night talk show host was speaking with one of his guests and said that a "father's job is to be distant, authoritative and never quite pleased. That way the children can eventually understand God." Is that your perception of God? Is this really the way God has made himself known in Scripture, as a distant and authoritative figure who does nothing else but bark orders down to us? Or do you believe God is knowable, approachable and in charge of your life?

Considering how many claim they do not believe in God and have no interest in learning more about the God of the Bible, doesn't it strike you as odd that in their exclamations these same people will readily refer to hell, Jesus, Christ and damnation? Why would someone do that if they don't believe God exists? And isn't it ironic that so many who claim to be open-minded have shut their minds to learning anything about the God of the Bible or to give Christianity a fair hearing?

When we think about knowing God we do well to listen to what the Bible itself tells us without allowing ourselves to get bogged down by personal opinions or some preconceived notions of God and reality. When we open Scripture we learn the best way of coming to know God is through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

You realize as well as I do that you cannot really say you know a person until you have taken the time to learn more about their character traits, personality, history, likes, dislikes, and desires. As you come to know things about a new acquaintance, you better understand how to carry on a relationship with that person. In much the same way, a vibrant relationship with the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- is rooted in a firm understanding of who he is as he reveals himself in his Word and as he displays his rule and government over creation.

When we speak about believing in God and "knowing God" we need to keep in mind that it is a glorious and blessed privilege to be in a relationship with the Lord God of heaven and earth. Knowing God goes deeper than merely believing God exists. It is to stand in a personal and intimate relationship of communion with the living God through Jesus. In Scripture "to know" includes responsibilities. We are called to act on the basis of what we know. This is the basic premise underlying God's revelation of himself in Scripture and how we are called upon to apply what we know.

Our knowledge of God should never make us feel haughty, proud or a cut above other people. Our desire to grow in knowledge should always be coupled with humility. Whatever we learn is to encourage us to meditate on God and draw us to the Lord in prayer and praise.

The LORD has revealed himself in his Holy Word. If you don't read the Bible you will never learn to speak a good word about him. God has made himself known and built up a reputation through his deeds as they have been made known to you on the pages of the Bible. Learning to know God from his Word will influence your thinking, colour your speech and impact how you act.

In a prayer that Jesus said just prior to his death he said, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only

true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). There is much to be learned from Christ’s prayer in John 17. Jesus reveals in this passage that the confidence he has in fulfilling his earthly ministry and in his prayers for his disciples well-being stems from his personal knowledge of the Father. Just hours before his arrest, death sentence, and crucifixion, the Lord Jesus prays to the Father. As he prays there is no sense of dread, anxiety or fear in his words. The relationship Jesus has with his heavenly Father allows him to be confident in the most difficult hour a human being could ever face. Jesus prays, “I have known you.” The depth of that knowledge undergirds his praying and enables him to fulfill what he is called to do.

The knowledge the Son has of the Father affects everything Jesus did and does. Jesus lived and accomplished what he did because he knew the Father. His authority came via knowledge of the Father (John 17:2). His redemptive work came through his knowledge of the Father (John 17:4). He saved whom he saved because of his knowledge of the Father (John 17:6). He prayed confidently for those believers and the multitude that would believe on him through the ages, due to his knowledge of the Father. (John 17:20-24) This knowledge which is at the heart of the intimate bond between the persons of the Triune God stand in stark contrast to the manner in which people respond to the coming of Christ.

In this world, Jesus is still unknown to those who do not put their faith and trust in him. But he is being made known. The only way Christ is known to us is through the gospel. No one believes in him or knows him apart from the light of the gospel (2 Cor 4:5-6). When we know God and his Son Jesus, that knowledge transforms everything in our life and changes the whole course of our existence (Phil Newton).

By now you will probably realize that our knowledge of God must go deeper than knowing a great deal of facts about him. Knowing God is a living relationship. That is why knowing him should be our highest priority, providing joy, delight and contentment. Everything we need for life and godliness is given through knowledge of God (2 Peter 1:3). This is why the apostle Paul prays in Colossians 1:9, 10 that we be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. Failure to know God brings destruction. The prophet Hosea writes in chapter 4:6 this strong statement, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...”

Deeper than knowing God is to be *known by God*. Galatians 4:9 says, “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless principles of the world, whose slave you want to be once more?” The Lord chose a people who are known by him, even though they do not deserve it. As the Lord says to His people in Amos 3:2, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” God chose a people no better or more worthy than others to be the recipients of his love.

In his best-selling book entitled, “Knowing God” J.I. Packer (pp 23-26) makes four observations regarding those who know God. First of all, the people who know God will have great energy for God (Daniel 11:32). They are not afraid to speak or take action. Secondly, the people who know God have great thoughts of God (Daniel 9:4, 7, 9, 14). They know Him to be the ruler of all the earth. In the third place, the people who know God show great boldness and courage for God. They are not afraid to stand alone (Daniel 1-3). And in the fourth place, the people who know God have great contentment in God (Daniel 3:16-18).

It is my prayer that you come to know God in this way, and that being in an intimate relationship with the living God will give you much joy and comfort. Knowing the Lord provides you with a new perspective on life. He doesn’t stand at a distance, never quite pleased with your performance. Believe that he has come to save and has provided you with all you need to know him and to experience what he provides in his love and grace. Have a good day.