



Dr. Robert A. Cook

Do You Really Want to Know God?

Are you satisfied with bits and pieces of knowledge? Are other people's opinions enough? Or...



“Do You Really Want to Know God?”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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Do you remember this old cliché? "It is not important what you know but whom you know."

There may be more than a modicum of truth in that saying. It pays to know the right people. I became keenly aware of that fact once years ago when I found myself in Toronto at the beginning of winter without a heavy overcoat. I was so excited about what I was doing - heading up a city-wide evangelism program - that I paid little attention to the temperature. Toronto was the hometown of the man who hosted me at the time. When he noticed the situation he approached it in a roundabout way.

"I'm going on an errand this afternoon," he said. "Want to go with me?"

"Sure," I replied.

Soon we were entering a men's clothing shop and the proprietor was greeting us. "This a friend of yours?" he asked, meaning me.

"Yes, indeed," my pal told him, and he recounted a few of the things we were endeavoring to do together. Then he said, "By the way, do you happen to have an overcoat that would fit this fellow?"

The salesman allowed that he did, and in a few moments he brought out a fine, warm garment and put it on me.

"Thanks a lot," my friend said, with a twinkle in his eye as he motioned me to the door. Outside the shop he told me, "That guy knows he owes me money. And I know he's not likely to pay it. I figured this was a good way for me to get at least part payment." Whacking me on the back he laughed, "Enjoy your coat, Buddy."

And I did. It was *knowing somebody* that made the difference.

The same principle applies in regard to heavenly things. It is important to KNOW God - not merely because of the good things that accrue because of that relationship (although there are good things aplenty) but also because He wants to be known and He ever "waits to be gracious." Lovingkindness is one of the characteristics He delights in manifesting.

I ask myself: What is involved in knowing God? He Himself answers:

"I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jer. 9:24)

This is the God whom we seek to know. In our search we come upon a few simple rules to help us.

Rule I - Agree With God

That is, say YES to Him in everything. Stop wanting your own way.

The prophet Amos asks an important question - and we know the answer:

"Can two walk together except they be AGREED?" (Amos 3:3)

If we are to give assent to what God says to and about us, we need to know quite clearly what He says. He has not left us guessing!

God says I am a sinner. *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23)*

Do I Agree?

God says I cannot save myself *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us," (Titus 3:5)* DO I AGREE?

God says I may come to Him only through the , atoning work of Christ. *"Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom. 5:6)* DO I AGREE?

God says He has provided and I may have eternal life. *"Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me [Jesus] hath everlasting life." (John 6:47)* DO I AGREE?

God says He will ALWAYS help me. *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5)* DO I AGREE?

This, of course, is only a partial list of divine utterances that we are called upon to accept and act upon if we truly want to know God.

God does not require you to make your life better. In fact, you are unable to do that to any great degree. He asks only that you direct your attention to HIM, so that He Himself can work in and through you.

There is a vast difference between REFORMATION (self-effort) and TRANSFORMATION (God's working). Reformation ends in incompleteness and often in despair. Why is this true? It is because one soon tires of maintaining a pose - which is all that is possible to one who is operating in his or her own strength. On the other hand, TRANSFORMATION is the work of God, and it endures.

You had better decide first off, it seems to me, whether or not you are willing to pay the price of giving up to God, letting Him take over. If you are not willing for that, then don't expect ever to know Him very well. If you insist on your own way, God will always be a remote character to you. He will be, to some extent at least, a source of fear and dread to you because you know in your soul that you are fighting Him, and that you never can win.

The sovereignty of God has to be settled in your thinking. Is He absolutely the One in charge of all that pertains to you? YOU give Him that right - or you withhold it.

If and when you decide to make Him LORD over all your affairs, you will find that this One to whom you have voluntarily yielded is full of lovingkindness. He is tender. He is compassionate. He knows and cares. He becomes a Father to you - not someone who is out to beat you over the head with some heavenly stick, but One whose arms are wide open to love and protect you. If you truly want to know God, you must see Him from this perspective.

That brings us to another rule for knowing God.

Rule II - Appreciate God

There are many facets of the divine character to which we might well give attention. One of the first would surely be His readiness to receive us.

Appreciate His Welcome

"Welcome" is a great word, a great concept. It is dramatized for us in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the return home of the prodigal son. The wanderer had his speech rehearsed and ready.

He intended to say:

“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: Make me as one of thy hired servants.” (Luke 15:18, 19)

But the father stopped that speech in mid-air and began to call for all manner of good things to be bestowed upon his son. In many different ways he was saying, “Welcome home, Boy!”

Do you want to know God? Stop running from Him. Hurry to Him, whether initially or repeatedly, and feel the warm pressure of His welcoming arms.

At Christmas at our house, each of our daughters and the grandchildren come home, though perhaps not all at the same time. The place is jumping for a little while. It is a joyous and wonderful occasion, so satisfying to the hearts of all of us.

Mother, who is the center of it all, has decorated the house like a fairyland. Everything that can hold a decoration has one: a ribbon or an ornament or a sprig of evergreen. She and I rush to the door to greet different ones as they arrive. They come bounding into our arms that are opened wide to receive them.

Thank God, we have had many Christmases like that. What happens at our house is “no big deal,” as we say today—just a bringing together of innumerable little loving things that fill our hearts with great joy.

Acknowledge His Lovingkindness.

We ought to appreciate our Father because He is the God of lovely little things.

Did you ever pray for a parking space in a crowded area - and then did you find one almost at once?

Did you ever pray for direction when you were momentarily disoriented and not able to know what to do next?

I recall standing on a street corner in Los Angeles years ago and praying, “Oh God, I don’t know anybody in this town. Yet I must make so many really meaningful contacts here. Will You please guide me?”

There was no flash of lightning, no heavenly vision to show me the way. Instead, I felt a great desire for a cup of coffee.

Seeing a hotel nearby that featured a coffee shop, I went in. A long, dark hallway led to the food center. Just as I arrived there I heard someone call my name. There was a friend of mine whom I had not seen in a long time, seated with another gentleman. My friend greeted me warmly and asked what I was doing there.

I told him I was the newly-elected president of Youth For Christ which had headquarters in Chicago, and that it was important that the work of Youth For Christ become known on the west coast.

"The trouble is," I said, "I don't know anybody here, so it's hard to get started."
"My friend here might be able to help you."

He introduced me to his table companion Ernie, whom, up to that moment, I had never seen. Ernie looked me over. I found out later that he was a very shrewd, understanding brother. You didn't fool him much. He evidently concluded that he could trust me. He asked, "Do you have any time today?"

Time! That was all I did have!
"I think I could arrange to be available," I told my new acquaintance.

That day we made several calls in homes that I never could have gotten into without the introduction of this man. The open doors were, every one, God's kindness to me. I could not command that kind of treatment. I could not earn it. It was evidence of God's loving concern for His child and His answer to a rather desperate prayer.

Do you pray about little things, Beloved? Do you talk to Him about small hurts (as well as larger ones)? Do you spell out to Him your needs of all sizes and kinds? He is the God of lovingkindnesses. As you turn the minor details of life over to Him, day after busy day, you will come to know Him in a deep and precious way that you never experienced before.

Acquaint Yourself with "Justice" and "Righteousness"

One further word: Notice that in Jeremiah 9:24, quoted earlier, lovingkindness heads the particular list the prophet speaks about as being things that God delights in. "Justice" judgments) and "righteousness" complete the list.

"Justice" implies a weighing of evidence that culminates in a decision based squarely on the revealed will of God.

“Righteousness” is of two kinds: imputed and imparted. Take the first word, “imputed.”

God reckons you righteous the moment you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord. In that moment He becomes, by faith, your Savior and He puts to your account, so to speak, all of HIS OWN glorious righteousness. That is why you find in God’s Word such expressions concerning the believer as “accepted in the Beloved” and “complete in him.” All that the Lord Jesus is becomes yours as by faith you take possession of it and claim it. This kind of righteousness is IMPUTED. It cannot be deserved or earned. It is credited to your account by our gracious

God who honors the faith you place in Him.

There is also righteousness that is IMPARTED. This, too, is bestowed by God. It is imputed righteousness that grows, so that year after year more of it is manifested in your life and character. Look again at these qualities, please: loving kindness, justice and righteousness. They are all qualities of the divine nature. To the extent that they become ours by faith, there will be not only “delight” for our blessed Lord but also a growing “knowledge of God” for us.

Our first question was this: Do you really want to know God? The “want to” must come first. Let me stop here to ask you, Beloved, do you know God any better today than you used to? Is He more of a friend to you? Do you spend time in His presence, and are you increasingly more comfortable with Him? You CAN be!

We have been talking about learning to know God. We have seen that, blessedly, one step of faith leads to another. When we agree with God - that is, when we say “yes” to His commands and promises to us - we come to appreciate Him in an ever-widening number of ways. That appreciation must always lead to action if our “knowledge of God” is to grow.

Appropriate His Strength

Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians:
“I do not cease to pray for you, that you might be ... strengthened with all might, according to his [God’s] glorious POWER, unto all patience and longsuffering and joyfulness.” (Col. 1:9-11)

There are three Greek words, each translated “power” in our English version. One word carries the concept of dynamite, another the imagery of authority, and the third the idea of brute force: the ability to chew up mountains.

As you put these three meanings together you get a well-rounded notion of the kind of power God wants to pour into your life and mine through the blessed indwelling Holy Spirit.

He not only wants to provide us with this divine enablement, but He does just that!
“[He is] *able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the POWER that worketh in us.*’ (Eph. 3:20)

The index of success in your life and mine is not how much we can do for God, or how long we can hold out, or how hard we try, or how smart we are. No, the measuring rod that indicates true achievement from God’s point of view is what God can do through us.

Early in his Christian life Stuart Hamblen wrote in a song now well-known:
*It is no secret what God can do. What He’s done for others He can do for you.
With arms wide open He will pardon you.
It is no secret what God can do.*

The difference between trying and trusting is that trying involves my best, but trusting calls forth God’s best.

Will you do this my friend? Take the situation that faces you today and that you simply cannot handle yourself, or take the inner rage you cannot quell, or the temptation you cannot surmount. Bring that thing to the Lord Jesus Christ in a definite act of commitment and faith. Say to Him, “From now on this is YOUR problem, Lord Jesus. I will just obey you. I think you will be delighted to see that at that very point God will work “on your behalf” according to his glorious POWER”

What is the evidence that God has bestowed His power upon us? Interestingly enough there will be no fireworks display, but rather a quiet outworking of a certain quality that we really wouldn’t seek to have: “Strengthened unto all PATIENCE.”

II ... Strength To Be Patient

Does it take power to be patient? Oh, yes it does! In the original text the word “patience” carries the idea of a command to stay down, or to stay under.

Rusty, our beloved Doberman, was a little puppy when we brought him into our home. He was so overjoyed that he would jump all over us. We had to say constantly, “Rusty, stay down!” He could understand that command much more readily than if we had said, “Be patient” - though the meaning was the same.

Over and over the Word of God calls us to patience:

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” (Psa. 27:14)

God wants us to let Him work. But that is a difficult assignment. We are like the little boy who prayed, “Lord, I need patience, and I want it right now.”

It takes strength to turn a situation over to God and then patiently look for Him to act. This kind of waiting is more than self discipline, good and necessary though that quality may be. Each of us has a point at which self-help is not enough.

We are like the steel girder being tested in the factory. Weight and heat and pressure are brought to bear - on the metal and on ourselves. Each of us has a point of maximum ability to withstand stress. That is why we need God’s almighty POWER to hold us steady when human strength would fail.

We hear a great deal these days about burnout. People in professional life - physicians, nurses, clergymen, counselors, statesmen, politicians-these are the ones most frequently affected.

What is burnout?

It is that condition in which the person is overwhelmed by his job. He no longer reacts to it with delight. There is no longer any meaningful challenge - just dread of inescapable demands.

Long hours of work, unrelieved by periods of rest and physical renewing, may account for many of these episodes. If you suffer from this kind of malady, you may feel impelled to run away from it all.

The other day a newspaper story told of a mailman who simply got fed up with delivering mail. So what did he do? He took eleven hundred pieces of mail and dumped them in a trash container. He said, “I got burned out.”

He also got fired.

You won’t burn out when God is resupplying strength to you. You’ll never feel depleted while He is pouring His strength into you.

... Strength To Accept People

Strengthened unto longsuffering.

In our search for ways to really know God we come up against some practical questions. They are suggested by the word “longsuffering,” which involves long-term caring for people. I ask myself: Do I have room in my heart for people WITH their faults? Do I accept them as they are, rather than as I wish they were? For how long am I willing to put up - graciously with those who are full of human shortcomings?

“How long” was part of Peter’s problem. He asked our Lord:

“How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” (Matt. 18:21)
The Lord Jesus answered, *“Until seventy times seven.”*

While divine forgiveness is so inexhaustible that it cannot be measured, our Saviour’s reply to Peter gave a strong hint of the greatness of it. Our Savior was saying “Peter, I want you to care, even as I do.”

Longsuffering is largeness of heart, a willingness to keep on caring no matter what happens. I tend to get to the end of my patience, don’t you? At that point I need to remember, quite clearly, that God has not given up on this person or that person who troubles me - nor has He given up on me! Jeremiah reminds us:

It is of the Lord’s mercy that we [all of us] are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. *“Great is his faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:22, 23)*

Oh, yes, dear friend, God keeps on caring when you hurt, when some person dear to you has caused you pain or grief. He cares when you cry. He wants to bring His own “good thing” for both of you. Our blessed Lord does not ever give up, not ever. We ought to be like Him in this, and we WILL be, only as we appropriate His strength that He is so ready to bestow. Longsuffering! I hear someone saying, “This is too large an order for me. I can’t take it.”

Of course you can’t! But God is almighty.

And if you are His child by faith in Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit, the great Enabler, lives within you. What you cannot do alone, He can. And He will! He will provide strength for you when you are under pressure, strength beyond human endurance, strength to rejoice when your heart is breaking. These are proofs of divine power in your life. They are received by faith - by you consciously laying hold of that which God has promised to give.

Need I point out to you that when you are living such a life of daily appropriation of divine strength you are coming to know God better and better?

... Strength To Be Joyful

Patience ... longsuffering. . . joyfulness. Each of these qualities requires a miracle to be performed in us if they are to be manifested in our lives. These traits can never be self-induced. Take joyfulness. This, of course, is far more than happiness. There is an old English chorus that I haven't heard in a long time:

*I'm happy when everything happens to please,
But happiness comes and goes;
While the soul that is stayed on Jesus the Savior
Ever with joy o'er flows.*

The word "happiness" is related to our verb "happen" which in turn embraces the idea of circumstances that please.

A little child is happy with a new toy, but unhappy if the toy breaks or ceases to function. Happiness is our emotional reaction to what is going on in our lives at the time.

Joy, on the other hand, is that deep-seated experience that is related not to circumstances but to persons - specifically and first of all to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joy is a relationship. Jesus said:

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that [therefore] your joy might be full." (John 15:11)

What must this relationship to Jesus Christ entail if we are to have joy?

First, we must accept His salvation: *"With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." (Isa. 12:3)*

Again, we must acknowledge that our chief work in life is in believing for ourselves, and sharing with others the truth of the Word of God: *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing." (Psa. 126:6)*

And all the time we must adjust our own will to the will of God. John the Baptist, when he was no longer met by great crowds as he preached repentance, declared the rightness of Christ's supremacy.

He said: *"This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He [Jesus] must increase and I must decrease."*
(John 3:29, 30)

How is it with you?

When things are rough and you are hurting and your heart is breaking and your eyes are brimming with tears and nothing seems to work out right and nobody understands - do you have joy then? You can!

This kind of joy, dear friend, is the result of God's outpoured power in your life. It will enable you to look up and say, "Dear God, I don't like this (whatever it is) but I want to feel your presence in this circumstance. I want to have Your joy. I want You to accomplish Your will through all of it." Tell Him that, and mean it, and the joy of the Lord will fill your soul. The peace of God will calm your spirit. The power of God will nurture your faint endeavor - and you will know God better than you ever have known Him before.

... Strength To Be Thankful

Does it take strength to be thankful? Oh, yes, it does! We live in a society where most people do not thank God, or anyone else, for anything. Thankfulness is a vanishing virtue. "What have you done for me lately?" is more than a New York joke. We Christians are in danger of becoming like our peers in this matter of self-centeredness.

God deserves our thanks. Have you noticed that the concept of deity is deeply-rooted in every culture? I have traveled over a good part of the world and have spoken to audiences, often through an interpreter. Never have I been in a place where listeners did not know what I meant when I referred to "the living God" - the One mightier than all their sacred objects.

The quarrel that God had against the heathen, as stated in Romans 1, was not that they were heathen, but that:

"When they knew God, they glorified him not AS GOD, neither were THANKFUL." (Rom. 1:21)

Learn to thank God. For what should you be grateful to Him? He keeps your heart beating. He holds your normal temperature at 98.6 degrees. He keeps the atmosphere in a delicate balance of nitrogen and oxygen, so perfect that any different ratio of the one to the other would spell disaster for the human race. He protects you in a million ways.

Learn to thank people. It is easy to criticize.

We need to make it a practice to find somebody who is doing something right and to thank that person for doing it, with absolutely no hidden hints of what he should have done.

How long has it been since you thanked your wife for the shining house and the good meals? Most of us take the everyday things for granted. The shopping, the laundry, the chauffeuring these are things seldom singled out for thanks. When the house rules are being kept, even imperfectly, do you thank your kids for trying?

Thankfulness is guaranteed to sweeten any relationship: in the home, in the classroom, in the work place - among peers, executives and subordinates alike. I urge you to put to work this powerful force - thankfulness - in your own environment.

Rule III - Assign Authority To God Over Little Things

The Christian life, as we have seen, is a relationship. The essence of your Christianity is not what you profess or what you do for God, but the extent to which He is in control of everything that concerns you. By your own choice, is HE the One who gives the orders? All the time?

If you are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ:

"All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22,23)

You are bound together in the very nature, power, presence and potential of God Himself.

You have a new "citizenship," a new allegiance. You are:

"Delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Col. 1:13)

That means that in non-religious matters (as well as so-called religious ones) you seek His guidance. In this matter of learning to know God, everything depends on your obeying even the slightest impression that comes to you as a signal of His' direction.

In the eighteen years that I served in the pastorate it was my practice always to go to the church before any stated meeting to be sure everything was in readiness. As I saw it, this was part of my "work" as a pastor and I performed it faithfully.

One night, about a half hour before a midweek meeting, I was leaving the parsonage when I had a strong feeling that I ought to go to a certain couple with whom I had been dealing concerning salvation. I stood on the sidewalk and had a conversation with God.

"You know I can't go just now," I said.

But the impression was so strong that I finally said, "All right, Lord. I'll go."

Up the street a couple of blocks was an apartment complex where I knew these people lived.

When I rang the bell I was brought into a scene that amazed me. The place was completely empty, except for a few packing boxes.

"What's going on here?," I exclaimed.

"Oh," they said, "we've been transferred to Joplin, Missouri. The movers are coming for the last load in the morning."

"Well," I began, "have you given any more thought to opening your hearts to the Savior?"

"Oh, yes, we have," they told me. "We've been thinking about it all the time."

"Would you like to do it right now?"

When they said they would, we knelt together among the packing boxes and they received Christ and were born again. I said good-bye to them and went back to my church meeting. (Incidentally, everything was all right there, in perfect order.) In my heart was a song, for I realized I had obeyed the promptings of the blessed Holy Spirit whose constant work is to reveal Christ, the only One through whom we shall ever "know God."

