

## Can I Know God?

### Introduction

This morning I'd like to try and answer the question, "Can I know God?" Not, "Can I know about God?" Can I know God the way I know my best friend?

In today's information age, we are sometimes lulled into the idea that knowing about someone is the same thing as knowing someone.

Before coming on staff here, I worked for a retail print shop in the Camelback Corridor downtown. Our location near the Biltmore made us the prime target for big wig business people, athletes, TV personalities and the like. Probably on a monthly basis, I see or hear a news story about one of my former customers and I make the comment, "Hey, I know him." What I really mean is, "I know who that is." I don't know really know them personally. But I've met them; I might know a little about them or what they do. Some of them even "know" me. But they don't really know me, and I don't really know them. We just know who each other is.

And that's how God is to a lot of people; we know who He is. And sometimes, we even know a lot about God. We go to church or listen to Christian radio so we can learn more and more about God. But knowing about God is not the same thing as knowing God. It's the difference between a movie star you know everything about and a close friend you actually know personally and intimately.

Knowing about God is a study. Anyone can do that. Knowing God is an experience. Knowing about God teaches that God is love. Knowing God is feeling loved my God. Those are different things. Learning about God teaches that God can heal any wound. Knowing God experiences that healing touch.

I am not saying that learning about God a waste of time. Learning about God and his character is a great thing. Knowing God and his character is a better thing.

This morning we are going to jump around a little more than normal as we try to answer to the question, "Can I know God?" Not just, "Can I know about God?" But, "Can I personally know God?"

For an outline this morning, I want to use the ►word KNOW. And I might as well give you the big idea right up front this morning. The big idea is, ►"Yes I can KNOW God." So, let's get started.

►The K in know represents the word Key. There is a key to knowing God. ►And that key is Jesus. Jesus is the key to knowing God.

►<sup>NAU</sup> John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

In John 10:30, Jesus says,

I and the Father are one.

Jesus is the only access we have to God. It is not possible to know God outside of Jesus Christ. We may be able to know about God, but God chose Jesus to be the path to knowing Him (God). Look at what Paul writes in the Bible book of Colossians.

►<sup>NAU</sup> Colossians 1:19 For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (Jesus), <sup>20</sup> and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

“Jesus is the only way to God” is not exactly a popular message today. Our current culture in America is pro-God. In a 2007 Gallup poll, 9 out of 10 Americans believe in God. Most people don’t have a problem with God talk. But Jesus is another story. Mentioning Jesus instead of God makes Christianity more exclusive than many people like. When you bring up Jesus, you exclude a bunch of people that might be ok with God, but aren’t ok with Jesus.

But the truth from the Bible is this: they have to go together, Jesus and God.

You cannot get close to God, you cannot know God, you cannot have a relationship with God without Jesus. He’s the key. Jesus is who unlocks the door to knowing God. According to the Bible, that’s the way God designed it.

But there is more to knowing God like a close friend than believing in Jesus. By his death and resurrection, Jesus promises eternal life to anyone who simply believes him for it. Believing in Jesus equals eternal life- spending eternity with God in heaven. But that’s different than knowing God in a personal way. Is possible to believe in Jesus and not know God. Sure! Lots of “believers”- those who believe in Jesus for eternal life- don’t really know God. They may know about God, but experiencing him as a friend- someone they know and interact with- they don’t know what that’s like.

That was me for several years after believing in Jesus for eternal life. I tried to read my Bible, go to church, serve someway. I did everything you should do. But, I didn’t get the “know God- relationship- friendship part.” I learned a lot about God. Probably because studying is easier for me than working on relationships. But God is patient.

Jesus is the key to knowing God. It is the most important part. It is the foundation- the basis- on which we can know God. If you are here this morning searching for God, maybe you need to start with Jesus. If you are here this morning searching for God or wondering if you can actually know God, the Bible says you can. In fact, the Bible says Jesus was born so you could know God. God created us to be with Him. But our sin has separated from God. And there is nothing we can do to work away our sin. But paying for our punishment, Jesus died and rose again. And everyone who trusts in just that to get to heaven will have eternal life.

If you haven’t trusted or believed in Jesus for eternal life, I invite you to believe Him this morning. It’s the key to knowing God.

►But there is another aspect of knowing God. So, we’ll let the► N represent Now. Now is the time to know God. Let me explain what I mean by “now.”

I am not sure if this happens to you, but I know it happens to me a lot. As I cruise through life, things get busy and the busier things get the further away from God I feel. Things happen and I am not really sure if God is paying attention. I am not sure if I really know what God wants. I wake up one morning and that knowing God as a close friend feeling has disappeared.

But this happens in other relationships in my life too. After my first year of college, I decide not to go to back to school in SC and I stayed in Phoenix to go to school. My girlfriend at the time went back to SC in early August. We wrote letters and talked on the phone, but it wasn’t the same. We were both busy with school and work. By October, the closeness I used to feel was gone. By the end of October, we broke up. Or maybe I should say, I broke up. I had a replacement waiting in the wings and she soon found herself a new boyfriend. It didn’t really matter how close we were before we were apart. All that meant was that it took a little longer to drift. Life and 2000 miles got in the way and I was too young and immature to know what to do about it. The point: relationships fade if regular attention is not given to them. Weather it’s a spouse or a friend or a family member. Or, I would argue, God. Our relationship with God is similar. It doesn’t matter how close we once were. What really matters is where I am today. What am I doing right now to better my relationship with God? What am I doing right now to know God better? Now is the time to work on knowing God. A fleeting memory of knowing God in a personal way doesn’t help us experience God today!

And church can't count. You can't sit here this morning and say, "That is what church is for." Going to church- by itself- does not count.

Let me illustrate. Most of us probably have people we work with that we might consider friends. While at work, we chat about work and the weather and sports and maybe even our families. But our relationship ends when the work day ends. We don't hang out after work or socialize together. Our families don't go camping together. We don't talk to each other outside of work.

For many people that's what building a relationship with God at church is like. Spending time with God is like spending time with friends at work or school. Since you're there, you talk to them and hang out with them. For many of us, God is the friend we hang with at church. But when the church day ends, our relationship is put on hold until the next church day. It's a start, but most friendship can't get very close by being together for 1 hour, 1 day a week. That might be a first step in helping know who God is, but we won't have a sense of knowing God by coming to church.

Think about it. Our friendship changes when you start hanging out with work or school friends outside of work or school. You get closer. You know each other better. You see sides of people you never saw at work or school. And that is what happens when we spend time with God outside of church. Even Jesus needed to spend time with God. The gospels record several times where Jesus needed to get alone and pray. For example,

►<sup>NAU</sup> Luke 6:12 It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.

The question I ask myself when God feels far away is, "When did I move?" When did I stop inviting God over? When did I stop asking God out? When did I stop working on my relationship with God? This isn't about having a number of times you have to read your Bible or pray. It's not about how many times you have to go to church. It's not about always acting the right way. It's about wanting to become better friends with God.

How can I know God NOW? What are some things I can do right now to further develop my friendship with God to get to know him better? Maybe it's reestablishing a quiet time. Kind of like a date night, but with God. A time for just you and God. Maybe it's trying to apply the Biblical principles from Sunday's messages. Maybe it's sacrificing something you currently do so you can make room for God. Remember the girlfriend I broke up with? Well she came home for Christmas. When I saw her, I knew I had messed up. It took me 46 days, but she forgave me and today we are married. Regardless of how much we have ignored our relationship with God, He is waiting for you right now. He wants you to know Him right now.

So, if the K is the Key to knowing God; and N represents Now; ►O represents a third point in knowing God. It is open.

Why is being open a key component to knowing God? Well, let's think about a normal relationship for a moment. Have you ever done something bad or wrong and been afraid to go back to scene of the crime? Or maybe you are involved in some kind of sin that makes it difficult to come to church or pray to God. I remember talking to a former student from when I was a youth pastor. She had gotten wrapped up in partying and other things. I asked her what the church could have done to help her. She laughed. "Nothing" was her answer. When I asked why, she told me it was because she felt so much guilt for the way she was living, she had a hard time coming to church or even talking to church people.

When I was 16, I hastily pulled out of a parking place in my girlfriend's apartment complex. Unfortunately for me, there was a car next to me. The front end of my car moved that car about 3 feet and caved in the door. I was scared to death. Did anyone see me? What am I supposed to do? What would you do? I chose to drive off. I found out the car belonged to

someone living in the apartment above my girlfriend. For the next 4 months until those people moved, I hated going over there. I didn't like being around my unconfessed hit and run. It made me uncomfortable. It made me edgy.

These two stories illustrate the same thing. We aren't comfortable with secrets. It works the same way with God for most of us. When we have things that we think God doesn't like, it is difficult to feel close with God. Not because God isn't there, but because we have baggage. You will often hear people say that when a Christian sins, it breaks our fellowship with God. But why? Does God get ticked and move away? I don't think so. I think God is always where God has always been. The problem is us. God is still around, wanting to be known. Wanting a relationship with us. Wanting to be close. But we pull away because of our secret. The trouble with that is that it isn't a secret to God. He already knows what you are doing. In First John, John tells us what to do with our secrets.

▶ 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us."

The word "confess" means "to agree with God." It is going to God and saying this was wrong and I am sorry. An openness about our sin removes the secrets with God and eliminates another barrier we create to knowing Him.

But there is another openness in our relationship with God. It is the openness to God's spirit.

▶<sup>NAU</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:11 For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God. . .

When we believe in Jesus for eternal life, God's spirit comes and lives in us. According to this verse, God's spirit knows the thoughts of God. If we want to know God, we must be open to what his spirit is saying. To know God is to listen to His Spirit. ▶

And that leads us to the W. W ▶ represents our walk. If we want to know God, we must walk in Him. There are several verses in the New Testament that talk about our walk with God. For example, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul says

▶<sup>NAU</sup> Colossians 2:6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him,<sup>7</sup> having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude.

The phrase "walk in Him" is fairly common in the New Testament. The command to "walk" can also be translated "live." It is a word that denotes a lifestyle. So, when Paul says to walk in Him, he is challenging the people in the church to live a lifestyle in Christ. And walking in Him- or living a lifestyle in Jesus- builds us up and solidifies our faith. Our trust in God is made stronger by walking in Him. Knowing Him more, knowing Him better, and knowing Him more completely occurs when we live in Jesus. When Christianity becomes a lifestyle instead of an activity, we will know Him more. When Christianity becomes a lifestyle instead of a badge we bring out on Sundays, we will know Him better. But how do we do that? How does Christianity become a lifestyle? How can I be open to God's spirit and what he has for me? The simple answer: by living out the Bible. By trying to apply Biblical principles to your daily life. By asking God what He wants and listening. By spending time in his word. By loving others the way Jesus did. Instead of dedicating Sunday to accomplishing my religious duty for the week, I daily ask God how I can live today like a Christian at work, at home, at school. That's how we walk in Him.

▶ It is possible to know God? It is possible to experience God rather than just learn about Him? The answer is, "Yes, I can know God."

This morning's message might have felt like getting a drink from a fire hose. We bounced around a little more than usual. But find one thing you can do this week to know God. Weather it is believing in Jesus, or committing to work NOW on your relationship or being open about sin and stuff in your life or learning to walk in Him. Ask God to show you where to start this week.

Will you pray with me?