

LIFE'S GREATEST HONOUR AND CALLING -- TO KNOW GOD

Introduction:

1. We rejoice in God's working in your lives leading us to know Him and to open up the door to serve Him. He has brought you to this part of the world as His servants. He has much for you to do for Him. There are people to be reached with the Good News, and many believers to be disciplined/strengthened in their faith. There is much work awaiting you -- for which God has prepared you (cf. I Cor.3:5).

2. What have you come here to do? What is the work He has called you to do?

We could give various answers:

- a) evangelism (many kinds),
- b) church-planting,
- c) discipling new converts,
- d) spreading a vision for mission,
- e) helping needy people with social aid etc.
- f) learning a new language
- g) understanding more of God's will for my future etc.

3. The question of greatest importance is: What is God sending you out to do? You might have many thoughts; others might have their ideas. But the answer to this question must be found in God's Word: To bear witness to Jesus Christ, to proclaim Him as the Good News, in order that we might lead people to know Him in truth -- that Christians will throw off their unbiblical ideas of a weak God, or a God who is angry all the time, or a God who's distant etc; and also unbelievers whose minds have been blinded by Satan's lies -- that they also will "see" through the work of the Spirit who God is in truth and want to place their entire lives and destinies into His love and care -- to know Him and enjoy Him forever.

See Luke 24:45-49; I Peter 2:9; II Cor.4:5-6; Col.1:28-2:3,9-10.

cf. John 17:1-6a; 20:21.

4. In other words, all that we will do as God's servants is focussed on revealing to the world and to God's people, His church, the incredibly glorious riches that are found in Christ.
5. What does this mean in practical reality?
 - a) It means that in the work God has sent you to do, regardless of the nature of that work, your primary concern and goal is to proclaim and exalt the glory and wonders of our Lord Jesus Christ through your life and your words -- who He is and what He has done, is doing and will do -- both to fellow-believers and also to unbelievers. cf. Psalm 145:3-12.
 - b) If God has called us to come to proclaim this living Person called Christ, then OUR PRIMARY, PERSONAL GOAL (or objective for our entire life!) must be to know Him.
 - i) While we need to learn much about the Gospel truths we will share, answers to people's objections, contemporary methods that will attract people to listen, discipling strategies etc., our primary focus must be elsewhere -- upon knowing God, our Father, knowing Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and knowing the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and Source of all power, strength, wisdom and love -- as the Three-in-One God is in truth -- in a very personal and intimate way.
 - ii) Then we will be able to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him personally -- but MUCH MORE THAN THAT, we will be able to speak about Him as He is (not according to our own private perceptions & even distortions!) and also as a living Person who is very real and near to us in daily experience. Few people are attracted to the Gospel because of our convincing arguments. They are drawn to Christ through us as it is evident that what we believe is ALIVE -- that we talk about a Person with whom we have a daily, living, vital relationship.
 - iii) So we are here to proclaim the One who has revealed Himself to us personally, who continues to make Himself known to us, and who has both changed our lives (some point of time in the past) and also continues to

work powerfully to change us continually from within -- i.e. our hearts that are the well-spring of our very beings. See Prov.4:23.

c) All this means that we must think of in a new way regarding our ministry -- OUR MINISTRY MUST FLOW OUT OF OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST. It is so easy to let our Christian lives and ministries slip down into a very dull routine of doing lots of tasks, even good ones, evangelistic ministries etc. All of this can spell "death" -- instead of "life" to people around us both believers and unbelievers. All of this becomes mere RELIGIOUS works, but not truly life-transforming, spiritual works -- living and teaching a dead religion of forms and rituals, or a religion that centers around a knowledge of the truth in a cold, impersonal, academic, rational way. Whereas God has called us to communicate Himself and true life to others. And this comes out of our knowing Him and growing in that knowledge of Himself.

cf. II Peter 3:18.

d) Here is a very important Biblical assertion or fact/truth: "Being" comes before "doing". And "being" flows from our "knowing" God and what He has revealed about Himself. Therefore, if we prioritise WORK (doing) -- all that we're hoping to do and accomplish for God instead of knowing God and being His child and servant, then our work will become just a lot of lifeless activities and programs that bring little or no lasting fruit -- perhaps even bringing spiritual death to others rather than life.

e) Therefore, if God has called us here to proclaim Him as the living, reigning Lord, then our NUMBER ONE GOAL -- NOW, throughout MTS, throughout our time with OM and for the wherever we might live -- must be to know Him and to hunger to know Him more intimately.

f) Then God will bring forth fruit from this knowledge in a life that honours God and a ministry that is truly effective and God-glorifying.

Question: Is this what we desire most of all?

6. Several fundamental questions:

- a) Is it really possible to know the God who remains hidden from mortal eye? And if so, how & why?
- b) What does it mean to know God in practical terms?
- c) How does God make Himself known to us?
- d) Why does God desire that we know Him?

A. HOW & WHY CAN WE KNOW THE INVISIBLE GOD?

1. Normally when we talk about knowing another person in our experience, we are referring to a person we know in the flesh, although we sometimes talk about knowing a lot about a person we've only read about in a book. How then can we talk about knowing this hidden spiritual Being we address as "God"? How?

cf. I Tim.1:17; 6:15-16.

2. The answer is simple: Because God has made Himself known to man.

cf. Just as we can only know a person if they allow themselves to be known, so we can know God only because He Himself makes Himself known to us.

3. This is the fact of the Gospel -- we aren't left to look for God and find Him on our own steam or in our own ways. Those who do never find Him! He has revealed Himself to man -- working powerfully in many different ways to open the spiritual eyes of man to know and believe the truth about Jesus -- and so come to know Him as "Father".

a) God is both the God who hides Himself and also who reveals Himself -- who hides Himself from some and reveals Himself to others. This is a divine mystery, but we know that from our side, God reveals Himself to whoever seeks after Him with a true and sincere heart. See Jer.29:11-13.

b) A fundamental truth is that God wants us to know Him. He takes the initiative to reveal (disclose) Himself to man. eg. Abraham -- Gen.12:1-3. And above all, through Jesus He has revealed Himself to man -- John 1:14,18; Heb.1:1-3.

B. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "KNOW" GOD?

1. Firstly, to know God is to know Him SPIRITUALLY. God is Spirit (John 4:24), so we can only know Him through the help of His Spirit and in our spirits. cf. I Cor.2:12-13.

- a) In the west, "knowing" mostly has to do with purely intellectual pursuits of gaining some head knowledge of facts -- and we deem the highest form of knowledge comes through studying lots of technical information which is then signified by the granting of a degree. We are said to "know" facts & information when we master it sufficiently to pass certain exams.
- b) Many believers can attend many Bible study groups at their church, or graduate from a Bible or theological college and be deluded into thinking that they know God because they have studied the theology of God. In fact, many believers are hindered from truly knowing God -- because they have reduced knowing God to the level of their minds. Spiritual and intellectual pride keep them from coming to know God in a deeper way (cf. I Cor.8:1-3.)
- c) Knowing God, therefore, is a spiritual pursuit. It isn't just what the mind can grasp but what happens at the very core of our beings through the working of God's Spirit. The effect or impact of this spiritual awakening upon the rest of our beings is ultimately dependent upon our giving the Spirit of God His rightful place of authority in our lives -- at the very control centre of our lives (in our hearts).

2. Secondly, to know God is to know Him PERSONALLY.

- a) If it is indeed true that God is a Person, a real Being who is hidden to the eyes of sinful man because He is holy, then we may talk about knowing Him because He has made us in His image as living persons.
- b) This means that we can speak about knowing God's mind (what He thinks), His character (what He is like as a Person), His plans and purposes (what He does and plans to do), His feelings and thoughts (how He feels about man, i.e. that He sorrows, grieves, delights etc.).

cf. Discuss what in practice it means for us to know another human being in an intimate way.

3. Thirdly, to know God means to know Him RELATIONALLY -- in a potentially very intimate, two-sided relationship -- where we are known by Him and know Him, where He communicates with us and we with Him and where the relationship is rooted in the deepest and purest form of love. cf. Psalm 139.

a) A married couple can say with meaning they know one another well when they have given themselves to each other unconditionally & freely and when they have shared each other's lives through years of living together and sharing the ebb & flow of a daily relationship with one another. This includes among many facets of life communicating openly and honestly with one another, seeking to understand and appreciate/value each other's desires, expectations and needs in the relationship. This implies:

- i) We can only know God in this relational sense if we commit ourselves unconditionally to our relationship with God, just as He has committed Himself to us.
- ii) Knowing God is worked out in the realities of sharing each day with God, not apart from Him. God desires to make Himself known to us through the pressures of life (cf. God's Book of Life). Hence no situation or circumstance in daily life no matter how painful or difficult is without tremendous potential for the strengthening and growth of our knowledge of God -- His faithfulness, love for us etc. We only come to know God in this deeper way as we determine to believe in this truth. (cf. Rom.8:28,31-39.)
- iii) Growing in this relational knowledge requires communication, hearing God communicating with us and we communicating with God. It is impossible to know someone who shuts himself/herself off and refuses to communicate. We come to know what is on a person's heart and mind when we listen to what they are saying (or what they write to us). God's people can only know God in truth as we listen carefully to what He has communicated to us through His holy Word. And though God knows all that is on our hearts, He also desires to delight in knowing us as we communicate with Him -- through words spoken in praise, thanks & prayer.

- b) Knowing God relationally also obviously means that it is a two-sided relationship: God knowing us, and we knowing God (cf. Psalm 139:1-4,23-24).
- i) God knows us as we are and still loves us perfectly. There isn't anything about us that He doesn't know, nor will there ever be any surprises to Him in the days ahead.
 - ii) It's our part in this relationship to know Him.
 - iii) We cannot know Him if we want to know Him on our own terms. He will only reveal Himself to us as we surrender all to Him and give ourselves both to be known by Him as well as to know Him as He truly is.

C. HOW DOES GOD MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN TO US?

1. God has made Himself known to man and continues to make Himself known in the following ways:

- a) Through His Word -- the Bible as the divinely inspired "breathing-out" of God's truths -- authoritative & reliable. See II Tim.3:16-17. On this every other way that God speaks is founded. Through the Scriptures we are to test every other "revelation" and through the Scriptures God reveals every other divine truth to us.
- b) Through Jesus Christ -- the revealed Word. See Heb.1:1-3.
- c) Through God's servants & His people as they teach and speak as God's mouthpieces or ambassadors. See II Cor.5:16-21.
- d) Through life's experiences, i.e. His acts in our lives & in the lives of people & nations around us (= His revelation in human history). He speaks to us through the joyful and the painful experiences of life, as well as through all His powerful interventions in our lives and in the lives of others and even in nations.
- e) Through dreams & visions (occasionally). cf. Acts 16:9; 18:9.
- f) Through nature (though people without faith in Christ are "blind" to the voice of God speaking through nature). See Rom.1:18-25.
- g) Through the still, small voice of the Spirit in the heart & mind of a regenerate believer.

2. Our evangelical faith focuses our attention on two key ways God speaks -- His WORKS and His WORDS. These two are most perfectly and wonderfully brought together in the Person of Jesus Christ whom God spoke to the world and also made His

life to be living, powerful Word especially to His own people, the Jews, and through them to the whole world and universe.

- a) Through His incarnation & birth, God ACTED -- He intervened in the history of the world. He came into our time-space world in the Person of His own Son. Through Jesus' life, God revealed in living flesh His own perfections (cf. Heb.1:1-3). At the end of Jesus' life, God acted powerfully for the salvation of all who will believe through giving up His Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:1-2; 4:9-10).
- b) Through His coming, God SPOKE to man the very words of God. He spoke God's truth and He was the truth. He was the LOGOS, the Word speaking to man. He did not speak on His own, but spoke those words that through the Spirit God gave to Him to speak (John 14:10). Jesus also made clear declarations about who He was in truth -- the One sent down from heaven through whom the world might be saved (John 6:38-40). To those who believed and received Him and listened to His words, God gave the power and privilege (honour) to become His own children (John 1:12).

3. Now as we contemplate how God makes Himself known to the world today, and to His people, we usually focus our attention, and rightfully so, upon what God has spoken, i.e. the words written down in the Bible as His inspired and authoritative Word. And this is because we believe strongly that in the Scriptures alone we have the God-breathed, authoritative, infallible foundation for knowing and understanding truth -- truth about God, His will, His purposes etc. (II Tim.3:16-17). But there is danger of imbalance -- causing our attention to so focus upon words written down so many years ago in the Scriptures that we miss what God is doing today -- His present actions in our time-space world.

4. Just as in the past as we read in the Scriptures God made Himself known to His people -- both through what He said to them, and also through what He did in their lives as a people of God (cf. the OT scenes in which God is working in historical moments to make Himself known to nations & to His people -- Exodus 7:), so we may expect that God to make Himself known to us in a similar fashion -- as THE GOD WHO SPEAKS & THE GOD WHO ACTS.

5. God continues to reveal Himself in this way to us today. How can we come to know Him in this intimate, life-changing, personal way?
- a) By listening to His voice (i.e. His Spirit) speaking to us through what He did and what He spoke to men & women of God in previous ages as recorded in the Bible - - and by listening also to God's servants as they interpret His Word to us for today; and
 - b) By listening to His voice as He speaks to us through what He is doing -- both in our lives as well as in the world around us today.
 - i) It is a most fundamental belief that God is not faraway in heaven (a deistic concept of God) but continues to be active in the world around us as well as in our personal lives and in the life of His people.
 - ii) Our upbringing and educational background is mostly from within secular cultures. In secular cultures and societies, God doesn't really exist (He is considered dead or irrelevant) to most people. And if He does exist, He has little or nothing to do with life here on planet earth. Life just goes on as driven by natural forces and by the ambitions and evil intents of man. All the events of life are seen by most (in practice) as being caused by mere chance or what man does or brings about by himself.
 - iii) The Christian view of God is that He is very much involved in what is going on in history and is orchestrating it all from His heavenly control room according to His divine purposes and plans. God is King, Sovereign and Ruler. As we watch what He is doing in the world around us and interpret it in the light of His written Word, then we come to know His nature and understand more about what He is accomplishing.
 - iv) We believe -- and, therefore, are to look for and expect -- that God is acting powerfully, lovingly and sovereignly in our own personal lives as well.
 - v) He is working in many ways in keeping with a perfect and glorious plan. God works always and in every situation in keeping with the perfections of His holy character, never arbitrarily, on a whim, or in spite etc. This means that the goal to know Him is possible -- because He always acts and speaks in perfect harmony with Himself.

- vi) Therefore, by looking for His loving interventions in our lives, and then accepting them humbly and joyfully, we may come to know Him in truth and experience a deep peace and joy in this knowledge and relationship.

Examples: His acts of mercy, kindness, faithfulness, or chastisement etc.

D. WHY DOES GOD DESIRE THAT WE KNOW HIM?

1. His primary aim is so that we love Him (cf. Deut.6:5; Matt.22:37-38; cf. Ps.18:1). He longs for our love. He is the God of love, and His will is for a relationship with us that is primarily characterised by LOVE, not just by work/service.
 - a) But we can't love someone we don't know. So He is constantly at work in our lives so that we might know Him -- which will elicit a deep response of love.
cf. How a couple in love grow in the depth of their love and affection for one another as they come to know more and more about each another.
 - b) God reveals Himself to us in order that we might love Him with greater depth and in more profound intimacy.
2. He also wants us to know Him so that as we come to know Him and love Him more and more intensely, then we will offer up to Him our offerings of love, adoration, praise, thanksgiving = WORSHIP. This is the natural response of our hearts as our eyes are opened to more and more of the wonder and glory of our great God -- His character.
3. Furthermore, God desires us to know Him in truth and with reality, so that we will communicate this knowledge to others. The closer we come to God, the more we feel His heart-beat for the world -- that He might have a people for Himself from every tribe, culture and tongue (Rev.7:9-10). When God's people see "fellowship with God" (a intimate relationship just for themselves and for God's "happy people"), they do not know Him in truth. To know God is to know Him as the God who reaches out to the world to save those who still stand outside His Kingdom.
4. In summary, the reasons why God wants us to know Him are, so that:

- a) We will love Him from our hearts;
- b) We will worship and praise Him in truth; and
- c) We will delight in serving Him wherever He so leads.

Conclusion:

1. God longs for us to know Him. And to know Him is eternal life (John 17:3) -- here and in the world to come.

2. Our part is to check our desire to know Him as the Triune God -- to long after to know Him in truth as He truly is -- opening up our hearts to the work of the Spirit who continues to reveal Christ (John 15;16) and God our Father.

3. This spiritual hunger and longing doesn't come naturally. We need to nurture it. We need to stir up this passion for God. And to put away everything, every hindrance that saps our desire after God. We must ask God to deepen this longing and satisfy it only in HIM.
 - a) It is our responsibility to remove every obstacle in the way in our lives, especially worship of our selves, putting our selves, our desires, our will, our ambitions (even in Christian work) ahead of knowing God and satisfying our spiritual needs in other ways and people than in earnestly seeking after God Himself.

 - b) It is also so important to recognise that Satan, our arch enemy as well as God's, is bent on stopping us from knowing God. How does he accomplish this? In many ways:
 - i) Blinds spiritual eyes of many (II Cor.4:4), stops their hearing especially so that they do not "see" and know Him through what He is doing nor hear His loving, beckoning voice;
 - ii) Lures them away from the simplicity of faith in Christ;
 - iii) Tempts them to fall in love with this world and all its temporal values (eg. false beliefs);
 - iv) To do what everyone else is doing -- following the natural passions of their evil hearts; and

- v) To fill their lives with so much activity & busyness including good, missionary activities, as a substitute for experiencing and living in a close, intimate relationship with God.
- c) Why is Satan working in these & other ways?
- i) Satan wants to rob us of a wonderful, joyful relationship with God; and
 - ii) He wants to lame us -- to render us useless, powerless and ineffective in the work of God's kingdom.
- d) Therefore, it is absolutely important in our desire to know God to understand & recognise Satan's ways & devices and to fight against them through the victory of the indwelling Christ.
4. Most of us find that we are often wounded in the fight or our minds at times have grown distracted from this pursuit. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to keep our spiritual hunger and appetite growing. We also need to repent and turn back to God, humbly confessing our responsibility for our lack of spiritual hunger.
- a) Pray to God asking Him to fill you with an insatiable hunger for God (cf. Matt.5:6);
 - b) Ask Him to show you clearly and specifically what is dulling or taking away from your hunger to know Him. Listen attentively until He reveals specific issues.
 - c) Then respond in obedience to what He shows you.
5. We need to look upon this whole experience as a life-long journey. This is a life-long journey.
- a) Yes, we already know God -- through Christ -- because He has made Himself known to us by His Spirit. He has opened our spiritual understanding to know truths about Himself that have radically changed our lives.
 - b) But knowing limitlessness and vastness of the true God, our Father, the sovereign LORD & Ruler over the universe, the eternal and infinite God will take all eternity.

6. Let us make it OUR NUMBER ONE AIM OR OBJECTIVE in life -- both for the coming months at MTS, for your time with IT or OM, and also for the rest of your life -- to know God, the living, holy Triune God. Let no one or nothing rob you of this greatest joy. Keep it alight all the way through your lives and ministries (cf. Phil.3:10).

Notes prepared by Graham M. Roberts

Missionary Training School, Czech Republic

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