

THE POWER  
OF  
KNOWING  
GOD

TONY EVANS



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## **The Power of Knowing God**

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Part 1

# THE PURSUIT

# LIFE'S HIGHEST AIM

A number of years ago, I was invited to do something I had never done before: skeet shooting. The goal of skeet shooting is to take a shotgun and try to hit little clay disks that get flung out of a machine into the air.

I'm from the concrete jungle of Baltimore, and I later moved to another metropolitan area called Dallas. Before being invited to go skeet shooting, I'd never gone hunting or target shooting before. But the concept was intriguing, and in all honesty the sport didn't look that difficult as I watched the man who had invited me knock disk after disk out of the sky.

Being the man that I am, I quickly walked over to the gun, picked it up, and aimed. I didn't need any lessons. That disk was mine, and it was coming down. Placing the gun against my shoulder, I proceeded to consistently miss my target.

Time after time I shot into the air like a starter announcing the beginning of a race. Regardless of how I aimed or where I looked, my efforts were in vain. I was in the right place and I was holding the right tools, but I wasn't making the connection. I failed to achieve my goal.

After enough rounds of wasted shot, my friend approached and asked if he could be of any assistance. I swallowed my pride for a moment and nodded my head. He then explained that when the disks are shot out of the machine, they move at a rapid pace. Because of this speed, the way to hit them is to get out in front of them. He instructed me never to aim at the disk itself, but to always aim a foot or two in front of it. That way, when the pellet reaches its destination, it will be in the same position as the clay disk.

Taking just a bit of advice from someone who knew what they were talking about enabled me to shoot my first disk clear out of the sky. And then my next one, and my next, and my next.

## WHEN SOMETHING IS MISSING

Friend, if you go to church, read your Bible, and participate in Bible study groups, you have the right tools for living the victorious Christian life. But even when you have the right tools or position yourself in the right place, there still seems to be something missing.

Far too many believers today are living off target. It's not for a lack

of effort. Neither is it for a lack of concentration. And it's certainly not because they are insincere. It's something deeper than all of that.

For example, when I attempted to hit the disks in the sky that brisk morning, I tried very hard. I focused very hard. But I still came up empty because I just didn't know the strategy for success. Once I discovered that strategy, I shot disk after disk out of the clear blue sky.

Similarly, there exists a strategy in the Christian life that few people ever realize. Despite their best attempts at living the abundant life Christ died to secure for them, they fall short. And even though the strategy requires very little external adjustment on their part, when that adjustment is made, it makes all the difference in the world.

What is this strategy to living out the fullness of your victory as a child of the King? It involves how well you know God.

Knowing God ought to be your life's greatest pursuit.

## HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD?

There are a variety of ways that people get to know God. Some people don't know Him at all because they are unconverted and unsaved. But then there are those who know Him casually. He is an acquaintance to them. Yes, they believe in Him and check in with Him from time to time. They'll "like" a Scripture here or there or "comment" on Him at church or in social circles, but they really don't know Him that well at all.

Other people know God informationally. They talk about Him fairly regularly and expound on their knowledge of Him. They may

read a number of books on Him or hear a lot of sermons about Him. They could give you an in-depth description of His stories, history, and qualities. They are relatively sound on who God is. They may even have a working knowledge of Bible doctrine.

There are others who know Him religiously and, in a way, He has become very programmatic to them because they connect to Him through activities, duties, or service.

Then there are those who know God spiritually. They can tell you how it feels when the Holy Spirit moves around or in them. They can emotively describe the feelings believing and hoping in God gives them.

As you can see, there are a number of different approaches and ways of understanding or knowing God. But none of these ways are what I am talking about in this book. Now, the path we are going to look at together will include a number of attributes from each of these categories, sure, but it will go deeper than that. While knowing God does involve your intellect, emotions, and actions, it also involves so much more. Because intellect, emotions, and actions on their own do not comprise the true meaning of knowing.

Consider a husband and wife who have been married for four or five decades. Of course, by then they intellectually know their spouse, they emotionally grasp how he or she makes them feel, and they have made adjustments in their actions in an effort to align with their spouse's desires. However, even with those three aspects of knowing, they may not truly know each other at all.

You've seen them. These couples can predict each other's next word, and they'll dutifully accompany each other to whatever



appointment or experience is on the agenda, but something seems to be missing. Despite years together and shared memories, they are still not connected in the way that matters most.

Knowing someone—even knowing God—involves much more than simple knowledge. It involves a connection so authentic and real that it gives birth to a synchronicity and cadence established as a natural outgrowth of the relationship itself. Knowing someone often can't be defined in words or activities. It's that subtle savoring that occurs within two souls uniquely bonded in love.

Our foundational passage for understanding why we are to pursue knowing God intimately is Jeremiah 9:23-24, where we read,

Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me.”

When a man sees a lady who captures his imagination, and he walks over to ask her, “What's your name?” he is after much more than information. While information is necessary, that's not his goal. His goal is a relationship. As this man and woman begin to date and start talking on the phone, facts about each other transform into feelings. As these feelings deepen, he becomes moved to ask for her hand in marriage. When she says yes and the wedding occurs, they then spend their first night together on their honeymoon. When the feelings have culminated in a mutual love, they then initiate the full knowing of each other in their first time of intimacy together.

See, that's what the Bible says when we read in Genesis 4:1, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain" (ESV). When the Bible talks about people knowing each other in this biblical sense, it is referring to physical intimacy at its greatest level. This ushers in the ability to both know and be known—which involves much more than mere physical contact and is only attainable in an atmosphere of total and deserved trust.

The Hebrew term used in Genesis 4:1 is the word *yada*. It is the same word used a few verses earlier when describing how Adam's and Eve's eyes had been opened and they "knew" they were naked (Genesis 3:7). It is also the same word used in Genesis 3:22, where we read, "The LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.'"

The word *yada* is not a word referring to body parts or physical activity. In all definitions of the word *yada*, which occurs more than 1,000 times in the Old Testament, it means:

- ♦ to know or learn to know
- ♦ to be made known or revealed
- ♦ to make oneself known to another
- ♦ to cause someone to know
- ♦ to know based on experience<sup>1</sup>

When *yada* is used in connection with relational interaction, it indicates plumbing the depths of someone else's reality. In fact, it has the capacity to be so intimate a term when applied to relational involvement that God uses it to refer to His own relationship with us.

The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know [*yada*] His covenant (Psalm 25:14).

“You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know [*yada*] and believe Me” (Isaiah 43:10).

I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know [*yada*] that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name (Isaiah 45:3).

In each of these descriptions, God speaks of His relationship with humankind in a close and intimate manner. We read about “treasures of darkness,” being “chosen,” and God’s self-obligatory relationship He establishes called His “covenant.” On top of that, twice we read the specific word *secret*—once in reference to God’s secrets (“the secret of the LORD”) and also in relation to what God will give (“hidden wealth of secret places”).

One thing about secrets is that you have to be pretty close in order to share them. Of course, you have to be close emotionally by way of trust, but oftentimes secret sharing includes being close in proximity as well.

When you were younger and wanted to tell someone a secret, what would you normally do? If you were like me, you would move next to the other person, close enough so that you could lean over and, with your hand cupped around your mouth, whisper in his or her ear.

That is the typical way of sharing a secret.

And that is what God says He will do with those who know (*yada*) Him. He will be so close that you can hear Him whispering in your ear, telling you the secrets that are reserved for those who have a special relationship of intimacy with Him.

Yet, what is essential to realize is that when God chose to *yada* us, He chose to do so with a people who are perishing (John 3:16), have gone astray (Luke 19:10), and are condemned (John 3:18). God gave His perfection to those who knew only imperfection (Romans 3:23). He revealed the purity of Himself to those who are “desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV). And He was able to do all of this while maintaining His holiness, because Jesus hung on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of us all. Jesus not only died physically, but He died to Himself, as we read, “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).

Likewise, the very foundation of true relationship with God Himself is rooted in a sacrificial dying to yourself, laying your will, pride, and needs on the altar while considering God’s heart as more important than your own. Knowing God involves so much more than just looking to Him as a cosmic Santa Claus or an emotional ride. Knowing God involves sacrifice on your part as well. Knowing Him means sharing your secrets, your heart’s DNA, your fears, your hopes, your failures, and even your “treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places” (Isaiah 45:3). It involves revealing yourself in a way unlike you do with any other. And within that revelation, you will find the most authentic form of love possible.

In fact, the secret nature of what you share with God becomes its own treasure.

So we're not talking about meeting God, gaining information about God, or even "dating" God. We're talking about getting to know the depths of His being and being absorbed in Him. God is your friend, yes, but He's interested in much, much more than that. He is interested in intimacy at the highest level.

## RICHES, WISDOM, AND MIGHT

The context surrounding the passage we looked at earlier in Jeremiah 9 is very interesting. It includes the Babylonian captivity of the Israelites as well as a significant amount of chaos in the land. In the midst of this turmoil, God arrives to provide stability and comfort. But He does this by pointing out that they are after the wrong things, which are summarized in three words: *riches*, *wisdom*, and *might*.

To contemporize these three words, we would say *riches* mean a big bank account; *wisdom* means plenty of degrees on the wall; and *might* means power, prominence, and platform. Essentially, these are the three things that nearly every American wants as well—to earn as much as they can, go as high as they can, and climb the ladder of success. But what God says is that if your claim to fame is your master's degree or the fact that you have the most powerful platform in your circle, then you've really got nothing to brag about at all. Because all of that, from God's overarching perspective, means little compared to what matters most.

Returning to the marriage analogy, this truth may make better sense if we compare it to a husband and wife team where one spouse

is highly successful, brings home a lot of money, waxes eloquent on a number of topics, and can essentially work any room. But if the marriage lacks the all-encompassing element of intimate love, not only will all of that mean little to nothing, it may even crop up as a point of dissension and resentment. A sincere woman doesn't marry a man for his paycheck or business card, and vice versa. Couples marry because they love each other and want that love to be an integral part of their lives.

When God sees us striving after status at the expense of relishing our relationship with Him, He feels like a jilted lover to some extent (James 4:4-5). After all, it is He who enables us to accomplish anything (Deuteronomy 8:18). And while riches, wisdom, and might are not wrong in and of themselves, they become wrong when they are pursued at the expense of intimacy with God. If you know the line items in your bank account better than you know the heart of God, that's wrong. If everybody knows your name, but you don't know the attributes of God's names and how they intricately link with your soul, that's wrong. Riches, wisdom, and might must be kept in their proper place. All boasting about them amounts to naught.

It reminds me of the story of a woodpecker that was pecking at a tree. He kept pecking and pecking and pecking until one day lightning came along, hit the tree, and split it right in two. The woodpecker thought he was Mr. Big Stuff until something bigger and more powerful showed up. In our social-media culture, it's easy to believe our own reviews and start thinking we are something bigger than we actually are. But none of what we accomplish ever

originates solely in us. We are all here by the grace of God and empowered by that same grace.

God didn't condemn boasting in the Jeremiah passage. No, He wants you to be confident. He wants you to be vocal. He wants you to go public. What He did condemn was boasting in the wrong things. God wants you to boast that you know Him intimately, fully, completely—like an engaged woman who goes on and on and on about her fiancé's qualities and character. God wants you to understand and know Him that well. We read in Jeremiah 9:24, "Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things."

## THE FULL EFFECT

God wants you to talk about who He is. And not just who He is in the heavens. He wants you to know Him in history, on earth. It's not a long-distance relationship God is after. He wants you to know His ways, His moves, His heart, and what He does on earth so well that you can't help but tell it to others. God desires to reveal Himself to you in such a way that makes you smile with delight. That's called "illumination." Illumination is when God unveils Himself and allows you to see Him for who He truly is.

It's like when you have a dimmer attached to a light in a room. Turning on the light allows for a portion of that light to illuminate the room, but as you turn the dial even more, additional light brightens the room. The greater the illumination, the more easily you can see everything there is to be seen.

If you are going to really get to know God, then He must have the freedom to provide full illumination of Himself so that you can see who He truly is, not who you have boxed Him into being. So many people have preconceived notions of who God is. They place Him in their neat little box tied with neat little strings and say, “He’s like that” and “He’s like this.” But one thing I know beyond any doubt after living more than seven decades on this earth is that God is not always who we think He is. His ways are beyond ours (Isaiah 55:9). His character allows for so much more than we think. His depth goes further than we can bear. He has surprised me, shocked me, and even charmed me at times. He has a sense of humor. His emotions are bottomless. And His jealousy is strong. He’s a romantic, a dramatist, and an artist, while simultaneously being the greatest mathematician, scientist, and logician.

Problems arise when we fail to allow God to be God, when we put Him in our tidy tin can and say, “Come out when I need You.” I admit, that would be a convenient god. In fact, most people don’t want a God who truly unveils Himself because it can be frightening, startling, and unpredictable. But when you choose to label God or diagnose Him, you no longer have the true, relational God—you have an idol which you yourself have created.

Only God gets to define Himself. And only God gets to reveal who He is and how He operates in history. He is who He is, not who you say He is.

Do you know what keeps people from knowing God? They do not simply allow Him to be God because they impose their own understanding, expectations, and desires onto Him.



God has a résumé. Sixty-six books in total. It's thick! When we read His résumé, the Bible, we should respond with, "Wow, He's got a lot of experience." Not only that, He also has references—people all over the world who talk about Him and what He has done in and through them.

But it's normal after someone has received a résumé and checked the references to say that they want an interview as well. Because while the written document is good and what other people are saying is nice, they want to see this person for themselves.

See, a lot of Christians are satisfied with simply reading God's résumé. So they come to church every Sunday and say, "Read me some more of your résumé, God! It's really impressive." But the problem is that some Christians stop at the résumé or the references, the testimonies of those who have known God for themselves. But God is waiting on the interview. He wants the face-to-face meeting because He wants you to know Him as He knows and loves you. He wants you to experience Him for yourself.

Have you ever watched a movie at the theater and then gone back a second time and experienced it in 3-D? Once you see it in 3-D, you realize that you didn't really see it much at all the first time. This is because you pick up on nuances in 3-D that have been designed to be revealed only in that unique format. What's more, if you decide to go and watch the movie in IMAX 3-D, it comes right off the screen, and you feel like you have to turn your head just to catch it all. This is because you are now seeing things from a different dimension.

When God calls us to know and experience Him, He's not

satisfied with a regular viewing or connection. He doesn't want us to have merely an HD view of who He is. No, He wants us to feel the full effect of IMAX 3-D, where everywhere we turn our gaze, He's there—all around us in every way.

As we start this quest together in our study on the power of knowing God, your challenge is to give Him the opportunity to give you *His* terms on how to get to know Him best. That is how you will come to know Him as He really is, and not simply as you have been taught or have come to expect Him to be. Then, as you respond to what He reveals to you, the door will open for Him to show you so much more of Himself. Remember, God wants more than a fan club. He wants an intimate relationship with you.