

Knowing God Study Guide

**An Exercise in Spiritual
Growth and Discipleship
Using the Book by J.I. Packer**

**Section Three:
If God Be For Us...**

by

William G. Meisheid

For Study Groups or Personal Use

Knowing God Section Three: If God Be For Us...

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Preface

While many books and authors have passed through Christian awareness over the centuries, periodically a book comes along that strikes a cord deep in the Christian community. *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer is one such book. While reading through Packer's book can be memorable, studying the book chapter by chapter changes lives. I have seen those changes happen again and again over the years as I have lead cover-to-cover studies, using a one week per chapter format. While this takes about twenty-eight weeks to complete (twenty-two chapters, introductory material, section reviews, and follow-up), it allows ample time for contemplation of each truth Packer introduces, time to delve into the scripture references and consider the depths of each claim that Packer makes. As faithful students, we do mean to be Bereans after all, to question everything that is said to see if it is true, and this study should be no exception.

While the study of good books can focus the growth of a Christian, I have always thought that discipleship could only be successful if it was centered in the cross of Jesus Christ and its true meaning of sacrifice, the "not my will, but thy will be done" that lies at the root of Christ's sacrificial decision. My goal is that everyone who uses these materials, who studies *Knowing God*, will find the cross of Jesus Christ taking its rightful place at the center of their lives. If that happens, then I will have been a "good and faithful servant."

A prayer for this study

Dear Lord God, you have challenged us in your Word to study to show ourselves approved and told us to leave aside the milk of the Gospel and mature into its meat. Open our hearts, O Lord, and prepare us to learn of you, to drink deep of your revelation of yourself. And as we come to know you better, O Lord, may we also come to better know ourselves. Grant us, by your grace, success in our efforts. We thank you, O Lord, for your mercy and patience with us as we struggle to understand both you and ourselves better. May everything we do be to your honor and glory. Amen.

William (Bill) G. Meisheid

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Knowing God Section Three: If God Be For Us...

Section Three: If God Be For Us...

Scriptures

Romans 8:31 “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Hebrews 9:24 “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

Hebrews 4:15-16 “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

1 Corinthians, 1:27 “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”

Matthew 19:26. “...but for God all things are possible.”

Quotes

“God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!” Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Madman*, in *The Gay Science*, first edition, “Third Book,” aphorism 125 (1882).

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the learned.” Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French mathematician, scientist, philosopher. “Memorial 1654,” p. 69, *Selections*, ed. R.H. Popkin, Macmillan, New York (1989).

“God is subtle, but he is not malicious.” Albert Einstein (1879–1955), German-born U.S. theoretical physicist. Quoted in Einstein, ch. 14, R.W. Clark (1973).

God pity them both! and pity us all, Who vainly the dreams of youth recall. For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: “It might have been!” John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892), U.S. poet.

“He whom God has touched will always be a being apart: he is, whatever he may do, a stranger among men; he is marked by a sign.” Ernest Renan (1823–1892), French writer, critic, scholar. repr. in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3. *L’Avenir de la Science* (1890).

“If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me.” Joan Of Arc (c.1412–1431), French patriot, martyr. Quoted in *The Trial of Jeanne d’Arc*, ed. W.P. Barrett (1931) On being asked whether she knew she was in God’s grace.

“There is hope. There is hope everywhere. Today God give milk and I have the pail.” Anne Sexton (1928–1974), U.S. poet. “Snow.”

“The gods help them that help themselves.” *Aesop (6th century B.C.), Greek fabulist. Fables, “Hercules and the Wagoner.”*

Knowing God Section Three: If God Be For Us...

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

Today's theme: Where God's sacrifice meets our soul.

Scriptural background: 1 John 4:10 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins."

Quotes for the week

"...yielding momentarily to sin when sorely tempted, acknowledged his error when calm reflection had shown it to him, and came forward with noble frankness and offered up his grandmother as an atoning sacrifice—in those old days when the luckless sinner could keep on cleansing his conscience and achieving periodical happiness as long as his relations held out."
Mark Twain. *Roughing It*.

"The effects of the incapacity shown by the popular leaders in all the great members of the commonwealth are to be covered with the 'all-atoning name' of liberty." Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

"I do not charge the merchant or the manufacturer. The sins of our trade belong to no class, to no individual. One plucks, one distributes, one eats. Everybody partakes, everybody confesses, with cap and knee volunteers his confession, yet none feels himself accountable. He did not create the abuse; he cannot alter it." Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Essays and English Traits: III. Man the Reformer*.

Concern: That we understand the difference between expiation and propitiation, and not minimize God's wrath over sin.

There have always been those who have argued against God being angry against human sin and therefore claim no need of appeasement, as if the mere thought was denigrating to God. The very idea that God should need to be appeased was/is anathema to them, as therefore the passion and cross is anathema also. However, what is forgotten in this approach is an appreciation of God's utter holiness and the clear attempt to put aside the obvious statements of his wrath against sin.

"Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 22:31

1. Why do you think the "progressive" church, and to some degree the "emergent" church, focuses almost entirely on God's love, allowing it to crowd out any other possible representation of God's nature?

"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amount to idolatry. For it is because of these things that

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

- 1 What is at the heart of the argument made by those who want to change propitiation to expiation? Why is refuting this argument significant, especially when you look back at the order of our study. (anger/wrath/jealousy) preceding this chapter?
- 2 How does Packer explain the nature of God's wrath poured out on Jesus at Calvary?
3. Why is “representative substitution” an important concept in Christianity?

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2

Today's theme: Jesus' death becomes the centerpiece of history.

Scriptural background: Romans 2:23-25 "...for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforesaid, in the forbearance of God..."

Quotes for the week

The famous painting of The Death of Socrates by Jacques-Louis David, if examined as a crucifixion picture, brings out a way in which Socrates' death was quite unlike that of Christ. While his disciples are in agonies of grief, Socrates himself remains calm and poised; his philosophy has saved him from pain and passion. Christ, on the contrary, dies after hours of torment and doubt. Socrates imperturbably takes the cup of hemlock: Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane cries out, "Take this cup from me." Oliver Taplin, British classical scholar. "Ideas: The Uneasy Marriage of Minds," *Greek Fire: The Influence of Ancient Greece on the Modern World*, Atheneum (1990).

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,
And did my Sovereign die?
Would he devote that sacred Head
For such a worm as I

Isaac Watts (1674–1748), British hymn-writer. "Godly Sorrow Arising from the Sufferings of Christ," l. 1-4 (1709).

Concern: That even when we understand the importance of propitiation and God's wrath over sin, we still will not understand the centrality of Jesus' death to everything he was and did.

"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death." Proverbs 14:27

1. Do you fear death? If so why? If not why not? Maybe the best time to answer this is in the middle of the night after you have been awakened and are lying there in the dark.

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“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;” 1 Corinthians 15:56

2. Do you think our culture insulates itself from death? If yes, then how? If no, then how does it make itself intimate with it?

Interacting with the text

Goal: To understand the centrality of Jesus' death and how it relates to man's rejection of God, as well as God's extension to us of his peace, love, and glory.

1. What kind of impressions do you get of Jesus by reading the New Testament? Are yours in any way different than Packers observations?

2. How do you explain the necessity of Jesus' death? (re: Isaiah 53: 4ff, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:18, Luke 13:33)

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

Today's theme: A Christian is..."the mystery of adoption" Part 1.

Scriptural background: John 1:12-13 "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Quotes for the week

"Now, there is a sense in which all men are the sons of God, for it is to God that all men owe their life. And there is, further, as the New Testament has taught us, another and deeper sense in which men who are not may "become" the sons of God, through faith in Christ." Jackson, George (1864-1945), *The Teaching of Jesus*, H & S 1903.

"The first is, that the Son of God became man. The second is, why he became man. That men might become the sons of God through him. Therefore St. Paul says, You are the sons of God. Not - you may be, if you are very good: but you are, in order that you may become very good". Charles Kingsley, *The Good News of God*, Macmillan and Co. 1887.

Concern: That we will define our Christianity by other than biblical standards.

Jesus said in Mark 12:29-30 that "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

1. The mystery of the Trinity casts a whole new light on our interaction with and relationship to God as compared to the Jew of the Old Testament. How is our relationship the same and how is it different?

What to Do Next

Reread Chapter Nineteen: *Sons of God*. This chapter will take one more session to complete as we continue our investigation into the very nature of what it means to be Christian. Think about the discussion we had during today's lesson and let those insights inform your thinking as you reread the text and address the next set of questions.

Goal: To understand what it really means to be a Christian

Begin to explore this week what it means to have God as Father, as well as Savior (Jesus the Son), and Comforter (Holy Spirit). The Lord's prayer focuses us on God as our Father. Think about why, when the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he pointed them to the Father; why of all the possible prayers he could have commanded, he commanded this one.

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 2

Today's theme: A Christian is... continuing with the mystery of adoption.

Scriptural background: 1 John 3:1a "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

Romans 8:29 -31a "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"

Quotes for the week

"The spirit of prayer is the fruit and token of the Spirit of adoption." John Newton

"The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of adoption" which God puts into our hearts, by which we know that we are His children. The Spirit bears witness to this great truth (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14, 16). This sealing has to do with the heart and the conscience—satisfying both as to the settlement of the sin and sonship question."

"Just as the incarnation was fore ordained, and yet took place in time; and just as the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world, and yet actually only on Calvary. Why then mention this eternal aspect of adoption? To exclude works and to show that our salvation had its origin solely in the grace of God (Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 6). Just as if we should adopt a child it would be a wholly gracious act on our part." The Great Doctrines of the Bible by Rev. William Evans, Copyright 1912, 1939, Moody Press Chicago, IL

Concern: That we will not grasp the importance of the need for gospel holiness and joy in our lives.

Two important components of our Christian lives are the demand for gospel holiness and the joy of assurance.

1. What is holiness and why is it important?

2. How is our blessed assurance tied to Philippians 4:7? "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Interacting with the text

Goal: To understand how the Holy Spirit, holiness, and our assurance in Christ are central to who we are as Christians, without falling into the traps of straining after experiences, slipping

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Twenty: *Thou our Guide* and consider the importance of God having a plan for your life that fits within his larger plan for humanity and all of history. Think about why this knowledge is significant.

Goal: To understand the significance of our assurance in God.

In the end, it is our grasp of our blessed assurance that brings stability and unrelenting hope to our Christian walk. Consider the eighteen questions every day for a month as an exercise. If you decided to do it, then do it at the same time every day so it will become a habit. Record your observations throughout the exercise and especially note any differences as the exercise progresses.

Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

Today's theme: God always has a plan for us.

Scriptural background: Psalm 25:9 "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."

Quotes for the week

"A blocked path also offers guidance." Mason Cooley, US aphorist. *The Columbia World of Quotations, City Aphorisms, Fourth Selection*, New York, 1987.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18

"I so love the Spanish proverb "God says, 'Choose what you will and pay for it,'" which stresses that life holds no easy answers, that conscious choices are often costly ones. We must live with and pay for their consequences." Marsha Sinetar, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love: The Spiritual Dimension of Entrepreneurship*. St. Martin's Press. 1996

Concern: That we would know what to do so that we could do it.

"I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied. So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: `Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty. Zechariah 4:4-6

1. Looking at this scripture, how do we usually make our decisions?

2. What does this scripture say is the right way to make decisions?

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7. Do you expect God's guidance to produce a trouble-free course for you? Packer says this is wrong. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

8. Why is Joel 22:22-26 so important to this discussion about guidance?

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Twenty-one: *These Inward Trials* and consider how you can have right doctrine yet go so wrong in your application that you destroy the very work you are trying to do.

Goal: To listen to God as he leads us along the path of righteousness and then act on that leading.

It is one thing to know what God has called you to do and quite another thing to actually *do* it. Many of us say if we only knew what God wanted we would do it. Would we; or is that a convenient excuse to avoid dealing with what we already know we need to be doing? I have some seminal advice: do what you know to do and when you run out of those challenges then tell me that you wish God would tell what you are supposed to do.

Chapter 21: These Inward Trials

Today's theme: **How easy we go off the narrow path and misapply the truth we have learned.**

Scriptural background: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." *Matthew 7:13-14*

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." *1 Corinthians 3:9-13*

Quotes for the week

"Partisanship is our great curse. We too readily assume that everything has two sides and that it is our duty to be on one or the other." James Harvey Robinson.

"I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations." James Madison

"You sell a company twice. First of all, you sell them the product, then you sell them the service." Richard Brock, founder, chairman and CEO of Brock Control Systems

Concern: That we would want to stay a child in the faith, protected and pampered.

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." *Hebrews 5:12*

1. Why is it so hard to grow up?

2. What is the best antidote against becoming Peter Pan (unable to leave childhood)?

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

Today's theme: When God is for us, nothing can succeed against us.

Scriptural background: "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"
Psalm 55:18

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Psalm 46:1-3*

Quotes for the week

"I admire the serene assurance of those who have religious faith. It is wonderful to observe the calm confidence of a Christian with four aces. *Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)*

"It is not so much our friend's help that helps us as the confidence of their help." *Epicurus (341 BC - 270 BC)*

"Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life." *Sandra Carey*

Concern: That we do not really believe that God is for us based on our misreading the situation.

While we often say we trust in God, our actions and our emotions often say different.

1. What does the modern scourge of anxiety say about our protestations of belief? Is anxiety a problem for you? Why?

2. Do you have anyone you truly trust? What might cause them to betray you?

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7. How does God deal with divided allegiance and how does this apply to this chapter? Think about Hebrews 12 and the Father who did not spare His own Son. Think about the demands that loyalty places on us.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter 22 through again and as you approach the last section think about the God with whom you have to do and what He offers you and what, as a result, you should expect of yourself.

Goal: To become a whole and complete Christian for whom the Greatest Commandment is a living guide to every moment of our lives.

God seeks commitment, a true heart sold out for Him. This week, let the Holy Spirit speak to you about the places in your life where you hold back from God. Think about why you are holding back and what you can do about it based on this chapter.

Interacting with the text

Goal: To accept forgiveness, lay hold of our birthright, and pull it all together into knowing God in Christ.

1. What, according to Packer, can never disinherit us? Why is this realization important?

2. Are you afraid (ever?) that God has or will reject you? Why?

3. What does Paul, according to Packer, argue about our justified status before God?

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8. Packer argues that the essence of Christianity is found in what link?

9. What are distractions and what is the true priority for every one of us?

What to Do Next

Think back on this section: *If God Be For Us...* and how Packer ended this study. What part of that phrase do you focus on? Too many people get mired in the “If” and lose their hope and trust, when they should be focusing on the last “God Be For Us,” an exclamation of primary significance.

Goal: To apprehend what it means to have God at our back, with our eternal well being His faithful concern.

There is nothing more empowering than knowing God has your back. Think about it; revel in it; live up to it.

Review of Section Three: If God be for us...!

Today's theme: God alone is always a reliably enough.

Scriptural background:

"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.." *Psalms 91:2*

Quotes for the week

"God, if this were enough, that I see things bare to the buff. *Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), Scottish author. Songs of Travel: If This Were Faith (l. 1–2).*

"A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing." *A Mighty Fortress is Our God, Martin Luther. (1483–1546)*

Concern: That we will have the grit to complete the task?

We have now completed our journey. Toward the end of this study, Dr. Packer makes the following difficult assertion:

"Now, if you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way [as Israel was in the greatest commandment Matthew 22:37-38]...The claim rests both on the right of creation and redemption, and it cannot be evaded. You know what kind of life it is that Christ calls you, as his disciple, to live...You are called to go through this life as a pilgrim, a mere temporary resident, traveling light, and willing, as Christ directs, to do what the rich young ruler refused to do: give up material wealth and the security it provides and live in a way that involves you in poverty and loss of possessions. Having your treasure in heaven, you are not to budget for treasure on earth, nor for a high standard of living—you may well be required to forgo both. You are called to follow Christ, carrying your cross.

- 3 Does that sound like call of Christ you hear preached in churches today? Do you agree with Packer's assessment?

In Review of Chapters 18-22

We have now completed our journey. Toward the end of this study, Dr. Packer makes the following difficult assertion:

"Now, if you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way [as Israel was in the greatest commandment Matthew 22:37-38]...The claim rests both on the right of creation and redemption, and it cannot be evaded. You know what kind of life it is that

Knowing God Section Three: If God Be For Us...

7. How is trust the deciding factor in our meeting Christ's call? What isn't dependant on trust?

8. Have you made the heart of biblical religion a part of your own heart? How or why not?

What to Do Next

To borrow a phrase from a well known commercial, "Just do it!"

"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power..." *2 Thessalonians 1:11*

Goal: To know God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep our course straight and true to the end.

May the grace of God empower you, may the joy of God fill you, and may the peace of God give you rest for your soul. Amen. So be it.