

Summary:

For many people the idea of knowing God seems impossible. If he or it even exists, it's "out there," distant, intangible, too large and removed for us to really know what he/it is on any concrete level... At most God is something we can only catch glimpses of.

But Jesus gave us a different picture. A picture of a heavenly Father who knows us and who we can know personally and intimately.

Main Points:

[01:24] According to Jesus, God is a Person who wants us to know him personally.

[01:57] We discover who God really is when we practice the art of following Jesus.

[03:03] Jesus said that knowing him was the only path to truly knowing God.

[05:53] We know God by studying Jesus.

[07:02] If studying lets you know a lot about Jesus but doesn't change you to love like Jesus... it's worthless.

[07:51] Embodying Jesus' love is our highest goal and the mark of true spiritual maturity.

[09:39] Fellowship is coming together to study and practice the art of following Jesus together

[10:16] Consistently being with each other allows us to consistently love and strengthen each other.

[13:41] We study Jesus on our own and together so we can make our King's purpose and life our purpose and life.

[14:36] The art of following Jesus is the art of knowing and experiencing God in our lives now.

Invitation:

Read the Gospels regularly.

Commit to consistently practicing fellowship.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the growth/change/development/progression of how you view God over the course of your life?
2. In your own words, how would you describe the relationship between studying Jesus and practicing fellowship? What benefits do you think you would see from incorporating both into your life?
3. Read John 15:1-17. What stands out to you in light of this message?
4. What are some ways you can "study Jesus" in the coming month? How might you incorporate fellowship into that study?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

INTRO: For many people the idea of knowing God seems impossible. If he (or something) exists, it's "out there," distant, intangible, too large and removed for us to really know what he/it is on any concrete level... At most God is something we can only catch glimpses of.

But Jesus gave us a different picture. A picture of a heavenly Father who knows us and who we can know personally and intimately... so let's talk about it... together.

WE: Humans are not just physical beings. Humans are spiritual beings

We have an unlimited capacity to hope and love and dream and create.

For millennia, spiritual leaders/thinkers/philosophers have told us that those qualities emanate from something beyond us...

- Either a vague universal life force around us and in us... or some type of deity or deities
- Something we can either tap into and use to enhance our lives
- Or something we need to fear and appease and submit to

But those ideas were challenged by a man named Jesus of Nazareth.

He claimed we are spiritual beings because we were created that way in order to live in a relationship of love with our heavenly Father.

According to Jesus, God is a Person who wants us to know him personally.

We take this for granted.

A heavenly Father who not only knows us personally but also who we can personally know.

A heavenly Father who loves us and whom we can truly love. Whom we experience in our lives... and with whom we can actually communicate.

Jesus took it even further... He told us how we can do that. He said if we followed HIM we would truly know God.

We discover who God really is when we practice the art of following Jesus.

He makes this startling claim right before he is arrested and executed. We have it recorded for us by one of his closest followers, John...

GOD: John 14:1-7

Jesus is claiming He embodies the ultimate revelation of God.

Notice... He didn't say he was "A" way... or A form of the truth, or A pattern of life.

Jesus said that knowing him was the only path to truly knowing God.

And then he goes even further... **14:8-11**

Crazy claims... If you have seen me, you have seen the heavenly Father.

All other major religious leaders have said they were showing the way or even a way to God or the gods or the spiritual force.

Jesus said he was the God that gave us life, breathe, gave us the capacity to hope and dream, and create, and love.

So why does anyone believe this craziness is true?

- Especially if he said them before he was arrested and executed?
- That would probably prove that he was a bit mistaken wouldn't it?

Why have billions of people for 2000 years believed these crazy claims of Jesus? Why do I believe it?

Because of another crazy thing he said... a few times actually... **Mark 10:33-34**

And then... he did it. The whole reason John wrote his biography.

- Why write about someone who claimed to be God, claimed he would rise from the dead if he didn't actually do it?

So... if Jesus is the embodiment of God... We know God by knowing Jesus.

As pastor and author Brain Zahnd said...

Jesus is the true and living Word of God. Jesus is what the Law and Prophets point toward and bow to. Jesus is what the Old Testament was trying to say, but could never fully articulate. Jesus is the perfect Word of God in the form of a human life. God couldn't say all he wanted to say in the form of a book, so he said it in the form of Jesus. Jesus is what God has to say!

But to know Jesus we have to be able to hear him... (Silence/Solitude/Prayer)... but how do we recognize his voice?

How do we know that what we hear is something he would actually say?

We have to study him... **We know God by studying Jesus.**

We have to become so familiar with him that we KNOW him

We have to know what he was like, we have to know what he did and why he did it, we have to know what he said and why he said it, we have to know his story and how to have our stories align to his... we have to study Jesus.

We do this best in two ways... through the biblical writings and by being with others who are studying him.

First and foremost we study the stories of his life...

We deliberately train our minds in studying the beauty, love, hope that he brought to everyone who encountered him.

Why? So we can win bible trivia games? So we can impress God and others with how much we know?

- God will never be impressed with your knowledge.
- As Apostle Paul said... Knowledge puffs up. But love builds up. (1 Cor 8:1)

The point of a life of personally knowing and being known by our heavenly Father isn't about knowing something it's about becoming something...

If studying lets you know a lot about Jesus but doesn't change you to love like Jesus... it's worthless.

We study to know Jesus so our minds can be renewed. So we can start seeing people the way he sees them.

What is important to him becomes important to us. What is trivial and pointless to him becomes trivial and pointless to us.

- EX. Do you think Jesus is worried about who is going to win the world series/super bowl or even the next presidential election?
- Those things might have some importance to us but Jesus cares about his eternal plan to seek and save the lost

When our minds are focused and bathed in the nature and will of God... our lives become about living out our true purpose (last week's message)... bringing the KoG to the people in our lives.

Embodying Jesus' love is our highest goal and the mark of true spiritual maturity.

To become like Jesus we need to study Jesus... we need to immerse our minds in his story

But not just the stories of his life... if we want to know why he did/said what he did... We have to know his historical/cultural context... his place in God's story and plan for humanity.

So we study the Jewish scriptures (OT) for that context... as Jesus said in **John 5:39**

and we read the Xian scriptures (NT) to see how Jesus' representatives taught how to live like Jesus in their 1st century mediterranean context... **John 14:26**

Study allows us to see the world and our lives through his eyes

It's why we do these episodes... to hopefully supplement your own personal study of Jesus.

- To help give tools and insights in how to study Jesus for yourself.

Just acquiring knowledge without doing something about it isn't actually *learning*... so we study the BW's but we also study each other...

Through a word that has come to mean a lot of things... but something that has always been at the heart of following Jesus and knowing God: Fellowship.

Fellowship in our context is not just hanging out... **Fellowship is coming together to study and practice the art of following Jesus together**

- Where we can study the BW's together.
- But also practice worship/prayer/service/celebration together.

In fellowship we study Jesus by learning from each other's experiences with Jesus and practicing what Jesus taught with each other. We practice living in the Kingdom of God together.

We use the gifts the HS has given us to exemplify Jesus to each other so we can each know/study him better.

Consistently being with each other allows us to consistently love and strengthen each other.

Can be done in large or small groups... can be done in person or online... even through handwritten letters like Peter, John, and Paul did w/ early churches.

If fellowship is a hard word to wrap mind around/get behind/too churchy for you... then just think about one of the greatest fellowships in history...

The Fellowship of The Ring (LOTR)

A group of diverse individuals drawing strength from each other for a common cause... the good of the (middle) earth.

Every teacher knows we learn more by doing.

So we study Jesus best when we are applying what we are studying together with a clear shared purpose in view.

And we best accomplish that purpose (of being a light to the world) when we are together...

One stick can burn, kind of, for a while... but put a bunch of sticks together and you get fires that can light up the darkest nights

And if you remove one stick from the fire and leave it on its own it is going to smolder and die out.

YOU: How do we study Jesus on our own and together in such a way that it leads to life change and not just the accumulation of more facts?

Read the Gospels regularly.

- Doesn't have to be everyday... twice a week? Regularly for the purpose of studying, getting to know Jesus.
- Like a book. Don't think chapter/verse... think scenes and paragraphs.
- If new to you... pick one and go...you'll have a lot of questions. Write them down and explore.
 - Ask God your question and write down the answer you "hear"
 - Email me... and we can walk through them together
- Ask questions... What words stand out to you? Why did Jesus say/do this? What does this show me about God? What does this show me about my role as a JF right now?
- And if haven't yet, start adding to that the reading of the rest of BW's...
- Seem a little daunting... Resources and starting points... check out How to read the bible episodes and show notes of those episodes.

Then **Commit to consistently practicing fellowship...**

- Gatherings
 - In person gatherings are a training ground and designed to be a safe and welcoming place for people to discover God's love FOR them.
- CG
 - You'll see how others are living in the KoG in their lives
 - You'll learn from each other
- Alliances (groups of 2 or 3), say "Hey want to read a story of Jesus with me?" Then ask those questions.

Not just so we become better people/nice and good... not so we can know a lot and be able to argue with people...

we study Jesus on our own and together so we can make our King's purpose and life our purpose and life...

...bringing the KoG to the people in our lives.

We can't follow someone we don't hear or see.

So, we Hear Him as we practice Solitude, Silence, and Prayer.

And **we See Him** as we observe His life in the Gospels, as we observe His early followers in the NT, and as we fellowship and watch those who follow Him now.

WE: God is not an unknowable force. He is not a distant, disinterested deity.

He is our heavenly Father who purposely created each of us personally. He knows us. He loves us. He has a purpose for your life and a purpose for our lives together.

He wants us to know him and enjoy him now and forever and, through us invites those in our lives to do the same.

The art of following Jesus is the art of knowing and experiencing God in our lives now.