

## **Introduction**

Several weeks ago, I saw a bumper sticker that said, "**My Rottweiler is smarter than your honor student.**" It's an obvious dig at parents who brag about the smartness of their children. It shows that people dislike bragging, when others do it at least. Apparently, God does too. I infer that from what He says in 1 Corinthians 13:4. Love "**does not brag.**" So, don't brag – with one exception. There is one thing we should brag about, and our texts reveal what it is.

## **Knowing God**

Let's start with Psalm 63. Look at its opening line in verse 1, "**O God, You are my God.**" Grasp the magnitude of those words. It dawned on me one time. Whenever I introduce Jill to someone, I say, "**This is my wife, Jill.**" That's how we always introduce the people who are closest to us – with the personal pronoun "**my.**" We call them *my* child, *my* parent, *my* friend and so on. Doing so conveys the nature of our relationship with them. It's so rich and deep it's as if they are ours and we are theirs. That's the dynamic here in verse 1. David's relationship with God is so rich and deep that he boldly declares, "**You are my God.**"

But it isn't just David. It's you and me as well. The word "**my**" in verse 1 teaches we can "**know**" Him with the same degree of intimacy we know any human within the field of our experience. That's a dramatic claim. But many other Biblical texts confirm it. We can have a personal relationship with the infinite perfect God that's as substantive or real as any we have with humans.

We can for two reasons, which together constitute what I call "**the basis of knowing God.**" Let's examine both of those.

The first reason we can know God is that He is Himself is a person. Psalm 63:1-8 drips with the personhood of God. Count how many times David uses the personal pronouns "**You**" and "**Your**" to refer to Him. It's 15 times. David knew it. God is a person. Sadly, many people don't. To

some, He's just an ideal, synonymous with goodness, beauty, or truth. To others, He's just what one Unitarian pastor calls a "**Creative Life Force.**" But God isn't just an ideal or a life force. He's a person.

He's a person in much the same sense that we are. He thinks, feels, wills, loves, enjoys, delights, desires, grieves, communicates, strengthens, enables, enhances, encourages, disciplines, rejects, and so on. Those are our qualities that make us persons and we're in His image in that regard. We're persons in other words because He is.

Realize the significance of that. A mere ideal or life force can't know and be known. But a person can. God is a person. He can, therefore, know and be known. He can know us and be known by us.

There's a second reason we can know God. It's that He's always present with us. We see that in verse 2. The title to the psalm reveals where and when David wrote it. It was "**in the wilderness of Judah**" as he fled from his son Absalom. Well, he contends in verse 2 that God is as much with Him in the wilderness as He was with him at the tabernacle in Jerusalem. He also comments in verse 7 that he's "**in the shadow of Your wings,**" a metaphor for God's constant protective presence. God was always present with David in other words and He is with us as well.

There's an idiom all of you know, "**Out of sight; out of mind.**" It speaks of the challenges of long distance relationships, with children for instance who live a thousand miles away. But we don't have any of those challenges with God because He's omnipresent. He always inhabits all the space right around us with His whole being. He's nearer to you right now than the person sitting next to you. In every second of every day, He's present with you and me with His whole being.

And He's always fully attentive to us. As David writes in Psalm 139:3, "**You scrutinize my path and my lying down.**" Present with us and in us, He focuses His complete attention on every thought we think, emotion we feel, word we speak, deed we do, and experience we have.

One of my vivid memories is of opening a letter from the Ohio Supreme Court notifying me I had passed the three day bar exam. It was

one of the most joyful moments of my life. And a person was there to share it with me – God. He was present and fully attentive as I opened the letter and was as joyful about it as I was.

My experience illustrates the basis of knowing God. First, He is a person. And second, He is always present with us and attentive to us.

### **Who Can Know God**

For those two reasons, He can be known. But I'd quickly add, "**not by everyone.**" Let me explain.

Those who don't follow Jesus have something in common with those who do. They have the faculties to know God. A. W. Tozer claims just that in his book *The Pursuit of God*: "**We (with or without Jesus) have in our hearts organs by means of which we can know God as certainly as we know material things through our familiar five senses . . . We possess spiritual faculties by means of which we can know God and the spiritual world.**" Non-followers of Jesus have the same "**spiritual faculties**" or inner dimensions that followers of Jesus do that enable them to know God. Their mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes are instruments of acting upon Him and interacting with Him. They have the capacity to know Him.

But they don't have the power. Think of it in terms of an unplugged TV. It has the capacity in its components or parts to pick up television signals. But it doesn't have the power to pick them up. It's like that with non-followers of Jesus. As Tozer explains it, "**the spiritual faculties of the unregenerate man lie asleep in his nature, unused and for every purpose dead.**" That's exactly right. They're like an unplugged TV. They have the capacity but not the power to know God.

But something miraculous happens when they make and carry out the decision to follow Jesus. Once again, as Tozer explains it, the spiritual faculties by which they can know God are "**quickened to active life again by the operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.**" They're like a plugged in TV. They have the capacity and now, through the Holy

Spirit, the power as well to know God. Let me ask you a personal question that you can answer to yourself. Are you a follower, a disciple, of Jesus? If so, recognize something remarkable about you. You have the capacity and power to know God – as intimately as you do any human.

So, use it. Use your capacity and power to know Him. Be like a TV that's not only plugged in but turned on as well. Make and carry out the decision to know Him, which requires two things of us.

### **How to Know God - Clarity**

The first is clarity. That's what verse 3 is about.

David makes a comparison here. It's between God's "**lovingkindness**" and "**life**." God's lovingkindness refers to knowing and experiencing Him. "**Life**" refers to knowing and experiencing the visible world. It includes things like the pleasure of a cream stick donut, the excitement of the Indians winning the pennant, the fulfillment of a professional career, the thrill of a romantic relationship, the joy of a hobby, the love of children, and on it goes. Notice David's dramatic assessment in that regard. God's lovingkindness is better than life – than all of those things put together.

His assessment reflects what I'm calling clarity. Clarity is grasping what is objectively true or so. It's objectively true or so that knowing and experiencing God is more valuable than knowing or experiencing the visible world. We have clarity, therefore, when we grasp that.

That clarity is foundational. It generates the one thing that prompts us to do most of what we do, including knowing God. That one thing is desire. Knowing God originates in desiring God.

We see that in verse 1. David mentions two contexts of desire. First, the words "**seek earnestly**" suggest the eagerness of a lover to engage his or her beloved. Second, the words "**thirsts**" and "**yearns**" suggest the compelling urge of a parched person for water. Recall a time you were so thirsty you could "**spit cotton**" and the consuming desire

you had for water. Knowing God begins with that kind of desire. We desire knowing Him more than we desire anything else. Question – when you get up in the morning, are you as hungry for God as you are for bacon and eggs? Most people aren't. Those who know Him are.

What elicits that kind of desire? It's clarity. Understand what that means. As long as we lack clarity (think anything else may be more valuable than knowing God), we won't know Him. It goes like this. We know Him because we do what we need to do to know Him. And we do what we need to do to know Him because we desire to. And we desire to because we have clarity. Clarity is the source of desire.

So get clarity. First, learn the value of God. Build a comprehensive and thorough vision of Him and of the abundant life knowing Him creates. Second, learn the vanity of the world. Build a comprehensive and thorough vision of what it can and cannot give. I have materials to assist you in doing that if you want them.

### **How to Know God – Clinging**

Making and carrying out the decision to know God requires a second thing of us. The first is clarity. The second is clinging.

That's the strong word David uses in verse 8. The Hebrew word translated "**cling**," which means "**follow hard after**," is used in Genesis 2:24. A man shall leave his father and mother and "**cling**" to his wife. Think about what that means as a practical matter. He naturally, intensely, and frequently acts upon and interacts with her.

Those of us who are spouses know how this plays out in real life. So, I asked my wife to hem my pants and thanked her when she did. Or I praised her when she showed me the creative and lovely place settings she made for the advent table. Or I empathized with her when she commented how sad she was that her father wasn't alive to see the Indians in the World Series. Or I enjoyed one of her bucket list experiences with her, *The Wilds*. That sampling shows what clinging looks like in the real world of day-to-day life. It's the response of

personality to personality. It's the natural, intense, and frequent interaction between persons.

According to verse 8, those persons include God and you – God and me. To know Him we must cling to Him, follow hard after Him. As I said, He's always present with and in us and attentive to us. Because He is, we act upon Him and interact with Him even more naturally, intensely, and frequently than a husband does his wife. Notice three acts of clinging in our text: praise (verses 3 and 5), worship (verse 4), and meditation (verse 6). There are of course many more. We spend time alone with Him in solitude and silence. We converse with Him about things. We ask Him to do or give things we desire or need. We thank Him for things He does or gives. We hang on His words in the Bible. We learn what He wills and purposely do it. We do our work for Him. And on it goes. Simply put, we think, feel, and act as if the most glorious person in the universe is always with us – because He is.

Particular examples abound. I studied God's words in Jude 9 and try never to revile anyone no matter how bad he or she is. Or I thanked Him all the way through eating a cream stick. Or I routinely ask Him to secure the health, well-being, and joy of James and Claire Wardle. Or I meditate on the details of Him sustaining the universe. Those actions flesh out what clinging is. We preoccupy ourselves with acting upon and interacting with God in our day-to-day lives.

## **Conclusion**

That then is the message of Psalm 63:1-8 and our other text, Jeremiah 9:23-24, sums it up well. Jeremiah writes about boasting or bragging. To brag means to tell others something about our person or life we think is impressive. In verse 23, Jeremiah names three things people think are impressive: wisdom, power, and wealth. But according to verse 24, they aren't. There is something that is though. It's knowing God. Now that, for his glory not our praise, is something to brag about.