



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

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Knowing God Exodus 33:12-23

Today I'm beginning a series of sermons focusing on the themes of a very helpful small group study written by Henry Blackaby and Claude King nearly 30 years ago—*Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. This will be our focus throughout the fall.

Some of you may be familiar with this study. Maybe you've been through it in a small group or on your own. For you, this will be a refresher course. If you haven't, I think you'll find these themes very helpful in our walk with Christ both as individuals and as a congregation.

So I offer this disclaimer at the very beginning: I am relying very heavily on Blackaby and King's study, especially as it was re-presented in book form in 1994.¹

We begin this morning with the overall theme of "Knowing God." Our text today is actually the Bible as a whole, but we're focusing on Exodus 33:12-23, one of Moses' many experiences with God. Listen carefully as you follow along in your Bibles. *Read text . . .*

There's a vast difference between *knowing* someone and *knowing about* someone, isn't there? I can't tell you how many times through the years I've had people ask me, "Do you know so-and-so?" Sometimes I know the person, but often I have to reply, "I know who he (or she) is," or maybe, "I've met him (or her)." But then I hasten to add, "But I can't really say I know him (or her)."

Getting to know someone takes time and effort. Husbands and wives know each other when they marry. But as they spend time with each other and work at building and deepening their relationship as husband and wife, they come to know each other much more deeply. Unfortunately, some people are so wrapped up in themselves and their own wants and needs and work and recreation that they never really take time to get to *know* their mates on more than a superficial level.

For many Christians, it's that way in their relationship with God, too. They've met Him, they've put their trust in Him, but they've never really gotten to *know* Him—never really grown in their relationship with Him.

And then there are some people who know a lot *about* God, but don't really *know* Him. They can recite doctrine and ideas about God, but they don't really *know* Him.

On the other hand, some know Him, but don't really know that much about Him or His ways. That's better, but it's not the way it ought to be. The ideal in all this is not *either/or*; it's *both/and* . . . We need both to *know* God and to know *about* God.

Moses' experience

Consider Moses' experience . . .

To see what was going on in our text, we really need to understand the context (Exodus 32:1 – 33:11).

While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law, the people of Israel became restless and called on Moses' brother Aaron, who along with his sons had been designated as the LORD's priests (Exodus 28:1), to make gods for them. Aaron made a golden calf from the people's earrings and told them, **"This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt"** (Exodus 32:4).²

The LORD sent Moses down the mountain to deal with the situation. Moses prayed on behalf of the people for mercy, appealing to God's honor. He came down the mountain with the stone tablets God had inscribed the Ten Commandments on, saw what was going on, and in his anger threw the tablets down at the foot of the mountain, breaking them into pieces. He punished the people by burning the calf, grinding it to powder, scattering the powder on water and making the people drink it. He then had the Levites execute about 3,000 of the men of the people in the camp.

The next day, Moses went back to the LORD and confessed the people's sin, begging God's forgiveness, even asking God to blot him out of God's book if He would not forgive them. The LORD replied that He would punish the people in His own way and time. Then He sent a plague among them because of this sin.

Now the LORD was instructing Moses and the people to leave and go to the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He would send an angel before them to drive out the inhabitants so they could possess it, but He Himself would not go with them because they were stiff-necked, and He might end up destroying them. They began to mourn. Moses went to talk with the LORD in the tent of meeting that he had set up outside the camp. Exodus 33:7-11 tells us that when Moses would enter the tent the pillar of cloud (the visible manifestation of God's presence) that went with the people would descend and stay at the entrance of the tent, and **the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend** (33:11).

Moses reminded the LORD of things He had told him—to lead the people, that He knew Moses by name, and that Moses had found favor with Him. Then Moses asked the LORD to teach him His ways, and to remember that the nation of Israel was His people (33:12-13).

The LORD replied, **"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest"** (33:14). Moses responded by saying, **"If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here"** (33:15). It was the LORD's presence that would distinguish them from all the other people of the earth.

Then Moses prayed, **"Please, show me Your glory."** The LORD told him He would show him His goodness and His mercy, and proclaim His name in Moses' presence, but that *no one* could see His face and live (33:18-20).

So the LORD put Moses in a cleft in the rock as His glory passed by, covering Moses with His hand as He passed, removing His hand after He passed, and so letting Moses see His back, but not His face (33:21-23).

Knowing God

Now Moses knew God. He had met the LORD at the burning bush. He had experienced God's power working through him in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and God's presence on the mountain as he received the Law. And now he was experiencing God in yet other ways. From all this we can see that *Moses came to know God more deeply through his experiences with God.*

And that's how it is with us. *We come to know God more deeply as we experience Him in our lives.*

When we think about knowing God, there are several foundational truths that we need to consider.

Here's the first one: *Knowing God is the essence of salvation*—it's a relationship with God that's real and personal! We read about that earlier in our service this morning in John 17:3, where Jesus said as He prayed that eternal life is to know the Father, who is the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He sent.

You see, God is doing much more than rescuing us from hell when He saves us. He wants us to *know Him* and live in a *right relationship with Him* as our heavenly Father through what Jesus Christ His Son did in His own life, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension!

The second foundational truth is this: *We can know God only as He reveals Himself to us.*

In a sense, the same is true for us as humans. People might learn some things about us, but they can really get to know us personally *only* as we open up and reveal ourselves to them.

You see, here's the thing. We can't figure God out, and in our sinful nature, we can't even discover the truth about Him. For us to know Him, He has to reveal Himself to us.

The third foundational truth about knowing God is good news! *God has graciously revealed Himself to us!* And He's done it in many ways . . .

Psalms 19 and Romans 1 tell us that He has revealed Himself in a general way through His creation. People who will can look at nature and see that God created it. How do you ride through the mountains or stand on the beach or look at the stars and not get the sense that there is a God who created all these things?

The Old Testament tells us how over and over, time after time, God revealed Himself to His people through His mighty works and His people's experience with Him. We can see it in His dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Jacob's twelve sons (especially Joseph), and with the Israelites through priests and prophets in the Exodus, the Wilderness Wanderings, the Conquest of Canaan, and the times of the judges and the monarchy.

But God has revealed Himself ultimately through His Son Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-3 tells us that **God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.** When Philip asked Jesus in John 14:8-9 to show the disciples the Father, Jesus answered, **"Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father . . ."**

After His resurrection and ascension to the Father, the risen Christ continues His presence in the church through the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament He continued to reveal Himself through the power and work of the Spirit.

In time, those New Testament writings came to be regarded by the church on the same level as the Old Testament—as Scripture. The Scriptures are the inspired, absolutely trustworthy written witness to and record of God's revelation of Himself to Israel, through Christ, and to the church. The Old Testament is Israel's witness; the New Testament is the apostolic witness to and interpretation of Christ and His saving work. Through this combined witness, God reveals Himself to us today!

Here's the fourth truth: *We know about God through what He has revealed about Himself;*

we **know God** through our own experience with Him. We can know all the facts, but still not know Him, still be lost, and still never enjoy a personal relationship with Him.

At the same time, as my teacher Charles Allen has so insightfully expressed it, our *subjective experience* must be *confirmed* by the *objective witness* of Scripture. As we look back on our experience, the milestones of our experience don't have to be identical to those of people in Scripture, but they do have to *line up with* the ways others experienced God in the Bible. In other words, our experience must be *consistent with* the way God's people have experienced Him as recorded in Scripture.

And the fifth foundational truth is simply this: *We experience God as we believe and obey Him, and He accomplishes His work in and through us.* The more we experience this reality, the more deeply we know Him.

For people in Scripture, God kept leading them into a deeper and deeper relationship with Him. They kept experiencing Him in new and deeper ways. Blackaby points out that when people experienced God in a new way, they gave Him a new name based on their new experience, representing that aspect of His character that He had revealed to them in the experience. As they believed Him and obeyed Him, He worked to accomplish His purpose, and they came to know Him more fully.

The same is true for us. When we hold back and don't trust and obey Him, we don't grow in our relationship with Him. But when we do trust and obey, He moves and works in and through us, and reveals Himself to us in deeper ways than we've known Him before.

Just as it was with Moses, *we come to know God more deeply as we experience Him in our lives.*

Are you experiencing Him in your life?

Do you know Him—*really* know Him?

Are you growing in your relationship with Him day by day?

Do you *know Him* as your loving heavenly Father and friend, or do you simply *know about Him*, like a character out of a history book?

And what about us as a congregation?

We can begin to know God more deeply today, as corporately and individually, we open ourselves up more fully to Him for Him to work in and through us as He wants to work. He has opened Himself to you; will you open yourself to Him now?

†MEG

¹ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

² Scripture taken from the New King James Version.