



KNOWING
GOD
STUDY
GUIDE

J. I. Packer

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PREFACE

I wrote *Knowing God* over a period of years during which I was deeply concerned, as I still am, to help people realize God's *greatness*. My own spiritual pilgrimage, such as it is, has been marked (thank God) by dawning light on this point. Before my conversion I was self-absorbed in just about every way, a silly, twisted adolescent who needed a great deal of straightening out. One milestone in this merciful process, so far as it has gone (and I do not suppose it has gone very far yet), has been the discovery that the first thing to ask of any Scripture is not what it tells me about myself, but what it says about my God. That is the open secret of right-minded and (to borrow a Puritan word) "soul-fattening" Bible study, and there is really no excuse for missing it. But I started off in Bible study on the wrong foot, and it took me years to get this lesson clear.

A second milestone has been the Copernican revolution in my outlook through realizing that I am not the center of things, but God is, and that I as his creature and child exist for him rather than he for me. This, too, was something which irreligious instincts continuing after conversion hid from me at the start. But the writings of four great God-centered men, John Charles Ryle, John Owen, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, helped me to get it clear intellectually, and in coping with rough stuff from people whom I have loved and trusted I have found what strength and support comes from learning, however incompletely, to put God first.

“Thus the Lord showed me,” and *Knowing God* reflects it, and in that sense has in it more of me than anything else I have written; and the task of trying to tell people who God is remains a major part of what I take to be my ministry. So it has naturally meant much to me to learn how *Knowing God* has circled the globe and, as it seems, brought blessing wherever it has gone. I hope the use of this excellent study guide which the publishers have prepared may increase its ministry yet further.

It was suggested that, as part of this preface, I should mention any ideas which I now wish I had put in the book but did not, and any which I wish were not there but are. I can thankfully say that in *Knowing God*, as in my earlier writings, I find nothing I wish to withdraw. In fact, I get help from re-reading it, as Richard Baxter did from re-reading his books three centuries ago.

Nor do I find any omissions in terms of the overall plan. On God's *sovereignty*, I deliberately chose to write no separate chapter, but to deal with it as John Newton said he dealt with his Calvinism: He did not make an issue of it, but mixed it into his treatment of everything else, so that, like sugar in coffee, “it sweetens the whole.” I followed the same policy with God's *holiness*, “the attribute of attributes,” save that here the appropriate image would not be sugar so much as mustard. The lack of distinct presentations of these two basic aspects of God is thus formal rather than substantial. My categorizing of God's attributes has been criticized as old-fashioned, but I would rather have a scheme that is old-fashioned and clear than one that is modern and muddled. And I wrote for readers who would feel the same.

But one defect I do see. In addressing my readers as individuals, trying as best I can to single them out and search their hearts before God, I fail to show that it is only as one gives oneself in human relationships, in the home, in friendships, with neighbors, as members of Christian groups and teams—in relationships that go sometimes right and sometimes wrong, as all our relationships do—that experiential knowledge of God becomes real and deep. For ordinary people, to be a hermit is *not* the way! The buttoned-up Christian “loner” who keeps aloof and reads books like this (or just the Bible!) may pick up true notions of God as well as anyone else may, but only

the Christian sharer, who risks being hurt in order to take and give the maximum in fellowship and who sometimes does get hurt as a result, ever knows much of God himself in experiential terms. This perspective, so clear in the Psalms (to which, perhaps, my book should be seen as a preamble, or maybe a footnote), is so vital that I am very much at fault for not having made more of it. But if *groups* use this study guide, as is intended, that in itself may yet induce the necessary open and mutually committed lifestyle which I failed to mark out in the exposition. I hope and pray so, anyway.

J. I. Packer

INTRODUCTION

J. I. Packer's *Knowing God* is a rich, profound, delightful and transforming discussion of the Christian understanding of God. Written with great intensity yet superb control, it explains both who God is and how a human being can relate to him. It has three sections: The first directs attention to the hows and whys of knowing God, the second to the attributes of God, the third to some primary benefits enjoyed by a person who is God's child. Packer has produced a book likely to nurture generations of believers.

The author says that he wrote *Knowing God* from the conviction that ignorance of God lies at the root of the contemporary church's weakness. The purpose of this guide is to help the "sick tree" of Christendom ingest a vitamin-rich diet; or, to drop the metaphor, to help groups of Christians identify and apply the essential truths of biblical theology.

This guide contains 22 studies, one for each chapter of *Knowing God*. A gathering of Christians can use it to examine the entire book or to lead them into various chapters according to their purposes, interests and time limitations. A Sunday school class or campus action group will find here two excellent eleven-week projects: (1) a survey of the attributes of God (studies 7-17) and (2) an investigation of the privileges and problems of living as a Christian (studies 1-6, 18-22).

The structure of each study is this: First, a purpose sentence (or sentences) states the aim. It helps the participants know where they are going. Then follows the body of the discussion—a series of questions which move efficiently through all the material. Finally, 1 or 2 summary questions help to draw out the essence of the chapter.

Each session will take from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how talkative the group members are. If the study is threatening to take less than the time you have, each summary question is open-ended enough to be pursued at some length. Furthermore, the shorter studies include an optional question which encourages the members to pick up an important point and develop it in detail.

Scattered throughout each study are 2 or 3 application questions. Each is designed to prompt personal sharing and an individualized response to the principles Packer sets forth. Answering an application question will take a minimum of 5 minutes—and should be held to a maximum of 10—so the application questions alone are likely to use up 15 to 30 minutes and comprise from a quarter to a half of each discussion.

For the Leader

The questions provided here make up the skeleton of each study. They help you keep your group working steadily through the entire chapter, touching on all the main points and applying them appropriately. It is expected, though, that you will flesh out the discussion by using follow-up questions. For example, you may ask, “How does the love of God make a difference in *your* life day by day?” (a question from study 12), and someone may answer, “It helps me get through my work.” Then pursue that by asking further, “How does it do that?” or “What particular problems does it help you solve?” Also, summarize frequently to remind people where they have been and where they are going.

Do everything you can to encourage balanced discussion. When someone who talks a lot finishes a statement, invite further comment by saying something like, “Does anyone want to add to that?” or “Does someone have another idea?” Doing this will encourage quieter people to make contributions. But don’t be afraid of silences

in discussion. If the group is working together, silences can be periods of creative effort. If a silence goes too long, rephrase your question or try injecting some humor. If someone is continually dominating or silent, talk with him privately about his participation. (You will find other helpful principles for leading in James Nyquist's *Leading Bible Discussions*, especially in chapter 8. This and the two titles mentioned below are available from InterVarsity Press.)

You may want to develop a regular habit of corporate worship—in conjunction with each topic, raising up prayers of praise and thanksgiving or singing a hymn. Occasionally a time of talking to God is suggested as an optional activity when it is particularly appropriate. But let this be a stimulus to further worship, not a limit. (Rosalind Rinker's *Prayer: Conversing with God* and John Paterson's *How to Pray Together* are valuable resources in this area.)

Regarding preparation. Tell each member to read the chapter prior to the session. Encourage him to underline significant passages and ponder them and to come with reflections and queries to help move the discussion along. For your own part, take time (you'll probably need between 2 and 3 hours) to "make the study your own." Write a brief answer to each question; then go back and, wherever necessary, put the questions into words and phrases you feel comfortable using. Make sure, however, you don't stray from a question's intent.

Think about how this particular study relates to your friends' needs. Does John need to know that God really loves him? Does Dawn have an accurate concept of God's wrath? Lives change; so the application questions provided in this guide had to be general enough to fit a variety of life situations. Be sure you make them touch the lives of the people in your group.

Be sensitive to needs that emerge during the discussion, and be prepared to carry on a ministry between the sessions. Sit down and talk with people individually. Show your concern for the members in other practical ways.

Make sure everyone knows what he is to read for the first study and then begin your own preparation—prayerfully eager to lead brothers and sisters in Christ into the adventure of knowing God.

I

**KNOW
THE
LORD**

STUDY

1

THE STUDY OF GOD

PURPOSE

To see why the study of God is important.

DISCUSSION

(The first three questions refer to the Foreword, the remainder to chapter 1.)

For whom has Packer written this book? What does he mean by a *traveller*?

What conviction lies behind the book?

According to Spurgeon, how does “contemplation of the Divinity” affect a person?

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *theology*? What is your attitude toward theology? Why does Packer think that “a study of the nature and character of God... is the most practical project anyone can engage in”?

What attitude does Packer say we should assume when someone tells us “there is no road to a knowledge of God”?

On pages 15-16 Packer lists five basic truths by which we will plot our course in these studies. Would someone please read them? What main themes will occupy us as we journey? How comfortable do you feel with these themes?

What should be our ultimate aim in studying the Godhead? Why does theological knowledge “go bad on us” if sought for its own sake?

Why did the writer of Psalm 119 want a knowledge of God? How does section IV speak to *your* motives for undertaking this study?

How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? What does it mean to *meditate*? How do you personally respond to Packer’s description of meditation?

Optional: How does this compare to contemporary forms of med-

itation taught by such groups as the Divine Light Mission, Transcendental Meditation and Hare Krishna.

SUMMARY

Why is the study of God important? How will knowing this affect your life this week?

STUDY 2

THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR GOD

PURPOSE

To consider whether we are people who know God.

DISCUSSION

On pages 20-21 what charge does Packer level against evangelicals? How true is this of you?

What does this sentence mean: "One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of Him"?

What does this sentence mean: "One can know a great deal about godliness without much knowledge of God"?

What are four characteristics of people who do know God?

What is it that goads God's people into action? Why is "the invariable fruit of true knowledge of God . . . energy to pray"?

What is the central truth about God taught in the book of Daniel?

Why are a man's prayers the best evidence of his view of God? Think back over your prayers of the past day or week. What view of God did they imply?

How would you describe the spirit of Daniel and his three friends? What produced it?

Why is knowing God the basis of genuine personal peace?

Packer suggests that if we desire to know God we should do two

things. What are they? How do you think we can do them day by day?

SUMMARY

Packer says that each of the four characteristics listed on pages 23-26 is a “sign” or “test” of a person’s knowledge of God. Where are you strongest? weakest?

STUDY 3

KNOWING AND BEING KNOWN

PURPOSE

To understand what it means to know God.

DISCUSSION

Would someone please read the first paragraph on page 29? What should be our purpose in life?

Consider the first three sentences of the second paragraph. What impact did paragraph one have on *you*? What, then, may this indicate about your stance before God?

Why are Christians immune from Absurdist tapeworms and Antoinette’s fever?

What does it mean to *know* someone?

On page 31, how does Packer illustrate our relationship with God? Do you think it is a good analogy? Why or why not?

What happens when the Almighty Creator, “before whom the nations are as a drop in a bucket,” breaks through to an individual and speaks to him personally? Are you thrilled at being God’s covenant partner?

What four things does the activity of knowing God involve?

What four analogies does the Bible use to describe man’s relation-

ship with God? What do they have in common?

How is a contemporary Christian's relationship with Jesus different from the relationship Jesus' first disciples had with him? How is it the same?

What does it mean to say that knowing God is a matter "of *personal dealing*"? "of *personal involvement*"? "of *grace*"?

Why is the fact that God knows us more important than the fact that we know God?

SUMMARY

What does it mean to know God?

STUDY

4

THE ONLY TRUE GOD

PURPOSE

To understand the meaning of idolatry.

To understand how idolatry affects our knowledge of God.

DISCUSSION

To what principle does the second commandment point us? At the top of page 39, how does Packer apply this principle to Christians?

For what two reasons is the second commandment of crucial importance?

How do images dishonor God?

How do images mislead men?

Packer says that "psychologically, it is certain that if you habitually focus your thoughts on an image or picture of the One to whom you are going to pray, you will come to think of Him, and pray to Him, as the image represents Him." Have you been trained or encouraged to focus on some image of God? What steps can you take to free your mind from images?

Optional: What implications does Packer's argument in Section I have for Christian art? For instance, how would his view affect an artist's choice of subject?

Why is a false mental image as harmful to knowing God as a physical representation?

What is the positive purpose of the second commandment?

What does Packer say is the relationship between focusing on images and heeding God's Word? How does the Jews' experience on Sinai support this contention?

Packer summarizes: "All man-made images of God, whether molten or mental, are really borrowings from the stock-in-trade of a sinful and ungodly world, and are bound therefore to be out of accord with God's own holy Word." Do you agree? If so, what in Packer's argument convinces you? If not, explain why.

What test does Packer give for determining if your God is the Christian God? How do your ideas about God measure up to this test?

SUMMARY

How can images keep us from knowing God?

STUDY 5

GOD INCARNATE

PURPOSE

To consider the mystery of the incarnation.

DISCUSSION

What is "the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us"?

Give specific illustrations of how believing in the incarnation dissolves other difficulties in Christian doctrine.

The baby born at Bethlehem was God. How does the apostle John

structure the Prologue to his Gospel to make clear what the title *Son of God* means? What seven things does he tell us about the Word who became flesh?

The baby born at Bethlehem was man. On page 50 how does Packer describe the “mathematics” of the incarnation? How did the incarnation change Jesus’ relation to the devil?

Why should the incarnation move us to praise God for his humility?

What was the *motive* for the incarnation?

What is the *kenosis theory*? What are some of the ways in which it has been formulated? Why will this theory not stand?

What does this statement mean: “The impression . . . is not so much one of deity reduced as of divine capacities restrained”? How can we account for this restraint?

What, in your own words, is “the Christmas spirit”? How is the church today failing to exhibit it? What are some specific actions you could perform to manifest the Christmas spirit?

SUMMARY

Why is the incarnation the supreme mystery of the gospel? What effects should being aware of the incarnation have on each of us?

STUDY 6

HE SHALL TESTIFY

PURPOSE

To understand the nature and importance of the work of the Holy Spirit.

DISCUSSION

Do you feel the doctrine of the Trinity is as neglected as Packer says

it is? How does the doctrine of the Trinity make a difference in your own life?

How does the Gospel of John teach us about the Trinity?

What are other translations of the term *Comforter*? What ideas does this word convey?

What is the relationship between the Spirit's work and Christ's work?

What does the Old Testament have to say about God's *Word* and God's *Spirit*?

On page 59 Packer untangles the relations in the Trinity. What conclusions does he reach? What is his evidence for them?

Packer maintains that the church consistently ignores the work of the Holy Spirit. Do you agree? How does your awareness of the Spirit's work make a difference in your own life?

Why without the Holy Spirit would there be no gospel and no New Testament?

Why without the Spirit would there be no Christians?

Optional: Read Romans 8:1-30. Discuss the relation a Christian should have to the Holy Spirit.

From section IV (by implication) how can we honor the Spirit in our faith? in our life? in our witness?

SUMMARY

What is the work of the Holy Spirit? Why is it important?

II

**BEHOLD
YOUR
GOD!**

STUDY 7

GOD UNCHANGING

PURPOSE

To grasp the fact and significance of God's immutability.

DISCUSSION

What problem does Packer describe on page 67? To what extent do you identify with this problem?

Answer Packer's question: "How can this sense of the remoteness from us of the biblical experience of God be overcome?"

State six aspects of God which do not change.

Optional: Read each of these verses aloud: Psalm 93:2; Jeremiah 10:10; Romans 1:22-23; 1 Timothy 6:16; Psalm 90:2; Psalm 102:26-27; Isaiah 48:12. What main impression do you get from hearing them read together?

Contrast the *life* of God with the life of his creatures.

Contrast the stability of the Creator's *character* with that of men and women.

How do the two disclosures of God's name in Exodus supplement each other?

Contrast the *words* of God and the words of men.

What are some things God *does* today which he also did in Bible times? (For each item you list:) Why does he do it?

Why does God never need to repent? How does Packer explain the verses which speak of God's repenting? What effect should our awareness of "the immutability of God's decrees" have on us?

Why can Packer say that Jesus Christ's being "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" is "the strong consolation of all God's people"?

On what grounds is the sense of distance between us and believers in Bible times removed? What realities are the same for us as for them? How should this thought comfort us? challenge us?

SUMMARY

What does it mean to say that God is *immutable*? Why is this important to you?

STUDY 8

THE MAJESTY OF GOD

PURPOSE

To appreciate the majesty of God.

DISCUSSION

How does the Bible use the word *majesty*? How does this contrast with modern thoughts of God?

When we stress that God is personal, what must we be sure we do not communicate?

What “twin truths” about God are impressed upon us in the opening chapters of Genesis? Through what events is each one emphasized?

What two steps must we take to form a right idea of God’s greatness?

Packer discusses Psalm 139 as an example of what the first step involves. How does this psalm highlight God’s presence? his knowledge? his power?

Optional: Read dramatically Job 38—41. How does God reveal his majesty? What effect does this have on Job (42:1-6)?

In Isaiah 40, to what powerful forces is God compared? What is the nature of these comparisons? How do these comparisons affect you personally?

What three questions does Isaiah ask to the downcast Israelites? What does each question rebuke? What can we do to be guiltless of each rebuke?

SUMMARY

What have you learned about the majesty of God? How should this affect your worship? your moral decisions? your prayer life?

STUDY 9

GOD ONLY WISE

PURPOSE

To appreciate and find comfort in God's wisdom.

DISCUSSION

What is *wisdom*?

Why is God "utterly worthy of our fullest trust"?

What do many people mistakenly take to be God's goal in the world?

What *is* God's ultimate goal?

What are his immediate goals?

Why is the Lord Jesus central in the fulfillment of each part of God's purpose?

Packer discusses God's wisdom in dealing with three men: Abraham, Jacob and Joseph.

What was Abraham like when God began to work with him? What was his greatest need? What were the characteristics of Abraham "the man of God"?

In what ways did Jacob need to be changed? How did God change him?

For what "double purpose" did Joseph suffer?

Optional: Share changes God has brought about in your life. How has he done this?

What are some of the reasons for which God allows us to endure hardship? Which of these have you experienced? Give examples.

Why is it important that a Christian trust God?

How should we meet trying situations when we can't see God's purpose in them?

In what ways is Paul's attitude a model for us?

SUMMARY

How is God's wisdom shown in his dealings with men? How can our confidence in God's wisdom be a comfort to us?

STUDY 10

GOD'S WISDOM AND OURS

PURPOSE

To understand God's gift of wisdom.

DISCUSSION

What is the difference between an *incommunicable* and a *communicable* attribute? Name some attributes of God which fall in each category.

State in your own words what it means to say that man is made in God's image.

What does this statement mean: "God is at work in Christian believers to repair his ruined image by communicating these qualities [communicable attributes] to them afresh"?

On page 90 what is the main thrust of all the quotations about wisdom?

What two steps must a person take to lay hold of the gift of wisdom? How can we do this day by day?

According to Packer's analogy in section II, what does having the gift of wisdom *not* mean?

According to Packer's analogy in section III, what does it mean for God to give us wisdom?

For what purpose did the author of Ecclesiastes write his sermon?
Read Packer's summary of the message of Ecclesiastes on pages 94-95. Then, in just a few sentences, put this message in your own words.

How can the admonition of Ecclesiastes help Christians today?
Why has God hidden from us "almost everything we should like to know about the providential purposes which He is working out in the churches and in our own lives"?

According to Ecclesiastes what is wisdom?

What is the effect of God's gift of wisdom?

What specific steps can we take to heed Packer's admonition in the chapter's final paragraph?

SUMMARY

What is the wisdom God gives us?

STUDY 11

THY WORD IS TRUTH

PURPOSE

To understand the nature of God's word.

To consider what is an appropriate response to God's word.

DISCUSSION

What two facts are assumed in every biblical passage?

For what two reasons does God speak?

What is the threefold character of God's *torah*? (If the meaning of any of the three terms is unclear, see examples on p. 101.)

What does Packer mean when he says that "God sends His word to us in the character of both information and invitation"? Why does God do this?

How does Genesis 1—3 portray God's creative word? his word of

command? his word of testimony? his word of prohibition? his word of promise?

Why could God tell Jeremiah that Jeremiah would establish and destroy kingdoms?

What did God say through Isaiah about his word?

What is the proper response to God's word? What is an impious response? How would you characterize your own response?

We should believe and obey God's word primarily because it is a true word. What is *truth* in the Bible?

Why are God's *commands* described as true? What is the result of disobeying God's commands?

According to Samuel Clark, what should be some practical consequences of knowing that God's *promises* are true? What specifically can we do to reclaim the benefits of God's promises?

In section IV, what definition of a Christian does Packer propose? How does his extended description describe or not describe you?

SUMMARY

How would you characterize God's word?

STUDY 12

THE LOVE OF GOD

PURPOSE

To try to fathom the love of God.

DISCUSSION

Packer says that "to know God is indeed heaven on earth." What three points about God's love does Packer highlight from Romans 5:5?

On page 107 what criticism does Packer level at contemporary

Christians? How do you react to this charge?

In the last paragraph of section I, Packer says about the content of this chapter: "Our theme will lead us as deep into the mystery of God's nature as man can go, deeper than any of our previous studies have taken us." Why is this so?

To avoid misunderstanding John's statement "God is love," what other two statements must we consider in conjunction with it? How does each one of these statements help us to understand God's love better?

Packer has just said, "'God is love' is *not* the complete truth about God so far as the *Bible* is concerned." What does he mean by the seemingly contradictory statement that "'God is love' is the complete truth about God so far as the *Christian* is concerned"? How does the love of God make a difference in *your* life day by day?

Would someone please read the definition of God's love which is found at the beginning of section III:

"God's love is *an exercise of His goodness towards individual sinners whereby, having identified Himself with their welfare, He has given His Son to be their Saviour, and now brings them to know and enjoy Him in a covenant relation.*"

What does it mean to say:

that God's love is *an exercise of His goodness?*

that God's love is an exercise of His goodness *towards sinners?*

that God's love is an exercise of His goodness towards *individual sinners?*

that God's love to sinners involves His *identifying Himself with their welfare?*

that God's love to sinners was expressed by *the gift of His Son to be their Saviour?*

that God's love to sinners reaches its objective as it *brings them to know and enjoy Him in a covenant relation?*

Read silently section IV. Where in your life has God's love not had its full effect?

SUMMARY

In your own *words*, what is the love of God? In your own *experience*, what does the love of God mean?

STUDY 13

THE GRACE OF GOD

PURPOSE

To understand the doctrine of grace.

DISCUSSION

What two responses to the doctrine of grace are contrasted on pages 116-17?

What four crucial truths does the doctrine of grace presuppose?

In discussing these four truths how does Packer characterize the modern pagan's view of his own morals? How does Packer characterize the modern pagan's view of God? How does such a concept of God rule out a doctrine of grace?

Why do some people find the doctrine of grace to be so meaningful?

How does your "working concept" of the doctrine of grace compare to the two views we have now discussed?

What is the relation of *grace* and *salvation*?

What is *justification*? How is grace related to it?

What is the *plan of salvation*? How is grace related to it?

What is the *preservation of the saints*? How is grace related to it?

What does this statement mean: "In the New Testament doctrine is grace, and ethics is gratitude"? How have you experienced this in your own life?

Why do you think Packer says that those who suppose that the doctrine of grace encourages moral laxity "in the most literal sense . . . do not know what they are talking about"?

Optional: Sing one or all of the hymns quoted in this chapter. Have a time of worship, confessing your unworthiness and praising God for his grace.

SUMMARY

What is the grace of God? How can a person *experience* it?

STUDY 14

GOD THE JUDGE

PURPOSE

To perceive the necessity of God's judgment—and rejoice in it.

DISCUSSION

Mention a few instances in Scripture where God is referred to as Judge; where God acts as Judge; where we are taught that God is Judge.

What four ideas are involved in God's being a judge? Why is God able to fulfill each of these judicial functions?

What is *retribution*? Why does Packer say that it is "the inescapable moral law of creation"?

On page 130 Packer argues that God's commitment to judge people is the final proof of his moral perfection. What is Packer's argument?

Also on page 130, what does Packer say is the "main thrust" of the reality of divine judgment?

What is the relation of Jesus Christ to God's judgment?

Optional: Read out loud the passages from the Bible listed at the end of paragraph 1, page 131. What is the main point of these passages?

What is "the significance of works in the last judgment"?

Answer Packer's question: "How does free forgiveness and justification by faith square with judgment by works?"

What does 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 teach Christians? How should our awareness of this affect our day-to-day living?

How will our *knowledge* about God affect his judgment of us?

What should our fear of judgment cause us to do? How will doing this affect our anticipation of the final judgment?

SUMMARY

Why should we rejoice in the fact that God is a judge?

STUDY 15

THE WRATH OF GOD

PURPOSE

To understand the nature of God's wrath.

DISCUSSION

What do you think of when you hear the word *wrath*? What does the word mean? Is the Bible inhibited in speaking about God's wrath?

Optional: Read some or all of the passages cited on page 135. What impression are you left with? What images are used to describe God's wrath?

Why does the Bible speak of God *anthropomorphically*? What pitfall can this lead us into regarding God's wrath?

What two biblical considerations meet the charge that God's wrath is cruel?

What Bible passages does Packer use to support his contention that "before hell is an experience inflicted by God, it is a state for which man himself opts"?

How does Packer describe *Gehenna*? How should our awareness of what it means to be separated from God affect our attitude toward non-Christians? our behavior toward them?

According to Romans, what is God's wrath?

In what ways is the constant, universal disclosure of God's wrath made?

How can a person be delivered from God's wrath?

What are some important truths that we shall never understand if we do not face the truth concerning God's wrath?

According to A. W. Pink, why should we meditate frequently on God's wrath?

How do you meet the test of "readiness . . . to meditate upon the wrath of God"?

SUMMARY

What is God's wrath? What should our awareness of it motivate us to do?

STUDY 16

GOODNESS AND SEVERITY

PURPOSE

To learn to relate God's goodness to God's severity.

DISCUSSION

Why is *and* the crucial word in Romans 11:22?

Why have people become so muddled in their thinking about God?

What is the origin of "the habit of disassociating the thought of God's goodness from that of His severity"? What effect does this habit have on Christianity? Why?

Why does "the Santa Claus theology [carry] within itself the seeds of its own collapse"?

What attributes together make up God's *goodness*?

Which attribute did God especially stress to Moses?

What does this statement mean: "Generosity is, so to speak, the focal point of God's perfection"?

What does this statement mean: "God is good to all in some ways and to some in all ways"?

What is the point of Psalm 145?

What stand out to you as the main blessings God has given you?

For what four examples of deliverance does the writer of Psalm 107 praise God?

What is God's *severity*? What does this statement mean: "Behind every display of divine goodness stands a threat of severity in judgment if that goodness is scorned"?

What does the entire Bible stress about the nature of God's severity?

What three lessons does Packer draw from his consideration of the goodness and severity of God? How can we apply each one?

SUMMARY

What is the relation between God's goodness and God's severity?

Optional: Conclude with a time of thanksgiving and praise to God.

STUDY 17

THE JEALOUS GOD

PURPOSE

To understand the nature of divine jealousy.

DISCUSSION

How do we know that God is jealous? When in Israel's history did God make this especially clear?

Optional: Read the verses listed in the last paragraph of section I. What do they tell us about God's jealousy?

How should our awareness of the Bible's use of anthropomorphisms affect our understanding of God's jealousy?

What two kinds of jealousy does Packer distinguish? Why is the second kind a positive virtue?

How is God's jealousy an aspect of his covenant love?

What does God demand from those he has loved and redeemed?

What is the goal of God's covenant love?

What is God's threefold objective for this world? Why does Packer say that "it is for the securing of this end, ultimately, that He is jealous"?

What did God's jealousy for Israel lead him to do?

What are two practical consequences of God's jealousy for those who profess to be the Lord's people?

What is *zeal*? Why should jealousy for God produce it? What does the Bible say about zeal?

Would someone please read the first full paragraph on page 158? How do you personally respond to these questions?

What did God say to the church at Laodicea? Would he say that to our (your) church?

SUMMARY

What do we mean when we say that God is jealous? What implications does this have for our personal behavior? our corporate behavior?

Optional: What stand out to you as the main things you have learned about God's attributes in studies 7-17?

III

IF GOD
BE
FOR US...

STUDY 18

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

PURPOSE

To recognize the heart of the gospel.

DISCUSSION

How is biblical religion different from pagan religion? In what way is it the same?

What is *propitiation*?

Optional: What important Old Testament rituals were related to the idea of propitiation? Using a concordance or Bible dictionary, investigate each of these practices.

How does propitiation relate to God's rationale for justifying sinners? to the rationale of the incarnation? to Jesus' heavenly ministry? to John's definition of the love of God?

What is the difference between *propitiation* and *expiation*?

What is C. H. Dodd's interpretation of the "propitiation word-group in the New Testament"? What is Packer's response?

In section III how does Packer characterize the wrath which was propitiated at Calvary?

In section IV what three facts about propitiation does Packer state? For what reasons is each fact important?

What is the fundamental problem the gospel solves? How does having this central problem solved in your own life affect areas outside the center? (Be specific.)

How does seeing the truth of propitiation help us to understand: the driving force in the life of Jesus?

the destiny of those who reject God?

God's gift of peace?

the dimensions of God's love?

the meaning of God's glory?

SUMMARY

What is the heart of the gospel? As Packer asks on page 162, "Has the word 'propitiation' any place in your Christianity?"

STUDY 19

SONS OF GOD

PURPOSE

To grasp the tremendous significance of *adoption*.

DISCUSSION

Is God the Father of all people? What sort of sonship can a human being experience?

In what phrase does Packer sum up the whole of New Testament teaching? the whole of New Testament religion?

Packer says that "the revelation to the believer that God is his Father is in a sense the climax of the Bible." How does God's revelation of himself in the Old Testament compare to the New Testament revelation?

How does Packer refute the notion that "the fatherhood of God can mean nothing to those whose human father was inadequate"?

How has God made the meaning of his fatherhood clear? What are four essential elements of it?

What does Packer mean when he says that adoption is "the highest privilege that the gospel offers"?

Packer says that the entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of adoption. From the Sermon on the Mount, what three things does adoption serve as the basis for? How does it provide this basis?

Why is the phrase *adoption through propitiation* such a rich summary of the gospel?

How does our adoption show us:
the greatness of God's grace?
the glory of the Christian hope?
the key to understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
the meaning and motive of "gospel holiness"?
the solution to the problem of assurance?

Think through (or write out) a yes or no answer to all the questions on page 208. What impressions are you left with about your own understanding of adoption and your relation to your heavenly Father?

SUMMARY

What is *adoption*? Why is it important?

STUDY 20

THOU OUR GUIDE

PURPOSE

To learn how God guides Christians.

DISCUSSION

Why is guidance a chronic problem to many Christians? Do you feel anxious about knowing God's will?

List the two foundation-facts upon which our confidence in divine guidance rests.

What are some examples of divine guidance in the Bible? What are some biblical promises that God will guide?

What other "lines of biblical truth" confirm that God will guide?

What is the basic mistake Christians make about guidance? What is the root of this mistake?

Optional: What are the two distinctive features of "vocational

choices”? How does Hannah Whitall Smith ridicule the habit of regarding every choice as “vocational”?

How *does* God guide his people?

What is God’s work in “vocational” choices? What mistakes can quench the Spirit as he undertakes this work? What specific steps can we take to make sure we avoid each of these pitfalls?

If we step out in faith and trouble comes, how should we react? What are the main examples Packer cites on pages 218-19 to demonstrate that those who are following God may experience hardship?

If we take the wrong way, is the damage irrevocable? Why can we be sure it is not?

On page 220 what essential truth about God’s guidance does Packer stress? How is this a comfort to you personally?

SUMMARY

How does God guide? How will knowing this affect your life?

STUDY 21

THESE INWARD TRIALS

PURPOSE

To recognize the harm a certain type of evangelical ministry causes.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter Packer is criticizing a certain type of evangelical ministry. Why is this ministry cruel? What makes it an *evangelical* ministry? What, then, is wrong with it?

According to section II, what does this ministry stress about the difference becoming a Christian makes in a person’s life? Even if these things are true, what is wrong with this emphasis?

What does this statement mean: “In order to appeal compellingly to human wistfulness, the type of ministry we are examining allows

itself to promise . . . more than God has undertaken to perform in this world”?

What effect does this promise produce?

Why is there usually a difference between the experience of a very young Christian and of an older one?

What is your spiritual age? How does Packer help you understand your current situation?

What remedy does the ministry discussed here propose for the struggles in the Christian life?

When is this remedy the right one? When is it disastrous? Why?

At the beginning of section IV Packer levels several criticisms. What are they?

What is grace? What is its purpose? How does God accomplish this purpose?

Packer says the main curse of this kind of teaching is *unreality*. What reality does John Newton’s hymn describe?

Where have *you* encountered the teaching Packer is opposing?

SUMMARY

What is the primary error of the ministry Packer is criticizing?

STUDY 22

THE ADEQUACY OF GOD

PURPOSE

To rejoice in God’s adequacy.

DISCUSSION

(Do not spend much time on the first five questions.)

In what ways can Romans, “the high peak of Scripture,” be read?

Why do some Christians have more appreciation for this book than other Christians do?

Why did Paul write Romans 8, “the high peak of Romans”?

What is the structure of Romans 8?

Why does Paul ask his readers in verse 31, “What then shall we say to these things?”

Paul’s answer to the question in verse 31 is focused in four further questions.

The first question is, “*If God is for us, who is against us?*” What thought does this express? What does it mean to speak of “the adequacy of God as our *sovereign protector*”? of “the decisiveness of His *covenant commitment* to us”? What does the phrase *God is for us* mean to you?

The second question is, “*He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?*” What thought does this express? What does it mean to speak of “the adequacy of God as our *sovereign benefactor*”? of “the decisiveness of His *redeeming work* for us”? What implications does God’s claim on us have for our lifestyle?

The third question is, “*Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?*” What thought does this express? What does it mean to speak of “the adequacy of God as our *sovereign champion*”? of “the decisiveness of His *justifying verdict* upon us”? How should these truths affect us?

The fourth question is, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*” What thought does this express? What does it mean to speak of God’s adequacy “as our *sovereign keeper*”? of “the decisiveness of *divine love* in settling our destiny”? To what fears in your life does this speak?

How has our study of knowing God brought us “to the very heart of biblical religion”?

How will what we have seen affect your priorities?

SUMMARY

Complete this sentence: Packer has discussed God’s adequacy as _____(four things). For which of these roles do you most rejoice?

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WHAT
THE
REVIEWERS
SAY
ABOUT
KNOWING
GOD:

“[Packer’s] style is succinct, vivid and epigrammatic. His perspective is mind-stretching, as he surveys the whole biblical scene, and the truth he handles fires the heart. At least it fired mine, and compelled me to turn aside to worship and to pray.”

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J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God* is a rich, profound, delightful and transforming discussion of the Christian understanding of God. Written with great intensity yet superb control, it explains both who God is and how a human being can relate to him.

The purpose of this study guide is to help groups of Christians identify and apply the essential truths in *Knowing God*. The guide contains twenty-two studies, one for each chapter of *Knowing God*. A Sunday school class or campus group will find it breaks conveniently into two eleven-week units.