Continue

I walked in the sunshine with a scholar who had effectively forfeited his prospects of academic advancement by clashing with church dignitaries over the gospel of grace. “But it doesn’t matter,” he said at length, “for I’ve known God and they haven’t.” The remark was a mere parenthesis, a passing comment on something I had said, but it has stuck with me and set me thinking. Not many of us, I think, would ever naturally say that we have known God. The words imply a definiteness and matter-of-factness of experience to which most of us, if we are honest, have to admit that we are still strangers. We claim, perhaps, to have a testimony, and can rattle off our conversion story with the best of them; we say that we know God—this, after all, is what evangelicals are expected to say; but would it occur to us to say, without hesitation and with reference to particular events in our personal history, that we have known God? I doubt it, for I suspect that with most of us experience of God has never become so vivid as that. Nor, I think, would many of us ever naturally say that in the light of the knowledge of God that we have come to enjoy, past disappointments and present heartbreaks, as the world counts heartbreaks, don’t matter. For the plain fact is that to most of us they do matter. We live with them as our “crosses” (so we call them). Constantly we find ourselves slipping into bitterness and apathy and gloom as we reflect on them, which we frequently do. The attitude we show to the world is a sort of dried-up stoicism, miles removed from the “joy unspeakable and full of glory” that Peter took for granted that his readers were displaying (1 Pet. 1:8 KJV). “Poor souls,“ our friends say of us, “how they’ve suffered.” And that is just what we feel about ourselves! But these private mock heroics have no place at all in the minds of those who really know God. They never brood on might-have-beens; they never think of the things they have missed, only of what they have gained. “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ,” wrote Paul. “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him. . . . I want to know Christ” (Phil. 3:7–10). When Paul says he counts the things he lost as “rubbish,” or “dung” (KJV), he means not merely that he does not think of them as having any value, but also that he does not live with them constantly in his mind. What normal person spends his time nostalgically dreaming of manure? Yet this, in effect, is what many of us do. It shows how little we have in the way of true knowledge of God. Knowing versus Knowing About We need frankly to face ourselves at this point. We are, perhaps, orthodox evangelicals. We can state the gospel clearly; we can smell unsound doctrine a mile away. If asked how one may know God, we can at once produce the right formula: that we come to know God through Jesus Christ the Lord, in virtue of his cross and mediation, on the basis of his word of promise, by the power of the Holy Spirit, via a personal exercise of faith. Yet the gaiety, goodness, and unfetteredness of spirit that are the marks of those who have known God are rare among us—rarer, perhaps, than they are in some other Christian circles, where, by comparison, evangelical truth is less clearly and fully known. Here, too, it would seem that the last may prove to be first and the first last. A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about him. A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about him. To focus this point further, let me say two things: 1. One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of him. I am sure that many of us have never really grasped this. We find in ourselves a deep interest in theology (which is, of course, a most fascinating and intriguing subject—in the seventeenth century, it was every gentleman’s hobby). We read books of theological exposition and apologetics. We dip into Christian history and study the Christian creeds. We learn to find our way around in the Scriptures. Others appreciate our interest in these things, and we find ourselves asked to give our opinion in public on this or that Christian question, to lead study groups, to give papers, to write articles, and generally to accept responsibility, informal if not formal, for acting as teachers and arbiters of orthodoxy in our own Christian circles. Our friends tell us how much they value our contribution, and this spurs us to further explorations of God’s truth so that we may be equal to the demands made upon us. All very fine—yet interest in theology and knowledge about God and the capacity to think clearly and talk well on Christian themes is not at all the same thing as knowing him. We may know as much about God as John Calvin knew—indeed, if we study his works diligently, sooner or later we shall—and yet all the time (unlike Calvin, may I say) we may hardly know God at all. 2. One can know a great deal about godliness without much knowledge of God. It depends on the sermons one hears, the books one reads, and the company one keeps. In this analytical and technological age, there is no shortage of books on the church book tables, or sermons from the pulpits, on how to pray, how to witness, how to read our Bibles, how to tithe our money, how to be a young Christian, how to be an old Christian, how to be a happy Christian, how to get consecrated, how to lead people to Christ, how to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (or, in some cases, how to avoid receiving it), how to speak with tongues (or how to explain away Pentecostal manifestations), and generally how to go through all the various motions that the teachers in question associate with being a Christian believer. Nor is there any shortage of biographies delineating the experiences of Christians in past days for our interested perusal. Whatever else may be said about this state of affairs, it certainly makes it possible to learn a great deal secondhand about the practice of Christianity. Moreover, if one has been given a good bump of common sense, one may frequently be able to use this learning to help floundering Christians of less stable temperament to regain their footing and develop a sense of proportion about their troubles, and in this way one may gain for oneself a reputation for being quite a pastor. Yet one can have all this and hardly know God at all. We come back, then, to where we started. The question is not whether we are good at theology or “balanced” (horrible, self-conscious word!) in our approach to problems of Christian living. The question is, can we say, simply, honestly, not because we feel that as evangelicals we ought to, but because it is a plain matter of fact, that we have known God, and that because we have known God the unpleasantness we have had, or the pleasantness we have not had, through being Christians does not matter to us? If we really knew God, this is what we would be saying, and if we are not saying it, that is a sign that we need to face ourselves more sharply with the difference between knowing God and merely knowing about him. This article is adapted from Knowing God by J. I. Packer. Related Articles 50 Books J. I. Packer Thinks You Should Read A list of all of the endorsements that J. I. Packer has written for books published by Crossway, with an introduction by Sam Storms. 10 Things You Should Know about J. I. Packer Leland Ryken Learn about a man from humble origin who the Lord has used in mighty ways. Podcast: The Life and Legacy of J. I. Packer (Sam Storms) Sam Storms reflects on Packer's remarkable life and ministry, including how Packer came to faith and the impact that his many books have had on generations of Christians. This post started as a teaching send-off at our church’s Wednesday morning Bible Study this week as we’re going through the study I wrote this summer on 1 & 2 Samuel. Several ladies asked for a copy of this teaching, so I figured I would post it for you all. I would love to give you a FREE copy of this study when you subscribe to my website, just check the box on THIS FORM and I will happily send it to you! There’s a BIG difference in knowing something or someone and KNOWING something or someone. Isn’t there? For example: You may know my husband. But I KNOW my husband.You may know what it takes to run a marathon. But those of you who’ve run one KNOW what it takes to run a marathon.You may know what depression is. While some of us KNOW or have known that monster personally. There really is a big difference between knowing something or someone and KNOWING something or someone, isn’t there? What’s the difference? Having an idea or knowledge about something someone vs. knowing something or someone intimatelyHaving familiarity vs. having extensive experience with the thing or person In Matthew 7 Jesus is starting to wrap up His Sermon on the Mount, and in this wrap-up He teaches about True Discipleship, (21-23). And this section absolutely wrecks me every time I read it. For starters, the words of verse 21 cut deep into my soul. Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. These are the words that propelled me to write to and for my Brothers and Sisters in Christ. They’re what ignited my passion and gave me my purpose statement: To help Christians discover and apply the vibrant relevance of God’s Word in their daily lives so that together we can positively impact the world for Jesus. But it’s the next 2 verses that break my heart: On Judgment Day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’ (Matthew 22-23) By Judgment Day He’s talking about when he separates the sheep from the goats (those who followed Him and those who didn’t) at the of end time, before He ushers in His Millennial Kingdom. And it’s those who will be counted among the goats that He’s talking about here. This section kills me, because I know many who will be counted among the goats…and desperately don’t want that. To keep this in context, just before this, Jesus warned His listeners, and us, about false prophets who strive to deceive us and lead us astray. Here, He’s warning us about deceiving ourselves—about believing our religion will usher us into the Kingdom of God rather than our faith, obedience, and relationship with Christ. Friend, Jesus wasn’t talking to irreligious people here. This crowd wasn’t made up of atheists or agnostics. Nor was he chatting with pagans or heretics. He was talking to fellow Jews: men and women who were devoted to their religion—not necessarily their God, His principles and precepts, or His way of doing life. He was talking to people like you and me who faithfully go to church and do all the religious practices. People who know the lingo. People who say and do “all the right things.” However, Jesus knows there’s a vast difference between Those who have His Name on their lip and those who have Him in their hearts. Those who are furthering their cause and those who are furthering the Kingdom of GodThose who are chasing after religiosity and those who are chasing after His heartThose who know His teachings and commands and those who apply and obey them Jesus knows there’s a vast difference between those who know ABOUT Him and those who KNOW Him. Tweet Jesus knows there’s a vast difference between those who know ABOUT Him and those who KNOW Him. And there’s a fine line between the two, isn’t there? Far to often we find ourselves flirting with that line, we cross over it without even knowing it because we’re blinded by pride, our selfish intentions, and our self-absorption. (Yes, this even true or those for us in ministry) Saul perfectly demonstrated for us that regardless of our potential, if we aren’t careful, our choices can lead us to reject God. Which, in turn, will ultimately leave Him with no choice but to let us go the way we choose. Beloved, we know Not everyone who says they believe in God BELIEVES GOD.Not everyone who claims to be a Christian has put their trust in Jesus and has the Spirit of The Living God in them.Only those who choose to submit to Jesus in complete surrender show they are His by the fruit they bear.Only those who choose to submit to Jesus in complete obedience will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Everything. As we’ve studied Saul and David—contrasting their lives, choices, obedience, and faith—we’ve see this play out in living color, haven’t we? Think of all the lessons we’ve learned over the past 5 weeks. All the challenges and blessings God has given us The things He’s made Vibrantly Relevant to you personally The sin He’s exposedThe forgiveness He’s givenThe wounds He’s healed and is healing Regardless of the sin Saul and David committed (as well as the other’s we’ve met so far)—we can see distinct evidence of Whose life was led by pride and whose was led by obedienceWho chased after popularity and who chased after God’s heart Who knew ABOUT God and who KNEW God And in light of their lives, we’ve examined ours. Often finding ourselves in both camps. Don’t believe me? Let’s hang in Saul’s camp for a bit… Have you ever eliminated God from your plans?Oh, Come on, I can’t be the only one… Have you ever deliberately disobeyed God, His principles, and precepts?Have you ever lied?Gossiped?Had eyes or hearts that wandered? Have you ever claimed anything that was appealing to you, even when you knew it wasn’t for you or didn’t fit into you budget?Target, anyone?Amazon?You kids’ Halloween bag? Now let’s visit David’s… Have you ever told a “white lie” only to later discover a lie is a lie is a lie and all lying is sin—no matter what color it is? Did that lie result in devastation?Destroy a relationship?Damage your character and integrity? Have you ever been faithful in a season of intense trial but when the time seemed to drag on and on and on you gave up?You got distracted by the horizontal and took matters into your own hands?Became disheartened with the duration, you gave up hope and trusting in God?And later found yourself in a wilderness time in your life and faith?This could be in a marriage, relationships with your kids, other relationships, education, career, finances, you name it Friend, we know a lot about God, but sometimes we forget we also KNOW Him. Tweet Friend, we know a lot about God, but sometimes we forget we also KNOW Him. When we get distracted by our horizontal life, we lose sight of Whose we are and who we are because of Whose we are. This is why I’m so in love with God’s Word! Seriously, aren’t you thankful God didn’t sugarcoat the lives of those who fill Scripture’s pages? I am! I’m thrilled He puts it all out there for us to learn from—their good, bad, and ugly. I’m thrilled we can see where they went wrong, where they went right, and how they got back on track when they went off the rails.I’m thrilled they were no less a hot mess than I am at times. Amen? Both Saul and David sinned. And both sinned big. But what separated David from Saul was David chose to engage in a vibrant relationship with God. And in nurturing that relationship, David’s heart became so aligned with God’s, that what broke God’s heart broke his. So when he sinned, David’s heart shattered because he knew he’d broken God’s heart. This then led to his genuine repentance. There’s so much to learn from David, isn’t there? In Saul’s case, he chose to reject God and refused to repent over and over again which eventually led to God rejecting him as king. However, we need to remember, God didn’t reject him as a man. Instead, God gave Saul countless opportunities to submit and turn back to Him. To repent. To establish his relationship with Him. To KNOW Him. But SAUL CHOSE NOT TO! He refused to do God’s and earned the epitaph: I PLAYED THE FOOL. I wouldn’t doubt on Judgment Day Saul will say , I was the anointed king of Your people—YOU chose me!I sacrificed offerings, in Your NameI fought Your battles, in Your Name But I can almost hear God’s reply: I didn’t know you, Saul. You never gave me the chance. (Psalm 51) However, David was the opposite. When he messed up, he fessed up, and looked up. What do I mean? When David got back on track, he submitted to the consequences of his sin, and earned the epitaph: A MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART. As we meditate on the difference between Saul and David and the others we’ve met in 1 Samuel, I challenge you to take a few minutes alone today and give praise to the God you know. The Savior you love. Fall into His arm—regardless of your brokenness and sin. Regardless of your worry and fears. Regardless of the unknown and uncertainties. Regardless of the loneliness and pain. He will meet you there. He will hold you. Do you know why? Because He knows you too. If this post blessed you, please share it. I would love to hear your thoughts in the comments, so please leave a note. I promise to respond. I’m an Amazon Affiliate . If you click on any of my Amazon links it will take you to that product in your Amazon account. I earn a commission on any purchases you make at no additional cost to you (once you enter into Amazon through newsletters, blog posts, or Facebook). Your support is greatly appreciated. Question Answer Fan sites and magazines help us answer this question. Adoring fans of movie, TV, music, or sports stars spend money and time obtaining information, photos, and tidbits about their favorite stars. After poring over such material, the fans feel as if they really know their heroes. But do they? They may know certain facts about their chosen hero. They may be able to cite birth date, favorite color, and childhood pets, but, if they were to meet that person face to face, what would the hero say? Does the fan really know the hero? Jesus responded to this question in Matthew 7:21–23: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’" There were people in Jesus’ day who thought they were friends of His because they knew the Law, made strict rules for themselves (and for others), and listened to His teaching. They followed Him, applauded the miracles, and liked some of what He said. But Jesus calls them “evildoers” and states, “I never knew you.” Today there are thousands who know about Jesus—that is, they know some facts about Him, they might commit some Bible verses to memory, and perhaps they even attend church. But they have never allowed the facts to become their personal reality. They hold knowledge in their heads without allowing the truth to penetrate their hearts. Jesus explained the problem: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules" (Matthew 15:8–9; Mark 7:6). It can be easy to substitute religion for a real relationship with Jesus. We often think that, if we are doing “Christian things,” that’s all that counts. We can appreciate the facts of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but until we have made Him our Lord, the facts do us no good (John 3:16–18; Acts 10:43; Romans 10:9). There is a difference between intellectual assent and saving faith. Knowing Jesus means we have accepted His sacrifice on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21). We ask Him to be the Lord of our lives (John 1:12; Acts 2:21). We identify with Him in His death and consider our old selves to have died with Him (Colossians 3:3; Romans 6:2, 5; Galatians 6:14; 2:20). We accept His forgiveness and cleansing from sin and seek to know Him in intimate fellowship through His Holy Spirit (John 17:3; Philippians 3:10; 1 John 2:27). When we repent of our sin and surrender our lives to Him, Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; John 14:26; 16:13). The Holy Spirit comes to live inside us, changing us forever (1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 John 3:9). The facts we know about Jesus come alive as we get to know Him personally. Let’s say you’ve read that your favorite movie star has green eyes and a dimple in her chin. Those traits are merely facts on paper until you meet her face to face. Then, suddenly, those green eyes are looking at you, and the dimple springs to her chin when she smiles. She tells you about her day, her fears, and her inner thoughts. You may recall that you had heard those facts before, but now you are experiencing them. You knew about her before, but now you know her. The abstract has become concrete. Things you thought you knew start to make sense as you enter into a relationship. Jesus is a Person. To know Him is to enter into a relationship. The greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). It’s hard to love someone you don’t know. Loving Him starts with surrendering to His plan for your life. That’s what it means to make Him Lord (Matthew 6:33; Romans 10:9–10; Psalm 16:8). The nature of God is so vast and complex that no human being can fully know everything there is to know about Him. But life is about continually seeking Him, learning more about Him, and enjoying His fellowship (Jeremiah 29:13; Philippians 3:8). Return to: Questions about Jesus Christ Knowing Jesus vs. knowing about Jesus—what is the difference? To know Jesus and to know about him are two different things. However, it’s not that simple. There are different levels to both knowing about Jesus as well as knowing him. It’s important to see the difference so you can employ your God-given power of choice to know Jesus as deeply as you, and he, desire.Knowing about JesusThere are two ways you can know about Jesus:1. You heard about him. This type of knowing can be compared to being shown a photograph, having read a news headline, or heard about some new restaurant in town. This is the most superficial way to know about a person or place. There is no elaboration or depth of any kind.Concerning Jesus, this could be applied to people who claim to be a Christian because their parents were, or because they’re American. However, this is just a label and means nothing.2. Learned about. This type of knowing goes a step deeper than just having heard about. It can be compared to how fans of famous people feel like they know them because they’ve read about them, or maybe even studied them. A fan might know their birthday, favorite food, or where they like to shop — but this isn’t knowing them.The same is true about that new restaurant in town. You can study the menu, choose a favorite entrée, and read about the ambiance — but if you’ve not been then it’s just information without experience.To know about Jesus is to know information about him. Concerning Jesus, this can be dangerous because one might feel as if they know him due to the abundance of knowledge, but, in truth, not know him at all. Some may even go to church and do religious things but if there’s no relationship, there’s no true knowing. Jesus talked about some who “never knew” him but thought they did.“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules” (Matthew 15:8-9).“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’ (Matthew 7:21-23, ESV).Jesus wants us to know him, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:11-13).Knowing JesusTo know Jesus is to experience him. There are three levels where we can truly know Jesus:1. Meet. When you’re introduced to someone, you have a shallow knowledge of them, but your encounter is valid. In this encounter, you hear their voice, maybe notice some mannerisms and facial expressions. You can choose to move forward with a relationship or not.Concerning Jesus, although there is much more to Jesus than just meeting him, it can be enough for salvation when you choose him as Savior. Consider this story of the two thieves on the cross. When they met him, one chose Jesus, and one rejected him.One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:39-43, NAS).2. In a relationship. Every deep relationship begins here. After meeting someone and deciding to take it a step further, there’s the adventure of getting to know one another better. Oftentimes this phase is full of emotions and is quite exciting.Concerning Jesus, this is where one starts to learn more about who Jesus is, and what that means to them personally. As they learn more, superficial knowledge takes root and comes to life in their understanding. Jesus prayed this prayer for people to know him.This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).3. Deep intimacy. Relationships continue through commitment. But commitment alone isn’t enough for intimacy. Married couples can stay together for a lifetime and never experience true intimacy. To develop a deep intimacy in a relationship requires sharing and vulnerability on both sides.Likewise, with Jesus, a deep relationship with him isn’t established through time alone (how long a person has been saved) but through the intentional choice of seeking the face of God.God makes himself vulnerable to us through his spirit….these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:10-14, ESV).We make ourselves vulnerable by coming to him for help trusting in his love.For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16, ESV).Knowing about Jesus might be interesting, but actually knowing him takes relational work and brings life and satisfaction to the soul.Photo Credit: ©iStock/Getty Images Plus/doidam10Danielle Bernock is an international, award-winning author, coach, and speaker who helps people embrace their value and heal their souls through the power of the love of God. She’s written Emerging With Wings, A Bird Named Payn, Love’s Manifesto, Because You Matter, and hosts the Victorious Souls Podcast. A long-time follower of Christ, Danielle lives with her husband in Michigan near her adult children and grandchildren. For more information or to connect with Danielle There is a big difference between knowing about someone and truly knowing them personally. This is especially true when it comes to knowing Jesus Christ. Many people know facts and details about Jesus. They may know that He was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, traveled around preaching and healing, was crucified on a cross, and rose from the dead. But this is very different from personally knowing Jesus in a relationship. Knowing about Jesus means being aware of biblical facts about His life, ministry, and teachings. But knowing Jesus goes much deeper—it means having a personal relationship with Him by faith, communicating with Him in prayer, obeying His teachings, and experiencing His presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Knowing About Jesus Knowing facts about Jesus is a good start, but it has limitations if that is as far as it goes. Consider these aspects of only knowing about Jesus: Knowing about Jesus often remains merely intellectual. The person may know biblical details but their heart and life remain unchanged. Knowing facts provides historical information but does not lead to a faith relationship. A head knowledge of Jesus does not mean He is Lord of one’s actual life. Information alone cannot transform a person’s heart or character to become more Christlike. Accurate knowledge may satisfy curiosity but does not bring salvation or redemption. In John 5, Jesus interacted with Jewish religious leaders who knew a lot about the coming Messiah based on their study of Scripture. However, Jesus said to them, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40). Their great knowledge was missing the key component of faith in Jesus. Knowing Jesus Personally While knowing about Jesus is good in itself, God wants us to go beyond head knowledge to truly know Him in a personal relationship. Here are some marks of what it means to know Jesus experientially: Knowing Jesus involves an active faith and trust in Him that leads to salvation from sin (John 3:16). It means submitting your life fully to Jesus’ lordship and following Him (Luke 9:23). Knowing Jesus includes communicating with Him through prayer and listening to His voice through Scripture. Experiencing divine love as you abide in Christ and He lives within you (John 15:4-5). Having the power of the Holy Spirit transform you to be more like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). Developing a deepening friendship with Jesus day by day (John 15:14-15). In Philippians 3, Paul counted all his impressive religious credentials and knowledge as loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. Everything else paled in comparison to a transforming relationship with Jesus. Paul desired to know both the power of Christ’s resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings (Philippians 3:8-10). Examples of Knowing About Jesus vs. Knowing Jesus Consider a few biblical examples that illustrate the difference between head knowledge and truly knowing Jesus: Nicodemus – He was a religious leader who knew the Old Testament Scriptures well. But he lacked spiritual rebirth until his encounter with Jesus (John 3). Rich Young Ruler – He knew Jesus’ ethical teachings but was unwilling to surrender everything to follow Christ (Luke 18:18-23). Judas – As one of the Twelve, Judas knew Jesus’ ministry and miracles firsthand but betrayed Him. Peter – He walked closely with Jesus and declared Him the Messiah. But Peter still needed to grow in knowing Christ deeply (Matthew 16:13-23). Paul – The learned Pharisee had great knowledge of the Law but viewed Christ as a false prophet until his conversion (Acts 9). Martha – She knew Jesus as a friend but was distracted by busyness rather than choosing the fellowship of sitting at His feet (Luke 10:38-42). Each of these people had knowledge about Jesus to varying degrees. But they needed a faith relationship with Him or a deepening of their existing fellowship with Christ. Mere facts were not enough. Stages in Knowing Jesus More For believers who already know Jesus, growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ is a lifelong process (2 Peter 3:18). Our relationship with Him can deepen progressively through spiritual maturity and close fellowship with God. While experiences may vary, some common stages may include: Curiosity – Being drawn to find out more about Jesus through reading or hearing Scripture. Commitment – Making a decision to accept Christ, follow Him, and rely on His grace. Devotion – Pursuing spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, fasting, worship. Communion – Sensing Christ’s presence strongly, communicating with Him meaningfully. Transformation – Seeing increasing fruit of the Spirit as Christ shapes your character. Intimacy with God – Growing in deep, close fellowship with Jesus day to day. Obedient Discipleship – Applying Jesus’ teachings to all areas of life and ministry. Maturing Faith – Responding like Christ more intuitively through a maturing faith. There are always new depths and breadths to experience as we pursue knowing Jesus more each day for the rest of our lives. Keys to Knowing Jesus More Deeply If you want to grow beyond just facts about Jesus to knowing Him intimately, here are some helpful practices: Study the Gospels – Immerse yourself in the accounts of Christ’s life and words. Pray – Talk and listen to Jesus; cultivate your relationship. Meditate on Scripture – Take passages personally and let them saturate your heart. Worship – Meet God in worship and open your heart to Him. Serve Others – Live out Christ’s love and see His face in those you serve. Obey His Commands – Act on Jesus’ teachings and see what He reveals. Fellowship with Christians – Grow together with other believers. Experience Trials – Hardships strip away pretense and draw you to rely on Christ. Share Your Faith – Tell others about Jesus and watch Him work. These spiritual practices help transform knowing about Jesus to a sincere, intimate, committed relationship with Him. It leads from religion to real, living faith. The Benefits of Knowing Jesus Personally Why does God want us to move beyond just knowing facts about Jesus to knowing Him intimately? There are many benefits to a close personal relationship with Christ, including: Forgiveness of sins – We are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:19-22). Eternal life – We gain resurrection life in Christ (John 11:25). Purpose – We know we are loved children of God with a mission (John 1:12). Freedom – We are liberated from sin, fear, and meaninglessness (Galatians 5:1). Strength – We have power to overcome challenges (Philippians 4:13). Guidance – We gain wisdom as the Spirit reveals God’s ways (Proverbs 3:5-6). Security – We are safe in God’s hands for eternity (John 10:27-29). Hope – We have confident expectation no matter our circumstances (Romans 15:13). Transformation – We are progressively changed to Christ’s image (2 Corinthians 3:18). Community – We are joined to the family of God (1 Peter 2:17). These blessings of salvation, meaning, security, purpose, and hope are found in sincerely knowing Jesus rather than just possessing theoretical knowledge about Him. Examples of People Who Knew Jesus Personally While knowing facts about Jesus is limited, many people in the Bible give inspiring examples of what a transformative relationship with Christ looks like: Peter – After denying Jesus, Peter repented and was restored to fellowship, becoming a great leader in the early church. John – Known as the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” he records profound revelations of Christ in his gospel and letters. Mary Magdalene – Delivered from demons, she followed Jesus faithfully and was the first to see Him resurrected. The Apostle Paul – Once a persecutor of Christians, he encountered the risen Christ and became the greatest missionary. Timothy – Led to faith by his grandmother and Paul’s mentorship, he pastored the church at Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila – This faithful couple knew Jesus intimately and instructed others like Apollos more accurately. Epaphras – This servant of Christ labored constantly in prayer for the Colossian believers to know Jesus fully (Colossians 4:12-13). These early Christians prove that a life-changing relationship with Jesus was worth far more than head knowledge alone. They call us to pursue Christ wholeheartedly today. Warnings About Knowing About Rather Than Knowing Jesus Why does it matter whether we know Jesus personally versus just knowing theological facts about Him? Scripture gives strong warnings about the danger of professing to know God but lacking a relationship with Him: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23). “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19). Demons know the truth about Christ but have no saving relationship with Him. “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:16). Empty profession is worthless. “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8). God wants more than lip service. These passages give a sobering warning not to assume you know Christ just because you know correct doctrines about Him. Relationship is required, not mere information. Jesus’ Invitation to Know Him Jesus Himself issued a warm, gentle invitation to every person to move beyond knowing facts to sincerely knowing Him: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Jesus wants a relationship with you. His invitation is open to leave behind empty religion and embrace Him as Savior and Lord. There is no greater privilege than knowing Christ personally. Conclusion Truly knowing Jesus goes far beyond head knowledge about Him. It means receiving Him by faith, entering an intimate friendship with Him, obeying His Word, communing in prayer, encountering His transforming power, and dedicating your whole life to His purposes. A relationship with Jesus impacts the heart and reorients all of life with new meaning, hope, security, freedom, and destiny. God invites every person to move beyond knowing about Jesus to sincerely knowing and following Him. Is there a more important question to ask ourselves than this? It is most paramount to ponder and address if we really know Jesus. What does it really mean to know Him? Like reading about a celebrity, we may become familiar with their life and have some vague understanding about them from what we read. Yet, we do not really know them at all. We can read all about Jesus in the Bible, and listen to countless stories about Him on a Sunday, but not personally know Him.How do we get to know someone? By spending time with them. Listening to them. Sharing life together. When we trust in Jesus, He gives us His Spirit to live within us (1 John 4:13). We become His friends and He says “for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). Knowing Jesus means we know God the Father. Jesus, the Son of God, is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). To know Christ is to know God. We are invited to know Him more, and if it is our prayer that we may truly know Him, He will not turn us away.To Know Jesus Is to Abide in HimJesus spoke of Himself being the vine and His people being branches (John 15:5). If we abide in the vine (Jesus), we will bear fruit. We need to remain connected to Jesus. Apart from Him we can do nothing of eternal, lasting value. Evidence of being with Jesus and knowing Him will be reflected in our life. It’s not about trying harder, but remaining in Him. He does not let anyone snatch away His children (John 10:28). It is His will to work in our lives.As we abide in Him, our heart’s affections will change and our priorities and lives will begin to reflect His, as we walk as He walked and follow His example (1 John 2:6; John 13:15).To Know Jesus Is to Know the FatherPhilip asked Jesus to show them the Father and that would be enough for them (John 14:9). Jesus had been with His disciples for a long time, and Jesus said to Philip, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” The religious Pharisees also asked Jesus where His Father was, but He told them that they did not know Him or His Father because if they knew Jesus, they would also know His Father (John 8:19). We do not need to wonder what God the Father is like, because Jesus makes it clear that those who know Him know God.To Know Jesus Is to Share in His SufferingsThe Father is the vinedresser, Jesus is the true vine and those branches of believers that abide in Him will be pruned back. Pruning results in more fruit and good, healthy growth. Bible commentator John Trapp (1601-1669) said, “If it be painful to bleed, it is worse to wither. Let me be pruned, that I may grow, rather than be cut up to burn.” All who know Christ will suffer. Yet with suffering, we can know the power of God. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us (Romans 8:11).To Know Jesus Is to Recognize His VoiceWhen we know Jesus, we will know His character and His voice. Like the sheep who know their shepherd, the children of God who are the sheep of His pasture will know His voice as the good Shepherd (John 10:27). When we spend time in prayer to Him, waiting on Him, reading His holy Word in the Bible and listening, we begin to know His voice. It will help us to live for Him, to discern truth from error and to walk in obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit that is at work in His followers.To Know Jesus Is to Have Eternal LifeThe Bible is clear that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Jesus prayed to the Father saying, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Jesus stepped into our world, both fully human and fully God, living the life that we could not live and dying the death that we should have died.When we know Jesus, we can know that He has paid the penalty that our sins deserved. When God looks at those who trust in His Son, He sees Christ’s perfection. We can come into the presence of God now, unblemished, and our eternal future is secure because we are trusting in the One who has washed us clean and will bring us to our eternal home.To Know Jesus Is to Grow in Grace and Knowledge of HimPeter warns the readers of his letter to “be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position” (2 Peter 3:17). There are many false teachings, enemies of God and temptations acted upon, which can hinder our walk with the Lord. We know that when we follow Jesus, we will suffer for being a Christian. The enemy hates believers and will do his utmost to stunt and kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10). Yet, Peter says “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). With the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus.Knowing Jesus and growing in grace is continual. We never exhaust the subject! There is always more to know about someone, and when it comes to the King of Kings, Lord of Lords and Creator and Sustainer of all things, it is limitless and beyond all comprehension. However, like Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, we can ask:“That out of the riches of His glory He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Then you, being rooted and grounded in love, will have power, together with all the saints, to comprehend the length and width and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16-19).Final Thoughts from J.I. Packer’s Book Knowing GodIn J.I. Packer’s book Knowing God, he states four propositions which show the effects of the knowledge of God on a person. Using the book of Daniel, his first proposition says that “those who know God have great energy for God.” This is evident by “their reaction to the anti-God trends around them” (p.28) and being “sensitive to situations in which God’s truth and honor are being directly or tacitly jeopardized” (p.29).His second proposition was “those who know God have great thoughts of God” (p. 29), noting Daniel’s knowledge of God’s holiness, majesty, moral perfection and faithfulness. The third proposition is “those who know God show great boldness for God” (p. 31), and Daniel and his friends counted the cost, and remained loyal to their God.Finally, Packer’s fourth proposition is “those who know God have great contentment in God” (p.32). We can know peace and full assurance that we can know God, that He knows us and that can carry us through life, death and into eternity.There is an outworking in the life of the believer of what is going on inside. When we really know Christ, He captivates and transforms our heart, and there will be fruit from that. There will be noticeable changes in our mind, heart and actions as we abide in Jesus. We must remember that it is His work, and we are becoming more like Jesus as we yield to Him and seek to know Him more deeply. Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Tinnakorn JorruangRuth Clemence is a wife, mom, writer and award-winning blogger based in Cardiff, Wales. Read more at: ruthclemence.com. Following Jesus can be difficult. Contrary to popular belief, experiencing that difficulty actually means you’re following him.But in order to follow Jesus, we must know Jesus in some way. And knowing about someone is not the same as actually knowing them. In fact, Scripture even says “You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder.” That doesn’t sound good…Below are three key differences between knowing about Jesus and actually knowing Jesus. These subtle differences can make all the difference in the world.1. You know Jesus was a “good person” but aren’t sure what he actually said or did that was goodIt’s generally believed that