

KNOWING HIS GREAT NAME

GOD'S COVENANTAL CHARACTER,
OUR IDENTITY,
AND HIS COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

What matters supremely therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All of my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me, and continues to know me.

J.I. Packer¹

There is no more awe-inspiring and incomprehensible truth than the truth that I am known by God. It is at the same time simple to state and impossible to exhaust. For a small child to describe their father as “daddy” or their mother as “mommy” is innocent, intimate, and true. And yet over time, the child will be able to say more about the parent. It is through experiencing “daddy” and “mommy” in the context of relationship that a child will deepen their understanding of who “daddy” and “mommy” are and how they respond in certain situations. A lifetime of experiences with the parent will present an unfolding tapestry of attributes. The events of life—both good and bad—will be the occasion by which the facets of a parent’s character are revealed.

In the same way, the unfolding story of Scripture shows us the greatness of the God we are privileged to know. We find that the One whom by grace we call Father, is also our Creator, King, Healer, Provider, Shepherd, and so much more. As the Bible broadens our view of who God is, it simultaneously deepens our gratitude for the fact that such a God has chosen to make Himself known to us. Becoming secure and confident in this knowledge will radically shape how we view ourselves (identity) and transform how we relate to others (community).

The beauty of God has many facets, like a rare and exquisite diamond that captivates a young couple in search of a wedding ring. Their failure would be to look at the jewel from only one angle and thus deprive themselves of the joy in seeing its true value. It’s no different in our study of God.

Sam Storms²

John Stott reminds us in his commentary on Ephesians, “It takes the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences.”³ In order to deepen our knowledge of God, we must seek to be known by others authentically in His covenant family. Certainly, committing to make yourself knowable in a local church requires both effort and risk. However, God’s grace makes this endeavor both possible and rewarding. As the Lord’s Prayer teaches us, through Christ, God is not just *my* Father but *our* Father. Our being known by Him gives us the confidence to be known by our brothers and

¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 41.

² Sam Storms, *One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004), 157.

³ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 13.

sisters in Christ. And in turn, opening ourselves up to be known by others deepens our knowledge and understanding of the love and character of God.

We invite you to dive into this book in community with others. This is an invitation to come alongside us into the stories where God’s character is revealed. Our God is a relational God, and we have the great privilege of being known by Him as a part of His covenant family.

In this study we will reflect on the character of our God by examining some of the words and phrases that are used to describe God in Scripture. Some of these words and phrases are used by God to describe Himself. Others are what is commonly called an *epithet*, a word or phrase someone in Scripture uses to capture the essence of his or her experience of God. This is not unlike the way many of us are given a nickname at some point in our lives. Our friends give us a nickname which reminds them of what we’ve done and serves as a memento of our character. In many cases, our nicknames can be reminders of our less glorious moments in life—not so with God. In contrast, each of His names gives us a window into the multi-faceted beauty of the Lord.

Theologically, it is also worth pointing out that just as the receiving of an epithet or nickname does not legally change our name, such is the case with many of the words and phrases we’ll examine in our study. As we’ll see in our first unit, there is only one personal name, *Yahweh*, with which the Lord identifies Himself. However, for the sake of simplicity we have chosen to use the word “names” to describe each of the words and phrases we’ll examine together.

Each unit of our study is composed of four major sections and a memory verse. You are welcome to walk through the sections at your own pace, or, if you prefer, you can break the sections up and

complete one section each day. There is a leader’s guide available for this study if you would like suggestions for how to lead a group or your family through this material. The memory verses are included for optional memory work but are highly encouraged as a way to help you and your group members meditate on the names of God throughout the twelve weeks of this study.

We will begin the study by discovering God as *Yahweh*, the relational and covenant-keeping God. Covenant Theology will undergird all our lessons. *Theology* is simply the study of God. Covenant Theology looks at the study of God through the lens of the covenants revealed in Scripture. The word

covenant is mentioned in the Bible almost three hundred times and allows readers to see the Bible as one big story: the story of a personal God rescuing His people from the reign of sin and restoring them to Himself through the redemptive work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Each week as we consider His character and attributes, we will always consider how knowing God as the Covenant-Keeper is foundational to knowing Him in the other facets of His character.

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(1) KNOWING THE CONTEXT: Our study of the Scriptures will take us on a journey through the landscape of the Bible with its ancient cultures, customs, and vocabulary. In order to get our bearings, we’ll begin each lesson by orienting ourselves to our surroundings and pointing out where we are in God’s unfolding story of redemption. This will help us to discover what each name meant to the original

hearers of what we now know to be the Old Testament and will give us the proper context for learning each of the names and attributes of God.

(2) KNOWING HIS GREAT NAME: Having set the contextual stage, we will focus on one Old Testament passage for each of God's names as it is revealed in Scripture. We will look at the passage to learn more about God's great name, His attributes, and His character.

(3) KNOWING THE CHRIST CONNECTION: With each name of God in the Old Testament, we will connect you to a text from the Gospels in the New Testament to show you how God's great name and His character are manifested in the life of Christ and His ministry on Earth.

(4) KNOWING YOURSELF (IDENTITY) AND BEING KNOWN (COMMUNITY): As we grow in our understanding of who God is through the lens of His various names, we will also unpack how these specific attributes shape the way we think about ourselves (identity) as those who belong to Him. Lastly, we will consider how our understanding of who God is shapes how we relate to others within the community of God's people.

KNOWING GOD AS THE
COVENANT-KEEPER
IS FOUNDATIONAL
TO KNOWING HIM IN
THE OTHER FACETS OF
HIS CHARACTER.

LESSON 1

KNOWING HIS GREAT NAME: YAHWEH

*What comes into our minds when we think about God
is the most important thing about us.*

A.W. Tozer⁴

■ **Memory Verse:** Exodus 3:15

God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD [Yahweh], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

■ **Main Idea:** *Yahweh* is God’s relational and covenant-keeping name.

(1) KNOWING THE CONTEXT

“What is the name of the God who sent you?” When tasked with the mission of leading the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt this is the question that Moses anticipated being asked by the Israelites (Ex. 3:13). When Moses asked God how he should respond, the Lord’s answer to that question helps us to understand something which is at once both deeply personal and central to everything else we will come to see about God in this study. The Hebrew for God’s name in verse 15 is the word *Yahweh*, which most English Bibles translate as “LORD.” However, if we understand the original language in which Moses wrote (Hebrew) and the culture of the ancient Near East, we recognize that God is telling Moses—and us—much more about Himself than might be seen at first glance. This week we will be digging in and seeing how *Yahweh* is the relational and covenant-keeping God.

What is a covenant? A covenant was a type of formal relationship between two parties in the ancient world. Some-

YAHWEH’S COVENANT
RELATIONSHIP WITH
HIS PEOPLE IS DEEPLY
PERSONAL. HE KNOWS
EACH BY NAME
AND INVITES THEM
TO KNOW HIM IN
THE SAME WAY.

⁴ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 1.

times, those two parties were nations. Other times, those two parties were people, such as in a marriage. Throughout the Bible we see God committing Himself to a covenant relationship with His people to redeem them from the curse of sin and to bring them into a relationship with Himself. Like in a marriage covenant, God makes vows to His people and He is faithful to keep them. Unlike in a marriage, God's promises transcend any one individual or even generation. Instead, God's covenant faithfulness extends from one generation to another. His rescue of Moses and the Israelites was not simply a response to their cries for help, but a fulfillment of His promises to past generations of His people, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:23-25).

As with a faithful spouse, we see the significance of God's character as a covenant-keeping God not just in the promises He makes, but in the specific actions He takes to fulfill them. As we see in this week's passages, God's character and actions are inseparably interlinked. Scholar, Michael Williams, puts it this way:

The name Yahweh means that God can be grasped and understood only by His actions and words. Only His action reveals His presence and His character. Humanity cannot discover or forge it. Israel can know God and learn of His true nature only through His acts on its behalf. By giving His name to Israel, Yahweh is saying: If you want to know Me, you will have to watch My actions and listen to My words. My faithfulness to the covenant is key to My character.⁵

However, Yahweh's covenant relationship with His people is not just formal and contractual; it is also deeply personal. God knows each of His people by name and invites them to know Him in the same way. In our passage, God revealed Himself to Moses using the personal and covenant name, Yahweh. The Jews long avoided speaking the name *Yahweh* out of a fear of doing so irreverently, and therefore, would substitute it with the formal Hebrew word *Adonai* (Lord) instead. However, God's act of giving us His name is a gracious invitation to know Him personally, to call Him by name.

(2) KNOWING YAHWEH

1. Read Exodus 3:13-15. Highlight God's great name. Underline the historical significance of His great name. Circle the places that connect God's great name to identity and community.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

⁵ Michael D. Williams, *As Far as the Curse Is Found* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005), 32.

2. Read Exodus 1:8-15. Determine where Israel was when God revealed His relational and covenant-keeping name to them, and describe their circumstances.

Israel's Location	Israel's Circumstances

3. Reflect on the significance of *Yahweh* being God's great name forever. Why is it important to see that His name is meant to be known throughout all generations?

4. Read Exodus 6:2-8. Highlight God's great name. Underline the "I will" statements. Put a circle around the word *covenant*.

God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name the LORD I did not make Myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered My covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'"

5. List the “I will” statements from Exodus 6 in the first column. Since you are included in this covenant-keeping and generational promise, write what these “I will” statements mean to you in the present day.

“I will” Statement	What this statement means to me in the present day

6. Using the chart above, explain why it is significant that the name *Yahweh* is connected to actions.

(3) KNOWING THE CHRIST CONNECTION

As we turn to the New Testament, we see God's character as the relational and covenant-keeping God fully on display in the person of Jesus. In the passages below, observe the ways in which Jesus identified Himself as God against the background of Exodus 3 and how His work of redemption relates to the promises of Exodus 6.

1. Read John 8:58. In your own words, why is this verse significant to learning about *Yahweh*, God's relational and covenant-keeping name?

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

2. Jesus is I AM. Connect Yahweh's "I will" statements from Exodus 6 to the life of Christ. Using the following passages, explain how Christ brings us out, delivers us, redeems us, adopts us, and blesses us in the present day.

2 Corinthians 1:10

Galatians 3:13-15

Galatians 5:1

Ephesians 1:3, 5

3. Read Galatians 5:1. Underline what Christ has done for us in the gospel. Put a circle around how we should respond as Yahweh’s covenant people.

For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

4. In Galatians 5:1 above, Paul was describing the way Christ’s death frees us from Jewish ceremonial laws and regulations. These were major points of contention in the church community as Jews and Gentiles learned to find their identity in the work of Jesus alone instead of in Jesus “plus” circumcision, or what they ate, or did not eat, or with whom they socialized. Thinking about the context of your community, what are the “ceremonial laws and regulations” in the culture surrounding you in the present day?

(4) BEING KNOWN: YAHWEH, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY

Being known by Yahweh can powerfully shape the way you view yourself (identity) and the way you approach relationships in your local church (community). Knowing His great name as *Yahweh* is to know He is redeeming us daily from the things that keep us oppressed and in slavery in the present day. Yahweh delivered His covenant family out of Egypt through Moses, and through Jesus, God delivers His people from present-day sin—this frees us, but we must stand firm in this truth.

In Exodus 6, when God revealed His personal name Yahweh to Moses, God also made the promise: “I will be your God and you will be My people.” This is a promise of adoption into Yahweh’s covenant family. *Yahweh* is a great name, and knowing and being known by Yahweh is the beginning of true community. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 34 explains adoption into Yahweh’s covenant family this way: “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.”⁶

To know Yahweh makes us fellow heirs with Christ, children of God, and members of His family. This facet of His character should push us into community in the church. Family life can be challenging at times, but Yahweh is the God of the Church, and the people in His Church are the fulfillment of the promise in Exodus 6—“*I will be your God, and you will be My people.*” If we know Yahweh and are confident in being known by Yahweh, we will be deeply connected to the people in His Church. If what comes to our minds when we think about God is first and foremost Yahweh, His covenant and relational name, this will change the way we live and relate to His redeemed people in our daily lives.

⁶ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2010), 27.

1. Read Romans 8:12-17. Circle the words that refer to Christian identity in the new covenant. Underline words that remind you of covenant community.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

IF WHAT COMES TO OUR MINDS WHEN WE THINK ABOUT GOD IS FIRST AND FOREMOST YAHWEH, HIS COVENANT AND RELATIONAL NAME, THIS WILL CHANGE THE WAY WE LIVE AND RELATE TO HIS REDEEMED PEOPLE IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

2. In Exodus 6, Yahweh said He will adopt His covenant people. God redeems our hearts and brings us into a family—we are saved to be a people. Use the space below to write honestly about your personal experience of relationships in your local church.

3. Name one to three ways your local church provides opportunities for covenant relationships to develop over time. Circle one opportunity you'd like to pursue more as you think about how knowing and being known by Yahweh, the relational and covenant-keeping God, transforms the way you think about community and relationships in your local context.

KNOWING YAHWEH

Abby Ross Hutto

As a child who grew up in the Reformed faith, I had an early understanding of the power of God and His sovereign control over the world. I knew He held all things in His capable hands and that nothing happened outside of His rule and reign. This should have brought me great comfort and security in life, but the prevailing emotion I felt towards God as a child was fear. I knew Yahweh was powerful. I had seen His mighty acts in Scripture. But how did He feel towards me? It was the relational part that I felt unsure of. I didn't doubt His power, but I wondered about His heart.

For many years I obeyed God, not out of love, but from a deep sense of fear. I did what I was supposed to do, but I kept my distance from God and (secretly) hoped He'd keep His distance from me. As I entered adulthood, my skewed "fear of the Lord" began to destroy me. If God was not for me, then whom could I trust? I was insecure, unstable, anxious, and blown about by every changing circumstance.

It wasn't until I was thirty years old and serving on staff at a church that I knew I had to change. Deep down, I wanted a different relationship with God, but I wasn't sure where to begin. How do you learn to trust when you've spent a lifetime protecting yourself? I needed new eyes to see the heart of God. So, I pleaded with the Holy Spirit for this gift and I opened the Gospel of John. As I studied each chapter, I asked Jesus to show me the heart of His Father, to make Yahweh known to me. I not only needed His words, I needed to see His heart in action. Over the course of a year, I sat at my kitchen table and listened and watched as Jesus put on flesh and narrated the covenant-keeping God to me.

What I saw was astounding! Jesus spoke about the Father's deep longings for His wayward people. He narrated a God who moved heaven and earth to seek out His prodigals and bring every last one of them home. I saw a Father who searched the horizon for His children, eagerly waiting to receive them with kisses and His best robe. This is a God who is for us, not against us, a God who keeps His covenantal promises.

By the end of my time in John, I was a completely different woman. I saw the proof of Yahweh's love—the beloved Son, face dripping in blood, His back torn from the lashes He had received, stumbling under the weight of my sins and His cross. In that moment, I knew. I knew, not just in my head, but in my heart that Yahweh truly loved me. As I watched Jesus hang on His cross, something shifted inside me, and I knew that I would follow this God anywhere He chose to lead. For I am His, and He is mine. By His words and actions, Yahweh has proven His heart to me. He is a powerful God who keeps His promises because He is faithful and true to His people.

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