

5 Books on Knowing God in Troubled Times

by Virginia Orton

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The most basic and abiding need of God's people is the knowledge of God.

While all people in every time and place, as God's image bearers, inescapably *know* God through his clear revelation in creation and conscience, sin causes man to suppress the true knowledge of God (Rom 1:18-21). The sinful inclination of the human heart is the desire 'to be like God'; self-sufficient and self-determining (Gen 3:5). By refusing to acknowledge the true God man doesn't cease to worship, rather his worship is re-directed: "exchanging the truth about God for a lie" he "[worships] and [serves] the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). Man substitutes the knowledge of the true God for one made after his own likeness.

God's people are not immune to this inclination (Ps 50:21). That is why the Holy Spirit, speaking through the apostle Paul, tells us to no longer "be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2). Only by bringing every thought captive in obedience to Christ in his Word are we enabled to correct our sinful distortions about who God is and what he requires (2 Cor 10:5). While God is infinitely beyond our comprehension, he has revealed himself, in his incarnation and written Word, so that though we can never know him exhaustively we can know him truly. Only in his light do we see light (Ps 36:9)—that is, truth about ourselves, the world and how we ought to live. A right understanding of God is the bedrock for true knowledge and worship.

Therefore, the biggest threat to the contemporary church is not external to her—whether in an increasingly hostile secular state, radical Islam or a global eco-gospel. The biggest threat to the church is the erosion of true knowledge and worship of God. The political, economic and social crises in ancient Israel were never due to external causes but internal corruption. The Lord warns us through the Prophets that: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6) and "My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge" (Isa 5:13). This "lack of knowledge" was not for want of access or opportunity to know God and his ways. Rather, being privileged with God's revelation in order that they might be a distinctive people demonstrating God's wisdom to the nations (Deut 4), "they rejected knowledge" (Hos 4:6), compromising with the surrounding nations and their gods, exchanging justice for injustice and righteousness for unrighteousness. While maintaining an outward form of worship, the reality of their lives denied God, living contrary to him, incurring his incremental judgements.

Likewise, the contemporary Western church has "rejected knowledge", refusing to be subject to God. Exchanging the truth about God for a lie, we have manufactured images of God to satisfy our own preferences and desires. God is domesticated and made to serve man—a god of self-betterment, health and wealth, and personal spiritual experiences. From evolutionary theory to existentialist philosophy, we import alien ideas into the Christian faith and export a false gospel. Like ancient Israel, despite the Western church's privileged access and opportunity to know God and demonstrate his wisdom, it has, to its own destruction, compromised and conformed to the surrounding gods of the culture. Having received the gracious revelation of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, the writer to the Hebrews pertinently warns us:

We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it ... how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

Heb 2:1-3

The peril of the church in these times is its abandonment of the knowledge of God. Just as the Prophets in times of spiritual decline called the people of God to "remember" and "return" to the revelation of God, so too today. Cultural and ecclesial reformation can only occur through God's people turning from their idolatrous images of a god made in their likeness and remembering and returning to the living God, becoming subject to his law-word.

Far from a theoretical exercise, the application of our hearts and minds to apprehend more clearly the revealed nature,

character and purpose of God is intensely relational and transformational. Not only does God's revelation humble and change us, cultivating the true worship and fear of his Holy Name, but in the midst of cultural upheaval "the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action" (Dan 11:32). This is what is needed in our times. These 5 books serve this end beautifully.

The Majesty of Mystery: Celebrating the Glory of an Incomprehensible God, K. Scott Oliphint

Christians may attempt to "know" God to the best of their ability—leading some to limit God as they contain Him within tidy answers for human understanding. In *The Majesty of Mystery*, K. Scott Oliphint encourages believers to embrace the mysteries of Christian faith: the Trinity, the incarnation, eternal life, and the balance between God's sovereign will and human choices. Drawing from the Reformed tradition and interacting with the biblical text, Oliphint shows how a profound recognition of our own limitations can lead us into a richer awareness of God's infinite majesty.

Written with deep theological knowledge and threaded with everyday implications, *The Majesty of Mystery* connects the dots between humanity and God, belief and practice, mystery and worship. Oliphint invites readers to rediscover the purpose to which all theology aims--the worship of the incomprehensible God who faithfully reveals himself in Scripture.

Knowing God, J. I. Packer

For over 40 years, J. I. Packer's classic has been an important tool to help Christians around the world discover the wonder, the glory and the joy of knowing God. In 2006, *Christianity Today* voted this title one of the top 50 books that have shaped evangelicals. This edition is updated with Americanized language and spelling and a new preface by the author. Stemming from Packer's profound theological knowledge, *Knowing God* brings together two important facets of the Christian faith: knowing about God and also knowing God through the context of a close relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

Written in an engaging and practical tone, this thought-provoking work seeks to transform and enrich the Christian understanding of God. Explaining both who God is and how we can relate to him, Packer divides his book into three sections: The first directs our attention to how and why we know God, the second to the attributes of God and the third to the benefits enjoyed by those who know him intimately. This guide leads readers into a greater understanding of God while providing advice to gaining a closer relationship with him as a result.

The Attributes of God, Arthur W. Pink

The foundation of our knowledge of God rests upon knowing what he is like. Without understanding God's attributes, we have a skewed perception of him—often one cast in our own image. We need more than just a theoretical knowledge of God in order to worship him as he desires.

This classic work of Arthur W. Pink invites readers to discover the truth about seventeen attributes of God, including his sovereignty, immutability, patience, love, faithfulness, and much more. Pink shows readers a God who is alive, all-powerful, and active in his creation. The perfect introductory text, *The Attributes of God* also has enough depth and meat to satisfy the more experienced reader.

The Attributes of God: Knowledge of the Holy, A. W. Tozer

What is the nature of God? How can we recapture a real sense of God's majesty and truly live in the Spirit? This beloved book, a modern classic of Christian testimony and devotion, addresses these and other vital questions, showing us how we can rejuvenate our prayer life, meditate more reverently, understand God more deeply, and experience God's presence in our daily lives.

Informative and inspiring, *The Knowledge of the Holy* illuminates God's attributes from wisdom, to grace, to mercy and shows through prayerful and insightful discussion, how we can more fully recognize and appreciate each of these divine aspects. This book will be treasured by anyone committed to the Christian faith. It bears eloquent witness to God's majesty and shows us new ways to experience and understand the wonder and the power of God's spirit in our daily lives.

The Doctrine of God (A Theology of Lordship), John Frame

Frame resolves to present what Scripture says about God and how to apply it to the questions of our time. Frame's central motif is that God is Lord of the covenant and that all the acts, attributes, and personal distinctions that Scripture attributes to God are also expressions of his Lordship. This approach focuses our attention on the main biblical message of salvation without ignoring or denying the large amount of biblical teaching on the nature and acts of God.

This award-winning book will help you appreciate the God revealed in the Bible and the God revealed through the lives of his people.

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