

6 KNOWN BY GOD



Receive

Isaiah 43:1-2

But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel; “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” (Isaiah 43:1-2, NIV)



Reflect

*Do I believe that God has summoned me by name, and that He will be with me when I feel spiritually lost?
Do I believe that God has a specific purpose just for me on this Earth?
Why does God guarantee that He will be with me during life's trials, but doesn't necessarily prevent those trials from taking place?*

Sometimes we assume that because we believe in God and have faith and trust in Him that He will protect us from grief and hardship. But that isn't necessarily true. We live in a broken world, and that means that most of us will not walk through life unscathed. We must remember that God walks *with* us—He doesn't send us off alone to forge through the wilderness. He accompanies us every step of the way—through deep waters, through the blazing fires of life. He knows each of us by name, intimately and thoroughly—our fears, our flaws, our deepest desires. And He guides each of us on our own, individual path ... going before us and coming behind us as we navigate the hills and valleys of life.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me to trust that You are here, right here with me. Help me to know with utter confidence that You will never leave me alone.*

Consider What's Real: It's easy to trust God in good times, when life rolls along smoothly and our worries are few. The key, of course, is to know that He is with us even when we feel alone, even when we might feel abandoned in the midst of our spiritual wilderness. The next time you are in such a desolate place, take a moment to reflect on other difficult times in the past that you survived with God at your side. And know that He's got your back today.

Additional Verses to Consider: Psalm 139: 5-12, Jeremiah 29:11

7 GOD'S DIVINITY



Receive

Isaiah 55:8-13

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11, NIV)



Reflect

Do I truly care about God's thoughts and ways?

Do I truly believe that His direction can make a concrete difference in my life?

Am I willing to read the Bible with an open heart and mind in order to discern what God wants from me?

God is clear about how He sees His Word working in our lives. As the rain nourishes the soil, feeding plants and crops that will grow to sustain those who harvest them, God's Word nourishes our souls, feeding us so that we will grow and flourish and sustaining us through periods of drought and difficulty. What's more, God's Word contains a specific message and specific direction for each of us. Scripture illuminates the purpose He has for us on this Earth. His personal message is contained within the pages of the Bible. We must seek that direction first in order to be led by it.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I know Your holy thoughts and ways are far beyond my limited human ability to comprehend. Yet I also know that You gave me Your Word as a means to grow closer to You and understand what purpose You have for me. Help Your Word mold my life into what You intend it to be.*

Consider What's Real: Sometimes we try to "get through the Bible" instead of letting the Bible get through to us. Today, try to slow down as you read; perhaps even meditate a bit on the verses. As Henri Nouwen says, "Meditation means chewing on the word and incorporating it into our lives. It is the discipline by which we let the written word of God become a personal word for us, anchored in the center of our being." (*Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*)

Additional Verses to Consider: Isaiah 55:1-7

8 TRUE FAITH



Receive

Hosea 6:1-3

Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.
(Hosea 6:3, NIV)



Reflect

*What must I do to return to the Lord and begin to acknowledge Him again?
Is there a particular sin in my life that is inhibiting me from pursuing true communion with God?
What can I do to press on in pursuit of the Lord in times of spiritual drought?*

Sometimes it seems as if God is slow to appear, even when it feels like we are pursuing Him wholeheartedly. *Why isn't God answering my prayers?* we might wonder. "Why don't I feel close to God right now?" we might ask. It may be that a sin in our life has opened a chasm between us and God. Perhaps we need to be honest with ourselves, and with Him, by confessing this sin and asking for forgiveness. On the other hand, there are also times when we simply don't know what is separating us from God. He feels absent, distant. We feel spiritually frustrated and empty, yet we don't know why. In these times, God urges us to press on in faith, to persevere, continuing to acknowledge Him and trusting that He will appear again in good time.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, thank You for being always present and always with me, even when I may not be able to see You or hear You. Fortify my spirit and strengthen my trust in You during these times, so that I may press on in pursuit of You.*

Consider What's Real: The disciple Paul knew that living the Christian life is a journey of endurance. He knew that faith isn't always easy, that sometimes it feels like a long, hard race. In his letter to the Philippians Paul admits that sometimes this journey requires "straining" in order to "press on toward the goal." Yet Paul was also confident that God *will* appear, and that in the end, the reward will be well-worth the effort: "The Lord Jesus Christ . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:21).

Additional Verses to Consider: Philippians 3:12-15; Hebrews 12:1-3

9 IDOLS



Receive

Romans 1:18-32

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:21-23, NIV).



Reflect

In what ways have I been deceived by the world?

What in my life replaces God as the primary focus of my attention?

Do I focus my attention on the idols in my life because I resist surrendering entirely to God?

The New Living Translation of Romans 21 says that the Israelites “began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like.” Sound familiar? We all make the mistake of trying to define God according to our human standards and human limitations. And we fail, of course, because God cannot be boxed in, contained or even defined. He is far too big, too powerful, too awesome—and that may be exactly the reason we try to define and contain Him: His splendor and all-encompassing love are too much for our human minds to process. As a result, we turn our attention and hearts to human gods—our jobs, finances, homes, ambitions, dreams—because they can be managed and controlled in ways that God cannot.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me identify the idols in my life and help me banish their influence and power over me so that I can focus my attention on You.*

Consider What's Real: If you're more inclined to practice a formal method of prayer, perhaps try a more relaxed, conversational type of prayer with God today. Try to engage in a conversation with Him, not just at specific, set times during the day. John warns about idols this way: “Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.” (1 John 5:21, NLT) The bottom line is that God wants your whole heart—not a quarter of it, or half, or even 99.9 percent of it. He wants it all. John is very clear in his advice when he warns us to steer clear of anything that will squeeze God out of His rightful place in the center of our hearts. This doesn't mean that we can't have interests or pleasures or even ambitions. Rather, it's simply a warning: if any of these other areas in our lives begin to dominate or take priority, *beware*.

Additional Verses to Consider: Exodus 32: 1-4, Psalm 106:19-31

10 DELIVERANCE



Receive

Psalm 94:16-19

When I said, “My foot is slipping,” your love, O Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul. (Psalm 94:18-19, NIV)



Reflect

*When my foot is slipping—and temptation is overwhelming me—do I immediately return to Jesus?
When I feel like I can't handle my worries and my problems on my own, do I turn to Jesus for solace?
When I feel God's hand of correction, do I accept that as a sign of His love?*

It's easy to beat ourselves up over sin, especially when we tend to repeat the same sins over and over again in a seemingly endless cycle. We wonder how we can even call ourselves Christian when we so relentlessly go against God and His will. Yet this is exactly why we need to lean hard into Jesus' love. If we continue to view faith as merely a set of rules to follow and obey, then when we fall—and we *will* fall—we'll crash hard, blaming ourselves for our weaknesses and failures. But if we view faith as a relationship with God based in love, then we will be able to turn to Him and know with great joy that He loves us no matter what.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I know obedience is important, but I also know that You want me to move far beyond simple rule-following and into a real relationship with You. Please guide me as I walk through this study so that I may learn how to better relate to and love You.*

Consider What's Real: In his book *Prodigal God*, Timothy Keller talks about the difference between religion and faith, or rule-following and relationship: “Religion operates on the principle of ‘I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.’ The basic operating principle of the gospel is ‘I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ—therefore I obey’... Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding, our identity, and our view of the world. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting.”

Additional Verses to Consider: Romans 3:23-24, Isaiah 29:13