

LEARNING TO THINK GOD'S THOUGHTS
Jeremiah 9:23-24

Living God's Word—A Walk Through The Bible
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A common question among many today is, “How can I truly know God and what he thinks?” How can I know for sure that Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior? How can I have the confident assurance that I am saved and will spend eternity in heaven?

The truth is that most of us come from a variety of different places as far as our faith and understanding may be concerned. Some of us may have grown up in a family where we went to church every week; participated in lots of activities; had a pretty good Christian foundation.

Yet after leaving home we may have stopped going to church. We may have been at a place where we thought that church was pretty irrelevant to our needs; we believed that you don't need to go to church to be a Christian. Perhaps it was only as we got older, got married, had children that we started to go to church again. Yet our questions of God and of faith remain.

Some others of us may have grown up in a home where we worshipped only a few times a year; were dropped off at Sunday school and Confirmation; had no other real involvement. Some others of us may have grown up in different church denomination, or in a family who didn't go to church at all, but then we married a very active Christian; one who was really involved in their church.

Some others of us may have moved into this area and just never connected to a church. Rather we got really busy with work and family activities; we simply put off finding a church home. Lately however we have wanted to change our priorities; wanted to find lasting values for ourselves and our family; wanted to find a deeper meaning and purpose to life.

The truth is that even though each of us come out of different church backgrounds and experiences, most all of us are searching for something deeper. We are seeking some answers to our questions. We want to know more about God and what he thinks about us. We yearn and hunger for a personal relationship with Jesus by faith.

In our Walk Through the Bible look today at Jeremiah 9:23-24, the prophet says, *“This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.”*

Jesus says in John 15: *“Abide in my love.”* God is saying live in me, know me, understand me, walk with me. Yet how do we do this? How does someone like me come to know God's thoughts; how do I come to know Jesus as my friend and Savior.

Jesus, in John's Gospel, actually gives us some truths that can help us all on this journey. Jesus says these words, *"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you."* He also says, *"You did not choose me but I chose you."*

The place we always need to begin in knowing God is to remember that he loves and has chosen you no matter where you are in your life. He loves you whether you know him, have fallen away from him, have had some personal or moral failures. He loves you and me more than we will ever know or are even able to comprehend.

Not only does God love us, but he has chosen us. We don't one day out of the blue simply decide with our own minds to follow him. No, he has chosen us from the beginning to be saved. Jesus died on the cross and rose again so that we might have eternal life. He searches for us when we are lost. He even knows the numbers of hairs on our heads.

Many people today are deceived into thinking they need to somehow climb their way to God. Some think that they need to get all holy and righteous before God will accept them or come to them. That however is not the truth of God's thoughts. He loves you and has chosen you. He comes to us with his gifts of forgiveness and new life.

So to abide in God, to know his thoughts, we need to first of all receive his love by faith. We need to allow his love to touch our hearts and lives with his forgiveness. We need to pray that Jesus helps us learn and know his promises; helps us to grow in faith and trust.

The second thing that helps us to know God's thoughts and abide in his love is to keep his commandments. It means that we learn more about him in his Word, the Bible. It means that we worship him faithfully. It means that we seek to walk in his wisdom and love.

It's kind of like when two people get married. A person could say, "Gee, honey, I love you with all my heart, but after the wedding I'm moving to Alaska. I'll call you once in awhile and try to get home a couple times a year. But I want you to know that I love you with all my heart."

Well, that would not be much of a marriage. To know each other and abide in a loving relationship means being together, communicating regularly, learning about each other, being committed to mutual values and goals. The same thing is true in our relationship with God. To know him better commits us to growing deeper in our love for him.

As most of you know, at Messiah Church we have committed ourselves to the mission of helping each person to grow in their faith and understanding of God. The Purpose Driven Life series we did last year, along with our learning this past Lent about what it means to be a Christian, were opportunities to learn together as singles, as couples, as families, and as a church, God's thoughts and purpose for each of us.

Our efforts to provide dynamic and Spirit-filled worship; relevant messages and teaching; an excellently revised and revamped children's program starting this September; a strong youth ministry with Charis leading; faith nurturing mentors; Confirmation and youth activities that empower youth to know Jesus and follow him—everything we do as a church is to help people know Jesus, love Jesus and to grow deeper in our faith in him.

Jeremiah warns that none of us boast of our own wisdom, our own strength, our own riches. Rather Jeremiah says that we should only boast of understanding God and knowing him. To be able to know God's thoughts means abiding and growing in him. It only comes as we commit ourselves in faithful worship and regular learning opportunities.

The third way we learn to know God's thoughts is by loving others as he first loved us. This means that as we grow in our knowledge of God's love, we are then motivated to put our faith into action by loving others. We are motivated to actively be involved in ministry and outreach.

How exciting is that? It is as we venture out in faith and ministry to others that we really feel God's love and learn to know his heart. It is then that we learn to know that he is the Lord "*who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.*" It is then that we want to learn more about the Bible and how we can be a witness for God.

I have often seen over my years of ministry that it is the people who actually get involved in a ministry. It is those who teach others; actually do a mission service for others; who go on a mission trip; who take on a leadership role, they are the ones who truly grow in their faith and understanding. Putting our faith into action truly draws us closer to the heart of God.

Again at Messiah we provide Stephen Ministry; Mission Quilting; Youth Ministry parent helpers/volunteers; Technology; Food Shelf volunteering/donating; VBS and Sunday School helpers; sing in the Choir or Praise Band; generous Stewardship; TeacHaiti; Feed My Starving Children; Luther Crest Support; these are just a few ways of putting one's faith into action. Messiah's mission is to empower more people to plug into various missions and ministries.

My friend, if you're not involved in a learning opportunity, above and beyond weekly worship; if you are not involved in a mission and ministry where you put your faith into action, it will be more difficult for you to learn to know God's thoughts like you should. Our God truly wants you to know him in a deep and personal way.

So how do we come to know God's thoughts and to know Jesus as our Savior? Well, first of all we need to remember that God has chosen us from the very beginning and that he loves us with an everlasting love. To have faith, then, is to simply receive his gift of love in our hearts.

Secondly, to grow in our faith and understanding of God means that we learn to know his Word, his commandments, his truth. It means that we commit ourselves to study and growth. And thirdly, it means that we put God's Word and our faith in him into action by reaching out in love, ministry and service to others.

Yet why is this so important and such a blessing? Jesus says in John 15:11, "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*" Isn't that, my friends, the real longing in our society today—to have joy in all its fullness and completeness?

Folks, that joy from God is there for each one of you this day. May you commit your life to God right now, today; may you receive his love in your heart and abide in him. For then you will truly know his love, and joy, in all its wonder and fullness.