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## HOW CAN I KNOW GOD THROUGH HIS BOOK?

**Y**ou can tell a lot about a person by what he writes. His way of saying things, the issues he discusses, and the people and places he mentions reveal a great deal about him. If this is true of the books men write, it is more true of the Bible—the book that was written to reveal its Author.

David Egner has written this booklet to show us how we can know God through our study of His book—the Bible.

*Martin R. De Haan II*

Managing Editor: David Sper

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# THE AUTHOR AND HIS BOOK

**A**n author often reveals himself in what he writes. He will sometimes put himself into his characters, talk through their speeches, and pour his feelings into their emotions. Ideas and issues that are important to him will find their way into the pages of his books.

One of the intriguing aspects of the study of literature, therefore, is learning about an author through his writings. For example, we can learn much about the blind poet Milton through his sonnets and through *Paradise Lost*. And the study of the dark and twisted stories of Edgar Allan Poe take us deeply into his twisted mind and tormented heart.

Sometimes the writer will come right out and tell the reader what he is like and

what he believes. The few people who took seriously Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, for example, recognized his ego, his love of power, and the intensity of his hatred for the Jews.

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***What an author says reflects who that author is.***

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Usually, however, an author does not reveal his thinking and his character directly. His works must be read carefully and analyzed before the reader can begin to understand him. We must study his characters, scrutinize his places and incidents, and review his themes before we can know what makes him tick.

Think a moment about James Fenimore Cooper, the early American writer who wrote such thrilling stories

as *The Deerslayer*, *The Pilot*, and *The Last Of The Mohicans*. Reading these stories would give you a sense of Cooper's admiration for the pioneering spirit of the early settlers and his respect for the shrewdness and skill of the American Indian. You would also begin to feel his love for the spirit of adventure and his conviction that faith is vitally important if one is to overcome the fears and uncertainties of life.

"But," you ask, "how is all of this going to help me? What does it have to do with God and the study of the Bible?" Simply this: While one of the interests of literature is to get to know an author through what he has written, it should be the main interest of all Bible study. The Bible is God's book. Although it was written by men like Moses and Luke and Paul,

it is the self-revelation of God. He is the Author behind the authors. And what He says reflects who He is.

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***While one of the values of literature is to help you get to know an author through what he has written, it should be the main purpose of all Bible study.***

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To know God, therefore, we have to read His book. We have to learn to see Him on every page, above every event, in every place and circumstance, and overseeing the choice of every person who makes his way into the sacred pages of biblical history.

# THE BIBLE AND ITS AUTHOR

**T**he Bible, the book of books, was written so that we could know the Author behind the authors. Sometimes He is revealed directly in statements that tell us exactly what He is like. The simple sentence “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16) is an example. So is the statement “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16).

In most cases, however, we must look into and beyond the stories and statements and people of the Bible to see the character of its Author. The story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17), for instance, tells us a great deal about God. True, the story is primarily the historical account of a valiant Jewish youth in his conquest of a bigger, stronger, more experienced foe. But it was

God’s cause that David was defending. It was God’s power and control that directed the stone from David’s sling and brought the blasphemous giant crashing to the ground. And it was God who was

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*What God says  
reflects who  
He is.*

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glorified when the pagan Philistines were put to flight by the armies of Israel.

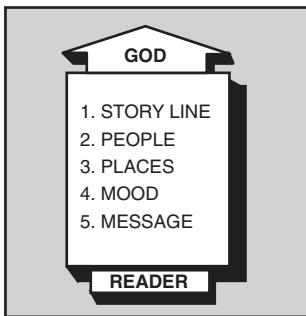
That God is our God! The details and scenery have changed, but the character of David’s God has not. Nor have His principles. He is still with us, and He can be found by those who seek Him. He is involved with all that happens. And He has a plan, a cause, and a purpose for each one of us.

# HOW TO KNOW GOD THROUGH THE BIBLE

The first thing you need to do as you approach the Bible is to ask its Author for help. Don't forget to do that! The amazing thing about the Bible is that its real Author is listening to your every thought. He is as close as a prayer. And when you ask Him to help you understand the book He has inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), you can be sure that He will find pleasure in giving you your request (Mt. 7:7-11).

The second thing we suggest is that you consider using the same method of study that is often used for literature of lesser importance. There are at least five classic elements of literature that also can be applied to the Scriptures. When adapted for the

purpose of Bible study, they look like this:



## 1. The Story Line.

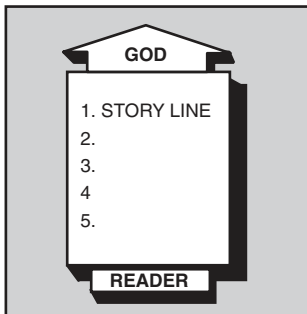
What God directly causes or allows to happen.

**2. The People.** How God relates to what people think, feel, and do.

**3. The Places.** Where God rules in the affairs of men.

**4. The Mood.** What God wants people to feel.

**5. The Message.** What God thinks or says. As we look at the Bible from these five points of view, our prayer is that it will help you see God more clearly throughout the pages of His book.



## I. THE STORY LINE

A first way we can know the God of the Bible through His book is by observing what happens in its pages. As we trace the sequence of events, the story line, we will see God in action: creating, making things happen, reacting to the things that take place in His world, and responding to the needs of man. All of this gives us insight into His mind and character. It helps us know God better.

**Learning From Literature.** Suppose we are reading *Moby Dick*. To understand and enjoy the book, we first have to follow

the story. We must note its beginning, how it develops, the climax, and the ending. When *Moby Dick* begins, the peg-legged Captain Ahab is hiring a crew to take his whaling vessel onto the high seas. His quest is to hunt down and kill the great white whale that took his leg. We soon realize that Ahab is obsessed with revenge.

As the story moves along from event to event, the showdown comes closer. Finally the whale is sighted and a longboat is lowered. The whale is harpooned, but in the wild struggle the longboat is smashed and the ship itself destroyed. Only one man is left to tell the tale of Ahab's defeat.

That is the basic story of the book. But in its 400 pages, numerous smaller dramatic episodes take place. Their significance can be understood only in the light of the basic story line. Each of these minor

episodes has a beginning, middle, and ending. Tracing them and fitting them into the main thread of the story is part of the enjoyment of reading the novel. It also helps us see the author's purpose for writing.

**The Story Line Of The Bible.** We can apply the same method to the Bible. Tracing its story line involves two stages as well: (1) seeing the big picture, and (2) examining the smaller segments.

**The Big Picture.** In short, the story line of the Bible shows what God either causes or allows to happen in the process of offering Himself to people who don't deserve to know Him. First He made two people, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a beautiful garden paradise. But then this same God allowed this first family to set the tone for what was to follow. While giving them indescribable opportunity to

enjoy His goodness, He allowed them to fail a simple "test of trust" (Gen. 3).

The rest of the Bible tells how God responded to man's need for rescue. The

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*The Bible is  
the life-saving  
self-revelation  
of God.*

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high point of this love story is also the low point of human history. God visits earth in the person of His own Son and allows Himself to be falsely indicted, tortured, and executed. But that was not the end. Three days later the Son of God rose from the dead. And before ascending to heaven, He assured the eternal life of all who would accept His offer of rescue. Revelation, the last book in the Bible, shows how God will bring to a wonderful, yet terrible

fulfillment the love story begun in Genesis.

The story line of the Bible, then, reveals a God who made us, loves us, shows Himself to us, and then allows us to accept or reject Him. He is a God who builds “tests of faith” into our environment. He is the God who allows an evil intruder to come into the picture to test our trust. He arranges circumstances in such a way as to allow us to choose Him over Satan, good over evil, approval over disapproval, rescue over judgment.

This story line is important. It shows that the God who has made us is a God who does more than give us good times, good health, and good relationships. He is also a God who allows the kind of circumstances that will test our faith. He allows the kind of temptations that will test our love. He allows us an opportunity to fail so that

we will also have a real opportunity to succeed. But most important, He shows Himself as a God of indescribable patience, mercy, and love, in that He is willing to save all who have failed so miserably and are now willing to come to Him in faith.

### ***The Smaller Segments.***

The same method we applied to the big picture of the Bible may also be applied to its smaller segments. Although the Bible is one major story, it is made up of many smaller stories and incidents. It reveals a God, for example, who oversaw and directed the flood of Noah, the call and life of Abraham, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, the trials of Job, the birth of Christ, and a host of other events.

Let's take a closer look at one of these smaller segments that make up the



one big story of Scripture. Let's look together at that most revealing record of God's plan for a man named Joseph (Gen. 37–50). As we do, keep in mind that God did not record the events of

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***The importance of the story of Joseph is what it tells us about the strategies and tactics of a God who will stand by while His servant is wished dead, thrown into a pit, and sold into slavery.***

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Joseph's life to educate us in the culture of an ancient nomadic people. He didn't leave this record to fill us in

on the details of Egyptian dynasties. Neither did He give us the story of Joseph to enable us to explore the dynamics of sibling rivalries. While He may teach us something about all of these along the way, His main purpose is to teach us to know and trust Him—the God who remains with us regardless of circumstances.

Joseph, one of Jacob's youngest sons, was his aging father's favorite. He was an irritant, however, in the eyes of his brothers. They were angered by the special treatment their father gave him. And when Joseph began telling them about his dreams that he would someday rule over them, jealousy burned within their hearts. Finally, they had all they could take of their little brother. After deciding against killing him, they chose to throw him into a pit. Later that day they sold him as a slave to a passing

caravan. That sudden end to Joseph's home-life marked a new beginning.

In the far-off country of Egypt, Joseph was resold to Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh. Things steadily improved for Joseph until Potiphar's wife made sexual advances. When he resisted, she accused him of trying to rape her.

Joseph was thrown into jail, but Joseph's God was still very much in control. After a series of up-and-down experiences, Joseph was appointed as Egypt's second-in-command. He held that kind of power when a famine caused his brothers to come looking for food. Unknowingly, they ended up at the mercy of the brother they had sold many years earlier.

The dream had come true. Joseph now had the upper hand. When he finally revealed his identity to them, they were scared stiff. But

Joseph, the man of God, said, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (Gen. 50:19-21).

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***Joseph's God could  
demote him to  
prison as easily  
as He could  
promote him to  
highest honors.***

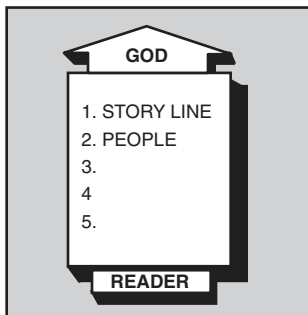
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The story of Joseph tells us a lot about God. It shows us that God is all-knowing. He knew everything about Joseph's future. He knew that someday He was going

to give Joseph dominance over his brothers, even though it sounded outrageous and impossible when Joseph dreamed it.

The story also reveals God as all-wise and all-powerful. He could stand by and let Joseph be sold into slavery because He knew He would weave this tragedy into His long-range plan. He could let Joseph be slandered by Potiphar's wife because He knew that He would bring good out of this unfair situation.

The truths about God that shine through in the story of Joseph are comforting. He knows and controls our present as well as our future. We can rest assured in His constant love, no matter what He permits us to suffer. We can find joy in knowing that He will someday honor all who trust Him—if not in this life, then certainly in the life to come.



## 2. THE PEOPLE

The second way we can know God through His book is to take note of what He does and doesn't value in people. The people of Scripture are there because of their relationship with God—positive or negative. As we observe that relationship, we will learn not only about the Bible characters but also about the Lord—what He likes and doesn't like, what He loves and hates. Directly or indirectly, the people of God reflect the character of God.

**Learning From Literature.** The fictional characters of literature often

reflect the concerns of their author. Some, like *Oliver Twist*, reflect an author's sensitivity to injustice. Others show an author's ability to dream lofty dreams or to create characters with the capacity for great good or terrible cruelty.

**The People Of The Bible.** The people of the Bible are different from those in fiction because they are real. But like the characters of literature, they also reflect the creative mind of their Author. And they do so in a colorful way. For example, Job was a rich man who lost it all because of a discussion between God and Satan. Samson was a real hero who displayed superhuman strength in overcoming the Philistine army, but he lost his life through the seductions of an unfaithful lover. Then there was Zacchaeus, a little man who climbed down from a tree to meet Jesus—leaving

behind his life of shady financial dealings.

There's no question about the human interest and local color that comes through the personal stories of Bible characters. But how can they also help us to know God? How can we learn to see them as people who lived out their own lives, yet showed how God related to what they thought, said, and did? The following questions will help:

1. What does each person's experience tell us about what God values or loves?
2. What does each person's experience tell us about what God hates and abhors?
3. What does each person's experience tell us about what God can do in the life of the one who does or does not please the Lord?

As an example of how this works, let's ask these questions about Moses, one

of the most complex and interesting people in the Bible. First let's review some of his story. Moses the lawgiver wasn't always "the man on the mountain." He

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***What God loved  
or despised in the  
people of the Bible,  
He loves or  
despises in us.***

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started out as "the baby in the bulrushes," who was pulled out and raised by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 1-2). And even though he is characterized as "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3 NIV), he wasn't always that way. On two different occasions, once early and another late in life, he expressed a rashness and impulsiveness that caused him great trouble.

In the first instance, his rage at an Egyptian he caught beating a fellow Israelite led to an act of manslaughter and the loss of his place in Pharaoh's court (Ex. 2:11-15). Because of his actions, this former "somebody" of Egypt spent 40 years learning what it meant to be a "nobody."

The second time Moses' anger and willfulness got him in trouble was later in life after God had brought him back to his people to lead them out of Egypt. This time he was so tired of hearing his people complain about their lack of water that he lost his temper and struck a rock that the Lord had told him to speak to (Num. 20:1-13). That might not sound very serious, but it was to God! Moses' anger caused him to lose his opportunity to enjoy the Promised Land. Still, in spite of his occasional lapses, Moses is characterized in Scripture as a man of God,

a giant of faith, who stood out among the people of his day as one who feared God and put his faith in the Holy One of Israel.

What does Moses tell us about God? He shows us that God values and loves the kind of faith that His servant showed when he chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:25-26). Moses shows how God values the qualities of humility (Num. 12:3), holiness (Lev. 19:1-2), and prayerful intercession (Ex. 32:11-14,30-32).

On the other hand, Moses also shows us how God can be angered. The Lord became angry when he repeatedly refused to believe that God could enable him to be His spokesman (Ex. 4:11-14). God kept him out

of the Promised Land because he lost his temper and dishonored God by his disobedience (Dt. 3:25-27).

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***The faithful people of the Bible reveal a God who deserves the highest praise, the deepest gratitude, and the most self-sacrificing kind of service.***

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When we read the history of Moses, we see how God values those who approach Him in holiness and godly fear. We see a God who loves obedience and hates disobedience. We see a God who is close to those who fear Him, but who moves against those who are willfully unfaithful to Him (Ex. 32).

It's one thing to know the

principles of what God loves and hates, values and doesn't value. It's another to see how the Lord actually expresses those thoughts and feelings in a relationship to a person like Moses. Moses was far from perfect, but he possessed characteristics of faith and humility that God used to show us what He is like.



### 3. THE PLACES

The setting of a story is also important for us to know the God of the Bible. It is never by accident that He makes things happen where they do. If we spend some time thinking about the places in the Bible, we will see more

deeply into God's mind and character.

**Learning From Literature.** An author chooses the setting of his story with care. It makes a vast difference whether the action takes place in the rich Gold Coast district of Chicago, the steppes of Russia, or at the foot of Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro.

Many Americans have read Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn*. The action takes place along the banks of the Mississippi River. The river is vitally important to the story, for it separates the refined culture of the East from the more adventuresome spirit of the West. Whenever Huck was on the river, things were peaceful. But when he went to the shore, he always found trouble. Just as the river brought him freedom from society, so it was the gateway to another kind of freedom to the slave, Jim.

## **The Setting Of The Bible As God's Realm.**

There are a number of different ways of learning about God from the settings of the Bible. One of the most obvious is simply to recognize that wherever God interacts with people, He is Lord of that place. If the setting is in the halls and courts of a pagan government such as in the courts of Pharaoh, we can be sure that God is revealing Himself as the Lord of government. He rules not merely in the inner world of the heart, but over the presidents, tyrants, and prime ministers of the world.

Similarly, an event in an agricultural setting will reveal God as One who rules over the crops. There is no planting, no growing season, no harvest without His decision and provision.

That's not all. If the setting is the family, we need to realize that God is Lord of

the home. If it is the battlefield, or a strategy session in the basement of the king's palace, we can be sure it is telling us that God is the God who rules over all

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***The settings of Bible events each reveal an area over which God is in absolute control.***

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military effort. There is no victory and no defeat apart from His control. The same is true of events that occur on the high seas or below them, in the heavens or in the world of the dead.

Whatever the setting, we can be sure that nothing happens apart from the sovereign rule of God. That is the kind of God who made us. He is the Lord of every place and setting.



## **The Setting Of The Bible As A Visible Backdrop.**

The Bible makes it clear that God is intimately involved with everything that happens in our world. Yet, He is distinct from everything in it. The implications of this are important. Imagine the infinite genius of a God who has chosen a physical, material setting in which to carry out His very spiritual business.

This does not mean that the physical settings of Scripture are not important. It means that they are important because they are being used as backdrops, platforms, and props by an invisible Author and Creator. They are tools in His hands as He directs the unfolding of a real-life drama.

This means we worship a God who is very different from the one worshiped by many today. He is not the God of the pantheist, who

sees no distinction between the Creator and His creation. Neither is He the kind of God who is satisfied to be met and then left in a building of worship. The God of the Bible cannot be “kept” in any setting. He is the God of whom Isaiah said, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, and

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*Imagine the infinite  
genius of a God  
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spiritual business.*

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earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made . . . . But on this one

will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa. 66:1-2). That is the kind of spiritual business that is occurring in the settings of the Bible.

**The Setting Of The Bible As Evidence Of God’s Wisdom.** There’s at least one more way the setting of the Bible can serve to reveal God to us. Think for a minute about the God behind the strategic selection of the Mideast (Gen. 15:18; 17:8). The central platform and backdrop of Israel speaks volumes about the wisdom and foresight of God.

Why do you suppose the Lord chose Israel? Why didn’t He give Egypt to Abraham? or Greece? or just let Abraham stay in Mesopotamia? Well, from a geographic standpoint we can see the strategic importance of this location.

*Here, God could fulfill His promise to multiply Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 12:1-3).* The fertile plains, lush valleys, and rich hills of Israel would turn that promise into a reality. So would the military location of Israel under David and Solomon.

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*It’s not by accident that God makes things happen where they do.*

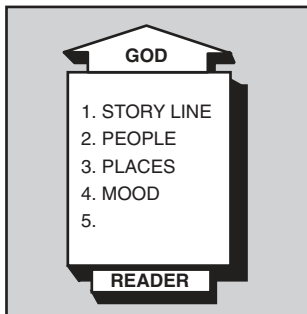
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*Here, God could use Israel to influence the world powers commercially, militarily, and politically.* Israel was an ideal place for a witness to the peoples of both ancient and modern times. It stands at the place where three continents converge: Asia, Africa, and Europe. The caravan routes that

passed through it were as important as the Persian Gulf is to supertankers today. Merchants, emissaries, generals, and traders, as they traveled through Israel, noticed the devout ways and strict laws of the worshipers of Jehovah.

***Here, God saw an ideal center for the spread of the gospel (Acts 1:8).*** The Lord commissioned His followers to a work of world evangelization. As the first witnesses for Christ went out from Jerusalem, using the excellent system of Roman roads and benefiting from a stable political environment, they were able to carry the gospel rapidly to Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Praise God for His inexpressible wisdom. He not only mercifully condescended to us, but He also determined exactly where and when He would meet and reveal Himself to us (Acts 17:26-27).



#### **4. THE MOOD (Emotion)**

A fourth way we can know God through His book is by looking for Him in the moods of the Bible. We are emotional beings, created in the image of a God who has made us to walk with Him not only with our minds but also with our emotions. We have been created with the capacity to share God's joy and jealousy, pleasure and anger, love and hate. We get to know Him by believing that He is to be feared, loved, and praised, and by entering into those truths with our heart. We need to think through the Scripture to the

point of feeling it. As we feel the moods of the Bible, our knowledge of God will grow.

**Learning From Literature.** Mood is important to achieving the effect the author of a piece of literature intended. A feeling of desperation grows as we read Jack London's gripping story *To Build A Fire*. The setting is the Arctic. The character is a man caught in a blizzard. The story is about survival; if he cannot build a fire, he will die. As he struggles to ignite a flame, while the air becomes colder and colder, attempt after attempt fails. As he comes closer to the end, we feel his growing sense of frantic desperation. The mood almost overwhelms us.

**The Moods Of The Bible.** When we take a bird's-eye view of the Bible, we observe two basic contrasting moods: despairing pessimism and hopeful optimism. They are

both rooted in God's character and reflect whether man is responding to Him in obedience or disobedience.

***Despairing Pessimism.***

One of the prevailing moods of the Bible is that of sorrowful, despairing pessimism. It is there for those who refuse to come to God His way—through Jesus Christ. This mood, which every sensitive Christian feels when the Bible is read, is rooted in God's perfect justice. Just as He cannot lie or fail to keep His side of an agreement, so He cannot allow such things as slander, unthankfulness, adultery, or child abuse to go unpunished. If He did, He would violate His own nature. That's why, when you read the Bible, you can get depressed reading about the terrible things that happened when men, created for God, tried to live for themselves.

Don't you feel sympathy for Achan and his family

when you read Joshua 7? Can you identify with David's feelings of alarm and frustration when God struck a man dead just because he tried to keep the ark of the covenant from falling off a cart? (2 Sam. 6:1-9).

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***Until we feel the heartthrob, the emotion of the Bible, we will not appreciate its message.***

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Have you ever felt the mood of despairing pessimism that gripped Jeremiah and Ezekiel as they watched the downfall of the nation they loved? Have you felt the warm tears of Jeremiah as he cried like a brokenhearted mother or father? He knew that if Israel didn't repent they would be destroyed. Feel the

mood of the situation as he cries out, "Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9:1).

You haven't really felt the mood of the stories in the Bible if you have never felt like Jeremiah did. God wants us to feel that way. Jesus, our perfect example, did. Think of Him with the tears running down His face as He thought about what was going to happen to the Jewish people because of their rejection of Him (Mt. 23:37).

Why did God give us a Bible that produces such an oppressive mood of negative, unhappy feelings? Because He wants us to be like Him. He wants us to share the kind of compassion that allows Him to care when others bring pain and destruction on themselves and those they love. The thought should

send shivers up our spine. Listen to God in Ezekiel 33:11, “Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?’”

Don’t miss this fact. Reading the Bible should sometimes make you feel horrible. It should sometimes scare you. That’s because its Author is right in His treatment of wrong. He must punish moral and spiritual rebellion just as any society must punish crimes of rape, embezzlement, or public drunkenness. He must do it even though He doesn’t like to. He must abandon people to utter hopelessness even though it hurts Him to do so. Listen to Him as He, like a parent who must deal severely with a rebellious child, cries out to the Israelites,

“O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you?” (Hos. 6:4). We don’t really know God as we should until reading His Word causes us to feel the kind of hatred for pride, sexual violence, and marital unfaithfulness that God feels.

The following are examples of Bible passages that are designed to produce a mood of sorrowful, despairing pessimism: Joshua 7; 1 Samuel 4; Matthew 27:1-10; Acts 5.

### ***Hopeful Optimism.***

There is another mood that runs from Genesis to Revelation. This atmosphere also stems from God’s character—His love, grace, and compassion. The psalmist declared, “The Lord takes pleasure in His people” (Ps. 149:4). The Proverbs repeatedly declare that God is delighted when people are honest, upright, truthful, and prayerful (Prov.

11:1,20; 12:22; 15:8; 16:13). Paul actually referred to the gospel as coming from “the blessed [happy] God” (1 Tim. 1:11). (The Greek word translated “blessed” here in most versions really means “happy.”) If you want to see this happy, forgiving, loving side of God, read Psalm 103, John 3:16, and Romans 8. Yes, God is the God of hope. Paul prayed, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13).

This happy side of God should fill us with overwhelming joy. It should give us a positive, hope-filled attitude toward the future. Jesus Christ came. He lived a perfect life. He revealed God’s love. He died for our sins. He conquered death. He saves all who put their trust in Him. He assures us that He is coming

again to take us to be with Him forever. He tells us that the sorrows and sins and pains of this life will be replaced with the glory of living forever in His presence.

Yes, the Bible is a hopeful, optimistic book because its Author is a loving, compassionate, communicating, fellowshiping kind of God. He showed this side of His character when He sent His Son into the world with the assurance that everyone who trusted in Him would enjoy an inexpressibly wonderful eternity. That’s the best news imaginable! It’s good news to be celebrated! It’s so good that it deserves a deeply emotional response of joy, gratitude, and praise. If we are not deeply moved by the Bible’s story of hopeful optimism, we do not see or understand our God the way we should.

Examples of Bible passages that inspire a mood of joyful, hopeful optimism are Psalm 32; 42; 121; Daniel 6; Luke 18:35-43; 23:39-43; 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Remember that all of these passages, even the words of the Psalms, relate to stories of real people.



## 5. THE MESSAGE

A fifth way we can know God through the Bible might be the most obvious. In this sense, the Bible is far more important to us than the US Postal Service, Western Union, or Federal Express. The Bible is nothing less than the means God has chosen to communicate His

thoughts and desires to us. The people of His book and their stories are not there to entertain us. They are there so that we can know what God wants us to be and do.

**Learning From Literature.** Once more we can learn from the world of books. The classics of literature—novels, plays, or poems—have often been a message from the writer to the reader. He wrote not just to entertain or to make money; he wrote because he had something important to say. The writer's job is to make that message clear; the reader's responsibility is to make sure he gets it.

Many of the novels of Charles Dickens, for example, were exposés of social wrongs in England. The well-known *Oliver Twist* pointed out in popular terms the cruel conditions that orphans faced in 19th-century England. And even *A Christmas Carol*, with such



powerful characters as Bob Cratchit, Ebenezer Scrooge, and the crippled Tiny Tim, called attention to the problems of low pay, long hours, and bad working conditions. Moreover, Dickens' message was: Let's *do* something to right these wrongs!

**The Message Of The Bible.** The message of the Bible is a call to action. Its message is to do what God wants us to do. Its basic, overarching message is to accept the rescue from eternal damnation that He has provided through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. But there are many other messages in the Bible that call upon us to act. For example, God wants us to:

- tell the truth
- love one another
- confess and turn from our faults
- meditate on His Word
- pray for one another

- serve Him
- trust that what He says is true

Such messages might be found in the form of a direct command, but they are often found in an underlying principle.

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***The message of the Bible is a call to action. Its message is to do what God wants us to do.***

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For one example, let's find the message of the story about Daniel and his three prisoner-of-war friends in Daniel, chapter 1. Transported from their homeland to Babylon, they were selected by their captors as leadership material and enrolled into a kind of "officers' training school." As prime candidates

of this foreign government, they were given the best of food and drink. But there was one problem—much of this diet was forbidden by Jewish law. Daniel and his friends had to make a choice. Would they try to please their captors or God? We are told:

*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (1:8).*

Daniel's request was granted. God, in turn, honored these four men and blessed them with unusual physical health and academic ability. Daniel soon held a very influential governmental role.

What is the message? What is the principle that surfaces in this story? It is

this: God wants us to remain faithful to Him no matter how difficult, frightening, or pagan the setting is. He expects this from His children and honors those who make the right choice.

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This principle is based on truths we should know before we read this story: (1) God as our Maker and Sustainer has a right to demand first place in our lives; (2) He has the power and wisdom to bless those who honor Him; (3) He possesses the moral integrity to do what is right with us.

# PUTTING IT TO WORK

**W**e have said that a person can know God through the Bible by using five different points of view borrowed from the study of literature. Let's put it all together with one Bible story—the story of God testing Abraham's faith by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Take a moment to read Genesis 22:1-14 and Hebrews 11:17-19. Then, apply the five points of view discussed in this booklet to the story.

**I. THE STORY LINE: What God causes or allows to happen.** God showed His power over nature by miraculously giving Abraham and Sarah a child long after her childbearing years. Later, however, God revealed that He not only had the power to give but

the right to take away. When God told Abraham to do the unthinkable, to sacrifice Isaac, He exercised His sovereign authority. God forced Abraham to make a choice between faith or doubt, obedience or disobedience. When Abraham passed the test, God showed His ability to provide a last-minute provision and reversal of circumstances.

**2. THE PEOPLE: What God looks for in His people.** Abraham shows us that God looks for trusting obedience in His servants. Here was a man who chose God over his most dearly loved “pride and joy.” As a result, God used Abraham as an example for a whole nation that followed.

**3. THE PLACE: Where God rules.** In this story we see that God is in control even on a remote wilderness mountaintop. God chose the desolate

surroundings of Moriah as the physical backdrop for His spiritual business. It was in this place far from home that God chose to test Abraham's faith. Here, where there was no one else for Abraham to turn to, God revealed His own presence and ability to provide. Here, even the animals and the bushes served Him. God later chose this location, rich with the significance of faith and His ability to provide, as a site for the temple.

**4. THE MOOD:**  
**What God wants us to feel.** The emotions of this real-life drama are intense. The mood, when properly felt, is enough to make a grown man cry. Here we find a God who chooses to arouse the deepest emotions of parental love. Yet, here we also find a God who doesn't want His children to succumb to the emotion of despair. Abraham's faith

enabled him to rise above the deepest and most agonizing feelings. On the basis of his faith, he showed his ability to put his hope in God rather than in his circumstances. His agony turned to joy and to a renewed, deepened awareness of God's ability to provide.

**5. THE MESSAGE:**  
**What God wants us to know and do.** The message here is clear. God wants us to see His right to test and develop our faith. He wants us to choose Him over anyone or anything else. He wants us to choose obedience over disobedience. He wants us to pass such a test by relying on what He has said. He wants us to know that He is our ever-faithful Provider.

## HELPING YOU HELP OTHERS

The following questions are listed here for you to use in teaching or discipling others. We suggest that these questions be discussed prior to studying the specific point—as preview questions.

### KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE STORY LINE

1. Do you agree or disagree with the premise that an author always says something about himself in what he writes?
2. Do you think this premise is true of the Author of the Bible?
3. What would you say is the overall story line, or the big picture, of the Bible?
4. What does the story line of Joseph's life (Gen. 37–50) tell us about God?

### KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE PEOPLE

1. Of what value is the study of biblical characters to a better understanding of God?
2. Who are some of the people of the Bible you would describe as colorful and interesting?
3. Do you agree or disagree that God is looking for different things in us today than He was looking for in the people of the Bible?
4. What do the following passages about Moses' life tell us about God? (Ex. 3–4; 14; 32; Num. 12:3; 20:1-13).

### KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE PLACES

1. Why is the setting important to a story?
2. What do the various settings of the Bible tell us about God?
3. How can a well-

rounded understanding of the settings of the Bible help us to avoid compartmentalizing God?

4. What does God's selection of the Mideast as the primary setting of the Bible tell us about God?

## **KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE MOOD**

1. Do you think God wants us to feel emotion when we read His Word?

2. If you neglected to consider the mood of a particular Bible story, how would your understanding of that story be affected?

3. What would you say are the two primary moods of the Bible?

4. What mood is predominant in the account of the flood? of David and Goliath? of Ananias and Sapphira? What do these moods tell us about God?

## **KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE MESSAGE**

1. What literary examples other than Scripture can you think of where the author used the story to get across a particular message?

2. What do you see as the main message of the Bible? How does this differ from the story line?

3. As you read the Bible, what are some principles that you would expect to see repeated over and over again in the various stories?

4. What is the underlying principle, or message, in the story of Daniel and his three friends? (Dan. 1).

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

**H**ow well do you know the God of the Bible? It's an important question, because the better we know God the better we will know ourselves. Furthermore, we will also be happier spiritually and in every other way.

To see God's holiness is to see our own sinfulness. To see His goodness is to know the wonder of His grace and the depth of His love for us. To see His majesty is to give Him the honor and praise He is worthy of.

Do you know God? Do you know Him better than you did a year ago? If you're a believer in Christ, your answer should be yes. The way to know God better is through His Word. As you read and study the Bible, you will grow. Perhaps

you've been neglectful. If so, we hope that reading this booklet has motivated you to go back to the Bible and begin growing again.

If you don't know God, the first step is to establish a right relationship with Him. You do that by receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior, God's love-gift to you.

The facts are clear. All men are sinners (Rom. 3:23). Our sin keeps us from a right relationship with God, and we are powerless to do anything about it ourselves (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation comes through Christ. He came to earth to die on the cross and pay the penalty for our sins. Now our responsibility is to trust in Him. Receive Christ as your Savior today. If you do, you'll have taken the first and most important step in knowing God.

# THE “KNOWING GOD” SERIES

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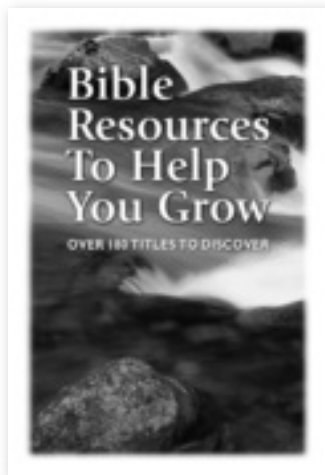
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