

NONE ELSE

NONE ELSE

31 Meditations on God's
Character and Attributes

Joel R. Beeke
and
Brian Cosby



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None Else

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To

Laura Beeke, James Engelsma, and Isaac Epp

three God-fearing, very special in-law children,
who Mary and I love greatly in Christ Jesus.

Thanks so much for blessing our children and us
with yourself and with our precious grandchildren.

*I have no greater joy than to hear [and know and see!]
that my children walk in truth (3 John 4).*

—JRB

To

Charles Barrett and Nick Batzig

pastors with whom I am privileged to serve alongside
at Wayside Presbyterian Church (PCA).

Thank you for your Christlike example, friendship,
and encouragement in gospel ministry.

*Therefore seeing we have this ministry,
as we have received mercy, we faint not (2 Cor. 4:1).*

—BC

INTRODUCTION: MEDITATING ON GOD'S CHARACTER

The purpose of this book is to guide genuine Christians, reading one chapter a day, in meditating on God's perfect character and attributes for one month so that your mind will be transformed, your affections kindled, and your faith nourished by His grace. Many competing distractions attempt to steal your time and fill your schedule so that you are tempted by sheer busyness from taking time to meditate on the triune God whom you love as a true believer.

Some of these distractions can functionally take the place of God in our lives—idols pulling our minds and affections away from the Creator and toward the creation.

But God calls us to “know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him” (Deut. 4:35). *None else*. Peter asked Jesus the rhetorical question, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). There is no other. *None else*. But who *is* this God and how are we to “know” that He is the sovereign Lord of all?

The answer to those questions is the aim of this book.

It is our hope that you will use this guide and resource to focus your thoughts on and channel your love toward the God who is. May His perfect character instill greater desire and love for Him and may the gospel of Jesus Christ

be evident as it is displayed from God’s manifold attributes. Indeed, “unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24–25).

Meditating on God’s Word is one of the most rewarding and faith-sustaining disciplines in the Christian life. It ushers the believer into greater communion with God and satisfies the longing soul. Meditation is a lingering over, a chewing on, and a wrestling with God’s Word until—like Jacob wrestling with the angel—you are blessed by its promises and nourished by its truth.

The purpose of this book is to provide you with meditations on God’s character and attributes so that you will grow in both knowledge of and love for the Rock of your salvation by the Spirit’s grace. While there are many devotionals in the marketplace offering guidance into the treasures of God’s Word, *None Else* specifically reflects on God’s manifold perfections as a means through which He—by His Spirit—graciously transforms our minds, changes our hearts, and molds us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

For each attribute, we seek to help you enter into a deeper relationship with God by organizing the material into the following sections for each attribute:

- Scripture Meditation
- Prayer
- Biblical Perspective
- Reflection Questions
- Digging Deeper

These are meant to be practical directional signs, pointing to the true and living God and His gracious work of drawing sinners into a living and active fellowship with Him.

In each meditation, the full Scripture passage is given so that you may conveniently reference the text as you go along in your study and reflection upon God's character. It is recommended, however, that you have your own copy of the Bible available to look up various passages referenced or to read the surrounding context. It is also recommended that you read through the passage slowly and intentionally, thinking about each word and the overall message. In fact, it would be best to read the passage out loud several times as you work through each day's meditation.

Praying at the start of each meditation is meant to set your mind afresh on this delight and privilege. The prayers are taken from the passage and are meant to remind you of God's absolute power, wisdom, and love, and as a true believer, of your absolute dependence upon Him as your heavenly Father. Ask God to give you a teachable and soft heart to be instructed, encouraged, challenged, and changed. Prayer is possible only through the mediation of Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near, with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19–22).

Furthermore, we are to pray *expectantly*, with full assurance of our position and righteous standing before God. Because our sin has been credited—*imputed*—to Christ's

account and His righteousness credited to our account by faith alone, we have been declared “not guilty” before a holy and just God. This, of course, is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. We can, therefore, enter into God’s presence with prayers of praise, confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

The section titled “Biblical Perspective” simply explains some of the biblical, historical, and theological background of the attribute of God under study and guides your thoughts on the truths of that attribute. It will also seek to show how each attribute is related to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself explained that all of Scripture points to Him and His life-work. While He was walking on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, He tells His traveling companions that all of Scripture points to Him. Luke records, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that “all the promises of God in him are yea.” Indeed, the Word of God is chiefly about the *Word* of God (John 1:1), Jesus Christ.

Reflection questions are provided with each chapter to help you think through how the truth of God’s character influences and directs your daily life. This is meant to be a very practical section in which probing questions are asked of your habits, thoughts, emotions, and actions. Space is also provided for you to write down your thoughts so as to remember them later or share them with others. To be sure, this will take some discipline, time, and honesty as you think through the implications of God’s attributes

and how Christ's strength is made perfect in your weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

The final section in each chapter, "Digging Deeper," provides further Scripture passages, questions, thoughts, quotations, and other resources on each characteristic of God. If you find yourself especially encouraged by a certain attribute of God, then you may find this section particularly helpful.

It is important to remember that we are to *meditate* on God in His Word. The psalmist writes that the believer is blessed when "his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Ps. 1:2). He goes on to say that he "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither" (v. 3). In other words, by His Spirit's grace, God is in the business of planting us and growing us into trees of righteousness (Isa. 61:3) through meditation on His Word. In addition, meditation will lead to the increase of spiritual fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23).

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther helped start what we now call the Protestant Reformation—a movement that eventually led to a break from the Roman Catholic Church. Luther debated many people over the nature of salvation, faith, and the authority of the church. One of those people was a man named Erasmus, who believed that humans had the moral freedom to choose God on their own. Luther responded in a letter to Erasmus by saying, "Your thoughts concerning God are too human."¹

1. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Lafayette, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 22.

Perhaps as you pick up this book, you find that your thoughts on God are far too human. Maybe you have succumbed, like many of us, to the temptation to believe that we are entitled to blessings from God. The truth is that nobody has arrived at a complete understanding of who God is in His fullness. Paul writes, however, that we are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). We have been given the privilege of discovering, learning about, and experiencing more and more the character of God—for His glory and our joy.

We wish to thank our dear wives for their faithful support as we persevered in writing this book. Thanks also to Ian Turner for his valuable assistance and Travis Childers and Ray Lanning for their able editorial pass. May this book of meditations encourage your heart, strengthen your faith, and grow your affections for God. May you see more and more of the riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for “it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Col. 1:19). And may you find yourself in a deeper, more satisfying communion with your Savior and Lord.

THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

—JEREMIAH 9:23–24¹

PRAYER

Lord God, I thank Thee for the gift of knowing Thee. Thou art a gracious, covenant-keeping redeemer, and the worth of knowing Thee far surpasses anything else I could set my heart on. Grant me fresh views of Thy glory in Christ to awaken me from spiritual slumber. As I pursue Christ by faith, continue to renew me in knowledge after Thy image. Grant me understanding through fearing and loving Thee.

1. Some material from Joel R. Beeke's chapters has been adapted from Joel R. Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Revelation and God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019).

Make my knowledge of Thee bear fruit in all that is pleasing to Thee. I pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Knowing God and making Him known are the heartbeat of what it means to be human. Calvin asks in his catechism, "What is the chief end of human life?" He answers, "To know God."² There are several reasons the knowledge of God is central and supreme for all human life.

First, knowing God is your highest *privilege*. We often think that if we achieve "wisdom," "might," or "riches," then our life has meaning and worth. But God declares that these "boasts" and privileges are not worth our esteem: "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer. 9:23–24). Many wise, mighty, and wealthy people on their deathbeds arrive at the same conclusion as the Preacher, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 1:14). Elevating other pursuits above God in our lives fills our hearts with worldliness, which diminishes our souls and makes us petty. But by learning, experiencing, and rejoicing in the knowledge of God, we receive the greatest of blessings and God receives the highest glory. We were created for the greatest of gifts: knowing God.

Second, knowing God is the heart of the *covenant* and the essence of *eternal life*. Our idolatry, sin, and false worship are linked to our ignorance of God: "They know not me, saith the LORD"; "there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of

2. Phillip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 1:470.

God in the land” (Jer. 9:3; Hos. 4:1). But in His grace God announces, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel”—which will bring the blessing of the knowledge of God: “they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” (Jer. 31:31–34). Such knowledge stems from the gift of a new heart—a “heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer. 24:7). Since knowledge of God is a gift of the “everlasting covenant” (Jer. 32:40), Jesus can then say, “and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Your eternal communion with God is based on the true knowledge of God.

Third, knowing God is the engine of *holiness* in our lives. When we forsake the knowledge of God, our hearts become foolish and darkened, since we “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever” (Rom. 1:21–25). Ignorance of God plunges us into idolatry, which fuels injustice and immorality in our lives (1 Thess. 4:5; Hos. 4:1–2). Often, the turning point in our times of spiritual decline is a fresh view of God (see Job 42:1–6). The growth that God gives us in “grace and peace” and “all things that pertain to life and godliness” comes “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord . . . of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:2–3). False ideas about God lead to shallow spirituality that mimics the world, but true knowledge of God—brought to us by God’s “exceeding great and precious promises”—produces deep, meaningful, and Spirit-empowered godliness (2 Pet. 1:4).

Knowing God is therefore the central priority of your life. To Paul, all the honors and privileges of this world are “but dung” compared to “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). How, then, do we seek the knowledge of God and “follow on to know the LORD” throughout our lives (Hos. 6:3)? The knowledge of God is fundamentally relational; we seek it by seeking *Him* in at least five ways.

First, we must be *dependent* upon and *receptive* to God. We do not *discover* the knowledge of God, but receive it. God must reveal Himself to us, on His own initiative, by His Word (Matt. 11:27). Too often we can be like some theologians who conjure deep thoughts of God that are only a product of our own imaginations. Rather, we must receive what God has revealed about Himself in His Word with childlike faith.

Second, we must seek to know the Lord through *humble repentance*. God is God. To know Him rightly is to fear Him (Prov. 2:5; 9:10). In the fear of God, we must hate sin, turn away from it (Job 28:28), and turn to Him in love (Deut. 10:12). Without knowing ourselves in our sinfulness and need, we cannot know God in His holiness and grace.

Third, we must seek to know the Lord through *Christ-centered faith*. Jesus declared Himself to be “the way, the *truth*, and the life.” He Himself makes known the unseen God (John 1:18; 14:6–9). Faith is not simply the initial act of taking hold of Christ at the beginning of the Christian life. We must continue in Christ-centered faith throughout the Christian life (Col. 2:6; Gal. 2:20).

Fourth, we must seek to know God through *righteous action*. We are not saved by our works, but by grace alone.

However, this grace *works* to make us a new creation “in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10). This means we must become hearers and doers of the Word (James 1:22–25). Personal knowledge of God deepens as we walk with Him in love and obedience.

Fifth, we must seek to know God through *holy desire*. We must treat the knowledge of God as much more than *useful*; we must regard Him as supremely *beautiful* and *desirable* (Ps. 27:4). Jonathon Edwards considers “a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel” to be of “the sweetest joys and delights I have experienced.”³ Let us pray with Moses, “Shew me thy glory” (Ex. 33:18).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you regard knowing God as your greatest privilege? Have you entered into a true covenantal relationship with God through the grace of knowing Him?

2. When do you find yourself striving after worldly “wisdom,” “might,” or “riches” in the place of knowing God (Jer. 9:23–24)? What is the effect of such a pursuit in your life?

3. Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957–2008), 16:800.

3. In John 17:3, Jesus equates eternal life with knowing God. If you could be in heaven where there is pleasure, friends, no sickness, and no death—but Christ were not there—would you be satisfied? How does being with and knowing Christ make heaven truly to be heaven?

4. David prayed, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Ps. 27:4). What has been and is presently the “one thing” you desire?

5. According to 1 John 2:3, how can you know that you truly know God (cf. John 14:21)?

6. Take a few minutes to meditate on the gracious fact that God wills to be known and takes the initiative to reveal Himself to us in our fallen, sinful state.

DIGGING DEEPER

- Some other Scripture passages about knowing God include Psalms 9:10; 27:4; Isaiah 43:10; 45:22; Hosea 6:6; Romans 1:21–25; 2 Peter 1:3–4; and John 14:21.
- Skeptics and agnostics would say that if there is a God, then He is so far above us that we cannot *know* Him—or that perhaps we might know something about God, but we cannot know Him personally. These statements would be true if theology were merely *our* human quest to discover God. However, Christian theology arises from *God's* pursuit of *us*. This is grace: God wills to be known (Isa. 45:22). He creates us in His image with the potential to know Him truly. By the grace of Christ, He “renews” us “in knowledge after the image” of God (Col. 3:10). And He reveals Himself to us through His works of creation and providence, and supremely through His incarnate Word Jesus Christ revealed in His inscripturated Word as applied by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9–16).
- In the Gospel of John, Christ’s words imply that the knowledge of God illuminates the minds of men and guides their lives (John 1:4; 8:12), engages their faith in Christ (3:15–16; 6:47), delivers them from perdition (3:15–16; 10:28), releases them from condemnation (3:36; 5:24), satisfies their deepest desires (4:14; 6:35), brings them into communion with the living God (5:26), and guarantees their future resurrection to eternal life (6:40; 11:25). What a marvelous gift is the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ!

- See also John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1987); Joel R. Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Revelation and God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019).