

The background is a teal color with a sunburst pattern of thin, light-colored lines radiating from behind the word 'GOD'. Below the sunburst, there is a silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees.

J. I. PACKER

KNOWING

GOD

STUDY GUIDE

*Fiftieth
Anniversary
Edition*



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *Knowing God Study Guide* by J. I. Packer.

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United States of America.

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

www.ivpress.com.

INTRODUCTION

J. I. Packer's *Knowing God* is a rich, profound, delightful and transforming discussion of the Christian understanding of God. Written with great intensity yet superb control, it explains both who God is and how a human being can relate to him. The book has three sections: The first directs our attention to the hows and whys of knowing God, the second to the attributes of God, the third to some primary benefits enjoyed by a person who is God's child. Packer has produced a book likely to nurture generations of believers.

The author says that he wrote *Knowing God* from the conviction that ignorance of God lies at the root of the contemporary church's weakness. The purpose of this guide is to help the "sick tree" of Christendom ingest a vitamin-rich diet; or, to drop the metaphor, to help groups of Christians identify and apply the essential truths of biblical theology.

This guide contains twenty-two studies, one for each chapter of *Knowing God*. A gathering of Christians can use it to examine the entire book or to lead them into various chapters according to their purposes, interests and time limitations. A Sunday-school class or campus small group will find here two excellent eleven-week projects: (1) a survey of the attributes of

God (studies 7–17) and (2) an investigation of the privileges and problems of living as a Christian (studies 1–6, 18–22).

The structure of each study is this: First, a purpose sentence (or sentences) states the aim. It helps the participants know where they are going. Then follows the body of the discussion—a series of questions which move efficiently through all the material. Finally, a summary question helps to draw out the essence of the chapter.

Each session will take from thirty to sixty minutes, depending on how talkative the group members are. Each summary question is open-ended enough to be pursued at some length if the study is threatening to take less than the time you have. Furthermore, the shorter studies include an optional question which encourages the members to pick up an important point and develop it in detail.

Scattered throughout each study are two or three application questions. Each is designed to prompt personal sharing and an individualized response to the principles Packer sets forth. Answering an application question will take a minimum of five minutes (and should be held to a maximum of ten), so the application questions alone are likely to use up fifteen to thirty minutes and comprise from a quarter to a half of each discussion.

FOR THE LEADER

The questions provided here make up the skeleton of each study. They help you keep your group working steadily through the entire chapter, touching on all the main points and applying them appropriately. It is expected, though, that you will flesh out the discussion by using follow-up questions. For example, you may ask, “How does the love of God make a difference in your life day by day?” (a question from study 12), and someone may answer, “It helps me get through my work.” Pursue that by asking further, “How does it do that?” or “What particular problems does it help you solve?” Also, summarize frequently to remind people where they have been and where they are going.

Do everything you can to encourage balanced discussion. When someone who talks a lot finishes a statement, invite further comment by saying something like, “Does anyone want to add to that?” or “Does someone have another idea?” Doing this will encourage quieter people to

make contributions. But don't be afraid of silences in discussion. If the group is working together, silences can be periods of creative effort. If a silence goes too long, rephrase your question or try injecting some humor. If someone is continually dominating or silent, talk with that person privately to encourage more balanced participation. (You will find other helpful principles for leading in *Leading Bible Discussions* [IVP], especially in chapter eight.)

You may want to develop a regular habit of corporate worship in conjunction with each topic, raising up prayers of praise and thanksgiving or singing a hymn. Occasionally a time of talking to God is suggested as an optional activity when it is particularly appropriate. But let this be a stimulus to further worship, not a limit. (Rosalind Rinker's *Prayer: Conversing with God* and John Paterson's *How to Pray Together* are valuable resources in this area.)

Regarding preparation: Tell the members to read the chapter prior to the session. Encourage them to underline significant passages and ponder them and to come with reflections and queries to help move the discussion along. For your own part, take time (you'll probably need between two and three hours) to make the study your own. Write a brief answer to each question; then go back and, wherever necessary, put the questions into words and phrases you feel comfortable using. Make sure, however, that you don't stray from a question's intent.

Think about how this particular study relates to your friends' needs. Does John need to know that God really loves him? Does Dawn have an accurate concept of God's wrath? Lives change, so the application questions provided in this guide had to be general enough to fit a variety of life situations. Be sure you make them touch the lives of the people in your group.

Be sensitive to needs that emerge during the discussion, and be prepared to carry on a ministry between the sessions. Sit down and talk with people individually. Show your concern for the members in other practical ways.

Make sure everyone knows what to read for the first study, and then begin your own preparation—prayerfully eager to lead brothers and sisters in Christ into the adventure of knowing God.

STUDY ONE

THE STUDY OF GOD

PURPOSE:

To see why the study of God is important.

DISCUSSION:

1. For whom is Packer writing (pp. 11-12)? What does he mean by *traveler*?
2. What conviction lies behind the book (p. 12)?
3. In what ways does “contemplation of the Divinity” affect us?
4. What comes to your mind when you hear the word *theology*? What is your attitude toward theology? Why does Packer think that “a study of the nature and character of God . . . is the most practical project anyone can engage in”?
5. What attitude does Packer say we should assume when someone tells us “there is no road to knowledge about God”?
6. On page 20, Packer lists five basic truths by which we will plot our course in these studies. Read them aloud. What main themes will occupy us as we journey? How comfortable do you feel with these themes?
7. What should be our ultimate aim in studying the Godhead? Why does theological knowledge “go bad on us” if sought for its own sake?
8. Why did the writer of Psalm 119 want a knowledge of God? How does the “Knowledge Applied” section of this chapter (pp. 21-23) speak to *your* motives for undertaking this study?
9. How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? What does it mean to *meditate*? How do you personally respond to Packer’s description of meditation?

SUMMARY:

Why is the study of God important? How will knowing this affect your life this week?

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