

Study Guide for Knowing God, by J.I. Packer

Preface (1973)

What does Packer say is at the root of much of the church's weakness?
In your own words, describe the two trends that have contributed to this problem.
What does Packer promise to do to help remedy this situation?

Ch. 1

What is the point of the long quote from Spurgeon's sermon?
How does Packer answer the challenge "Is theology necessary and relevant in our day?"?
State in your own words the five foundational truths.
What does Packer mean by "the Godhead of God," "the powers of God," and "the perfections of God"?
What is the answer to the fourth question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism? Do you think this is a good definition? Why or why not?
What is the danger of pursuing theological knowledge for its own sake?
According to Packer, what should be our ultimate aim in studying theology?
How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God?
What is meditation, according to Packer?
What is the result of meditation?

Ch. 2

What is the difference between people who say "we know God" and people like Packer's friend who are able to say "we have known God"?
What is the difference between knowing God and just knowing about God?
Describe in your own words the four characteristics or evidences of people who do know God. Think about how your own life measures up to these four characteristics. What are your strongest and weakest?
In what two ways does Packer describe people showing great energy for God?
What would having "great energy for God" look like in your life?
Describe in your own words what it looks like to "have great thoughts of God". How does that work out in your own life?
What would "great boldness for God" look like in your life? Does this depend on what others are doing?
Describe in your own words the two steps that Packer recommends for those who wish to know God. Think about and plan what you intend to do about it. Share this plan with a friend and ask them to help keep you accountable to follow this plan.

Ch. 3

According to Packer, what is the most important goal in all of life?
How does understanding this goal help with most of life's problems?
What does Packer mean by "The more complex the object, the more complex is the knowing of it."

“The quality and extent of our knowledge of other people depends more on them than on us.” Explain.

How do the previous two concepts inform our relationship with God?

In your own words, summarize each of Packer’s four points about knowing God (top of p. 37).

What are the four Biblical analogies for knowing God? What does each tell you about your personal relationship with God?

What are the three differences between our relationship with Jesus and the relationship the disciples had with him in the days of his flesh?

According to Packer, what does it look like when “Jesus’ voice is ‘heard’”?

Describe in your own words the three points Packer makes about Knowing God being a Personal Matter. How does this impact your own life?

What is the point that Packer makes about the word “know” when it applies to God knowing us?

Which does Packer think takes the priority – Our knowing God or God knowing us?

What are the implications of this priority? How does that impact your life?

Ch. 4

Do you agree with Packer’s idea that all visual representations of God are harmful and idolatrous? Why or why not?

Does Packer think that the factors of temperament or personal taste should be considered in this discussion? Why or why not?

What two reasons does Packer give against using images in worship?

How do images obscure the glory of God? What aids to worship can we use that do not obscure the glory of God in this way?

Give an example of a way in which an image of God might mislead us. How can we protect from such falsehood?

Why is a false mental image as harmful to knowing God as a physical representation?

Explain in your own words Packer’s point about people thinking about God in the way they like to think of Him. Why does this matter?

How does Packer rate speculative theology? How does this integrate with your understanding of general revelation? How does this integrate with your understanding of special revelation? How does this change the way you do theology and ministry?

How does Packer relate the second command to the idea of God’s revelation? To the practice of reading God’s Word? To the practice of worship in general? To the task of theology? What does it matter to you and your ministry?

What is Packer’s test for determining if your God is the God of the Bible? How do your ideas about God measure up?

Restate the three objections raised against Packer’s dissuasion from images in your own words. Do you agree with these objections? Why or why not?

Ch. 11

What are the two facts that Packer claims are assumed in the entire Bible? What is the relationship between these two ideas?

What are the two levels/purposes that a king speaks? How does this demonstrate God's communication to us?

What are the three characteristics of Torah described by Packer? What does this tell us about the Bible?

Summarize the categories of God's communication described in Genesis chs. 1-3 in your own words. How are these categories displayed in the rest of Scripture? How do these categories apply to your life?

According to Packer (and Jer. 13:10 and Isa. 66:2) what is the mark of impiety and what is the mark of true godliness?

Is truth primarily a quality of persons or propositions? What does God's character tell us about the character of His words?

How can a command be true? What do God's commands teach us? How does Packer suggest we become 'truly human'?

How can a promise be true? How is this connected to our life of faith?

How does Packer describe "True Christians"? To what extent does this describe your life? How should your life change so that the description fits even better?

Ch. 7

What is the problem with Bible reading that Packer describes? Do you experience this problem? Why or why not?

According to Packer, what is the underlying root of this problem?

How can the sense of remoteness from us of the Biblical experience of God be overcome?

What is the link between the Bible times and us? What difference does this make for your Bible reading?

What does it mean to say that God is immutable? Why is this important to you?

Describe in your own words the six ways in which God does not change, according to Packer. How does each of these truths apply to your own life and ministry? How would they change if any of these were not true?

What is the challenge that Packer mentions at the end of the chapter? How are you personally responding to this challenge?

Ch. 8

Define the word "majesty" in your own words. What does it tell us about God?

What are the dangers of not knowing the majesty of God?

What are the dangers of stressing the fact that God is personal?

How does the Bible keep clear that God is both personal and majestic?

What is the meaning and significance of the name El Shaddai?

What are the two steps that Packer suggests to know God's greatness? How do you intend to put these into practice in your own life?

Compare and contrast Packer's discussion of the "No Limitations" of God with Erickson's discussion of God's "Infinity" (pp. 94-6).

How does the idea that God is everywhere and sees and knows everything change the way that you live?

How does Packer describe the audience of Isaiah 40? How close does that correspond to you? Your church? Your culture? How does Isaiah's message address each of these audiences?

What are the five comparisons Packer draws from Isaiah 40? How do we compare with these five realities? How does God compare with these five realities? What does each of these comparisons tell us about the greatness of God? What does it matter to your life and relationship with God?

What are the three questions from Isaiah that Packer uses to point toward our response? What inadequacy in our lives does each question address? How do you respond to each of these questions? How should your life change as a result of these realities?

Ch. 9

How does Packer define wisdom? What aspects of this definition are things you had never considered before reading this?

How is God's wisdom different than ours?

What is the main cause of people failing to recognize God's wisdom, according to Packer?

Describe in your own words God's immediate and ultimate goals, according to Packer.

What is the point that Packer is trying to make in telling the stories of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph? What have you learned about the wisdom of God? How does this apply to your life?

How does Packer suggest our understanding of God's wisdom can bring us aid in difficult times?

What two things does Packer recommend when we are facing a trying situation?

How can our confidence in God's wisdom be a comfort to us?

Ch. 10

What are the two categories of attributes that Packer mentions? What are the attributes in the first category? What are the attributes of the second category? How do these compare with the attributes described by Erickson?

If you were asked if humans have the moral qualities which are in the divine image, how would you reply? How would Packer reply?

Describe in your own words the two prerequisites to obtaining wisdom from God.

What is it that makes a person to be characterized as a fool by Packer?

What is the mistaken view of wisdom that Packer describes? Why is this dangerous?

What does the driving illustration teach us about wisdom?

How does Ecclesiastes help us to learn and apply wisdom? What is the kind of wisdom that Ecclesiastes seeks to protect us from?

Why does Packer mention the sin of sloth? How does that illumine the point he is making about Ecclesiastes?

What then is the type of wisdom that Ecclesiastes recommends?

Describe in your own words the wisdom that God gives. What is the effect of this wisdom?

Ch. 6

How does Packer use the opening of John's Gospel to argue for the importance of the idea of the Trinity?

What do the various translations tell you about the idea of a "comforter"?

How is the function of the Holy Spirit related to the function of Jesus, according to Packer?

What does the Old Testament have to say about God's Word and God's Spirit?

What are the relationships described between the Spirit, Son and Father? Why is this important?

Why do you think the Holy Spirit is ignored or not understood as compared with Jesus?

What is the work of the Holy Spirit? What two general categories of work are highlighted? Why is it important?

How does Packer describe the Spirit's work of illuminating? Why is it necessary?

What implications for evangelism does Packer draw from the work of the Spirit?

In what three areas does Packer call for response to the doctrine of the Spirit? How does he suggest we respond? What steps do you plan to take to apply what you have read?

Ch. 12

Describe in your own words the three points that Packer makes from Romans 5:5. Why are they important?

How does Packer describe the "ordinary" work of the Spirit?

What does revival look like, according to Packer? How can we seek revival?

State Packer's first point about "God is love" in your own words.

How does Packer connect the idea "God is love" with the rest of Scripture? What errors does he seek to correct by doing so?

How does the idea that "God is spirit" inform the idea that "God is love"? What difference does it make to you that God is "without body, parts, or passions"?

How does the idea that "God is light" inform the idea that "God is love"? What errors is Packer seeking to correct? What does this tell you about your Christian walk?

State Packer's second point about "God is love" in your own words. How does this bring comfort? How does this help you to see every aspect of your life?

Explain in your own words the six parts of Packer's definition of the Love of God.

How does Packer's definition of the love of God differ from the common description of God's love in our society and in many churches? Which love is actually a stronger, greater love? Which love would you rather be the object of? Why?

What application questions does Packer raise based on the love of God? How should you respond? How should you change?

Ch. 13

What is it that hinders so many who profess to believe in grace from really doing so?

Describe, in your own words, each of the four truths that the doctrine of grace presupposes. Why is this truth necessary to understand and experience true grace? Why do so many people not have this foundation for receiving grace?

In what ways does Packer think the modern heart is pagan? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Packer's discussion on "the sovereign freedom of God" with the discussion of God's plan and attributes from the Erickson textbook.

In your own words, what is the grace of God?

In your own experience, how have you found the grace of God to be meaningful to you?

What are the three main ideas connected with grace in the New Testament? How is each of these related to grace? How are these three related together?

How is Packer's discussion on the plan of salvation similar to Erickson's discussion on the plan of God?

How should you respond to this teaching on the grace of God? What is God teaching you? What should you do about it?

Ch. 14

What is the Biblical evidence that God is judge and that He judges people?

How does the Old Testament differ from the New Testament on the subject of God's judgment?

Describe in your own words the four characteristics of a judge. How do each of these apply to God? How does this impact your life and ministry?

Define the word "Retribution" in your own words. What does this concept tell us about God? How does this impact your life and ministry?

Why do some people dislike the idea of God being judge? How does Packer counter this tendency?

According to Packer, how should the idea of retribution apply to our lives? What is the main purpose of the retribution of God?

How does Jesus participate in God's activity of judgment? What Biblical evidence is given for this truth?

How does Packer reconcile the idea of judgment by works with the idea that we are saved by faith? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Do Christians ever face any kind of judgment? In what ways? How does this impact your life and ministry?

Ch. 15

Define "wrath" in your own words.

How does the modern society's treatment of the wrath of God compare with the Bible's treatment? Why do you think this is the case?

What is the Biblical evidence for the wrath of God?

Describe in your own words, the two main objections to the idea of God's wrath that are mentioned by Packer? How does Packer reply to each objection? How does this apply to your life and ministry?

What does the Book of Romans teach us about the wrath of God? Why are these truths important to us?

What is the connection between the doctrine of wrath and the doctrine of salvation? Why is this connection important? How can we help people see this connection? How does this apply to your life and ministry?

Ch. 16

What are the four answers Packer gives to the question “How have modern people got into such confusion about God”? Describe each in your own words. Describe how each of these problems can be solved according to Packer.

What is “Santa Claus Theology”? Does Packer think it is Biblical and true? Do you agree? Why or why not?

How does “Santa Claus Theology” deal with the problem of evil? Is this a good response? What is Packer’s proposed way out of this “ironic paradox” onto the “true road”?

How does Packer define God’s goodness? How does this apply to your life and ministry?

What does Exodus 33-34 tell us about God’s goodness according to Packer?

What one characteristic of God does Packer highlight as the “one in particular to which the term *goodness* points”? Explain this characteristic in your own words.

What is the difference between common and special grace?

In what ways is God’s generosity shown to all of creation? to those who believe in Him? Is there a difference between the two?

Count your blessings. Do it now.

What does Psalm 107 tell us about God’s goodness according to Packer?

How does Packer define God’s severity? What is the main cause of God’s severity?

How does this apply to your life and ministry? How does this apply to our response to God’s goodness?

How is God’s patience related to His severity? What are the implications for your life and ministry?

What are the three responses suggested by Packer to the reality of God’s goodness and severity? Do them. Do them now.

Ch. 17

What is the Biblical evidence for God being a jealous God?

Explain in your own words the two facts that Packer mentions as helpful to understand God’s jealousy.

What is an anthropomorphism? How does this apply to Packer’s discussion?

What are the dangers of misunderstanding anthropomorphism? How does Packer suggest we guard against getting the “wrong end of the stick”?

What are the two types of jealousy? Why is one a sin and one a virtue? What is different between these two? Which types applies to God?

When the jealousy of God is mentioned in Moses, what reality is it in connection with?

How does this connection apply to your life and ministry?

What does God’s jealousy demand of us? How does this apply to your life and ministry?

Packer suggests that God’s jealousy must be understood in light of which reality?

What kind of actions does God’s jealousy lead God to undertake? Why does this matter?

What kind of response does Packer suggest we have to God's jealousy? How is zeal related to jealousy?

What does Ryle's description of the zealous man add to your understanding of Christian discipleship? What steps do you need to take to grow closer to this description?

Take them.

What does God's message to Laodicea have to say to many modern churches? What is Packer's point and how can you take it to heart? How does this apply to your life?