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Fiftieth Anniversary Edition

KNOWING
GOD

DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL

A ONE-YEAR GUIDE



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Introduction

This small book offers you a wonderful opportunity to reflect each day on the nature of God, drawing you to him in worship, wonder and praise.

As you begin your journey through the year, talk to God about your motives for reading this book. Thank him that you don't have to earn his approval. Tell him about your desire to grow, and thank him for promising to meet you.

At the bottom of each page, a suggested activity gives you a place to start in responding to the Scripture and accompanying thoughts. That activity may be to reflect, pray or journal. Because reading without response has little effect, responding to what God has said to you in the daily meditation is important. These suggestions are just a place to start, since meditation and prayer naturally intertwine—one leading to the other.

Beyond that, you may choose to journal. If the reflection raises confusion, you will find it helpful to write your thoughts on paper. Also, some prayers are better written in a journal. A written prayer is just as worshipful as a prayer thought or spoken, and the process of writing gives you a chance to carefully phrase what you say to God—and then come back to it later. And sometimes God will speak to you through reflection and meditation in a way that's so downright stunning that these thoughts should be recorded and read for several days.

These devotions are not dated; you can start anywhere and move around as you please. Most of the reading is condensed and adapted for devotional use from J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*, though not necessarily in the sequence or context of the original book. In addition, several entries dealing with biblical characters come from *Never Beyond Hope* (by J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom). Scattered throughout this devotional guide are quotes from hymns. At the back, you'll find a list of these hymn sources if you want further information on these rich texts of worship and praise.

You'll find a year's worth of devotions here, designed to fill six days a week. We choose to offer six rather than seven, assuming that you will use at least one day a week for worshiping God with his gathered people

in your church—and also for a built-in bit of grace as circumstances do sometimes infringe on our devotional time. You can use the seventh day to go back to some of the “pray,” “journal” and “reflect” suggestions at the end of each devotional entry.

May you know God more deeply and fully as you focus on his character through this year.

Carolyn Nystrom



MONDAY

*See, I have engraved you
on the palms of my hands.*

God's Palms

ISAIAH 49:16

What matters supremely is not the fact that I know God but the larger fact that underlies it—the fact that he knows me. I am graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind. All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him because he first knew me and continues to know me.

He knows me as a friend, one who loves me. There is no moment when his eye is off me or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort—the sort of comfort that energizes, be it said, not enervates—in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good.

REFLECT

What comfort do you take from knowing that your name is engraved on the hand of God?

 TUESDAY

Looking Back— and Up

Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

Christian minds have been confused by skepticism. The foundation facts of faith are called into question. Did God meet Israel at Sinai? Was Jesus more than a very spiritual man? Did the Gospel miracles really happen? Is not the Jesus of the Gospels largely an imaginary figure? And so on.

JEREMIAH 6:16

Nor is that all. Skepticism about God has bred a wider skepticism that abandons all idea of unity of truth. Since God is not “out there” in the world but only “down here” in the psyche, uncertainty and confusion about God mark our day.

The prophet Jeremiah voiced the invitation that these devotionals issue. It is not a critique of new paths, except indirectly, but rather a straightforward recall to old ones, on the ground that “the good way” is still what it used to be. Let us join the ancient prophets and the early apostles and walk humbly toward knowing God.

JOURNAL

How has contemporary skepticism affected your own thinking? What questions do you need answered about God?



WEDNESDAY

Watchers and Walkers

*Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and
with all your soul and
with all your mind.*

MATTHEW 22:37

In *A Preface to Christian Theology*, John Mackay illustrated two kinds of interest in Christian things by picturing people sitting on the high front balcony of a Spanish house and watching travelers go by on the road below. The “balconees” can overhear the travelers’ talk and chat with them, but they are onlookers. The travelers, by contrast, face problems that, though they have their theoretical angle, are essentially practical—problems of the which-way-to-go and how-to-make-it types, problems that call not merely for comprehension but for decision and action.

Take the problem of the Godhead. While the balconeer is asking how one God can conceivably be three, what sort of unity three could have and how three who make one can be persons, the traveler wants to know how to show proper honor, love and trust toward the three Persons who are now together at work to bring him out of sin and into glory.

REFLECT

When it comes to knowing God, are you a balconeer or a traveler? Talk to him about it.

 THURSDAY

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Lofty Thoughts

PSALM 139:6

At the age of twenty, C. H. Spurgeon proved that he already had his priorities right:

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, . . . "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.

REFLECT

Meditate on God, prayerfully naming his various names found in Scripture. Let yourself feel small in his presence.

 FRIDAY

Hope for Hurts

*Take my yoke upon you
and learn from me, for I
am gentle and humble in
heart, and you will find
rest for your souls.*

C. H. Spurgeon wrote:

MATTHEW 11:29

There is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balm for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.

We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing the God whose world it is and who runs it. Knowing God is crucially important for the living of our lives.

REFLECT

Picture Christ in any setting recorded in the New Testament. Meditate on his work, his character, his teaching. Allow him to absorb your pain.



SATURDAY/SUNDAY

Shedding Weight

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

You know how Bunyan’s pilgrim, when called back by his wife and children from the journey on which he was setting out, “put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life.” I ask you for the moment to stop your ears to those who tell you there is no road to knowledge about God, and come a little way with me and see.

HEBREWS 12:1

Anyone who is actually following a recognized road will not be too worried if he hears nontravelers telling each other that no such road exists. We are in the position of travelers who, after surveying a great mountain from afar, traveling around and observing how it dominates the landscape and determines the features of the surrounding countryside, now approach it directly, with the intention of climbing it.

JOURNAL

If you were to put your fingers in your ears and run off shouting, “Life, life, eternal life,” what would you need to leave behind?

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