

Series: God & Abraham #1131

**Title: *Knowing God*
*Genesis 12.1-4***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. I hope you enjoyed the weekend and I am grateful for your company as we begin a brand new week together, returning now to our series *God and Abraham* in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Genesis. Thus far we have established that the LORD, who speaks to Abram, is the God of glory. That is how Stephen describes God in Acts chapter 7, recounting the call, the command of God to Abram.

I want to use our time today to speak with you about knowing God. Specifically, I want to show you what the Bible means by knowing God, and trust me, believe me this will relate to what we read about in the relationship Abram has with the Living God.

And let me get at knowing God by way of a personal story. I hope you will find this helpful. Abraham is a man who has had a profound effect on my life. I consider him someone I admire, I look up to, and he is a real mentor to me. Why? This is because Abraham has been teaching me (this is something that is ongoing; happening at present), Abraham has been teaching me *how* to know God. His life, more than anyone in Scripture with the exception of Jesus Christ, Abraham more than anyone else has shown me who God really is. Through reading about Abraham's relationship with God, I have met the *true* God, and know Him more deeply. And that is because Abraham has shown me *how* to do that; *how* to know God.

When I read about Abraham's life in Genesis I recognize that I have brought along with me to my reading many ideas and several pre-conceived notions of who God is. In the wise words of theologian and pastor Dennis F. Kinlaw I have been an idolater. By that he means "the God that [I have] worshiped was one that [I] thought was there and it was more of what [I] have thought than the One who actually is [God] (*Lectures in Old Testament Theology*, 21)." I tell you I am guilty of this. In some ways who I have met when I think about God is myself – my own ideas about God – rather than meeting *The God* who is. I end up worshipping whom I have made God out to be in my own mind, rather than worshipping the *True God*, the same One Abraham encountered in his life's journey.

And the reason for this is that I had sought to know God as more of a detached observer rather than by way of getting personally involved with Him. Or, I can say I have taken the more scholarly route to God rather than meeting God in my (very) real human experience. Here is what Abraham has been teaching me: to really know the Living God I have to know Him through my *experience* with Him. I must not be detached, but thoroughly, fully, completely involved. God's relationship with Abraham teaches me that God is personal. God wants me to know Him through my personal experiences with Him. That is, God invites me, every day, not to know *about* Him, but to actually *know* Him.

And there is a difference. Let me put the following to you as an example of what I mean. I have a friend that I am in regular conversation with. His name is Rod Wilson and he lives in Vancouver, Canada. Rod and I speak by phone about once a month and he is a very good listener who asks me pertinent and penetrating questions about my life and ministry. He is also an author and recently he released his newest book with the title *Thank You. I'm Sorry. Tell Me More. How To Change the World with Three Sacred Sayings*. This is a book that will appeal to both Christians and people who are not yet Christians.

Now I know Rod personally. I have had several experiences with him. I can remember things we have talked about and what we did when we were together. I know many facts about his life. And so when I read Rod's book I will have all that I know about him by way of experience stored up in my mind and heart. When I read his words I will hear his voice in my mind. And I guarantee you his book will impact me in a way that you or some other stranger who does not *personally* know Rod will read *Thank You. I'm Sorry. Tell Me More. How To Change the World with Three Sacred Sayings*.

Likewise, God has a Book that I read every day. And when I know God personally, in my own experience with Him, then I bring my intimate knowledge of God to my reading. I can hear His voice as I read His words to me in the text. I am very involved because I know the One I am reading about.

Knowing God is not just knowing facts *about* Him. Knowing God is actually knowing the *person* of God. It is getting personally involved in the life of God; it is talking to Him and listening to Him; knowledge is derived from experience. This is the way it was with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. This is the way it was with the Hebrew people we read about in Scripture. God taught them about Himself in the context of their human experience. As another author, John N. Oswalt puts it, "The teaching takes place in the context of experience...the fundamental truth of Scripture is derived from Abraham's experiences with God (*Perspectives On Our Father Abraham*, Location 445)."

The Dutch theologian Theodore Vriesen puts it this way (quote), "In the Old Testament, knowledge is living in a close relationship with something or somebody, such a relationship as to cause what may be called communion (*Lectures in Old Testament Theology*, 20)." Yes, I think, that's it. Communion with the Living God. That is what I see in Abraham and that is what I want. As we will see, Abraham walked with God in close, intimate communion. That is my desire also. Is it yours?

Let's hear again from Dennis Kinlaw (quote), "Biblically, the knowledge of God is different from having a conception of God by which one defines His nature. It is not a theory about Him....[It] is a true knowing of Him [and] it will affect you and it will affect [God] (*Lectures in Old Testament Theology*, 20)." Concerning knowing God, Kinlaw adds, "It is easy to get interested in the data and keep the Living God on the margin (21)." I agree and this is so true! But when we talk about knowing God in the biblical context we talk about God – not on the margins – but very much in the middle of life.

Let's apply this to Genesis 12, verses 1-3. I am reading Genesis chapter 12, verses 1-3,

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.'"

When God says this to Abram, from Abram's perspective God comes out of nowhere. There was Abram, down in Ur of the Chaldeans and again at Haran, worshiping the moon god and the goddess that we've talked about. There was Abram the idolater, minding his own business and living his life. There was this one man, an individual. And then one day God breaks into his life. One scholar says, "God obtruded into Abraham's life and would not let go (Oswalt)."

The LORD speaks and Abram hears His voice and this is what God says. And I find it interesting and fascinating and sometimes frustrating that we are not told any more than this. Just that "the LORD said to Abram..." Then the content of the saying. And then this in verse 4. Genesis 12, verse 4 now, **"⁴ So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him..."** What that tells me is that whatever God said and *however* God said it, Abram decided of his own free will that God could be trusted. "The LORD said, 'Go,' and so I will go." And even though Abram did not previously know this LORD, nevertheless off he goes. You see, God met Abram in his life, in whatever was going on that day, and God spoke and this man heard Him and responded positively to the call and the command. He *experienced* God.

What does this tell us about Abram? We will come to that. But what does this tell us about *God*? It says that to know God is to know this about Him: He can obtrude and He can intrude into anyone's life at any moment. A man and a woman can be walking along, moving and grooving in life, just having their being and *BOOM*, suddenly, there is the voice of God. He breaks through any barrier. He knocks down any walls. He crushes any defense. He conquers any unbelief. He sounds an effectual call and sovereignly draws the sinner to Himself with salvation. This is who God is.

We know God by how we experience Him when He crashes into our lives. We do not find Him. He finds us, and then He never ever lets go. God puts His hooks into us, as He did with Abram, and we cannot shake Him off, not now, not ever. Join me tomorrow for more on who God is.

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