

## Knowing God

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We want to start the year off right by coming back to something so fundamental, so significant, that we never move beyond it. *Being known*. Being known by others gives us a certain kind of security, a happiness that can't be replaced by income, possessions, vacations. But, our capacity to know one another is limited, by time and personal brokenness. Even the closest relationships let us down, which signals the need of a greater relationship, of knowing and being known, that is perpetually fulfilling. And just think if you could find that person, you'd tell the whole world. Over the next three weeks we're going to know that Person, knowing one another, and making God known all from Isaiah 12. I hope you'll join us in making this a priority, not only for yourself, but for others, for the world.

### Thanks

Now why Isaiah 12 to know God? Well, verses 1 and 2 show us several ways to know God: by thanking him, trusting him, enjoying him. Isaiah begins, "[You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to you, O Lord.'](#)" Now before we can get into gratitude, we need to ask "In what day" is he talking about? Well in the prior eleven chapters, Isaiah the prophet documents a case against Judah, the northern part of Israel, for steady rebellion against God. What has this rebellion looked like? They've formed alliances with pagan nations, embraced their gods, and sought protection in their political power. And with a change of power in the White House, it can be tempting to make a similar mistake, to lean on presidents, governments, political strategies, to find security in an alternate power. Virtually every newsfeed tempts us. How easy it is to get wrapped up worrying about the future, silently dismissing God in the present. Which reminds me of CSL fictional account of a demon's advice on temptation, "*Whatever you do, don't let the patient be present. Get him to think on the past or the future.*" This way he'll actually be far from God. You see, rebellion against God doesn't have to be flagrant; it can be subtle, preoccupation with what might happen to your country, your career, your family, *yourself*. Investing yourself in what *has* happened to you or what *might* happen to you, missing the Redeemer right in front of you. I see people quite regularly who are so preoccupied by how they have misbehaved or been mistreated that they are unable to enjoy God in the present. I want so much more for them. In fact, it's a trend that says, if I can *understand* myself, my crosses and my losses Packer says, then I'll be happy. Bon Iver described his latest album as "*part love letter, part final resting place of two decades of searching for self-understanding like a religion. And the inner-resolution of maybe never finding that understanding.*" When I read that I feel a certain admiration mixed with sadness. I admire his commitment to search, but a sadness creeps in when the search for self-understanding is an end in itself, a religion with the Self as the god. Barth: *You cannot get God by shouting man with a loud voice.* Christians slip into the same error, knowing our sins and hurts *more than knowing our Savior*. God says, "[Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand](#)" (1:2-3). Why? They have looked to foreign powers, false gods, fretted over the past and the future to the neglect of knowing God *in the present*. Are you? If you try to know yourself you won't reach God but if you know God, you'll know yourself. So how do we know God? Isaiah says a day is

coming, when his people will be marked not by a search for self-understanding but by thanks, *I will give thanks to you, O Lord*. And why do they give thanks? “*for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.*” They are marked by gratitude because they know, at a deep personal level, the God of the gospel.

## Trust

Verse 1 is a concise summary of the central Christian teaching, the gospel. Now it's not popular for God to be angry, but again this is trying to get God by shouting man with a loud voice. God is not one of us. He is holy, categorically different, off the charts righteous. Isaiah knows this firsthand from his encounter with God. In chapter six he has a vision of God high and lifted up, with the train of his royal robe filling the temple-cosmos. Angels hover around him, with their faces covered, calling out to one another in antiphonal song, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*” And upon realizing the utter holiness of God Isaiah comes face to face with his utter sinfulness, “*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.*” God is holy and God is angry with those who rebelled. His people abandoning him in search of self-understanding, political power, fabricated forms of security. They are unclean and undeserving of his love. They're throwing their lives away. So what does God do? Like a good father he despises and diverts, despises the sin but diverts his anger. Where? To Christ. In chp 10, we learn that in that day the root of Jesse, the messiah of chapters 9 and 11, will rise to bear the anger of the Lord on our behalf: “*though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*” (1:18). Their blood impression removed! How? Jesus bleeds scarlet so we can be washed white. In the word of text, that you might comfort me, so we can find comfort, not anger, in the presence of God. That he might comfort me. Comfort me? Yes, you. Well how's that? As an awareness of his holiness and the horror of your sinfulness settles upon you, he brings the comfort of the cross. [[Cross Chart](#)] And the more you live with this gospel—holy anger of God against the horror of your sin, the comfort of Christ for your salvation grows gratitude, and with it the glory of the cross, of divine comfort and salvation. And the more we increase in our awareness of his holiness and our sinfulness (not presence of), over time the cross (Christ) gets bigger and bigger and bigger and we pour out more gratitude for Jesus: *though you were angry with me you turned your anger away that you might comfort me*. The God of the gospel generates gratitude, and the more we grasp of his incredible holiness and tremendous love in Christ, the more we express this in our lives. We abandon the pursuit of “self-understanding” and join the pursuit of understanding God. We become less prone to complain about the future and the past and more prone to rejoice in God in the present. How does this manifest, concretely? **One**, your *prayers* will be marked less by the things you want from God, and more by God himself. You find yourself spilling over in gratitude for his greatness, his patience, his love, his forgiveness, his comfort. You will be more prone to pray prayers for faith, humility, holiness to know Christ and show Christ *even in your unwelcome circumstances*, so that the comfort of Christ can shine in the world. **Two**, worries about the past and the future will recede because you have an awareness of the infinitely capable and kind hands of God and that you can trust him with everything. In the hands of the thankful, worry turns to *trust*. And this is how Isaiah responds, “*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation*” (2). Which brings us to our final way to know God, sing.

## Sing

I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song. How can God's people *not* be afraid about the future? They were surrounded by much greater powers with bigger armies. When we contemplate our fears is God saying we shouldn't feel any fright? Consider one of your fears, losing a loved one, an cheating spouse, a traumatic death, the end of the world. Is God saying don't feel alarm about those things? There's a passage in one of Tolkien's stories where Hurin, about to leave for war, says to his wife, But if things do go ill, I will not say to you: Do not be afraid! For you fear what should be feared, and that only; and fear does not dismay you. There are things in this world that should be feared, but *we* should not be dismayed. When Jesus told his disciples he was leaving them, he said: Let not your hearts be dismayed; you believe in God; believe also in me" (Jn 14:1). He's not saying feel no sadness or fear. He's saying don't let your heart be dominated by it, dismayed, thrown down. He's saying, "Feel fear but don't be dismayed." How? By trusting in ME, a greater strength, not in what your fear can do to you, but in what Jesus has done for you, comfort. I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song. I think of people who have faced terminal illness, trembled, but fought the good fight of faith and found comfort in their Savior. Because the Lord God is their strength and song. Is God your **strength** or your self-understanding? Is God your strength or your personal accomplishments? Is God your strength or your ability to hide? Is God your strength? If he is, you are free to admit your weakness. In fact, God's strength insists it work through weakness. ILL. Church planting, father to daughter, counseling broken people, I have cried out to God over and over again admitting my weakness and asking for his strength. And you know what? It comes, with comfort, each time. A church got planted, counsel was given, my daughters are flourishing because, not because they have a strong father but because I have a strong God. One commentator notes that when God is our strength, he gives us a durability in the face of life. God as strength is the outer mark of our trust in the gospel. What about the inner mark of trust? Song, a welling up of inner joy that has to be expressed. When our awareness of Gods holiness and our sinfulness increases, and Christ gets bigger and bigger, how can it not give way to song, and dance, and joy?! When Israel was rescued out of Egypt, they wrote and sang songs celebration, the song of Moses, the song of Miriam. When evil is defeated, the elves sing. God is calling us to sing our way out of rebellion, out of fear, out of self-centeredness, into worship, to worship our way from sin into a deeper knowledge of the Savior. Invest yourself, not in worries about the past or the future, but in a present-tense knowledge of God. "This day" is the age of the messianic king who is gathering a remnant, a worldwide people, a second exodus saving grace. Jesus is king and he is coming back to roll justice and peace out over a new earth, where He will be forever our strength and our song. Take heart, church. Know God and make him known. Give him thanks, trust in his salvation, and sing, sing your heart out. For Christ is Savior & King!