

Knowing God



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Knowing God" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training*. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of *Leadership Resources* and *Christianity Today International*, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is not another program. You don't have to build a program from scratch or take another night to be out. *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* works when you want it to, where you want it to, the way you want it to. It's completely flexible and designed to be easy to use.

You probably already have a monthly meeting with board members or regularly scheduled meetings with other committees or groups of leaders. *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of "Knowing God," you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ Bible study
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activities
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ sample retreat

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you want your board or church to uncover areas for growth in their understanding of God and their relationship with him. You could select one of three assessments in this theme: "What's Your Orphan Quotient?" (p. 6), "The 4 Religious Types" (p. 7), and "4 Threats to Quiet Time" (p. 8). From these options, select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected "What's Your Orphan Quotient?" Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion on to specific issues your church is facing.

Most *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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Know God and Live

What the Bible teaches about our deepest yearnings to commune with God.

John 17:3

Reflect (15 minutes)

What are we talking about when we use the phrase knowing God? A special sort of emotion? Shivers down the back? A dreamy, off-the-ground, floating feeling? Or is knowing God a special sort of intellectual experience? According to Scripture, this is a region in which it is easy to be fooled. What is truly necessary to know God?

1. Commitment. Knowing about God is a necessary precondition of trusting in him. Still, the width of our knowledge about God is no gauge of the depth of our knowledge of him. A simple Bible reader who is full of the Holy Spirit will develop a far deeper acquaintance with his God and Savior than a more learned scholar who is content with being theologically correct. The reason is that the former will deal with God regarding the practical application of truth to his life, whereas the latter will not.

2. Friendship. “Taste and see that the LORD is good,” says Psalm 34:8. A dish may look good and be recommended by a cook, but we do not know its real quality till we have tasted it. Similarly, we do not know another person’s real quality till we have tasted the experience of friendship. The same applies to the Christian’s knowledge of God. However true a person’s thoughts of God may be, he does not know the God of whom he is thinking until he has personally experienced friendship with God.

3. Invitation. We do not make friends with God; God makes friends with us, bringing us to know him by making his love known to us. Paul expresses this priority of grace in knowing God when he writes, “Now that you know God—or rather are known by God” (Gal 4:9). Grace comes first and remains fundamental. We know God by faith because he first singled us out by grace.

—J. I. PACKER. *Adapted from Knowing God (InterVarsity, 1993). Reproduced by permission of Hodder and Stoughton Limited.*

Detect (15 minutes)

Write down the following Bible passages on individual pieces of paper. Pass them around so each person has one or more. Ask each person to read the passage privately, pray for guidance from the Spirit, then write down what it says about what is necessary to know, experience, and appreciate God. Here are some points that participants might raise:

Romans 10:14—You must know who God is before you can know him.

Isaiah 55:6, 8, 9—God’s ways are incomprehensible, but if we seek him, he will be found.

Jeremiah 1:5—We can know God because he made us.

Psalm 34:8, 9—Know God by tasting his goodness.

Psalm 46:10—Know God by seeking him in stillness.

John 14: 6, 9—If you know Jesus Christ, you know God.

John 10:27—Know God by obeying his commands.

1 Corinthians 2: 10-12—The Holy Spirit helps us understand deep things about God.

Discuss (15 minutes)

1. What five things are necessary for us to know God?
2. How can church programs be specifically designed to help people know God?
3. What activities can help us know God better?



Fit Food for the Hungry Soul

How theology fills us with good things of God.

Colossians 1:28

To know God, you must know about him, which involves theology. Here's why and how to teach theology, according to J. I. Packer, author of Knowing God (InterVarsity, 1993). Packer teaches at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia.

For many, theology is a bad word. Why have you devoted your life to it?

It helps me appreciate the greatness, goodness, and glory of God—lifting up the sheer wonder and size and majesty of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Puritans and Calvin taught me that's what theology is about. The truth I try to grasp and share is truth that enlarges the soul because it tunes into the greatness of God. It generates awe and adoration.

J. I. Packer

"Theology is food for the hungry soul."

If this is theology, why do so many people find it boring or objectionable?

Too often theology has been taught to say: "This stuff you are to believe and share; these are the errors you are to recognize and reject." The conclusion is determined before you've asked the question. Such an approach shrinks the soul. Focusing on the greatness of God enlarges the soul. It makes you a greater person by making you a smaller person. I've always tried to present truth so that it will humble the sinner and exalt the Savior, and so produce a Christian who is of larger stature than one who simply knows orthodoxy and is prepared to recite it on demand.

What does such theology say to a culture like ours, which aims to exalt the self?

The business of religion, in many circles, is to make people happy. Anything that enlarges my comfort zone is regarded as good, godly, and to be integrated into my religion. But true theology challenges the presuppositions of North American culture, both secular and churchly, which seem to be primarily concerned with the "right to happiness." True theology calls on us to deny the claims of self and exalt God.

Does that mean you're opposed to a seeker-oriented approach to ministry?

There's great wisdom in the old adage "Scratch where it itches." The question is, what are you going to tell people about the particular problems on their minds? The really good evangelists, like Billy Graham, say these problems cannot be solved unless the bigger problem of their basic relationship with God is also solved.

Is it legitimate to say that true Christianity is a means to personal fulfillment?

We exist for God. In his great mercy, God has promised that blessedness will accompany discipleship, but it's got to be God first. Without that, to say that Christianity is the secret of happiness is dangerous. People who get into the Christian life without ever being challenged to repent of their egocentricity are, at best, likely to remain stunted Christians. The struggle to change at this point is necessary for health and growth.

Repentance doesn't seem to be a popular theme in churches these days. Why is that?

Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish pastor of the 1800s, spoke of the "expulsive power of a new affection." That's how true repentance is born; that's how lives get transformed. The new affection is grateful love of a God who saved you, of a Christ who died for you. It means the things of this world grow strangely dim. Only a new vision of the purity and greatness and goodness of God has the power to expel selfish affections and so make repentance real.





Fit Food for the Hungry Soul *continued*

Is it appropriate to use guilt to motivate people to repent?

I hear some evangelists say, “People today simply don’t respond if you teach guilt and then highlight the Cross as the act of God putting away guilt; they don’t think of themselves as guilty.” Well, that’s our fault because we haven’t told them of their guilt. We haven’t made them recognize how thoroughly they’ve been dishonoring and defying God. We’ve left them on the egocentric happiness track.

Today people demand choices in everything. How can we speak to them?

Church leaders must say in one way or another, “Through our ministry, we trust God is going to speak to you because our business is to let God’s Word speak its message through us. And we’ll study the Bible together on the matters the Bible treats as central. That’s what we as a church have covenanted to do. That agenda is non-negotiable.” Next, leaders must say, “The only real choice we have is whether or not we’re going to listen to God. Are we going to allow him to speak what’s on his mind, or are we going to make the rules and allow him to address us only on matters of our choosing?”

What shows us that people have moved from self-absorption to maturity?

Maturity was exemplified by the leaders of the church from the first to the nineteenth century who had a sense of stature, a sense of bigness about them that was directly related to the quality of their discipleship. It gave them dignity. It gave them poise and a searching insight. It meant that even when others rubbished or martyred them, they generated respect. Richard Baxter, the seventeenth-century Puritan, was a man of stature who was hated. He got under people’s skin simply by his poise, passion, and integrity.

What role does theology play in this maturing?

Theology is food for the hungry soul. What you have in the Bible, very often, is the raw material, the makings of the meal. We who preach and teach as theologians are like cooks, and it’s our business to shape the meal. Good theology, when we produce it, will come as a meal for the soul. You have a liberty and authority when you allow the Bible to talk through you, a liberty and authority you don’t have if you’re offering your own ideas or cherished notions.

What is the most pressing task of church leaders for the future?

We need to recover the awareness that God is more important than we are, that the future life is more important than this one, that happiness is the promise for heaven, that holiness is the priority here in this world, and that nothing in this world is perfect or complete. That would give people a view of the significance of their lives on a day-to-day basis, which so many at the moment lack.

To Discuss:

1. Was there ever a time when a faulty understanding of God left you feeling spiritually starved? Explain.
2. Describe a time when new insight into the nature of God so filled you that it affected your walk with him from that day on.
3. What kind of theology do we offer in our church ministries? How does it help people appreciate the greatness, goodness, and glory of God?



What's Your Orphan Quotient?

Seeing yourself as God's child.

Romans 8:13–17; Galatians 3:26–4:7

Because of our fallen nature and the negative patterns we may have learned from human relationships, we often relate to God as though we were orphan children instead of who we really are: his beloved sons and daughters. This attitude has repercussions in the way we behave toward God and those around us. Recognizing the ways we fail to see our identity in Christ can be the first step toward a relationship with Jesus that is hopeful, refreshing, and intimate.

The following exercise is adapted with permission from Sonship, a discipleship course of World Harvest Mission. Sonship is designed to renew the hearts of believers by applying the gospel of God's grace to their lives and ministries. Read through each description. Put a check beside any tendency you see in yourself.

Orphan

- I feel alone, lack a vital, daily intimacy with God, sense "a vacuum of self concern."
- I live on a success/fail basis, need to look good to others, am performance-oriented.
- I labor under a sense of unlimited obligation, try hard to please, am likely to burn out.
- I yearn to be right, safe, secure. I am unwilling to fail, unable to tolerate criticism, can only handle praise.
- I feel like I must always try harder. I rely on self-effort and my "gift package" to get by in ministry.
- I feel powerless to defeat the flesh. I have no real heart victory over pet sins, yet I have lost a sense of being a big sinner.

Son/Daughter

- I have a growing assurance that "God is really my loving Heavenly Father." (1 John 4:16)
- I am learning to live in daily self-conscious partnership with God; I am not fearful.
- Prayer is the first resort. I say, "I'm going to ask my Daddy, Father, first."
- I am able to take risks, even fail. Because my righteousness is in Christ, I need no record to boast in, protect, or defend.
- I am trusting less in self and in the Holy Spirit more (with a self-conscious, daily reliance).
- As I rest in Christ, I am seeing more and more victory over the flesh (Romans 8:1-9). Yet I see myself as a big sinner.

Discuss

1. When you feel alone, condemned, or afraid, what false view of God are you likely to believe?
2. In what areas of your life are you most likely to behave as an orphan? In which areas do you most trust in God's goodness, and what gives you that confidence in God?
3. How might seeing God as a good father change how you interact with him?



The 4 Religious Types

How personality influences our perception of God.

Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12

Like a car's steering wheel, the will influences a person's choices to move life in a new direction. Most people find a spiritual experience devoid of meaning if it does not sufficiently touch their will so that it moves them in a new direction.

Four kinds of people define as meaningful various types of spiritual experiences. They report that a spiritual experience is most likely to touch their will if it primarily involves one of the following: thinking, feeling, meditation, action.

When people say they did not find a church or a particular religious experience within a congregation meaningful, they mean that the type of spiritual food the church provided lacked the power to touch their wills and influence their lives. Closer examination often reveals that the spiritual food served was for other types of people. It met someone else's needs, but not theirs.

*Which of the following types are most like you?
Which does our church's worship most likely appeal to?*

	Most Like Me	Our Worship Appeals To
The Thinking Type: These individuals find spiritual guidance in the words of Scripture, sermons, and position papers on ethical issues. They are likely, for example, to examine the words of hymns to see if we are singing what we believe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Feeling Type: These individuals find spiritual enrichment in music, heartfelt testimonials by persons whose lives God has touched, and engagement in personal evangelism. For example, they are likely to judge hymns by how the style and tempo make them feel rather than by word context and definition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Meditation Type: These individuals find spiritual enrichment in contemplation and introspection. Sometimes called mystics, their prayer is largely an experience of hearing God speak to them rather than vice-versa.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Action Type: These individuals find spiritual enrichment in service and idealistic crusading designed to transform society. For them, action is authentic theology and prayer. People of this type find little spiritual nurture in organized religions, which they may accuse of "talking the talk but not walking the walk."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—Adapted from Leadership Is the Key, by Herb Miller © 1997 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. What type best describes you? Explain.
2. Share an event that influenced the course of your life. What role did your personality play in that event?
3. What are the main components of worship in our church, and which type of person is each component likely to reach?
4. Which groups of people do you think are less fed by what our church provides? How can we improve on our ability to appeal to these religious types?



4 Threats to Quiet Time

Overcoming invasions of intimacy with God.

1 Kings 18:42; John 15:4

We all have problems in our quiet times. Of all the problems of meeting with God, there are four big ones that loom like giants:

Giant 1: Loss of Concentration

“How do I increase concentration and keep my mind from wandering?” Before you go any further, answer this question on a separate sheet of paper. What are four causes of concentration loss for you?

Prayer is our most effective giant killer for all kinds of concentration breakers. After that, preparation, planning, and the pad and pencil can serve as weapons to spring us from the trap of confusion and small accomplishments brought on by the confinements of concentration loss.

Giant 2: Loss of Feeling

Do these statements sound familiar to you?

“Sometimes I just don’t sense God’s presence and I don’t know why.”

“How do I worship when I really don’t want to?”

We tend to live by our feelings. Yet as Christians, our responsibility, according to the Bible, is to be in control of our feelings. God doesn’t want us to dismiss our feelings. We must learn, however, to acknowledge them and then express them in a way that honors God.

I discovered this for myself when I wanted to have more personal worship in my devotional time. I began to take portions of the Psalms as if they were my own words. At first, this felt very awkward and unnatural. But the more I acted on my desire to worship God, the more I began to enjoy it.

Giant 3: Lack of Discipline

The thorniest problem in discipline is keeping priorities. When we properly view faith as our responsibility but still struggle with discipline, we may have a problem with priorities. The Devil is no fool. He wants to keep us bottled up. Encouraging fuzzy or faulty priorities is his favorite trick.

When you think of priorities, ask these questions:

- ◆ “What do I want in life—do I really want to know God?”
- ◆ “How can I get there—what steps do I have to take?”
- ◆ “How much am I willing to pay?” It’s going to cost something.

Giant 4: Lack of Practice

Once we understand time with God as an expression of a love friendship, we understand how crucial practice is. We learn to do God’s Word and continue its work over the long haul. That is what makes permanent changes in our lives and the lives of others.

—Taken from *The Priority of Knowing God* by Peter V. Deison. Copyright © 1990, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used with permission.

Discuss

1. What is the biggest giant preventing your time alone with God?
2. What one goal can you make (and measure) to improve your fellowship with God? What steps can you take to help achieve your goal?
3. What might God want to do for and in you through prayer and reading Scripture?



Finding Time for God

Not enough time for prayer?

The answer may be more than time management.

Psalm 16:11

The Case It was Friday morning, and my Day-Timer was full. I had a million things to do. So I rushed through a few verses, ran through my prayer list, and went on to my real work.

When I finally decided to do something serious about my own spirituality, I made some interesting discoveries. The villains I most suspected turned out to be mere accomplices.

At first, I thought the problem was my schedule. So I studied time management and learned to set priorities. I put prayer in my Day-Timer, along with relaxation and dates with my wife. My marriage improved, and so did my health. But I still had a problem. I chose work over prayer most of the time. It was almost like I didn't want to pray.

Thinking I needed personal renewal, I tried attending various conferences. Many of these were wonderful. I enjoyed the preaching, was lifted by the worship, strengthened by the prayers. But I was a spiritual groupie—spiritually vital in the group but dried up back in the daily grind.

Was the problem stress? I started working out. I began to journal about the “oughts” I battled. I learned to delegate responsibilities. But still I found myself too busy to pray more than a few minutes a day. Why wasn't I spending more time with God?

What Would You Do? If a friend told you about this problem, what would you advise?
What generally prevents you from spending time with God? What helped you overcome this?

What Happened As Richard eventually discovered, the real impediment to daily encounters with God was a matter of spirit more than schedule. His theology of God was flawed, he said, resulting in his viewing prayer as duty more than delight.

Like Richard, we may work hard for the Lord but feel more like bondslaves of Jesus than his self-abandoning, joyous servants. Intellectually, we know we are justified by grace alone. But we live as if we are under the law, working for a boss who demands something far beyond what we are able to deliver.

When we see God as he really is, as the one who loves us and cares about our feelings, struggles, schedules, and work, we can stop trying to prove something to him. We can enjoy his presence. As Richard says, “I snatch times with him now many times a day: stopped at a red light, sitting in a dentist's office, parked in front of the school to pick up the kids. I discovered God is my Friend, not my Foreman.”

—RICHARD BRIDSTON. *Adapted from Living By God's Surprises by Harold Myra* (Word, 1988). Used with permission.

Discuss

1. If we can enjoy God anywhere, anytime, why should we schedule time with him?
2. What times of prayer in our lives have been most meaningful? What were the circumstances that prompted them?
3. Do some prayer sessions in a group work better than others? What makes them effective?



Like Father, Like Son

To find God, look at his son, Jesus.

John 14: 5–14

Read “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:9).

Comprehend God is unknowable unless he chooses to reveal himself. Apart from that, we grope for him in vain and have to say with Job, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him!” (Job 23:3). Left to ourselves, we arrive at a false knowledge of God, which begets fear and bondage and repels us rather than draws us to God.

However, God has made a full and final revelation of himself, which makes him understandable, accessible, and desirable. He has done so in a Son who made the worlds, humbled himself to take on our flesh and blood, purged our sins, and now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high. That Son is the Lord Jesus. He reveals his Father in three ways:

Like the Word (John 1:1), he is the expression of God’s thought.

Like a wax-impression of a seal, he is the image of God (Heb. 1:3).

Like the rays of the sun, he is the brightness of God’s glory (Heb. 1:3).

Jesus is the Son of God, equal to him but never independent of him and perfectly expressing him. He was all this before time began and will be so when time has ceased to be. Nowhere else can we fully see God.

Still, we may be shocked by what we see. For the face that reveals the glory of God is marred, spat upon, and disfigured by the malice of men. As Isaiah 52:14 says, “His visage was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human.” So, in Jesus, God’s glory consists not so much in his ability to exalt himself and humble man but in his willingness to humble himself for the sake of man.

To see Jesus, we must also lay hold of him as the supply of all our needs. He is presented to us in the Scriptures, not for our academic contemplation and delight, but for our desperate need as sinners. When we acknowledge our need, the Holy Spirit delights to reveal the Lord Jesus as the supply of that need.

Basically Jesus is revealed through the Scriptures, but often in other ways too—through another’s testimony, through the words of a hymn, or through the more direct approach of the Spirit to the soul. As we take for ourselves what the Spirit shows of Jesus, our striving, strain, guilt, fear, and sorrow flee. As Psalm 126:2 says, our mouth is filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. We have seen God.

—ROY AND REVEL HESSION. *Adapted from We Would See Jesus (Christian Literature Crusade, 1958). Used with permission.*

- Discuss**
1. What images come to mind when you think of Jesus?
 2. How does seeing Jesus as marred and disfigured affect your impression of who God is?
 3. How can our church most accurately reflect the face of God to others?



Open Up to Love

We can know God because he knows us best.

Psalm 139:1-4, 13

Read “Oh Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways” (Psalm 139:1-3).

Comprehend I was in college the first time I truly felt known and loved by God. I was walking back to my dorm, and suddenly it came to me that God knew me intimately. It was a shattering, wonderful feeling. God knows me, I thought. He really loves me. At the time I had a great roommate, and he and a bunch of other guys and I would sit around until all hours of the night talking. It would get late, and we would get tired enough to let our guard down. Then one of us would let slip some revelation about his innermost self. He would feel embarrassed, until someone looked at him and said, “You too?” He knew—and he was known. Somehow, being in that position of vulnerability and sympathetic intimacy opened me up to the sense of God’s deep and close knowing of me. It’s wonderful to know. It is more wonderful to be known.

In April 1995, we experienced a student revival on our campus that dramatically illustrated the power of feeling known by God. In a chapel service, students began to spontaneously confess their sins in public, streaming up to the microphone and openly speaking of their sins and struggles. Short of murder, I can’t think of a sin that wasn’t confessed. After speaking, each student would be surrounded by friends. Hugs, tears, and prayers of encouragement and healing would follow.

These young people had been told a lie their whole lives that said, “You’re alone in your struggles. No one knows you.” They longed to be known—don’t we all—but at the same time, it’s terrifying to lay oneself bare before others. The Spirit moved among those students to give them the gift of being known. He empowered them to discover, finally, that to be completely transparent and to feel completely loved is to come closer to the heart of God. So it is for all of us. The gift of prayer is that we can lay all that we are before God, who won’t be surprised or shocked at anything we say. —BEN PATTERSON. *Adapted from Deepening Your Conversation with God (Bethany House, 1999). Used with permission.*

- Discuss**
1. Describe a time you felt vulnerable in opening up to someone. How did that affect your relationship with that person?
 2. Have you ever felt completely vulnerable before God? What prompted that opening up before him, and how did that affect your relationship with him?
 3. How does our church encourage people to open up to one another? To God?



From Solitude to Service

3 stages of meeting God.

Luke 6:12–19

The more you know how deeply you are loved by God, the more you will see how deeply your sisters and your brothers in the human family are loved. Here are ways for you—and others—to claim intimacy with God:

Find God in solitude. It's not easy to sit and trust that in solitude God will speak to you—not as a magical voice but that he will let you know something gradually over the years. And in that word from God you will find the inner place from which to live your life. Solitude is where spiritual ministry begins. That's where Jesus listened to God. That's where we listen to God.

In Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, the father holds his son and says, "I'm not going to ask you any questions. Wherever you have gone, whatever you have done, and whatever people say about you, you're my beloved. I hold you safe under my wings." If you can keep that in mind, you can deal with an enormous amount of success as well as failure without losing your identity, because your identity is that you are the beloved.

Find God in community. In solitude you realize that you're part of a human family and that you want to lift something together. Community is not an organization; community is a way of living: you gather around you people with whom you want to proclaim the truth that you are the beloved sons and daughters of God.

I live in a community called Daybreak, where children, men, and women who are mentally disabled and those who assist them live together. We share all aspects of day-to-day living. We know how hard it is and how beautiful it is to live together.

Community is not loneliness grabbing onto loneliness, however. It's solitude grabbing onto solitude, saying: "I am the beloved; you are the beloved; together we can build a home." Sometimes you are close, and that's wonderful. Sometimes you don't feel much love, and that's hard. But we can be faithful. We can build a home together and create space for God and for the children of God.

Find God in ministry. In this crazy world, there's an enormous distinction between good times and bad, between sorrow and joy. But in the eyes of God, they're never separated. Where there is pain, there is healing. Where there is mourning, there is dancing. Where there is poverty, there is the kingdom. Jesus says, "Cry over your pains, and you will discover that I'm right there in your tears, and you will be grateful for my presence in your weakness."

Ministry means to help people become grateful for life, even with pain. That gratitude can send you into the world precisely to the places where people are in pain. Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate. It's a great call.

—HENRI J. NOUWEN, (*Adapted from an address given at a Leadership Network Conference*). *Used with permission.*

Discuss

1. Describe a time when interacting with God in solitude prepared you for interacting with others.
2. When have you experienced God's grace in a time of weakness, pain, or sorrow? Did you later find reasons to thank him for that time of trouble? Explain.
3. What do we expect from others at church that they fall short of giving? How can we turn that disappointment into celebrating what they are giving?



How Do I Know It's God?

Safeguards for recognizing his voice.

Psalm 139:23; Jeremiah 17:9-10

How can you know for sure that it's God you're hearing and not just your own thoughts? Here are some safeguards for recognizing the voice of God:

- 1. Study Scripture.** We need to do some independent thinking about God's Word that enables us to grow spiritually. We can benefit from what others say, but we benefit most from our own work in the Scriptures. When our thoughts are balanced against God's Word, we can be assured of the Lord's direction.
- 2. Digest the Word.** We take in spiritual food by reading and listening to God's truth. With spiritual food, however, many of us get biblical indigestion. We hear the Bible week after week at church meetings and read it from time to time on our own, but we don't really seem to gain anything from it for the long run. Digestion enables the body to do something with the food. It breaks it down into usable parts.
- 3. Listen to what it says.** James 1:19–27 tells us to prepare our hearts for God's Word in two ways. First, have an attentive ear so you are ready to hear God, not yourself. Second, put aside anything that would hinder a receptive spirit. Our openness to God's Word is influenced by the magazines we read, the movies we see, and the attitudes we harbor. James encourages readers to avoid such influences and to humbly receive the implanted word.
- 4. Practice the Word.** When we hear God's Word, we can respond in three ways: by thinking that we have heard this before and it doesn't really apply to us, by being so emotionally moved by the words that we substitute strong feelings for strong action, or by acting on what we've heard. Doing something about the Word shows that it is being digested and used in our life.
- 5. Meditate on the Word.** Thinking about the things of God allows his words to fill our minds. Then we meditate on them, taking those thoughts and words into our minds and chewing on them until they become thoughts that nourish us and help us grow. We also turn thoughts into action. As Andrew Murray says, "Hold the Word of God in your heart until it has affected every phase of your life."
- 6. Recognize the voice.** Sometimes thoughts from the Lord come right at the time of our study; other times the Lord speaks to us days or even months later about something we have meditated on. But we can be assured that if we study and meditate, God will speak to us. His voice in our thinking will always be in accordance with the written Word. It will never be at odds with the Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).
—Taken from *The Priority of Knowing God* by Peter V. Deison. Copyright © 1990, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used with permission.

Discuss

1. Tell about a time when you heard God speak to you.
2. How did you recognize it as the voice of God? Name some ways that affirmed that for you.
3. How can we help church members distinguish the voice of God from voices that may not be him?



A Complete Connection

How to involve both mind and heart in the wonder of God.

1 Chronicles 16:29

Worship that feeds only emotions is often shallow and artificial. But worship that feeds only the mind fails to seize the heart with wonder and passion. Here are some ways to link well-ordered minds to overflowing hearts in the awesome presence of the living God:

Read Scripture. Ironically, churches that claim the highest devotion to the authority of Scripture often neglect its public reading in worship. The Bible is read merely as part of the sermon or without preparation. Scripture deserves better. Have Scripture read by a number of people trained in drama. Present it visually on screens, perhaps accompanied by music or visual images.

Use teaching moments. Spend five minutes on a brief teaching that explains something about the character of God or an aspect of doctrine that relates to what you are about to express in worship. The rhythm of learning and worship helps to enrich both.

Try visual enhancements. Some churches have rich traditions of color and beauty that make worship a feast for the eyes; others need to work on this. Visual enhancements can be powerful. At our baptism services, we place a large wooden cross at the center of the stage. As people come to be baptized, they first pin to the cross a list of sins they've written out. When the baptisms are done, the sight of that cross covered with lists of rebellion for which Christ died is a powerful expression of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Offer opportunities to respond. Besides singing, worshipers need ways to express their hearts to God. Offer them a few minutes for self-examination and confession, perhaps using a structure such as Psalm 139:23–24. Then invite them to write down prayer concerns or blessings they've received. At times, ask them to simply sit before the Lord in silence. In one service, we gave everyone small pen lights; after darkening the room, we asked those who had become Christians through the ministry of this church to shine their lights. The lights that illumined the room showed us the goodness of God in a manner beyond words.

Tell stories. Share stories of how God has been active in the lives of your congregation. This can be done by interview or occasionally by video. The story might be written out and read by someone else. But few things have the ability to move the heart God-ward like a true story.

Include sacred movement. When it works, dance can express the desire of the heart for God in an incredibly unique way. This may mean hiring professionals to bring a high degree of artistry, but not always. A church in Ethiopia used a team of 12-year-old girls to do simple choreographed movements during a worship song. Another related form is signing for the hearing impaired. Have the signing take place on the platform to offer a beautiful visual expression to worship.

—JOHN ORTBERG AND PAM HOWELL

Discuss

1. Describe a worship experience that challenges your mind.
2. Name some meaningful ways that worship affects your emotional response to God.
3. What are some ways to keep a balance of these in worship?



Two Ways to Meet Jesus

Helpful approaches for Bible reading and prayer.

Psalm 42:2; John 14:23

Jeanne Guyon was a Frenchwoman born in the seventeenth century. Unhappily married at a young age and later imprisoned for her religious beliefs, she sought happiness in God. Her simple, yet fresh instructions on seeing the face of God are excerpted from Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ. (Christian Books Publishing, 1999).

Pray the Scripture

Praying the Scripture involves both reading and prayer. Turn to Scripture, choosing a passage that is simple and practical. Now come to the Lord quietly and humbly.

Be careful as you read. Taste and digest. In “praying the Scripture,” you read very slowly. Do not move from one passage to another until you have sensed the heart of what you have read. Then take that portion of Scripture that has touched you and turn it into prayer.

“Praying the Scripture” is not judged by how much you read but by the way you read. If you read quickly, it will benefit you little. You will be like a bee that merely skims the surface of a flower. Instead, in this new way of reading with prayer, you become the bee that penetrates the depths of the flower. I am quite sure that if you follow this course, little by little you will come to experience the rich prayer that flows from your inward being.

Use Guyon’s method to pray:

- ◆ Slowly and carefully read a short passage of Scripture.
- ◆ Allow the sense of each word to fall on you before you proceed to the next one.
- ◆ When something meaningful strikes you, turn it into a prayer.

Behold the Lord

The second kind of prayer also makes use of Scripture. First, read a passage of Scripture. Once you sense the Lord’s presence, move on. Scripture has served its purpose; it has quieted your mind; it has brought you to God. Now turn your heart to enter the presence of God. By faith you may do this.

As you read, gently pause so that you may set your mind on the Spirit. You are not doing this to gain understanding of what you have read; rather, you are reading to turn your mind from outward things to the deep parts of your being. You are there to experience the presence of the Lord.

While you are before the Lord, hold your heart in his presence. Do this also by faith. If your mind begins to wander, turn your attention back to the inward parts of your being. You will be free from wandering, and you will be brought near to God.

The Lord promised to make his home within you (John 14:23). You will now be able to notice his presence more acutely because your outer senses have become calm and quiet. Your attention is no longer on outward things or the surface thoughts of your mind; instead, sweetly and silently, your mind is occupied with the touch of God’s presence.

As your soul becomes more accustomed to withdrawing to inward things, this process will become easier. The mind, after much practice, will form a new habit of turning deep within to encounter God.

Encounter God for a short time by following this approach:

- ◆ Focus on God’s presence through a portion of Scripture.
- ◆ Concentrate on the reality of God’s presence with you.
- ◆ When your mind wanders, return to the Scripture, and it will draw you back into God’s presence.



Further Exploration

12 resources to help you know God.

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL Special Issue on “Real Worship” (*Spring 1999*). How to recognize holy moments when a congregation encounters God, how to do what God wants in worship, and how prayer can release God’s power. Read this issue online for free: www.leadershipjournal.net, click on “Archives,” scroll down and click on the issue.

The Seeking Heart by *Francois Fenelon*. Probes gently but thoroughly our propensity for self-love. (*The Seedsowers, 1992; ISBN 0940232499*)

Listening to the Voice of God by *Roger Barrier*. This is not just another book on prayer. Barrier brings great insight into the nature of our hearts, asking the question, Do you want to hear God speak? Once you’ve answered that question, he suggests ways for discerning when and what God says and how to avoid pitfalls of following the wrong voice. (*Bethany, 1998; ISBN 1556619723*)

Deepening Your Conversation with God by *Ben Patterson*. Written expressly for church leaders, Patterson discusses causes for prayerlessness and ways to deepen intimacy with God through prayer. It is an honest, challenging, and hopeful book from a man who knows God well. (*Bethany, 1999; ISBN 155661974X*)

Awake My Soul by *Timothy Jones*. Ways to invite the Spirit into the routine of the day, making every day a retreat. (*Doubleday, 1999; ISBN 0385491565*)

A Place for God by *Timothy Jones*. If you want to spend time apart with God at a spiritual retreat center, here’s where to find these centers, what to expect from them, and how to use them. (*Doubleday, 2000; ISBN 0385491581*)

Knowing God by *J.I. Packer*. The best-selling favorite that shows the wonder, the glory, and the joy of knowing God. (*InterVarsity, 1993; ISBN 083081650X*)

The Priority of Knowing God by *Peter V. Deison*. Practical ways to establish and maintain a satisfying relationship with God through personal communion with him. (*Kregel, 1990; ISBN 0825424917*)

Into the Depths of God by *Calvin Miller*. A call to journey inward through discipline, listening, understanding, and confession to find the deepest, most magnificent truths of God. (*Bethany, 2000; ISBN 0764221728*)

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth by *Richard J. Foster*. This primer on spiritual formation devotes chapters to prayer, fasting, and submission to God. (*Harper, 1988; ISBN: 0060628391*)

We Would See Jesus by *Roy and Revel Hession*. A classic little book on knowing God through knowing Jesus Christ. (*Christian Literature Crusade, 1997; ISBN: 0875084524*)

Sonship by *World Harvest Mission*. This curriculum was designed for discipleship of missionaries and ministry leaders to help them live out of grace. For more information, contact World Harvest Mission, 100 West Avenue W960, Jenkintown, PA 19046; <http://www.whm.org>; 877-255-9907.



Retreat Plan

How to use this theme of “Knowing God” at a weekend retreat.

Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the “Knowing God” theme. The purposes of this retreat are (a) to help leaders reflect on their relationship with God, and (b) to deepen and enrich their relationship with God.

Friday Evening

◆ 8-8:45 P.M. **Opening Session:** Hand out copies of “Finding Time for God,” the case study by Richard Bridston on page 9, and allow time for each person to read it. Then form groups of three or four. Have each group discuss the questions at the bottom of the page. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes, and have the groups share their comments and consider what it may mean for the church.

◆ 9-9:45 P.M. **Bible Study:** Pass out “Know God and Live” (p. 3), which gives a biblical overview of the ways we can know God. After discussing those, spend time in prayer asking God to draw your group close to him through your time together.

Saturday Morning

◆ 9-9:45 A.M. **Devotional:** Set the tone for the day by handing out (or presenting) the devotional “Like Father, Like Son” (p. 10).

◆ 10-10:45 A.M. **Assessment:** Hand out “4 Threats to Quiet Time,” the assessment on page 8, to each participant. After each person has read it, discuss the questions at the bottom. Ask, “Based on this discussion, what are some practical ways we can help people in the church grow closer to God?”

◆ 11:00–NOON. **Article:** Use “A Complete Connection,” the how-to article on page 14. Discuss ways worship helps develop a deeper relationship with God and how we know God through community.

◆ NOON. **Lunch.**

Saturday Afternoon

◆ 1-2 P.M. **Final Group Session:** Close the retreat with the activity, “Two Ways to Meet Jesus,” on page 15. This activity gives opportunities for individuals to seek God’s face and find encouragement through a time of fellowship in God’s presence.

Pray together, and ask God to continue to build upon what he started in both the group and in the church.

You can create similar retreat plans for this BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS theme. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.