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Knowing God

First Taste

The first purpose of your life is to know your God.

Daily Bread

Take a minute to read *Jeremiah 9:23, 24; Philippians 3:8*.

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, let not a mighty man boast of his might, and let not a rich man boast of his riches; but, let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and *knows Me*, that I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness, for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah
9:23, 24

Note

I will use the *New American Standard* version of the Bible throughout the books unless noted otherwise.

You were created *by God*; and, you were created *for God*. You are not here by chance, and your life is not an accident. The Lord made you for a reason; He created you for His *pleasure* and His *purposes*, that you might *enjoy* Him and be a *praise* to His name.

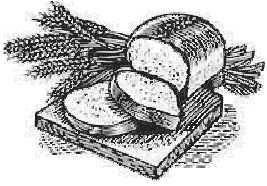
God *loves* you more than anyone else loves you. You are His *workmanship*; and, He is your Maker. *You bring Him great joy*. As a good father does, He provides for your needs, and He gives you all good things to enjoy.

God’s love for you extends beyond comprehension. Though you have rebelled and sinned against Him, He has sent His Son to make *all things new*. In Christ, you have a Savior; in Christ, you have a friend, and, in Christ, you have hope, both in this life and the life to come. Christ is the measure of God’s love, and, because of Him, you are one of God’s children; and, because of Him, you are able to stand before your holy Father as clean, free, and secure.

God also *knows* you better than anyone else knows you. Everything about you, He knows it all — your strengths and shortcomings, your hopes and hurts, your fears and failures, your passions and pursuits; He even knows your heart and mind, every thought, every word, every desire and deed. *Nothing* about you escapes His attention.

The God who made you, who knows you, who loves you, and who even sent His Son to die for you, desires to have a *relationship* with you. Though He is with you at all times, dwelling in you by the presence of His Spirit, He wants you *to know Him*, to learn of His love, to experience His faithfulness, to follow His lead, and to find contentment and peace in His presence.

So then, your God knows you; but, *do you know Him?* Knowing God means more than knowing facts about Him; rather, do you know Him by experience? *The first purpose of your life is to know your God*. Nothing in this world will give you more joy and contentment than experiencing Him; but, you must know Him, who He is, what He’s like, His works, His will, His way.



The Baker's Bread
66 Days, 1 Purpose

That is my prayer for you — that you will *know* your God, that you will learn to *enjoy* Him, and that, in everything you do, you will be a *praise* to His name. You may be asking yourself, “How do I accomplish these things? Where do I begin?”

The best way to begin knowing your God is to commit yourself to reading His words. The Bible is His wonderful gift to you, to teach you who He is, what He’s like, what He’s done, and what He expects. This book was written to help you succeed in this endeavor.

“The best way to begin knowing your God is to commit yourself to reading His words.”

To begin enjoying your God, simply start by *recognizing His works* in your life. Look for and thank Him for the evidence of His *hand*, for example in the beauty of creation, the joy of laughter, the blessing of sleep, or the pleasure of food. Also, look for and thank Him for His *help*, which may be expressed in His provision or protection.

To be a praise to God’s name, start by *reflecting glory* to Him whenever possible. You can do that both by what you say and how you live. Everything you do glorifies someone, either yourself or others. *Make it your aim in life to reflect glory to God.* He deserves it most.

If a stranger were given the assignment of looking at your life, in order to determine your passions and pursuits, for whom or what you live and breathe, what would be his observations? What do you think about? What do you do in your free time or spend your money on?

Consider This...

What does your list reveal to you? What or whom do you most treasure, based on your time, effort, and money?

The Baker’s Challenge

I am the Lord your God. I’m the One who made you. I’m the One who provides for you and protects you. I’m also the One who saved you. I love you, I enjoy you, and I know you. Can you say the same to Me? To love and enjoy Me, *you must first know Me.*

A Curious Question

First Taste

Scripture intake is essential to your spiritual growth.

Daily Bread

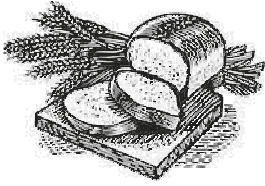
Take a minute to read *2 Timothy 3:14-17*.

“Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All *Scripture* is inspired by God and *profitable* for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be *adequate*, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:14-17

A young man said to me once, “I know that I should be reading the Bible, but I don’t know why. Can you tell me?” I could sense that he was sincere in his asking and that he did not want the ten-second churchy answer. We found a place to sit down and talk. After investigating, I discovered that he had posed this question to several of his peers, but their responses left him wanting. “Some say that I should read the Bible so that I will have a good day. Others have told me to do it in order to feel good or to put me in a better mood. Still others admitted that they read the Bible but don’t know why.” I commended his curiosity, his courage, and his quest for the truth.

Perhaps you have struggled with this issue yourself. You know that you should be reading the Bible but don’t know why. What are some of the thoughts you’ve had? How would you have answered this young man?



The Baker's Bread
66 Days, 1 Purpose

I had a wonderful conversation with this curious young man. After explaining that his friends were a bit misinformed, I expressed my own reasons for reading the Bible regularly. Here are a few of the purposes that I shared with him:

- I want to *know God*, who He is, what He's like, and how He deals with man.
- I want to understand what exactly *Christ has done* for me concerning my salvation.
- I want to *discover God's expectations* for how to live the Christian life.
- I want to learn what I should and should not be doing in order to *glorify God*.
- I want to grow in my biblical view of the world, to gain *true wisdom*.
- I want to discern *God's will* for my life and be equipped to do it.
- I want to learn how to steer clear of and overcome *the temptations* of this world.

“How could you ever become all that God desires for you, if you ignore the primary means by which He accomplishes His work?”

To summarize, “God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (*Phil. 2:13*), “to conform you into the image of His Son” (*Rom. 8:29*), to make you look more like Him. It makes sense, then, that for God to accomplish His great work in you, “to make you adequate for every good work,” that He would use His written Word to do so. *How could you ever become all that God desires for you if you ignore the primary means by which He accomplishes His work?*

Ask Yourself...

On a scale of one to ten (1-10), how consistent are you with regularly reading God's Word on your own?

In short, *Scripture intake*, that is reading, studying, meditating on, memorizing, and applying God's Word, *is essential to your spiritual growth*, but it is a discipline often neglected. It is the most important personal exercise that you can undertake, but, it requires a great deal of time and effort, a sacrifice that many are not willing to make. However, to ignore the Scriptures is to stunt your own spiritual progress, *for you will not be adequate or equipped for the work God has for you to do, if you neglect His primary training tool.*

The Baker's Challenge

No matter where you are in your walk with Me, and no matter how long you've been a Christian, there's always room for improvement in the area of Scripture intake. You are undermining your spiritual formation, if you are not spending quality time in My Word. Dedicate yourself in the coming weeks to establish this vital discipline in your life.

Muscles

First Taste

Spiritual growth requires time and effort.

Daily Bread

Take a minute to read *Hebrews 5:11-6:1*

“Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time *you ought to be teachers*, you have need again for *someone to teach you* the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need *milk and not solid food*. For everyone who partakes *only of milk* is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an *infant*. Solid food is for the *mature*, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...”

*Hebrews
5:11-6:1*

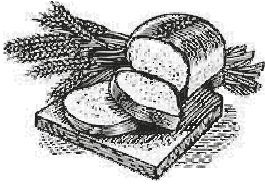
When I was in seventh grade, I was introduced to weight lifting. We were divided into small groups, given a regimen and a time frame and told to progress through the stations. Immediately the testosterone kicked in and the spirit of competition intoxicated us all. Each one of us tried to outdo the others in form, repetitions, weight, and strength. While we had very little training, I noticed something by the end of the year that surprised me — *muscles*.

I remember being so impressed by my physical improvements that I asked my parents for a dumbbell set, so that I could lift at home. Little did I know that weight lifting would become an integral part of my life, as I was a four-sport athlete in high school and a quarterback in college. Over the years, the lifting got more specific, the regimen more intense, and I even had the guidance of trainers at times. However, I was always aware that *the more time and effort that I invested, the stronger and more physically fit I became*.

As Christians, we transition through similar stages in our spiritual lives. After our “rebirth” experience at salvation, we are immediately thrust into *spiritual infancy* (no matter our physical age), that place in which we are immature, dependent, and have much to learn.

While every newborn Christian starts there (spiritual infancy), it is vital that you do not get stuck there. It is God’s desire that you progress and grow into maturity. *Spiritual maturity does not happen overnight; it occurs gradually*, as you learn more about your God, as you better understand the Gospel (what He has done for you), as you practice the spiritual disciplines, as you shed your old life, as you demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, as you discover and obey God’s will for your life, and as you conform more to the example of Christ.

The theological term for this process of spiritual growth is *sanctification*. Sanctification is quite different than salvation. While salvation is a one-time occurrence and solely a work of God, sanctification (spiritual growth) is an ongoing event in which you cooperate with God. In other words, God has already done His part, by giving you everything that you need to



The Baker's Bread
66 Days, 1 Purpose

Consider This...
Spiritual growth is not accidental but intentional. Do you intend to grow or are you waiting for an accident?

progress spiritually — the Gospel, freedom from sin, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, the spiritual disciplines, spiritual gifts, and the Church. However, *He has left the rate at which you grow to you.* Thus, sanctification is a joint effort; *God supplies the tools, while you supply the labor.*

This principle explains why you find Christians at all stages of spiritual maturity, because much of your progress depends on your own investment. I have known teenagers who were as spiritually mature as adults, yet I have known senior adults stuck in spiritual infancy. All of them had the same spiritual tools and opportunities; the difference was personal effort.

Sanctification is much like exercise. God has provided you the gym, the machines, the weights, the program, and even the Trainer; all that is left is your own initiative and hard work. You can decide to make use of these tools and get into “shape,” or you can refuse to put in the time and effort and never progress at all. It is your choice; and, if you choose to work hard, God has promised to bless you, to make you “adequate for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). Thus, you must decide to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7), to roll up your sleeves and get to work. The Lord will do the rest.

“Sanctification (spiritual growth) is a joint effort; God supplies the tools, while you supply the labor.”

The quickest way to graduate from spiritual infancy is through Scripture intake. When you are a spiritual toddler, you must rely upon others to feed you, and that is okay for a time. However, the goal of a growing Christian (when it comes to the Bible) is to reach that stage when you wean yourself from getting fed to feeding yourself and, eventually,

to feeding others. Unfortunately, *many Christians are satisfied with or are forever stuck in the rut of spiritual infancy, never knowing or caring that God expects more.* I believe one of the reasons this occurs is because we are never taught to feed ourselves; thus, *many believers never contribute to their own spiritual growth.*

The Baker's Challenge

Assess your spiritual growth and put a mark on the line below. How much time and effort are you willing to invest in order to progress or maintain your growth?



Spiritual Infancy
Others Feed Me

Spiritual Adolescence
I Feed Myself

Spiritual Adulthood
I Feed Others

God Does Not Keep Score

First Taste

Scripture intake is meant to be a blessing not a burden.

Daily Bread

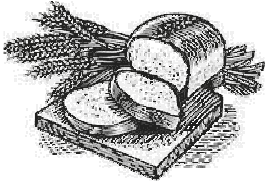
Take a minute to read *1 Timothy 4:6-8*.

“In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following; but, have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*”

1 Timothy
4:6-8

I’m sure by now you have noticed, that in these first few days, I have used the term “spiritual disciplines” several times, but I have not yet defined them or explained their purpose; but, before I do, what is your understanding of the spiritual disciplines? List some of them here and, then, briefly explain their purpose.

You will not find the words “spiritual disciplines” in the pages of Scripture; rather, this is a phrase that scholars invented. Just as the word “providence” is not in the Bible, yet, the truth of God working in the lives of His people is on every page. The term “spiritual disciplines” is scholars’ best attempt to explain a key concept. The origin of the phrase is found in *1 Timothy 4:7*, where Paul instructs his associate to discipline himself “for the purpose of godliness.” Here Paul insinuates that there are activities in which we as Christians can participate, that will help to develop godliness or Christ-likeness in our lives. In other words, *we can discipline ourselves for spiritual fitness and usefulness*, and, thus, we call these exercises the spiritual disciplines.



The Baker's Bread
66 Days, 1 Purpose

Consider This...

All religions, except for Christianity, promote works as a means of receiving God's grace; but works don't work. Our works are corrupted by our sin. How would they save us? No, Christ saved you for good works not by them.

The spiritual disciplines include activities such as worship, prayer, service, giving, accountability, etc.; but, notice that Paul pointed out the most important discipline — *Scripture intake* — when he encouraged Timothy “to nourish himself constantly on the words of the faith and of sound doctrine.” *All of the other disciplines are informed by and revolve around Scripture intake.* Without it, the others are (or can be) misguided or misunderstood.

Before we get too far into this adventure of getting to know God and His Word, I wish to address and dispel two common misconceptions regarding the spiritual disciplines. First, the disciplines are meant to be practiced both *privately* and *corporately* (in the church). In other words, it is not enough just to read the Bible on your own and never hear it preached or taught; likewise, *it is not enough simply to hear the Scriptures taught at church and never to open them or study them on your own.* The same goes for prayer, worship, and the others.

Second, the spiritual disciplines are often overemphasized; I don't wish to do that. While they are important to your spiritual growth, you should never equate them with spirituality; in other words, *never think that the more disciplined you become, the more spiritual you are.* This path leads to legalism or performance-based religion, when you believe God's favor or love is based on the amount or intensity of your activities. *God does not love you more because you read the Bible, and He would not love you less because you didn't read it;* you cannot earn God's favor by such means. God does not keep score, neither does He extend grace or favor or love based on your religious performance. As a believer, *you already have God's favor,* not because of anything you've done, but because of what Christ has done. *Nothing you do can cause God to love you more, and nothing you do can cause God to love you less.*

“The disciplines are an aide to godliness; they do not equate to godliness.”

You should hold the spiritual disciplines, including Scripture intake, in high esteem, but you should never idolize them. They are to be a blessing in your life, not a burden; *they are meant to be delights to be treasured and not duties to be performed.* Remember, the disciplines do not change your standing before God. *They are an aide to godliness, but*

they alone do not equate to godliness. They are a means that God uses in your spiritual growth; the disciplines were never meant to be the end themselves.

The Baker's Challenge

Before you proceed, do you have a clear understanding of the purpose for the spiritual disciplines, for Scripture intake? My love for you is not based on whether or not you read your Bible. *My hope is that you will read My Word out of desire not duty.*

The Wonder of the Bread

First Taste

Recognizing the weight of God's Word will help you realize the wonder of it.

Daily Bread

Take a minute to read *Jeremiah 15:16*.

"Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I have been called by Your name, O Lord."

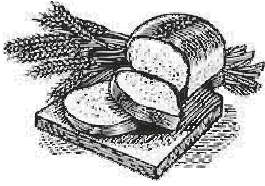
Jeremiah
15:16

I love bread — buns, bagels, cakes, croissants, doughnuts, cinnamon rolls, bread rolls, bread sticks, pancakes, waffles, muffins, wheat bread, cheese bread, monkey bread, Italian bread, French bread, flat bread, corn bread, banana bread, Texas toast, you name it. I grew up eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches made with Wonder Bread. Man may not be able to live on bread alone, but I could sure try!

From the beginning, bread has been a staple of life, one of the constants in mankind's diet, so it should not be a surprise to see bread regularly surface in the pages of Scripture. Neither should it be a surprise that *God would use this common element as a symbol of something much more important than food*. For example, when the Lord freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He sustained them for 40 years in the desert with manna or bread from heaven; His primary purpose for the manna was that He might "make the people understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (*Deut. 8:3*). The people had bread because God commanded it; so then, *it was not bread that sustained them in the wilderness but God's Word*.

Later, Jesus, whom John called "the Word [of God] who became flesh" (*Jn. 1:14*), called Himself "the Bread of Life" (*Jn. 6:33-35*). "The bread of God," He said, "comes down from heaven and gives life to the world; anyone who comes to Me will not hunger." That "Bread of Life" was soon broken on the cross, which was symbolized by Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples (*Lk. 22:19*), when He took some bread and broke it, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

When Jesus was teaching His followers how to pray, He taught them to say, "Give us this day our daily bread..." (*Matt. 6:11*); but, what does that "daily bread" consist of? Certainly, God provides for and sustains us physically, but "our daily bread" is much more than food. *It is God who also sustains our souls through the Gospel, through Christ, by His Word*. Thus, Paul tells Timothy "to nourish himself constantly on the words of the faith..." (*1 Tim. 4:6*).



The Baker's Bread
66 Days, 1 Purpose

**Verses
Referenced**

¹ Ex. 33:13-15

² Josh. 1:8

³ Ezra 7:10

⁴ Job 23:12

⁵ Ps. 19:7-10

⁶ Ps. 119:11, 105

⁷ Jer. 15:16

⁸ 2 Tim. 3:16, 17

⁹ Heb. 4:12

¹⁰ James 1:22-25

You must discover the wonder of this Bread for yourself. It is no light loaf! *It is living and active and able to sustain you for the work that God has for you to do.* Consider these comments from others who have nourished themselves with God's "daily bread":

"God's words do not depart from my mouth, but *I meditate on them* day and night" (Joshua).² "I will not depart from the commands of God's lips, for *I have treasured* the words of His mouth more than necessary food" (Job).⁴ "I have *set my heart* to study the Scriptures, to practice them, and to teach them among the people" (Ezra).³ "I try to be *more than a hearer* (or reader) of God's Words but a doer also" (James).¹⁰

Here are some more. "I found God's words and I ate them, for they became to me *a joy and a delight* to my heart" (Jeremiah).⁷ "I pray that I may *know more of God* and His ways; and if His presence does not go with me, then I wish not to leave Him" (Moses).¹ "God's Words are *living and active* and more powerful than any human weapon; they are able to pierce me deep within, to stir my thoughts and heart" (Author of *Hebrews*).⁹

"Don't miss such a marvelous opportunity to read God's Book. Don't overlook the wonder of it!"

Finally let's consider two more. "I have found God's Words to be *great instruction* for me; they have trained me in the way of righteousness. Now, I am adequately equipped for every good deed" (Paul).⁸ "The words of the Lord *restore my soul*; and, they enlighten my eyes. I desire them more than great wealth, for they teach me wis-

dom and right living. They are *sweeter than honey*. They are my *guiding light* and I have hidden them in my heart" (David).^{5,6}

Why are these men so enthralled with the Scriptures? They understand something that is often taken for granted. The Maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty Sovereign, the One who gives life and provides all good things to enjoy, *He has something to say*. He has written about Himself, He has revealed how all things came into existence, He has explained man's purpose here and the bigger picture of His plan, and He has given His wisdom for living. *Don't miss such a marvelous opportunity to read His Book.* Don't overlook the wonder of it!

The Baker's Challenge

It's no wonder why these men had such a close relationship with Me. They took to heart everything that I said. They loved and treasured My words. What about you? Have you discovered the wonder of My Bread? Do you delight in it or have you dismissed it?

Independence Day

First Taste

To become a life-long, independent student of Scripture, you must set your heart to start.

Daily Bread

Take a minute to read *Ezra 7:10*.

“Ezra had *set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*”

Ezra
7:10

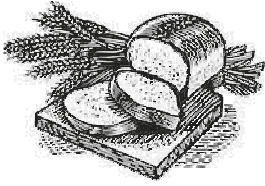
When I turned sixteen, I received two gifts — the keys to my new used car (1983 Cutlass Oldsmobile) and a crisp, clean leather-bound New American Standard Bible (1977 Edition). The car was a generous present from my parents; the Bible was a thoughtful gift from my grandparents. Both gifts signified a turning point in my life.

As any teenager knows, sixteen is sweet. It is the mark of mobility. I spent many practice hours behind the wheel. I passed Driver’s Ed and went on to ace both the written and driving tests. Once I had my license, I was more than ready to set out on my own and experience independence.

Just as that car signified a new beginning for me, so did the Bible. I grew up in a wonderful Christian home, with parents who modeled the Christian life. I was the equivalent of a “gym rat,” except we were always at church. I guess you could’ve called me a “church rat.” I knew the Bible stories, I knew the plan of salvation, and I could win all of the “sword drills.” I had been given several Bibles at that point, but this one was different. It was a clean slate, a fresh start, at a momentous time in my life, and I could sense that God was moving me to action.

As I looked over my new Bible carefully and read the words my grandmother had written in the front, I knew that it would change my life. I made a commitment that day to be a good steward of that Bible. As the car marked my independence as a driver, *that Bible marked my independence as a life-long student of Scripture.*

In time, God led me to the example of Ezra, the High Priest of Israel. The Bible describes him in *Ezra 7:10*, which became a mission statement for my life. It says, “*Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*” God has used this verse to set me on the path that He intended for my life. That path has led me to become the spiritual leader of my home, a Christian school teacher, a community group leader at my church, and an Elder.



The Baker's Bread
66 Days, 1 Purpose

This description of Ezra continually challenges me in several ways. For example, in order to share God's Word with others, I must first model it; but, in order to model it, I must know it. In order to know it, *I have to set my heart to read it and study it.*

Of all the spiritual disciplines, I'm convinced that Scripture intake is the most critical; yet, I've discovered that a small percentage of Christians regularly read or study their Bibles, and even fewer have ever read it entirely. Does that not seem hypocritical of us — to claim to live by a book that we do not read? For us to become more intimate with God and to understand better what He expects of us, we must know and do what He says; but *how can we know and do what He says, if we do not first read what He says?*

I still carry and use that *New American Standard Bible* today. It has been rebound twice, but it's still holding together. I've read it cover to cover multiple times since turning sixteen, and I've made all sorts of notes and markings in it, to the point that I can hardly read the passages any more. It has become my most treasured earthly possession.

“You would be wiser if you read no other book but the Bible for the rest of your life than if you read every other book available.”

I cannot recommend a better way to spend your time than learning and living God's Word. *You would be wiser if you read no other book but the Bible for the rest of your life than if you read every other book available.* I encourage you, as Ezra would, to set your heart on this task. May this book inspire you to dive into *the Book*. May these 66 days help you establish the consistent intake of your *daily bread* and lead you to a more intimate relationship

with the Baker. Are you willing to make such a commitment?

The Baker's Challenge

If you are serious about your commitment to My Word, sign this pledge:

I, _____, desire to become an independent life-long student of Scripture, and I will set my heart to establish a consistent daily time with the Lord; to encourage me along the way, I have asked _____ to check regularly on my progress.