

# Knowing God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, thank you. John 1, verses 1 to 18, such famous verses in the Bible. John 1 says to us that we can know God.

! And so you and I can step into September and the autumn and we can enjoy in our lives now a real life. A real living relationship with our Creator.

With John 1 open in front of us this morning, we're talking about knowing God. Such a foundational thing to think about, isn't it? Do you know, in 21st century Britain, in this melting pot of cultures and religions and opinions, the truth is there are tens and hundreds of voices telling us about God, the divine, the spiritual.

And so, in our world today, you could fall into thinking that you could never really certainly know Him, or them, or it, or whatever is beyond.

Certainly not know anything with any confidence. Imagine Orchard Park Community Centre deciding to put on a connecting with the divine market.

[ 1 : 23 ] They set up tables and stalls in the small hall and snacks and people, and you can go in and listen. And there are options to choose from all around Orchard Park Community Centre.

A spirituality fair, if you like, where instead of buying candles and cheese and the kind of stuff you buy, you can look at religions and God. Imagine you walk in, not because you're looking for something to do, but because you want to know God.

And you walk into a room that is a wall of noise and tables everywhere and stall holders competing for your attention and your business. You walk up to the first stall. It's big and shiny and new. And there's a very clever looking Cambridge man. You think, do I recognise him from work or somewhere? And he looks you in the eye and he says, I represent the intelligent people today. There is no God. No one has seen Him. He is not there. Forget all those old traditions. In fact, here's a book for you.

[ 2 : 29 ] Richard Dawkins, *Outgrowing God, A Beginner's Guide*. I think we should take our courage in both hands, grow up and give up on God's. Don't you?

You hear him speaking, you think that's unsettling. The next stall, just along from the shiny stall, looks rickety, but a bit more relaxed. And the people sit serenely.

And through a haze of jostic fumes, a smiling lady in a Tibetan jumper says to you, you've got to feel the divine. He or she is there. You've just got to search and sense God.

And there on the table, there's leaflets advertising yoga and the power of crystals and mountaintop experiences and meditation. OK, it's going to be weird in the community centre. Out of the corner of your eye, you see a sixth century holy man.

And he's in a cage. He's hanging from the ceiling. And he's bent double with his forehead against his knees. And he's been there for 10 years, hoping by his suffering to break through the curtain and know God's mind.

[ 3 : 39 ] He's deadly serious about it. That's weird. Imagine there. Imagine there. You pass along the established religions table. Well, tables. There's loads of them.

You pick your way past the Muslim table. There's 1.5 billion of us. And then the Sikhs and the Buddhists and every type of so-called Christian. Church of England, Catholic, Assemblies of God, Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian scientists.

All saying different things. All promising different experiences of God. God is like this. Come to us. It's so confusing that. Dizzy and dazed, you make for the exit.

And right next to the door out, there's a young woman. She's sitting at a table. And on the table, there is just one big question mark. And she looks at you kindly and she says, how can we really know God?

Look at all these different stallholders, each convinced they're on the right track. Let me tell you, I hold my hands up. I just don't know.

[ 4 : 45 ] We're all searching. We're all reaching out. But to really know God, well, I think that's probably beyond us, don't you?

If you can connect with that. That is what our world is like in part, isn't it? When you pause to think about it. There are competing claims and there are many options.

And if you like, pick your stall and do your own bit of searching and maybe it will do you good. But to really think you could actually know him truly and personally, that's, well, it's wishful thinking.

It's clutching at straws. It's arrogant even. Isn't it? Well, John chapter 1 verses 1 to 18 is so good for us.

John chapter 1 introduces John's eyewitness account of the life of Jesus Christ. And these densely packed verses are here to intrigue us and grab us and go, we must read on.

[ 5 : 55 ] We must get to know Jesus Christ. And you think, why? Well, verse 18 sums up John's message. It's where we're going to spend our time today. It's so bold.

Verse 18, do you see? No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father has made him known.

Jesus, God the Son, has made God known. Which means that through Jesus Christ, you and I can know our creator today, truly and personally now.

In our remaining time, let's just explore this verse together. Verse 18 begins by telling us what we know in our experience, what we know.

No one has ever seen God. God. This is the universal human condition. None of us has seen our creator.

[ 7 : 03 ] None of us have come face to face with the one who sits above and beyond time and space. No one has ever seen God. Have you? You haven't.

I mean, in a sense, that's very straightforward and obvious to us, isn't it? Over the past years, we talk about this at home sometimes.

We've not seen God. I've not seen him. I wish I could. It's obvious to us that we haven't seen God. It's obvious, but it's very challenging too.

Because if, as human beings, we've never seen him, if we've never encountered him, how can we know him truly? I remember a while back looking up what is the biggest crowd of all time.

And in February 2013 in Uttar Pradesh in India, the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage took place. A group of Hindu pilgrims gathered on the banks of the Ganges to bathe and be cleansed of their sins.

[ 8 : 06 ] The biggest crowd ever. How many? An estimated 30 million pilgrims together seeking some kind of salvation or liberation in the presence of their deities.

But if no one has ever seen God, there's been no encounter with him, then all of this devout activity is, what would you say?

It's guesswork. When we lived in London, I used to cycle sometimes into the city through the past the East London mosque.

It cost 22 million pounds to build. It's got an eight metre diameter golden dome. It can house 7,000 worshippers at the right moment of the week when you drive past cycling or cycling.

It's such an impressive vision of commitment as worshippers stream in. But if no one has ever seen God, there's been no encounter with him.

[ 9 : 06 ] Then all this costly commitment is man-made religious hoping, isn't it? In Cambridge, amongst various people I know, the football crowd and others where we spend quite a lot of our time, there's very little obvious sense of God at all seeking to know him or worship him.

And for some of my friends, life's moved on from the churchy stuff that their grandparents might have signed up to. The bottom line is, we've not seen him. No one's ever seen him in Histon.

And therefore, he's not there. Until a grandparent dies or something like that. And a grandchild asks mum or dad, where's grandma now? Is she in heaven?

And parents have to work out what to say. And realise how hard it is and hopeless it is to live and die believing that there is no loving Creator.

But how can we know? Because no one has seen God. You haven't, I haven't, no one has. One of us.

[ 10 : 20 ] One of us. Which means that unless he steps in and reveals himself to us, all of us, whether we're religious or not, we are just making stuff up.

We're just flailing around. We're just hoping for the best. We're actually utterly lost. Our universal condition, no one has seen God.

John 1 verse 18. But, look at this in the verse. Now in verse 18, the unmatched claim.

No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father has made him known.

In this verse, John describes Jesus Christ, God the Son, very carefully. Look at it with me. He is the one and only Son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father.

[11:28] Notice three things. First, he's the one and only. Means he's the unique Son of God. Only he, for all eternity, is his Father's Son.

The one and only means he's uniquely loved by God. Infinitely precious to him. And when you see a young man introduced as my only Son, you know he's everything to his Dad.

And all of a Father's love channelled into this one boy, his pride and joy, my only Son. That is who Jesus Christ is. He's the one and only.

Second in the verse, he is himself God. Fully God. What John says here, he fleshes out back in the very first verses that Kate read, verse 1 onwards.

Look up at this. Describing Jesus, whom he calls the Word. Listen, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word.

[12:34] And the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Which is mind-blowing. Say you stretch your imagination backward as far as you can go before the universe even existed in eternity.

What do you find? Who do you find? You find him. The Word. Who was with God and was God.

Verse 3 goes on. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind.

He, God the Son, is eternal. He's the co-creator of the world. He gives life and breath. He is himself God. And thirdly, in verse 18, he is in the closest relationship with the Father.

Sometimes, sadly and painfully, dads and sons have pretty strained relationships. They don't see much of each other. They don't talk to each other.

[13:47] So painful when you hear a boy say, we were never close and I hardly knew him. But it is not like that between God the Father and God the Son.

God the Son is in the closest relationship with the Father. He is at the Father's side or in his bosom. It means the place of the closest love and the deepest knowing as a person lies on your bosom. There's lots there in that verse and quickly. But you get the sense of John's careful description, don't you?

No one has ever seen God. You haven't. I haven't. But there is one who has and does. He's the dearly loved Son.

He is fully God. And for all of eternity, he's been with his Father, looking into his face, listening to him and knowing him infinitely and perfectly.

[14:52] And now here's the thing finally in verse 18. That this one and only Son in the closest relationship with the Father for all of forever, end of the verse, has made him known.

It says here, God the Son has made the Father known to us. John 1, 1 to 18, tells something of the story.

It's not a nativity story, but you see what's going on here. In verse 9, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. Most famously, in verse 14, John declares the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

God the Son, with God and himself God for all eternity, who sees and knows the Father, became flesh. This is like the grand miracle of everything.

That 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, God the Son came from the Father into the world. He became flesh. He took to himself human flesh.

[16:09] This is Jesus. The one who has life in himself, who is fully God, now born of Mary, a wriggling baby, a grown man.

And the one through whom the stars were made, now gazing up at them through human eyes. The one who was with God in the beginning, now dwelling amongst us.

And we should say this morning, at the start of September, this is a complete life changer. It's a game changer, isn't it?

In our 21st century world, with tens and hundreds of voices telling us about God, the divine, the spiritual. If you can imagine, it's like you're at the community centre at the spirituality fair. And there's all the noises and the claims and you should read out growing God and grow up and try these crystals and listen to what we think and reach out and search. And then the woman at the door with the question mark, how can we really know him?

[17:11] And there's hustle and bustle and you don't know which way to turn. And then into the room steps God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And he declares in a loud voice, I have come.

I have come from the Father. And in an instant, all the spiritual chatter and uncertainty and guesswork and clever opinion stops.

It can stop. It must stop. Because God the Son has come into the world to make the Father known. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, verse 14. And, says John, the eyewitness, we have seen. We've seen his glory.

The glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God. But we have seen his glory, John says.

[18:15] In the Bible, glory, it means something like the open shining display of God's character and beauty.

To see God's glory means, as a creature you come face to face with God himself. In all his splendour and holiness and love.

And that is what happens as God the Son walks the earth. He's no prophet or teacher or guru.

Through his life in John's Gospel, he speaks divine truth.

Truth about what we're like. Truth about what the Father is like. I'm telling you what I've seen in my Father's presence, he says. Through his life in John's Gospel, he acts with divine power.

Healing the paralysed and dying. Feeding the hungry. Opening the eyes of the blind. Raising the dead. Through his life in John's Gospel, he displays the power. He displays divine grace.

[19:17] To an adulterous woman, broken and shamed, offering eternal life. Through his words as he speaks, God made known to us. Through his actions, God made known to us.

Through his character, God made known to us. God made known to us. Until finally, at the end of his life, he makes God known ultimately and beautifully.

As he dies on the cross and gives his flesh for the life of the world. Displaying the glorious, sacrificial love of God for all to see. And this is the start of John's Gospel, verses 1 to 18.

John's eyewitness account of the life of Jesus. And it is here to grab us. Does it grab you? God made known to us. No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son, who is himself God and in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

We should say how wonderful our God is. And how kind. To send his Son into the world and make himself known to us.

[20:32] We should say how good this is. How stabilising in our lives. To know that there is one who has come from the Father who speaks truth and reveals God truly.

And you and I have John's Gospel in front of us so we can listen to Jesus' words and see Jesus' actions and know God.

How good that is. We should say, by the way, I will not turn and I will not go looking anywhere else. What influential preachers on the internet say.

What the major religions think. What your wider family reckons about God. What your own internal, I like to think of God as. What your teacher or your lecturer says to you.

He or she who is cleverer than you. Or the later sceptical book by a clever person. All that noise. All that opinion we can and must put to one side.

[21:34] And we must listen to the one who was with God from the beginning. I am the way and the truth and the life. Jesus will insist. Isn't that good?

How wonderful our God is to send his son. How good to have truth from God in the person of Jesus. Put all other opinion aside and listen to him.

Finally this morning from John 1. Receive Jesus Christ. And know God personally forever. And in verses 10 to 13 John shows us up front that in his gospel.

As Jesus came into the world making God known. He split the world in two. As he does today. On the one hand some reject Jesus Christ.

As then so now. In verses 10 and 11 I'm reading. He was in the world. And though the world was made through him.

[ 22 : 41 ] The world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own. But his own did not receive him. Shockingly.

The world's maker enters his world. And his creatures say. We don't know you. We don't want you. Get away from us. How offensive that is.

How wicked. How shocking. And yet. Verse 12. Yet to all who did receive him.

To those who believed in his name. He gave the right. To become children of God. And this is the heart of the gospel.

At the start of this month. God the son comes into the world. He comes into the world. He makes God known. He dies on a cross. To take away the sins of the world. He rises from the dead. As Lord of all.

[ 23 : 41 ] And to all who come to him. And listen to him. And receive him today. And believe in his name. Jesus you are my Lord.

And my God. Do you see what it says here? He gives us the right. To become children of God. That is God the father and God the son.

If you like. Open themselves. And include us. In the family. Forgiven. And safe. And secure. And secure. This is the offer of eternal life.

You can know God. Not just know truth about him. You can know him. You. Even you. Known and loved and adopted by God the father.

You. Even you. Knowing God truly. And personally. And deeply. In your life. Now. And into September. And always and forever. And always and forever.

[ 24 : 45 ] Like that is wonderful news. To start a September isn't it? No one has ever seen God. You haven't.

No one has. But God the son has come. To make God known. So that you can be included in his family and known forever. And let me lead us in a prayer.

Let's pray together. Our Lord and our father. What extraordinary grace.

And kindness. That you sent your son into the world. What extraordinary goodness.

That rather than having us grope out and reach for you. You have come. Your son has made you known. And not only that he died for our sins and rose from the dead.

[ 25 : 46 ] And will forgive us. And see us adopted into your family forever. Please would you make us those this morning right now. Make us those who receive Jesus Christ.

And know you as our God forever. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen.