

“Known and Loved to Know and Love”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I'm grateful to be up here. My name is Bill Herrett. I'm an associate pastor here at Southwood, and I'm grateful to be able to talk to you guys about God's Word this morning.

Um, as I was thinking about this week, I was reminded of a friend of mine. I was thinking about what the Lord was, what we were working through to preach this morning.

I was thinking of a friend who, when I was very early as a parent in my new days as a parent, young kids, I asked my friends, what was it like? How are your kids?

How's everyone? And I remember this moment, uh, vividly where my friend, just a wave of, um, I don't know, relief and excitement and gladness and joy, uh, uh, crossed over his face as he went on to just describe how much he loved and cared for and how delighted he was in his children and, and all the nuances and, and the, the things they did, the sports they, they were good at there and how his daughter had this, you know, tender heart and cared deeply for her friends and how she, um, wouldn't let someone be lonely.

[1 : 32] And, and, and it struck me in that conversation, um, how much this friend of mine knew his children. He wasn't just telling me details like, well, she's a blonde seven-year-old and that's it.

And that's it. Um, he was describing who she was as a person because he'd interacted with her and walked with her through her young life. He knew his son and the things that he did, the things that, um, that annoyed his dad, the things that bothered him, the things that he loved, the delighted in, and joy was on his face describing his children as he told me about them.

I was glad I asked, honestly. I was excited for my friend to know how deeply known and loved his own children were.

It wasn't a doubt in my mind because I knew this man for a long time. It wasn't any doubt in my mind, but to hear him express it. So important. So beautiful. And I think as you see, hopefully the kind of a little more crazy than normal outline that we have in the bulletin, it's a lot of scripture.

So I'm not going to ask you to turn to every single passage that we read. Um, one of the reasons why we're talking through this idea of being known and loved by God is because as the youth staff, um, which I worked through with, with high school, high school students, we worked through these ideas this past fall.

[3 : 05] Lots of different passages. So we've, we've studied a lot of different passages throughout the Old and New Testament about understanding and coming to grips with and holding fast in the fact that you are known and loved by the God of the universe.

But if I'm being honest about my own baggage with the rest of church ministry, because I've done youth ministry for 20 years, um, all of us need to hear these truths.

This is not just something that kids need. So it's foundational or students need. So it's foundational. And we walk through life holding fast. It's that we all struggle and forget these realities.

And so we know these things that are true, right? We know we can, we can look to the scriptures. We can know in Hebrews, um, that it tells us that nothing is created in creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. God knows everything. He's omniscient. And we know that God is love because we can look to the scriptures and we can see in first John chapter four, that God is described as love.

[4 : 15] So we can acknowledge these realities. Yes, I'm known and loved by God. And so I think this is more than just a youth ministry truth that we need to uncover and, um, look at and wrestle with and cling to.

It's something we all deal with us. All we, we all struggle with. And so the struggle, right? The struggle that we all have is rooted in Romans 3 23.

It's this reminder that all of us have fallen short and all of us are sinners. There's not a person on the planet who doesn't deal with the realities of a broken world.

So in Genesis chapter three, when we, when we see the fall of man and, and, and we know that the whole of the earth is no longer going to be made right and perfect and good. It has this fallen nature that human beings have this fallen nature.

We also know that, that people have this fallen nature and we all walk in this brokenness daily. And the tension of that brokenness and the sin that we live in.

[5 : 28] Um, we, we wanted our students this fall to know how transcendent God is, how beautiful God is, how much you are known and loved by God.

But I, and I think the things that we, we talked about, and so I'm just going to rattle off some of the things that we try to address that I don't think are far off from any of us when it comes to our sin.

Do we know who we are? Do we know our own identity? These are the kind of questions that maybe, um, you've, you've asked.

Um, am I worthy? Am I a good dad? Am I doing enough? Am I present enough? Am I doing enough for my family? Am I providing?

Am I loving? Am I encouraging? Am I a good enough pastor? That's when I ask often. And I think as we think through these things, we, we deal with the, the frailty of ourselves and the struggle of, are we safe?

[6 : 34] Are we secure? Am I living as an imposter? Am I really just pretending to be a Christian? Am I behaving Christianly? Am I doing Christian things? Am I really who God says I am?

Do we struggle against the idea of competition? Or earning or failure or success? I'm not doing enough.

I'm not good enough. I have, I failed. I'm a, I'm a, I'm bad at this. This is just not who I am. Some of us in the past months, even weeks, have dealt with deep sorrow and sadness.

I've simply experienced too much hurt to be able to even relate to the idea that God would know me, let alone love me. Some of us are swimming in broken relationships in our lives, whether through work or family or friends.

And this sense and this feeling that no one likes me, let alone no one loves me. So therefore God could never know me or love me.

[7 : 45] And so the reality of sin and the brokenness of the world is what causes us to doubt the truths of Scripture.

This brokenness and hurt that we live in, that we swim in, that we know is true. Because let's be honest, we're good Presbyterians. Our theology is rooted in this idea that we are sinners in need of a Savior.

And so I'm not going to deviate from that. I'm not going to stray from that. I'm not going to ever stop saying that. Because I do think we do, we need a Savior. We're not strong enough on our own.

But I think the struggle that we face is we doubt the strength of our Savior. We doubt and struggle and wrestle with the love of our God for His people.

And I think our students live in that. But I think all of us do. And so I wanted to remind you today as we tried to condense a semester's worth of teaching into just a couple of points that hopefully will help us, encourage us, and draw us closer to God Himself.

[8 : 58] As we try and move all those things to this space right here, we hope it encourages you. I hope it encourages you to remember the reality in which you live about who God is and how He knows you and loves you.

And so I want to make sure that despite our struggle, you cling to the truth. So let's, we're going to look at Psalm 139.

I'm going to read to you from Psalm 139 here. I want to read to you just this idea of being known by God. And so in Psalm 139 from David, it says, And then here's the question that I love.

Where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed and shield in the depths, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you.

[10:34] The night is bright as the day, for the darkness is as light as you. And the things that, we could do a whole sermon. I promise I'm not going to go till 945 tonight because each passage could be talked about over and over and over again.

But I want to make sure I communicate to you that God knows you in your highest of heights and your deepest depths. At your very best, at your very worst, God does not flee from your presence. When you are in Christ, God does not leave you or forsake you. Jesus promises us this, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, he shall neither leave us or forsake us.

He will be with us to the end of the age. And that here we see in King David, even in the Psalms, we see God's very presence with his people. And so into these places that we go, these struggles that we face in this world, God himself continues to go with us.

And so he knows you at your very best, which is great. I would love God to just be like, great job. I'd love him to just, you're doing great. But the comfort that I often find is that God knows me in my very worst.

[11:55] And he still remains our God. At the worst struggles, at the deepest hurts, at the biggest things in our lives, God still knows us at our very worst.

And then I want us to, so we know that God knows us at our very best and our very worst. In the book of John, as we kind of pivot. So if God knows us at our very best and our very worst, surely he couldn't care about me.

I'm in my, in a place in my life right now where I'm just far off from him. There's no way. And in John chapter four, we're seeing this, Jesus had this interaction with a Samaritan woman.

We're not going to read the whole book because, or the whole chapter, because I think that would make us, again, I'm 45. We're not, we're not aiming for that goal. But he interacts with this Samaritan woman.

And he relays to her about her life and how the man she's with isn't even her husband then. And she's had many husbands. And, and the woman, when she is interacting and Jesus is giving her information about, so that she might never thirst again.

[13:08] From this well that never runs dry. And he's speaking about himself. He's speaking about himself being the well that never runs dry. Being this water that might, she might never thirst again. But because he relayed to her this information about her life, I was so struck by her reaction.

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. And this is what she said. This Samaritan woman who in many ways with the Jews would be, have been considered enemies, idolaters, people who have tainted the real religion of Israel and the Jewish people.

Jesus interacts with her. He knows her sin. He actually lays it out before her. And tells her all about it. And she, in understanding who he is, this is the Messiah.

He is the Savior of the world. Jesus, this prophet, this man told me everything I ever, I ever did. And then when she goes to tell people, it is no longer, the Samaritans respond with, it is no longer because of what you said, we believe, for we've heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.

So God knows that you're best and you're worst, but God also knows you personally. God has not forsaken you. God is knowledgeable about you in your situation, your place, your life, your house here in Huntsville, Alabama, even now.

[14:54] And he knows this woman even in her worst. But Jesus, even though he knows that she is at her worst, she is the one who he came to save.

Jesus knows that this woman and all of us, because of what we've said in Romans chapter 3, that all of us are sinners. And so God came to save those.

And even though he knows that they are sinners, he has come to save those who are in sin. He's come to save those he has known.

So even though God knows us at our very worst, those are the ones he has come to save. So as we pivot from there again to Luke chapter 5, we see this story of the call of Levi.

One of my favorite passages in all of the Gospels is after this, he went out and he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, follow me.

[16:04] And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made for him a great feast in his house. And there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples saying, why do you eat and drink with

tax collectors and sinners?

And Jesus answered them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And so let's pause. So we've said that you're known by God. He knows you at your very best, your very worst.

He knows you personally. He's interacted with this Samaritan woman in such a way that laying out details of her life, that there's no way he could just know this unless he is the Messiah, unless he is the Christ, unless he is the Savior.

And who has Jesus come for? Jesus has come for sinners. And so even though God knows us in our weakest, worst, and most terrible places, God comes for sinners so that they might know life and righteousness and relationship with the true God of the universe.

[17:29] Jesus, the friend of sinners. The one who was there, who spoke all of creation into being, has come to give sinners life and life eternal.

So I'm going to, let's make sure we remember this, that we're known by God. And so there's two ways that I typically go in this, my own personal struggle with being known by God. I'm just, lay it out there.

I'm either going to be incredibly terrified by this, that God knows me. If God knows me the way he knows the Samaritan woman, I am honestly terrified.

The things that go on in my life, the sins that I commit, the times that I raise my voice in my children, and that's just a euphemism for all any other bad thing I've done in my life.

That, that terrifies me. That makes me uncomfortable. That, that scares me. And on the other side, you've got this reality that it's such a relief.

[18:32] Oh, God knows me. I'm not some far off, unknown person to God. I'm not some forgotten piece of his creation.

I'm not some random person. I'm not some small speck of nothingness. But the fact that God knows me immediately restores this feeling of value.

That the very God of the universe who could speak creation into being cares deeply enough to know broken sinners so that they might know him. That the God of the universe who is above and knows everything and has done everything, is all powerful, all these things that we can't comprehend.

He knows me. And he cares enough to know me at my best and my worst. And he cares enough to know me and to make his presence known in my life in such a way that I might even get to share in salvation and live in him for all my days.

It gives us this great opportunity to no longer hide or live in the shadows where our sin creeps.

[19:54] It allows us to be transparent with a God that actually forgives, actually calls sinners to repentance, actually redeems sinners and cleanses us of our sin.

So, as I've wrestled with this, one of the things that we try and say, we talk about, is the safest person in the room is the one who's honest and repentant.

The Christian is the one whose sin has been dealt with. And so, the beauty of this God knowing us is that even in our repentance, God knows what we've done even before we, the words on our tongue.

And yet, we feel this sense of relief. We can feel this sense of relief because God himself knows us. And so, since it's been dealt with by the cross, we can be transparent.

We can be people who reveal ourselves to and admit and confess and repent to our God in the ways that we're called to. God is comfortable with redeeming sinners.

[21:17] We are the ones he has come for. And he knows us more deeply and relationally than we could ever imagine. And I think that as we think on, yes, God knows me, but could he really love me?

Could he really care about me? Could he dare to give me any sort of love that would be meaningful? And I think that oftentimes I'm guilty of being very clinical and maybe robotic in kind of this idea of knowing that God loves me.

Yes, I can regurgitate to you verses of the Bible that tell me that I'm loved by God. But I'd be remiss to say I wish that I couldn't just attribute it to my dad, but a lot of different people, this love that God has for us.

And I don't mean to demean it because we don't want to take sin very seriously. I've already said that. Sin is spiritual death. And yet God seems to be one who wants to bring life to his people. But God loves us. And even though we feel this sense of weakness, brokenness, sin, God loves us in our warts and all kind of moment.

[22 : 46] Because one of the beauties of it, this is a very almost crude saying, Southern, I would say, but perhaps transcendent beyond Southern, but warts and all. But I remember having this conversation with my own dad about being married.

And this is before I was married and how he and my mom dealt with conflict and struggle and differences. And he said, I didn't marry your mom because she was perfect. I married her warts and all.

And that's a crude saying. I hope my mom doesn't get mad when she listens to this sermon that I've relayed that information. But he married her even though he knew she wasn't perfect.

God redeems imperfect people and continues to love his imperfect people. We see it in his faithfulness and his long suffering through all of Israel's history.

We see it in pictures of how they turn from him and turn to idols over and over and over again. And yet we are deeply known by God, but we're also deeply loved by God.

[23 : 48] And there's three things that we want to try and talk about briefly. Is that first that it's in this love that's revealed to us in Jesus.

We are loved with a costly love. We are loved with a costly love. It is not love that is just flippant. It is not love that is unintentional.

It is love that costs God at the deepest, his own son, so that we might have life. Most of us know and could perhaps regurgitate John 3, 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. I love what Romans tells us here in chapter 5.

For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die.

[24 : 55] But God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The kind of love that God has for his people is a costly love.

It's one that he was willing to give his only begotten son so that we might have eternal life. That we might know we were loved by a God who acts despite our brokenness and because of our brokenness to bring us back to himself and make us righteous before him.

To make us holy, to make us in right relationship with him. God reveals his love for us in this act that Jesus, this act of God that Jesus gives his life so that we might have life eternal.

But not because we've earned it, which we talked about in this past semester. We talked about looking at Israel and how God declares they weren't mighty among the nations. They weren't the best, they weren't the biggest, they didn't have the biggest army.

But yet, God, because of his steadfast love and his covenant, he, he loved them. And he redeemed them. Because of his steadfast love and his willingness to draw his people back to himself, he gave his only son.

[26 : 18] His love extends to us through the loss of his son. And it is a big, big cost.

And that must mean our sin is very big. But God's love is greater still. And because it's greater still, we want to see here in Ephesians, as we kind of continue to work through these passages, that God's love is much bigger than we could ever imagine.

It's a love that surpasses even our knowledge or our understanding. It's something that's hard to comprehend. It's something that we can't get our heads and minds wrapped around. It says this, that in Ephesians, that so Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

That we can't understand that you may be filled with all the fullness of God, that we could not even comprehend the love of God. It is so much bigger than we could ever imagine.

I often try, I don't know, I feel like I'm not trying to, I'm not trying to encourage anyone in this, please.

[27 : 39] But often when you see things like this past month, when like a \$1.1 billion lottery happens, I can't, I'm trying to imagine in my mind the kind of money that they're talking about.

A billion dollars. That's more money than I could ever fathom any person needing or wanting. And there's nothing wrong with money used to the glory of God, to God's, I'm not saying that for a

lottery, I'm not making a statement, please don't.

Let's just keep it there. I'm just trying to make the point that it's a lot of money. But the reality of that is that it's hard for me to fathom it. If you're familiar with, if you were a child of the 90s, as I am, I say child of, I'm a two decade child, that was the 80s and the 90s.

There's a show called Duck Tales. Is anyone familiar with Duck Tales from growing up? Okay. And Scrooge McDuck would swim in a giant building full of gold coins.

I'm trying to understand and try and give an idea of comprehending how big God's love is. And so when I think of the lottery and the wealth and the, how much money that, 1.1 billion dollars, or how much money Scrooge McDuck is swimming around in gold coins, I cannot even get my head wrapped around how much it is.

[29 : 08] And even that dwarfs and it pales and is worthless compared to the love of God. Because the love of God transcends even our thoughts.

It transcends even any way we could think about it. It is so big that it is incomprehensible.

At least we can put a comma and talk about money. But we cannot put a comma on God's love because it is inexhaustible.

So not only does God's love, not only is it costly, not only does it surpass knowledge, but it is ultimately transformative.

In 1 John, we're reminded what God's love does because it's not inactive. It's transformative. See, in 1 John, it says this, see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God.

[30 : 17] And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

Multiple places in the New Testament, it talks of the transformation of adoption and how we are made into God's children, his sons and daughters.

So that we might be a part of his family. And so when this is where kind of that blurring of the line of being known and loved kind of becomes in this place where we become transformed and we've been made like into his children, where we were once sinners, we were once far off, we were once far away and now we are his people, now we are his children.

And so not only are we his children, I often think back to where my friend would talk about his son and his daughter. And if we are his children, I'm grateful for my friend, I'm grateful for the way he describes because this is where I'm reminded that this is the way God delights in his children.

And I have to remind myself, oh, that's Bill. He's an only okay pastor. He's doing great. He's doing this.

[31 : 52] I try to put myself in the place where God would actually talk about me that way. And I promise my ego doesn't need it.

I promise I'm too much of a sinner. But I have to remind myself that God's deep love isn't just for his people. It is for me as well. It is for you.

And God has transformed you and adopted you and made you his own children. And so as we kind of wrap up here in the end, people who are now known and loved and transformed by that love, since we are known and loved by God in Christ, we can know and love God himself.

We can understand. I don't want it to just be some sort of clinical or educational thing. It's something that transforms us so that we might love God himself. And so I'm going to give you a little sneak peek into what we're trying to do today in our Connect Hour across the street.

Okay? So we are people who know and love God. So we've talked about this. We've talked about this passage from Deuteronomy about hero Israel, the Lord our God.

[33 : 14] The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And these words I command you shall be on your heart. Here's what we're trying to do and just to kind of connect the dots.

If you don't know, my goal, and I think it's a biblical goal, is not to have a ministry to our students and our youth that is entertaining.

It can be fun. It can be great. It can be a lot of relationships and connection, but our desire above all else is that they would know and love God and that they would walk with God not just now in this brief time in middle school and in high school, but that they would walk with the God of the universe all their lives.

We want them to know Christ with a lasting knowledge, with a lasting love. our heart for them is that they would love the Lord their God with all their heart, all their soul, and all their might.

And today, we're going to take that passage and some other passages across the street and we're going to encourage them. We're going to take a time to think about what are the things that we might know and love about God in this coming year.

[34 : 34] what are the things that, not that we would set a resolution, we're not trying to have our kids step into some sort of self-help, spiritual New Year's resolution.

What we're trying to do is encourage them in their walk with Jesus both now and forever. And so, because God has known us, God has loved us, God has moved us, we are able by His Holy Spirit, by His grace, to know and love Him.

And so, people who are transformed by God, who love God, who have been loved by God, who have been known by God, are able to know and love Him. So, we're not going to hold your students back, the students of this church, to say, oh, we're going to wait.

Once you get older, then you can start doing this serious work. But that all of us, all of us who've been transformed by Christ, all of us who have been known and loved by Jesus, that we might step into this reality to know and love God.

So, when you come across the street, our hope is that you would grow when you are a middle school or high school student, that you would know and love God and grow more and more with that.

[35 : 57] But just like I said earlier today, I don't think that's just our goal for our students. My encouragement to you would be what are the ways this year, maybe you can walk away like we're trying to do and encourage our students to see Jesus and cling tightly.

What are the things that you love and you delight in in Jesus? What are the things that you know about God and encourage you about your relationship with God? My personally has lately been this idea of remembering who I am in my identity as a Christian.

Not just as his beloved son, but someone who is a servant of Christ, someone who is called to be a voice for telling others about Jesus.

These kind of things that we wrestle with are what we're called to as we move to know and love God. So as you think on these realities, these things that God has laid before us in his word, would you pray for us?

Would you pray with us? May we work together as God's people here at Southwood to encourage and point one another to the beautiful ways that God knows us, the beautiful ways we can know God, and the beautiful ways God has loved us and how we might love him.

[37 : 19] Let's pray. Father, we're grateful for this time together in your word. We pray that you would use this to encourage us, to help us.

Lord, may we know you more and more. May we love you more and more as we seek to glorify you during this year. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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