

Joke: Three friends decided to go deer hunting together. One was a lawyer, one a doctor, and the other a preacher.

As they were walking, along came a big buck. The three of them shot simultaneously. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three rushed up to see how big it actually was.

Upon reaching it they found out that it was dead but had only one bullet hole. Thus a debate followed concerning whose buck it was.

A few minutes later a game officer came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him their reason for the debate. The officer told them he would take a look and tell them who shot it.

Within a few seconds the game officer said with much confidence, "The pastor shot the buck!"

They all wondered how he knew that so quickly.

The officer said, "Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other."

Known Week 2 - Known By God

God is the only one who fully knows you and loves you. And He knows what's best for us and He works the best in us and out of our lives.

Welcome to week 2 of our sermon series, *Known*. As I mentioned last week I think to know and be known are two of our deepest desires we have as relational beings.

And in this fast paced, disconnected digital world, it's easy to have all the followers, all the connections, and all the fans but still feel completely alone.

But here's the good news we serve an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving Creator who knows us more deeply than anyone.

And as we learned last week, Psalm 139 gives us a clear picture of at least two things that we need to hold close to us at all times.

- God's comprehension and understanding of all things has no limits. He knows and sees all aspects of our lives, for better or worse.
- And this all-knowing, all-seeing God of the universe says that we are wonderful.

How incredible is that?

And today, we're going to take a deeper look together as we seek to understand what it is to live *known by God*.

Depending on who you ask, or what article you're reading it's generally understood that America is facing an, "epidemic of loneliness." The statistics vary, but when surveyed it appears that about half of the population experiences significant loneliness. The numbers are regularly higher among young people and the elderly and obviously the global pandemic affected everyone, exacerbating an ever-increasing problem.

But this is not how it's supposed to be. We were meant for more, designed as relational beings born into families and wired for fellowship. Isolation and loneliness are awful ways to live! No wonder they use solitary confinement as a punishment to discipline criminals.

But God already knows that isolation and loneliness is no way to live, doesn't He?

God knows.

Turn with this morning to Galatians 4. I want to start at verse 8.

Galatians 4:8–9 (NIV): Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Hear Paul's pastoral heart in these verses. In part, what he's saying is, "Hey church, you know all those false gods, those idols you are serving. . . Well they don't know you at all. They don't care about you, in fact you're enslaved by them."

I love this verse

Acts 17:16–23 (NIV): While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening

to the latest ideas.) 22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

Truth is, Idolatry is a one-way dead end road.

And yet still, all of us choose at some point or another to see how far down that road goes. Each one of us at some point have settled for less than God has for us because other things seemed more important.

Martha did. . .

Luke 10:38–42 (NIV): As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” 41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Now I’m not suggesting that Martha had an idol of cooking come before Jesus, but she was distracted by the task that had to be done.

And far too often we get distracted as well. And anything that is more important to us than God can easily become an idol.

And there comes a point when we realize just how far gone we are, just how dark the road has become, and we turn back to God.

Remember the prodigal son? (talk about it)

And so, we look to re-establish our connection - which we talked about last week - and we commit or recommit ourselves to an actual relationship with the creator of the universe, God.

When we come to know and understand God we realize, as Paul identifies in our Galatians passage, that God already knows us.

He knew us from the very beginning and He knows everything about our lives. . . nothing is hidden from Him. He's there when we sleep and when we rise. He's there in the pain and the triumph.

He's always watching over us.

At some point, we realize that with God, we're never alone.

Matthew 28:20 (NIV): and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

With us when. . . ?

Deuteronomy 31 tells us, He'll never leave or forsake us.

And for those of you in the room, or watching online who think you've done things too horrible to be counted as one with God. Or maybe you have something awful going on in your life right now that you can't reconcile with God's grace and mercy. Let me take a moment to remind everyone here, myself included. . . That He loves us and knows us, even at our worst.

Romans 5:8 (NIV): But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8 (TPT): But Christ proved God's passionate love for us by dying in our place while we were still lost and ungodly!

The key to this verse is how Paul identifies God's demonstration of love for us; It was by sending His son to die on our behalf, while we were still sinners.

We couldn't work hard enough to earn salvation, it's only because of God's grace that we have been saved. It's not based on anything you could or couldn't do, it's based upon the Father's unconditional love for you and I.

God chose to send salvation even though He knew full well we were an enemy.

Romans 5:10 (NIV): For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life

And so, in spite of our faults, in spite of our idolatrous ways, in spite of ourselves. . .God chose to provide a path to reconciliation and redemption. He chose to once and for all establish an incorruptible connection with His creation through His Son Jesus.

He sees everything from beginning to end and He knows everything. He knows what you need and how you need it.

And He sees the best in His creation, and He knows how to draw the best out as well.

We've already discussed God's all-knowing and all-powerful attributes. Admittedly it's both comforting and for some maybe scary to think about God knowing every last detail of our lives.

We can be free from hiding things from Him because at the end of the day nothing is hidden from Him.

But what happens when we are living in a way we think is best, when in fact it is not? Who can we turn to when we need someone to check our blind spots? I believe this is where the all-knowing character of God becomes so important. He is able to see, and know, what's best for us.

Proverbs says it like this;

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV): Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Who knows you better than God?

Who knows your strengths, weaknesses, and future better than God?

Who knows what's best for you?

I love how the Scriptures reveal this idea in Acts 9, this is where we read about the conversion of Saul.

Acts 9:1–19 (NIV): Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and

heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”
5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. 11 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”
13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”
17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

In this passage we see Jesus, quite literally, intervene in Saul’s life. And what an intervention it was! Saul was traveling, still breathing threats and murder, to root out and persecute as many disciples of Christ as He could. He believed the path he was on was the best path. In fact, because of his Jewish upbringing and rabbinical training, Saul believed it was the most righteous path.

But God knew better.

Jesus knew there was more for Saul's life.

And that's where we see God's all-knowing nature come into play.

Listen again to what the Lord says to Ananias about Saul;

Acts 9:15 (NIV): But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Wait, what, Paul the terrorist a chosen instrument?

God knew what He had created Saul to become.

Going back to what we learned last week from Psalm 139, we know God formed and knit Saul together. God created him with purpose and it wasn't to imprison or kill off the people that followed Jesus.

He was *chosen* to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and the Jews.

Saul turned Paul would go on to become one of the most prolific missionaries the world has ever known. He established countless churches and wrote much of what we now have as the New Testament.

Included in those writings is Paul's letter to the church he helped establish in Galatia. It's the letter we referenced to begin our time today and I want to return now to what Paul said in Galatians 4:9;

"But now that you know God—or rather are known by God..." (Gal. 4:9)

Paul understood, maybe better than anyone, that as he came to know and understand God. . . God's heart for His people, His church, His kingdom, and eternity. . . As Paul knew more, he realized that God knew him. From the beginning, God knew Paul and purposed him and chose him to be an integral part of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth.

God knew Saul at his worst, and believe me when I say that his worst is some of the worst you can be in terms of the kingdom.

What he did to persecute and destroy the early church were terrible acts of intolerance and hatred.

But God knew there was more to Saul.
And He called him out.
He called Him up.
And He knew how to get Saul's attention.

Saul turned Paul is a story about God's eternal understanding and comprehension. It's a story about a man, known and loved by God, who helped turn the world upside down with the gospels good news of Jesus Christ.

And if God knows how to get the best out of someone like Saul, you better believe He knows how to do the same in your life.

As we wrap up our time today, I want us to read the second half of the Galatians 4:9 once again. The entire verse says this;

Galatians 4:9 (NIV): But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Truth be told, there are seasons in our lives where we can feel less connected in our relationship with God than we desire. We all have gone through those wilderness seasons.

Sometimes, it can be due to a lack of effort and engagement on our part and sometimes it can simply be a symptom of an extremely difficult and trying time.

The key however, is to recognize that we were created as relational beings, which we'll talk more about next week, and that we will seek out connection, one way or another. It's in those seasons we keep the hunger, we keep longing for and running after God.

Oftentimes, that deep rooted need and desire inside of us, to know and be known, will lead us back down the wrong path as we try to fill the void with other things.

But, as Paul would say, "how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?"

Those things leads to slavery.

And it leads to an extremely lonely way to live.

But God has so much more for you. He has redemption and reconciliation available through the sacrifice that Jesus made for you.

He knows you and He loves you.

And today is as good a day as any other to repent and turn from any idol or earthly thing looking to occupy a space in your life

solely meant for God. Those other 'things' will enslave you, Jesus will set you free.

So take some time today, tomorrow, this week and prayerfully consider what we've talked through today. Recommit yourself, re-establish the connection, and return to the only one in the universe who fully knows and loves you.

Just like Saul, God is calling you out and up today, let's respond together in worship and prayer.

I want to close with some extra time of worship this morning.

Join us next week as we look into Kingdom connections.