WATCHMAN NEE

The Way to Know God

Living Stream Ministry

THE WAY TO KNOW GOD

by Watchman Nee

DEALING WITH GOD

AND BEING DEALT WITH BY GOD (1)

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Scripture Reading: Luke 22:41-45; Col. 1:9-12; Matt. 2:4-6; 26:42, 44; 22:29; Psa. 103:7; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; John 11:49-51; Heb. 8:10-11

This morning we have read the Scriptures about an event which took place several days before the Lord Jesus was crucified. The Sadducees came to Jesus asking Him concerning the matter of resurrection. They said there were seven brothers with them. The first one married a wife and died and left no children. His widow became the wife of the second brother. Likewise, the second brother also died, and the third became the husband. This continued until the seventh brother, who also eventually died. Last of all, the woman died. Whose wife would she be at the time of resurrection? The Lord gave them a very clear answer: "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). I am not going to expound on the marriage of the seven brothers, but point out from this verse two very deep principles which relate to our spiritual living. The first principle is to know the Bible, and the second is to know the power of God. Christians should have two kinds of knowledge: the first is the knowledge of the Bible, and the second is the knowledge of God.

Among God's seeking children, there are two kinds of people: the first kind know the Bible but lack the knowledge of God's power; the other kind know God's power but not the Bible. Very few Christians have both kinds of knowledge in a balanced way. Some believers have considerable Bible

knowledge but know nothing about God's will, nature, and ways of working. My intention is not to talk about the equal importance of these two things, but to tell you that it is not enough to just know the Bible; we have to know God's power as well. I will assume that all of you know the Bible. What we want to see now is how to know God. It is not enough just to have the knowledge of the Bible; we must also know God. However, if we want to know God, we need to deal with God and be dealt with by God. Without dealing with God and being dealt with by God, we cannot know God. The knowledge of God comes from dealing with God and being dealt with by God. Apart from this there is no other way. This is what all of us should pay attention to.

MERE BIBLE KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT NECESSARILY MAKE ONE KNOW GOD

One day several magi came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:2). They asked this question everywhere along their way. When Herod the king heard this, his heart was troubled, and assembling in haste all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked where Christ was to be born (v. 4). At that time did anyone among them say, "I do not know; let me go back to check the Scripture"? Did anyone say, "I have forgotten what the Scripture says; let me go back and look it up"? No, they could recite immediately, "In Bethlehem of Judea" (v. 5). This proves that the priests and the scribes knew the Scriptures very well. When they were asked, they answered immediately. Was their answer wrong? No, it was right. But strangely, not one scribe or priest went to Bethlehem. They knew the exact answer, but they only told the magi from the east to go to Bethlehem. They were like traffic policemen who only direct people from one place to another with a police stick in their hand, while remaining unmoved. The priests and scribes knew the Scriptures well, but they never took any action to look for the Messiah. The magi probably found out from the book left behind by Daniel about the One who was born to be the King of the Jews. Therefore, they came to seek the Lord despite the long journey. It is interesting to see that some people without Bible knowledge had the zeal to seek for Christ, while those with Bible knowledge did not seek for the Lord. It was the men from the east who came to seek the Lord from a long distance. Eventually, they found the Lord. Therefore, those who only have Bible knowledge do not necessarily know God.

This was true not only concerning Christ's birth; it was also true concerning Christ's death. It was Caiaphas who prophesied, "Nor do you take account of the fact that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people and that not the whole nation perish" (John 11:50). It was also Caiaphas and his father-in-law who sentenced Jesus to death. Therefore, we can see that it is useless to have only Bible knowledge without the knowledge of God. This is why God prophesied again and again through the prophet Jeremiah, "I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And they will no longer teach, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them" (Jer. 31:33-34). The outward knowledge of the Bible is not sufficient; this knowledge also needs to be written within man. The result of this inward writing is knowing God. We hope all the brothers and sisters will realize that mere biblical knowledge is not enough; we need to pursue the knowledge of God as well.

Today an unfortunate phenomenon exists in many places: too few people know God. Brothers and sisters, it is possible for us to acquire much Bible knowledge without knowing God. If all that a man has is only some Bible knowledge, he is merely making weapons of reeds, which will collapse when the wind blows and which are completely powerless when it comes to fighting the warfare. Who can say today that he knows God's purpose, God's desire, God's will, and the way of God's work? I have often said that the knowledge of God is more precious than anything else. Nothing is more precious than this. A man can open up the Bible and can expound a passage very well. Yet at the same time, he can know nothing at all about God. Although he can say a great deal, he knows nothing concerning the knowledge of God. Originally, the knowledge of the Bible was to lead people to the knowledge of God. But this is not true today.

THE WAY TO KNOW GOD

The prayer of our Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane was for the purpose of knowing God's will. Gethsemane means the place where oil is pressed. Our Lord knew that He ought to press out the oil there, so He knelt down and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). The Bible tells us that He prayed the same way for a second time and that the words He used in His third

prayer were the same. He did not just pray once and then foolishly let it go; He prayed three times. When He finished the third prayer the Bible says, "He rose up from prayer" (Luke 22:45). He left when the prayer was done, and "He came to the disciples and said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour has drawn near, and the Son of Man is being delivered up into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going" (Matt. 26:45-46). When He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "All things are possible to You; remove this cup from Me" (Mark 14:36). But when Peter cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest with a sword, Jesus said, "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). When He was praying at Gethsemane, He was unsure of the cup; but when He was walking on His way, He had no doubt about this cup. He was willing to drink it. Through the three prayers, He came to know God. He never assumed anything; He wanted to deal with God and know God through His prayers. He dealt with God and was also dealt with by God.

There was a thorn in the flesh of the apostle Paul. We will not consider what this thorn was, but since it was a thorn, it must have been something that made him uncomfortable, something that stung him all the time. He also said that a messenger of Satan often buffeted him. Therefore, this thorn must have caused him constant discomfort. He could not overcome this thorn without the power of Christ tabernacling over him. He prayed three times to ask the Lord that it might depart from him. But the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul was clear. Did he pray the fourth time? No. While he was praying the third time, God spoke to him, and he was clear. Paul was another person who did not want to make decisions according to his own knowledge. He desired to deal with God through prayer so that he could know God and know His will concerning certain matters.

From the experiences of the Lord and the apostle Paul we can see one principle: if a man desires to know God, he must learn how to deal with God. In other words, we have to deal with God and be dealt with by God. When many Christians encounter difficulties or problems, they let them slip by and are never dealt with by God. They do not know why God gives them such difficulties. When someone else encounters the same problem, they also do not know the reason. This kind of person may read the Bible every day, they may have knowledge and light, but they do not know God's will. This is

grossly inadequate. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, we must deal with God and be dealt with by God. Only then will we truly know Him.

HOW TO PRACTICE

For example, every one of us has his own particular sins which he cannot overcome. With some, one sin stumbles them, while with others, another sin stumbles them. Some people cannot overcome pride, and others cannot overcome jealousy. Some cannot overcome their temper or the world or lust. Everyone knows that they have a special sin, but they cannot overcome it. By reading the Bible, some have come to know Romans 6:14, which says, "For sin will not lord it over you," and Romans 8:1-2, which says, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death." They may have scriptural knowledge concerning these matters, but they still cannot overcome their sins. The truth they obtain cannot be carried out in practice. I am afraid that among us today there are some brothers and sisters who are like this! If a believer who has failed to overcome sin comes to them, they can tell him the high teaching of victory over sin, when in fact they may still be in the bondage of sins that they are unable to overcome. Consequently, the brother who came to consult with them will only gain some knowledge of sin, but still will be unable to experientially overcome his own sins. This indicates that they only have the knowledge of the Bible. They have never been dealt with by God and have no knowledge of God's power.

How do we know God through His dealings? Suppose you lose your temper quite often, and you come to God's presence and ask God to eradicate the root of your sin. Soon there may be a brother who comes to you asking for help on overcoming this sin. You may tell him to ask God to eradicate the root of his sin of temper, like removing a tooth. (I wish that such a thing could happen. But we have said many times that this is impossible. We cannot eradicate the root of sin; rather, the more we try to eradicate the root, the stronger it becomes.) After the second one learns the teaching, he will also begin to teach others in the same way. However, they will find that not only is the root of sin not removed, but it has actually taken deeper root. If you fear God, you will not easily let the sins that you cannot overcome go by; you will certainly want to deal with God. You must come before God and pray once, twice, three times, asking God to tell you what this is all about. God will then show you the truth in Romans 6:6. God has dealt with the body of sin by crucifying the old

man; He has not eradicated the root of sin from the flesh. Instead, He has crucified the old man through the cross.

After a while you find yourself losing your temper again. You may want to ask a brother what has happened. He may tell you that when the Lord Jesus was crucified, your old man was crucified with Him and that you will overcome if you count yourself as dead. In this way you will acquire more new knowledge. However, when temptation comes, no matter how much you reckon yourself dead, it will be useless. Your temper will still be there. You may think that this method does not work. Although the Bible says clearly that this kind of reckoning will make you overcome, you find yourself still being defeated. If you are one who fears God, you will ask God again. By then you will realize that you do not reckon yourself dead with Christ when temptation comes. Rather, you died with Christ more than nineteen hundred years ago. Your heart will rest upon what Christ has accomplished. When temptation comes you will know that your old man died more than nineteen hundred years ago. You will not need to take hold of any particular word; you will only need to rest on the work that God has accomplished.

However, a short time later the temptation will come back, and you will find yourself losing your temper again. If you do not fear God, you will probably stop here. But if you fear God, you will not be satisfied with Bible knowledge. You will ask God again, saying, "God, Your Word tells me that my old man has been crucified with You; why can I not overcome my sin?" You will deal with God again. Perhaps God will tell you that you are wrong in certain things, or perhaps He will tell you that you do not realize the corruption of your flesh and that you are dependent on yourself. This is why He allows you to err or stumble, so that you will realize the corruption of the flesh. You will then learn another lesson; you will know your self and the corruption of your flesh. In this way you will not dare to do anything but humbly ask God to protect you, and you will no longer trust in your flesh.

But before long you will fail again. If you fear God, you will come before God to deal with God, saying, "Why is it that I still cannot overcome my sin? I have reckoned my old man dead and have known the corruption of my flesh. Why do I still fail?" You may pray once, twice, three times, even four or five times. You may ask God to speak to you. In the end God may grant you the revelation to see that sin is like the fruit of a tree. The tree of life bears fruit every month and bears twelve kinds of fruit, but the root of sin produces

thousands of different kinds of fruits. There is only one root of sin, but its fruit multiplies day after day. God may say, "If you only deal with one sin and neglect the other sins, the other sins will come back, and you will find yourself committing the same old sinful habits as before." If you only deal with your temper, while the other sins are still there, before long the sin of temper will come back. You have not dealt with your pride or your jealousy, and you have forgotten to deal with other sins like your unclean thoughts. All those who forget to deal with other sins will find their past sins coming back to them. All those who forget to deal with the root of sin will find the miscellaneous sins coming back to them. If you only pay attention to your temper, you will fail. But if you pay attention to dealing with sin itself, God will bless you.

While you are dealing with your sin this way, you may think that you have overcome and are walking on the broad way to victory; you may think that now you can live peacefully. But perhaps not too long afterward, sin will come back again, and you will find yourself failing again. This is a critical time, and you must not relax. You have to come before God once more to ask Him to deal with you. After praying once or twice, God may give you another new revelation. You will realize how you should live after you have overcome. God will show you that all Christ has accomplished on the cross can be maintained only in fellowship with God. God may say that your prayer and reading of the Bible have become lax or that you have been rising too late every day; therefore, your fellowship with God has been frustrated. This does not mean that the work of Christ on the cross has failed. It only means that the accomplishment of Christ on the cross can only be maintained in the atmosphere of fellowship with God.

Perhaps after a few days, you will lose your temper again. You will pray the same way again, asking God to deal with you. Perhaps God will say that you are good in everything but that you still have not obeyed one of His commandments. This may be a specific commandment that God has for you. You have been touched, but you have refused and procrastinated. As a result, God allows you to lose your victory. You have not obeyed, and your old sins begin to come back again. Therefore, brothers and sisters, as long as we disobey once, we will not overcome sin. In the past I have often shared with you the matter of trusting and obeying. This is the secret to victory. If one slackens in his obedience, his faith will be weakened.

ONE WHO KNOWS GOD

If you know God and have experienced God's dealings, you will know at which point someone cannot get through. Since you may have experienced dealing with God more than fifty times in certain matters, you can help others go through the same. You are not just telling someone about the Bible, but are telling them about God.

Last summer many famous people were speaking at a very popular spiritual conference. Someone told me that I should attend because a certain one gave good messages during those few days. I went there once. The subject of the message was "The Infilling of the Holy Spirit." The Scriptures he used were quite adequate, and the parables and logic were also very good. But after he spoke for ten minutes, I asked myself, "Is this the so-called infilling of the Holy Spirit?" His preaching was good, but several laymen's words slipped out from his mouth; therefore, I knew that he did not know God in this matter at all. He did not know anything about the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Mere Bible knowledge cannot make one know God or minister God. We must learn to take the way of the cross and must experience God's dealings. The Lord did not say, "I am the Son of God, so I do not need to worry about God's will." On the contrary, He prayed to the Father once, twice, and even three times, until He finished the prayer. Then He said, "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

The apostle Paul also prayed to the Lord again and again until the Lord spoke to him: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). Later Paul was misunderstood by the Corinthians. Second Corinthians express Paul's sorrow, while Philippians expresses Paul's joy. Only these two books among Paul's epistles express his emotions. But I love to read the Epistles to the Corinthians more than the Epistle to the Philippians. The Corinthians misunderstood him and said that he was not honest and that God consequently made him sick. Paul did not ask God to remove his thorn in an attempt to avoid being laughed at by the Corinthians. He said, "Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:8-9a). Because God had spoken, he did not ask God to change His will. Paul said, "Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me" (2 Cor. 12:9b). No one can know God without first having dealings with Him. I have told several brothers that if anyone wants to progress, the only way is to be dealt with by God. If you do not accept God's dealing, you will never progress. If you want Bible knowledge, all you have to

do is study hard and receive some help from those who have Bible knowledge. But if you want to know God, there is no way except to deal with God personally and be dealt with by Him.

I often treasure very much the experience of those who know God. I know from their words that they are experienced in knowing God and that they truly know God. One sister from the West was truly a person who was waiting for the Lord's second coming. (Many scholars of prophecy do not even know what it is to wait for the Lord's second coming!) Whenever I went to her, I was afraid of doing anything, because as soon as she opened her mouth, I realized that she was a very experienced person. I remember that I prayed with her on the last day of 1925. She said, "Lord, are You really going to let 1925 go by? Do You really want to wait until 1926 before You will come back? Even on this last day, I will still ask You to come today." I knew what she was praying for. Several months later I met her on the street. She held my hand and said to me, "Brother, it is strange. Why has He still not come back today?" These words proved that she not only was a scholar of prophecy, but was also a person who had fellowship with God and who truly waited for the Lord. She knew God and was experienced in the matter of the Lord's coming again.

Once I talked to another sister. I thought she was not very experienced in spiritual things. But after a short conversation, I knew that she was very experienced. She was one who had passed through God's dealings and was a person who had dealt with God.

In Peking I met an old believer. He did not have much knowledge of the Bible. I did not think highly of some of his behavior either. But he really knew God. While I was talking to him, he said, "Christ is responsible for everything." He was rather poor, but both he and his wife were happy. He said that although he encountered many difficulties, Christ was responsible for everything. I asked him, "What then are you responsible for?" He said, "I am responsible for singing the praise." This is like King Jehoshaphat who, when going into battle, ordered the singers to sing before the battlefield (2 Chron. 20:21-22). I said, "Since you gave up everything for Christ, do you have any regrets at all?" He answered straightly, "You do not understand. Christ is responsible for everything; I am not responsible for it." You can see that regarding the matter of the Lord bearing our responsibility, he was far ahead of us. We can only be his student. He is an experienced person regarding the Lord's bearing of our responsibility. What he has is not just Bible knowledge,

but knowledge that he has learned from God. Some have really experienced God's dealing, and they know what it is to be dealt with by God.

NEVER STOPPING UNTIL ONE RECEIVES GOD'S DEALING

Not only do we have to deal with our sins, and not only do we have to know God, but we need dealings in our environment as well. For example, do you let everything that happens in your family go by freely? If you pray only once and then stop praying because you do not receive God's answer, you can never expect to know God. Paul surely was not like this. He prayed once, twice, even three times to the Lord until the Lord answered his prayers. If you are only willing to pray once, then you do not need to pray. If God does not answer you the first, second, or third time, you should pray ten times or a hundred times until God speaks to you. Keep in mind that any hastiness is contrary to faith and prayers. Faith is the most enduring thing. If God does not answer, you should be able to wait until you are one hundred years old. Abraham believed in hope in a situation that was against hope. Elisha told King Joash to beat the ground with an arrow. Joash only beat the ground three times, and Elisha said that he could only win the battle over the Syrians three times. If he would have beaten it several times more, he could have destroyed the Syrians (2 Kings 13:14-19). Our prayers should be the same. We cannot stop our prayers at two or three times.

Mr. Usher said that prayers are like putting name cards on a balance. You put one gram of weight on one side and then put the cards one by one on the other side. After the first one or two cards, the other side may not move; perhaps, only after you have added the last card will the weight be offset. Prayer is the same; you have to pray once, twice, three times, again and again. Perhaps by the last time, the prayer will be answered.

Therefore, we have to learn to deal with God. In our physical health, in our work, in our family, in every detail of our environment, we have to ask God to deal with us. I know a sister who is over sixty years old. She said to me that everything she encounters in her environment has something to do with her. I asked her, "Is this really true?" She said, "Yes." I thought that she only said this in her preaching and that the fact might not have been so. Once a brother had a cold, and she wrote to him: "What lesson have you learned from this cold?" I thought that it would be reasonable to learn something if he had a

severe disease like intestinal flu. But how could he learn a lesson from a small cold? But this brother received the help. He replied, "I did not normally pay attention to this. By your asking, this matter has come to my attention. I have been dealt with by God, and I have repented."

There was another brother whose relative was sick. This sister again wrote and said, "You have to be responsible for prayer. You should not allow this sickness to go on." Consequently, this brother also received help from her. Once she herself was sick in bed. Her co-worker was away in another place. She was out of money, and her cook also went home for some reason. She prayed continuously, asking God, "Why does this sickness come upon me?", and God showed her that this was not from Him, but this was Satan's attack. She said, "If this is due to my own problem, I can remain sick. But if this is Satan's attack, let the sickness be gone." She had been ill for four days with a high fever, but she stood up right after she prayed. At this time she wrote a song: "To the foe my word is always, `No,' / To the Father it is `Yes.'" We have this song in our hymn book. When she finished writing this song, she went out to work, and her sickness was over.

Wherever she was, she had God's hand with her. She fully understood Christ's victory. Once she told me that everything would be all right if we really knew Christ's victory. I could easily find Colossians 2:14-15 in the Bible, which says that Christ triumphed over everything on the cross, or Hebrews 2:14, which says that through death He destroyed him who has the might of death, or 1 John 3:8, which says that the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, or Revelation 12:11, which says that the brothers overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb. But whenever I heard of Christ's victory from this sister's mouth, I always felt that with her there seemed to be a special meaning. I did not understand this, and I was bewildered all the time. Once I stayed in her house and was very sick. At that time in addition to my sickness, I was really depressed in my heart because a few matters were still unresolved. She came to see me, and I told her my problems. After every phrase that I spoke, she stared at me and said, "Christ has won the victory." I said that I was not afraid of the outward sickness, but that whenever I thought about the inward problems that were not yet worked out, I broke out in a cold sweat, and I just could not bear it. She still said, "Christ has won the victory." I said, "You cannot say this. To the enemy you can say, `Christ has won the victory.' To sin, we can trust in the cleansing of the blood. To sickness, we can say that Christ has borne our infirmities. In all

these things, we can say that Christ has won the victory. But this is my own fault; I have a problem with God. How can you say Christ has won the victory?" But she still said, "Christ has won the victory." Then she read two verses to me. At that moment I became fully clear inside and out. On that day I realized what Christ's victory really meant. Prior to this I had only the Bible knowledge. From that day on, I received the real knowledge from God. I also realized that the victory I used to know was a weapon of reed and that it was useless. On that day I realized how much Christ's victory includes. Whether it be the enemy, sin, sickness, or personal business, Christ's victory covers them all. She knew Christ's victory through her repeated experience of God's dealings. She knew God, so she was able to help others.

Today many believers have not paid enough attention to Bible knowledge. Let me ask you: which book from among the sixty-six books of the Bible do you really know? It is a pity that most of today's Christians do not even understand one book in the Bible. But more pitiful than this is the fact that they are ignorant about the knowledge of God. If you want to know God, you have to deal with God concerning your body, your family, and your environment. You should not let anything go by carelessly. You have to pray until you have God's answer. By doing this you will learn a lesson which the Bible alone cannot teach you. If you do this you will know the next time that you have to deal with God in everything. If you learn this time after time, you will really know God.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OUR WORK

Let me also say a few words to those brothers and sisters who are co-workers. No one can work for God without knowing God. Many people who believe in the clergy-laity system think that as long as they go to the seminary to study the Bible, they can preach the gospel. I would like to ask this: when we preach the gospel to others, are we merely giving them some Bible expositions, or are we giving them the Savior? Is this merely Bible exposition, or are we telling others the good news? Even if the seminary is as good as you think, it can only teach you to understand the Bible; it cannot teach you to know God. Today many people understand the Bible, many can even systematize the Bible in a very good order, but how many of them can minister God and know God? We have to learn to know God before we can

work for God. Some people say that they want to do a personal preaching work. They hope that they can preach, but they have nothing to say when they come before the crowd. They are uncertain as to what they should say. Indeed, a man can only preach what he is touched by in the Word; he can only help others in the areas that God has touched him. What can we preach if we do not know God?

Suppose you have not dealt with a certain sin, and God's hand is always touching you concerning this point. Whenever you pray, God always points to this sin and says, "You have not dealt with this sin." He will not let you go. Next time when you see a brother in a similar situation, you will know that Bible knowledge alone cannot help him get through and that he has to deal with his sins. If you carelessly allow your sin to get by, and if you see a brother committing a similar sin, you will excuse him in your heart because you have been excusing yourself. If you do this, you cannot help him at all.

If a brother has a hard time rising up early, and if he has been caught and dealt with by God in this matter, when he sees another brother doing the same thing, he will lay hold of this brother and will tell him, "Brother, get up quickly; otherwise, the manna will be melted." He can help this brother because he has been dealt with by God.

Preaching the word is preaching what we have been dealt with by God. If this is not the case, even though we may preach something, we cannot lead others to what we preach. Today we have so much preaching with so little result because we have not been dealt with by God nor taught by God. If we only preach a Bible sermon that we have prepared in two or three hours, it will be merely a teaching, and it would be better for us not to preach it at all. We must have three to five years of experiencing God's dealing before we can preach something to others. New wine and aged wine are both useful, yet most people prefer aged wine because it is more tasteful. If we deal with everything that we run into every day, one by one, we can help those who encounter the same thing. Many of us do not know how to help young believers and sinners because we do not know what is within their hearts and what their backgrounds are. Under these circumstances, we cannot offer any help to them.

Do you know the difference between a discourse and a report? A discourse cannot render any help to people, but a report can. The discourse that you

expound may make others feel that you are very logical. But you cannot help others go on the way, because your discourse does not have any base to it. This is like an elementary school student composing a travelogue; he writes of sceneries which he has never seen. What about a report? A report means you have something in hand and can describe it point by point. You can only give a poor description; you can never give a wrong description. This is because what is described is real, something that can be touched and seen. Whether you are working on believers or unbelievers, the most important thing is that you have to be dealt with by God. After you are dealt with, you will speak the reality, and others will touch it.

Brothers and sisters, we have to deal with hundreds and thousands of events before God. Unfortunately, to this day we have neglected so many things that need to be dealt with by God. Day after day if we learn to be dealt with by God, we will know God in the long run. Many believers run around asking people questions, but they themselves never seek to know God. They may have been saved for many years, but they still do not know God. What a pitiful situation this is! We should ask God what we should do in this or that matter, and we should not stop asking until we know God. Do not pray just once and think that it is over. Again I say it would be better for those who only want to pray once to not pray at all.

Finally, I have to say that no lazy person can know God. I would also tell the co-workers that if something does not cause us to feel pained, we will never cause others to feel pained. I hope we learn to deal with God daily, and I hope that we are dealt with by Him daily. This kind of experience and condition is most precious. It is more precious to know God than to have mere Bible knowledge. May God bless us.

DEALING WITH GOD AND BEING DEALT WITH BY GOD

(2)

Issue No. 28

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:7; 12:8; Matt. 26:44

Today we will continue to consider the matter of knowing God. We will consider how we can learn to deal with God and how to be dealt with by Him. In other words, we will learn how to have dealings with God. Last time I mentioned only one aspect, which was how to deal with God. That was not enough. We should learn, step by step, to know God. If we know nothing about God's nature and how to communicate with Him, it will be impossible to go on. Today I want to mention two items: one is learning to know God through prayer, and the other is learning to know God through His will.

LEARNING TO KNOW GOD THROUGH PRAYER

One matter that causes many Christians to grope in darkness is that they do not know how to receive answers to prayer. Every Christian has a desire that God would listen to his prayers. If God listens to your prayers only once every three to five years or once every three to five months, you are what can be considered as an abnormal Christian. Many people barely have even one answer to their prayer. I do not mean that they do not pray; I mean that their prayers produce no effect. Many believers have no assurance about the things they pray for. They do not know whether or not God will answer their prayers. As time passes by, if they get what they pray for, they say that God has answered their prayers; if not, they say that God has not answered their prayers. They have no assurance at all from the beginning. We should be very rich, but because we do not know how to pray, we become very poor. How poor that God only answers our prayers once every three to five years! I have mentioned many times that we cannot live a life in which God does not answer our prayers. If this is the case, we have indeed fallen into an extremely poor condition.

Today I would like to talk about how a Christian should pray. How long should we pray before we obtain God's answer? What kind of assurance should we have after we pray, and what should the results be? What is the basis for this kind of knowledge? It comes from our knowledge of God. If you ask anyone these questions, he may tell you that you should pray to remove sin, that prayer should be with faith, or that you should pray according to God's will, etc. He may give many doctrines about prayer. However, many people understand prayer only through the Bible; they never understand prayer before God. They read the Bible and know the conditions for God to answer their prayers. But it is of little use to only have knowledge from the Bible without knowledge that is learned by dealing with God. We must spend time before God to learn to deal with Him and to be dealt with by Him; only then will we know God's requirements concerning prayer. Knowing God through prayer does not come by accident or by learning from others. Neither does it come by listening to my messages. A travel guide can only direct you to a place; he can never bring you there. If you do not go, you will never have any experience.

Brothers and sisters, suppose you have a desire or a request for God to fulfill, and you begin to pray for it. While you pray, you may or may not be very enthusiastic, and you may or may not have spent much time praying. But what is most interesting is that you never consider that you should know God through your prayer. You do not care whether or not God answers your prayer. For example, you may ask God for a book. One day God may indeed give you the book. You will think that God has answered your prayer and then forget about it. However, you should realize that you have not just received a book, but something more, which is the knowledge of God. Oh, only after you know how to ask will God answer! Receiving the book is not the most important thing. The precious thing is the acquisition of the knowledge of how God answers prayer. By praying this way, you are brought on further in the knowledge of God. Our knowledge should not only be from the Bible, but should also be from God Himself.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Suppose you ask God for another book and after four or five days, He has not given it to you; after two months God still has not given it to you. If after three or four months God still has not answered your prayer, and you do not know why, you must have a seeking and searching heart to ask Him why He

answered your prayer the first time but not this time. You must find the problem. The problem must not be on God's side. God has no lack, and He has the power to accomplish your prayer. The problem is definitely on your side. You ought to put aside the matter of asking for the book and search for the reason that there is no answer. You can ask God, saying, "God! I have asked You for a book. Why do You not give it to me?" When you earnestly seek and ask God to show you, God will tell you to deal with this and that matter before He will answer your prayer. After you have dealt with these matters, God will give you the book after three to five days. But by then you have not just received a book, but something deeper—the knowledge of God. This knowledge will cause you to not pray as before. You will know that you have to remove the barriers before God will answer your prayer.

All the knowledge we acquire from God comes by some amount of laboring; we cannot acquire this knowledge simply by reading or listening. If we learn how to deal with God and how to be dealt with by God in everything, that is, if we learn to have dealings with God in everything, we will know what God wants from us, what He wants to remove from us, and what He wants to accomplish in us. In this way we will know God, and God will be known by us.

DESIRE

I will mention a few more things about our experience so that we can know God more. There are many spiritual principles concerning the matter of praying. If we do not learn them, God will not answer our prayers. For example, we may ask God for a watch. After we pray for two or three days or five or six days, we forget about the matter. God has not answered our prayer, and we have totally forgotten about it. Many times we pray for this or that or tens or hundreds of other things. God has not answered us, so we forget about it and so does God. This kind of prayer is like not even praying at all. Strictly speaking, we should ask God why He has not given us the watch. We should say, "God, I asked for a watch; why did You not give it to me?" When we deal with God this way, He will show us that our desire is not strong enough. Since our desire is not that strong, even if God were to answer our prayer, we would not feel very happy. If God did not answer our prayer, we also would not feel much of a loss. Since this is our condition, God cannot answer our prayer. Any prayer that cannot move our own heart cannot move God. If we pray, we must have an absolute desire before God. We should not let God go if He does not answer. If we can let go of something whether or not God answers our prayer,

He will certainly not answer our prayer, because He knows that it does not matter to us. If we realize this, we will acquire new knowledge and realize that all of our prayers must be accompanied by sincere desires.

ASKING

Sometimes we are full of desire, yet still do not receive an answer. If we ask God again, He may tell us that while we truly have a desire, we have not asked; we have not opened our mouth to speak out what we want. This is what the Bible says: "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). Thus, you acquire new knowledge that even with a desire within, you still have to ask without.

OBEDIENCE

Suppose that you want God to answer your prayer and you have a desire within and an asking without, and God still has not answered your prayers. If you pray again and ask God why He has not answered you, He may say that you still have not obeyed Him in one thing and that He will not listen to your prayer until you obey Him in that one thing. Then you will realize that you need to obey God totally. After you have obeyed Him, you may say, "O God, I have removed what You wanted me to remove. God, answer my prayer now." In this way you acquire the new knowledge that God only answers the prayers of the obedient ones. The kind of knowledge which you acquire through dealing with God and through being dealt with by God is very different from the knowledge you acquire from reading the Bible or listening to messages.

Let me say a sincere word. The reason God does not listen to the prayers of many brothers and sisters is that they have not learned to obey God. If you do not listen to God all the time, neither will He listen to your prayer. You may think that many things are small and that you can ignore them. You may ignore them, but God will never ignore them. Let me say a very frank word: Many Christians still need to go through a thorough dealing from God. You cannot ignore things, one by one, until tens or hundreds of items have piled up. When you pray to God, you must have a thorough dealing with each matter, one by one. Unless you do this, God will not answer your prayer. Sometimes a great danger is approaching, and God may make an exception and listen to you. However, if you want God to continually answer your

prayers, you have to faithfully obey God every time, on every item, and in everything.

FAITH

Perhaps you have obeyed, but your prayers are still not answered. You should then inquire of God again. Perhaps God will tell you that you have no faith. You can then inquire how you can have faith. Perhaps you repeatedly ask God to answer your prayer, and you pray that He will give you faith. If you still do not have it, God may tell you that you need to deal with some things before you can have the faith. Perhaps you have prayed too zealously and asked repeatedly, to the point that even when God says no, you do not let Him go. This proves that you have not obeyed. When you obey, you will say, "God, even if You do not give me what I want, I will still obey You." This seems to contradict the point about desire that we mentioned earlier. Indeed, many spiritual things are contradictory one to another. Yet they are all facts. When you reach this point, God may tell you that you need to ask for faith. If you, accordingly, pray for faith, you may come across or may look up a passage in the Bible, and one of the lines will lay hold of you. The word lays hold of you, instead of you laying hold of the word. The letters may be in a small size, but when the word lays hold of you, they may appear to be much larger. You will realize that God has comforted you and has given you a word. You will realize that God has heard your prayer and has given you the promise. You can then speak to God and reckon with Him on the basis of His word. In this way you acquire the new knowledge of faith in God in prayer. By then you will know what faith means in the Bible.

PRAISING

Perhaps you have dealt with everything and have obtained faith. Yet you still have not received the watch. You may pray again. After you have prayed for one or two months, you still may not have received the watch. The more you pray, the less likely it appears that you will receive it. You ask the Lord again and learn that after receiving a promise, you should praise rather than pray. If you pray after you have already obtained faith, your prayer will bring forth doubts. If God has given you the word and you have the faith, you should praise. Satan may come at once to tempt, saying, "You should pray." You should reply, "No, I should praise." He may come a second time to tempt, saying, "You should pray." You should still reply, "No. God has heard my

prayer, and I should praise instead." This is the right thing to do. This is actually what happens in our human relationships; if others have not promised anything, you can ask for it. But if they have promised something, all you have to do is thank them. In the same way, since God has given you His promise, you should praise Him. If you pray more, the prayer will cause you to lose your faith. Mr. B_____, an experienced brother in the Lord, once said, "Do not pray yourself out of the realm of faith." If your prayer causes you to lose faith, doubts will be brought in. More prayer means that you do not believe what the Lord has spoken to you. In this way you acquire new knowledge from God; you now know how to offer up praise in your prayer based on faith.

REMINDING GOD

However, after praising again and again, you still may have not received what you prayed for. You ask God again, "Why is this so?" You then find out that after you have faith, you must not only praise, but also must remind God. As the Lord said in Isaiah, "Put Me in remembrance" (43:26). It is as if God can forget, and we have to remind Him. God may have promised, but He needs us to remind Him. We should say, not with a heart of unbelief but with a heart of faith, "Lord, You have given me Your promise. You should remember Your promise." This is exactly what King Solomon did. He said to God, "Now, O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established" (2 Chron. 1:9). This way of reminding God is very meaningful. The reason that God delays His promise is that we may have the opportunity to deal with Him. In this way we acquire new knowledge; we have learned how to remind Him.

A DEEPER LESSON

Having done all these, you may still not have what you asked for. There is something more you have to learn. The matter of prayer is so simple that even a six-year-old child can do it, but it is also so complicated that a person with seventy or eighty years of experience still has much that he does not know or comprehend. Perhaps God wants you to wait. Or perhaps Satan is attacking you, in which case you should learn to resist. The knowledge of God's way is acquired through numerous prayers. The next time you pray, you will know how much you have to remove; then you will get God's answer whenever you ask. An experienced believer has a great deal of assurance about his prayers. He knows without any doubt that at a certain time God has answered his

prayer. Without this kind of knowledge, we will not know whether or not God has answered us. We will also be full of doubts and have no rest at all. We must learn to know God in things that are big or small. If we do this again and again, God will answer our prayer.

SOME EXPERIENCES

Once a friend of mine was short of one hundred fifty dollars (if I remember right). At the time he was living in a village. He needed this amount of money on Monday, and it was Saturday. The steam ferryboat only docked at his village several times during the week, and no boats were scheduled to arrive before Monday. He had only two dollars in his pocket. He prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to him, "You still have two dollars. This is only Saturday. Wait until the two dollars are spent, and see what happens on Monday." He submitted to God and concentrated on how he should spend the two dollars. As he went out to preach the gospel, he met a man who said to him, "I cleaned your windows the other day and have not yet asked you for payment." So he paid this person one dollar as usual. Now he had only one dollar remaining in his pocket. As he walked further, he met a beggar asking for money. He thought about having only one dollar, and the dollar seemed to become more precious to him. He considered changing the dollar into coins and giving half of the coins to the beggar. But at that very moment, he knew that was wrong, and he, subsequently, gave the whole dollar to the beggar. Once the dollar bill went out, God came in. He was very happy and said that there was nothing left for him to depend on in this world and that God must take care of him and bless him. He went to sleep and worked on the Lord's Day as usual. It was marvelous that one of his friends cabled him a money order on Monday, and it was exactly one hundred fifty dollars. If I remember right, the cable charge was about thirty to fifty dollars. But there was not any shortage for the payment he was supposed to make.

Every time we want God to answer our prayers, we must go through God's dealing. Even a large bottle can be plugged with a small plug. If it is then thrown into the sea, not one drop of sea water will enter into the bottle. The two dollars remaining in our pockets are just like the small plug; if we do not remove this plug, we cannot receive anything from God. We cannot learn very much at once. However, if we have prayed for ten years, we should have ten years of praying experience; if we have prayed for twenty years, we should have twenty years of praying experience. Our experience should become

deeper as time goes on. In the end we will realize that even the words of our prayer are crucial. We will know that if we pray in a certain way, God will not listen, and if we pray in another way, God will listen. Everything has to be thoroughly studied. Whenever we pray we should have the confidence that God will answer. We do not have to wait three to five months to realize God's answer. Without the experience of knowing God in prayer, no one can have the experience of knowing God.

Once, Miss M.E. Barber felt that it was God's will that she prepare about ten rooms for hospitality for believers. These would be apartment-like buildings. She prayed for this and, marvelously, God caused a nearby vocational school to close and it was rented to her. There were twenty rooms altogether, and the monthly rent was only twenty dollars. The matter was thus settled. I felt that it was quite remarkable.

Four years later, some bad news came that the vocational school would be reopened. I heard this news through my father because he was one of the board members of the school. One afternoon I went purposely to visit Miss Barber and asked whether or not she was aware of the news. She said that she had indeed received a notice from the school that it was scheduled to reopen in the fall. The school had hired two engineers from the United States to come, and they were on their way. The matter was very certain in their eyes. I asked her, "Are you going to move?" She said, "No." I asked again, "Have you prayed?" She said, "No, I do not even need to pray this time." A young believer who was there said that she must have been deceived by Satan. She answered, "Do not say that so quickly; let us wait and see." Then I asked her again how she could be so sure. She said, "God does not play jokes on us. He said that He wanted me to manage some living quarters. I have done this. He has not told me to stop; will He cast us out? God does not play jokes on us." But how about the other party? The engineers were on their way, and the opening of the school was definite. But she was enjoying her summer vacation peacefully on the mountain, as if this situation would never occur. Remarkably, when she was about to come down from the mountain, the school sent her a letter telling her that the school would not reopen. They asked her to continue renting the rooms because, while they were preparing to reopen the school, an unexpected financial change had forced them to declare bankruptcy. Oh, once we realize clearly the principle of God's working, no matter what happens, we will know definitely how to deal with it. In this way we will avoid many unnecessary actions and words. If we know God, we

will certainly know the way He acts. If we know a person's disposition, we can predict how he will act and speak under various circumstances. If we know God, we will know whether He will answer our prayers or not.

Today the church is always paying attention to Bible studies. Bible studies are very important, but I urge everyone to realize that it is more important to know God. After you have learned all these lessons, when you see someone with problems, groping in darkness, you will be very clear about what he should do. Situations may differ, but the principle is the same. When you pray with someone, you will know assuredly whether his prayer will be answered or not. When you pray with two persons, you will know which one knows how to pray and which one does not. This does not mean that you are a prophet; it merely means that you know the outcome of their prayer based on their spiritual condition.

We must never be contented and never think that it does not matter whether or not God answers our prayer. How precious it is to have a definite answer every time.

LEARNING TO KNOW GOD FROM HIS WILL

In the future I will speak on this topic specifically. Perhaps I will need to speak four or five messages on this. Today I will just speak briefly about it. If we want to know God's will, we also need to deal with God. If we have not been dealt with by God, we cannot know His will. Some brothers and sisters may think, "God's will is the greatest thing in the entire world; how can we possibly know it?" Yes, God is indeed great. How then can He reveal His will to little men like us? We have to first adjust ourselves. If a mirror is foggy, it cannot reflect a clear image; if it is too long or too short, convex or concave, it will also distort a person's real image. If we do not adjust ourselves, the will of God will be very distorted by us. Every time we want to know God's will, we must first deal with our selves. We must be willing to lay down our selves and forsake everything, before God will reveal His will to us. Whenever we are seeking God's will, our self must first be dealt with by God.

Whenever Mr. George Müller sought God's will, he continually searched and examined the situation. In his diary, whenever he mentioned something for the first time, he would always say that things seemed to point toward a certain way. The second time he mentioned it, he would say again that things

seemed to point toward that way. After a month or two, he would record the same thing with the same remark that things seemed to be pointing a certain way. It would sound like, "On a certain day, someone came, and what he asked seemed to have to do with this matter." Or it would say, "On a certain day, what a certain co-worker said seemed to match this matter." Sometimes he would say that on a certain day he received a promise. After a period of time, he would record that the matter was now quite clear. Still later, he would say, "Now not only is there the word, but there is the supply also." Yet later, he would say, "Now the matter is absolutely clear." Sometimes he would record in his diary that though he did not have much money, God was beginning to provide and was blessing him again. Therefore, he was not afraid of those who scoffed at him, neither would he make a contract with others. Whenever a need arose, he asked God to provide, and God's provision always met the need exactly. He was always learning to deal with God.

One day as he was praying, he felt that God wanted him to return to Germany. He said to God, "There are three matters at present which prevent me from returning: (1) if my wife goes along, there is no one to take care of my three children; (2) there are no traveling funds; and (3) there is a need for someone to care for the orphans in my place. I do not know whether You want me to go. If You do, please make provisions for these matters." One day someone came, and he felt that this person would be very suitable to care for the orphans. He told God that one need had been met, but that there were still two more. Before long, a sister wanted to stay in his house for a few months, who, at the same time, could take care of his children. The second need was also met. Then someone offered an amount of money to him (he never took any money from his work), and the last need was also met. When this happened, he asked God, "Can I leave for Germany now?" These dealings were clearly recorded in his diary. He always learned to deal with God step by step.

How can one know God's will? Someone may tell you that the first thought that comes to your mind after you pray is God's will. But this is not always so. Mr. Müller's spiritual growth was faster than others because of his thorough dealing. This has much to do with prayer. Those who do not pray in a thorough way can never know God.

THE STORY OF ABIGAIL

Mr. Müller once taught a little girl how to pray. Eventually, she learned it. The girl's name was Abigail. She was very young. She wanted some colorful yarn in order to make a play ball. When she saw this man of God, Mr. Müller, coming to her house, she bargained with him, saying, "My parents said you can pray very well. I would like to ask you for one thing. I would like to have a yarn ball with different colors. Can you please pray for me?" The old man said, "Yes, but you need to pray for this as well." The little girl knelt down, and this man of God also knelt down with her. The girl first prayed, "I want a yarn ball, and it must be colorful." Then this man of God bowed down his head with silvery hair, put his hand on the girl, and prayed, "Lord, here is a child who wants a yarn ball with different colors. No one knows this, neither can I provide it. This matter is Yours; please listen to her prayer." After this old man uttered his prayer, he was silent, yet he appeared to still mutter something. Then he stood up and told the girl that God would give her the colorful yarn within a couple of days. At that time the girl's heart leapt. He brought her request to God. She thought that perhaps her grandmother or her aunt would bring her some colorful yarn. The following evening, her father brought home some colorful yarn to her. She was extremely happy. Her father owned a department store, and all the other kinds of yarn, except this one, had been sold. It had been on display in the store for a long time. Since it did not look nice on the shelf, he took it home and gave it to his daughter. The next time Mr. Müller saw her, he asked, "Have you enjoyed playing with your yarn ball?" He did not ask her whether or not she had received the ball, but whether or not she had fun playing with it. A person who knows God has this kind of assurance. Mr. Müller had countless anecdotes like this during his lifetime. Every time, he was always very accurate. It took him several decades to learn. He followed God until he was more than ninety years old. Many of his experiences were learned from following God. He never did anything in a vague way. In his diary he always recorded clearly what had happened on a certain day. He dealt with God in this way all the time. It is no wonder that he had such a deep experience. Today our mistake is in thinking that spiritual knowledge is mere biblical knowledge. Little do we realize that genuine spiritual knowledge must be learned from God. If we want to learn before God, we must deal with God and be dealt with by God.

THE INSEPARABILITY OF DEALING AND KNOWING

The most precious thing on earth today is the knowledge of God. However, in order to know God, we need to be dealt with by Him in everything. We

need to be dealt with by Him in prayer, and we need to be dealt with by Him in matters related to His will. We need to deal with sin and our environment. When something happens, we need to ask, "What does this mean?" and "What is God after?" A lazy person can never know God. We can only know God through prayer and through communicating with Him. We should be like Paul who, after asking the Lord once without getting an answer, asked the Lord two or three times until the Lord spoke to him. We should also learn of our Lord. He prayed in Gethsemane the first time, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt 26:39). He prayed a second time and a third time until He was completely clear on this matter. We also need to pray once, twice, three times until we get the answer from God. Only in this way can we know God.

I would like to speak some words to the co-workers: if you have not learned to be dealt with by God and to deal with God, you can never go out to work because you are not yet even a proper Christian. If you do not know God's principles, God's way of doing things, and God's nature, you are no different from other people. If you can only give people some spiritual theories, you cannot lead them on in the spiritual way. A person who has read a tour book on Hangchow or Peking has not necessarily been to Hangchow or Peking. A person who owns a cookbook has not necessarily eaten all the dishes in the cookbook. In the same way, if you merely understand the Bible, but have no experience, you can never lead others to the right way.

If you simply have experience and do not know the Bible, you will not have the proper word for other people. The Lord said, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." This was the Lord's rebuke. Many believers lack the knowledge or the realization of God's power. Many people only know some spiritual theories. In the end all they have are theories. Likewise, all you have are theories. They do not know what they are talking about. Neither do you know what you are talking about. Many people are able to teach others simply because they have a better memory and can remember more doctrines. O brothers and sisters, this is too poor. May we learn to know Him in prayer and in His will. We can know God. There is nothing more important than knowing God. May we not just retain what we have heard today in our mind, but, from now on, may we be diligent to learn to know God and accept His dealing.