

**"Knowing God by J.I. Packer**  
**Session 4: Chapters 9-11 (July 4, 2022)**  
**Father Jonathan Bailes**



**Lesson Summary:**

*In an increasingly complex and confusing world, where do you look for truth? Where do you look to know what you should value and how you should live? In short, where do you find wisdom to live well? Packer's answer to these questions is simple: God. For God is all-wise, and he desires to impart his wisdom to us. This does not mean that we can understand precisely what God is doing and why, but rather that, through close attention to his word, we may discover what is true, what is valuable, and what is the right way forward in a complex world.*

I sometimes hear people say that the world around us is getting more and more confusing every day. Technologies and cultural values seem to be constantly evolving. What once seemed so obvious, so apparent to people, is now a matter of hot dispute. "All that is solid," as Karl Marx once put it, "now melts into the air." If all of this rapid technological and cultural change is not bad enough, many people find that truth itself is increasingly hard to find. Everyone has their own favorite sources of information and opinion.

But which is right? Who knows the truth? And how can we know it when we see it? And with all these competing voices and competing opinions, how are we supposed to make the right decisions in life? How can we navigate life well if we don't even know what is true?

Maybe you yourself have wrestled with those questions. Maybe not. But I think it's undeniable to say that there are many people today who are very confused about what is true and how they can live well. And that, according to J.I. Packer, is precisely why we need to know God.

In chapters 9 and 10, Packer turns his attention to the subject of wisdom, which he defines at the very beginning of chapter 9.



*In Scripture, wisdom is a moral as well as an intellectual quality, more than mere intelligence or knowledge, just as it is more than mere cleverness or cunning. For to be truly wise, in the Bible sense, our intelligence and cleverness must be harnessed to a right end. Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the means of attaining it.*

KNOWING GOD (P. 90)

Doesn't that sound exactly like what we need so badly in the world today? Not only the power to see what is right and true and best, but the inclination to choose it and the means of attaining it. That's really what people long for. Not just the knowledge of what's true and false. Not just a cunning ability to identify a goal and go about getting it. No, what we really want is to be able to see what is true and good, to choose it without hesitation, and then to attain it.

The question is, how can we get this ability? How can we become wise? For Packer, the answer to that question begins not with OUR wisdom, but with God's.

The first step to becoming wise, he says, is to recognize that God is wise. And in order to do that, we first need to understand what it is that God wants. What exactly is His purpose? The goal toward which he is acting?

Packer breaks it down into stages. At first he talks about God's ultimate goal.



*[God's] ultimate objective is to bring [his human creatures] to a state in which they please him entirely and praise him adequately, a state in which he is all in all to them, and he and they rejoice continually in the knowledge of each other's love.*

KNOWING GOD (P. 92)

The book of Revelation gives us a vision of that ultimate objective in which God's people experience perfect delight in their love of him and his love for them. When, as we read in Revelation chapter 21,

the dwelling place of God is with mankind. He dwells with them, and they are His people, and God Himself is their God. That is God's ultimate objective.

But he also has more immediate objectives.



*His immediate objectives are to draw individual men and women into a relationship of faith, hope, and love toward himself, delivering them from sin and showing forth in their lives the power of his grace ...*

KNOWING GOD (P. 92)

Knowing that these are God's goals, Packer says, we can begin to recognize his wisdom in bringing them about. And one of the first things that we learn about His wisdom is how difficult it is to understand. There's an often quoted verse from Isaiah 55 where God speaks to his people:



*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

ISAIAH 55:8-9

That, Packer says, is exactly what we learn about the wisdom of God. When we pay attention to how God achieves his goal in the lives of individual people.

### AN EXAMPLE FROM THE PATRIARCHS

(detail found on pages 92-96)

Just look at the patriarchs: Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Each of them endured long and difficult years of testing and trial. If you would ask them in the midst of those years what God was up to and why - why was he allowing them to undergo such hardship - no doubt they would have been at a loss to explain it. How could allowing Jacob to be deceived or Joseph to be wrongly imprisoned be good? Where's the wisdom in that? And yet as we read these these stories until the end, it becomes clear that God did precisely what was needed to

mold them into the saints that he intended them to be. And the same is true with us.



*We may be frankly bewildered at things that happen to us, but God knows exactly what he is doing, and what he is after, in his handling of our affairs ... Meanwhile, we ought not to hesitate to trust his wisdom, even when he leaves us in the dark.*

KNOWING GOD (PP. 97-98)

So although we may not understand his ways, we do know that God is wise. He knows what is true. He intends our good and he knows how to bring it about.

***He has, as Packer put it earlier, the power to see, the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, and the means of attaining it.***

### What About Our Lives?

But you might be asking, but how does this translate to our wisdom? God may see what is true and know what is best and understand what's needed to get there. But how does this help us as we attempt to navigate the difficult and confusing questions which we face in our own lives?

I think the Packer's answer to that question is contained in chapters 10 & 11, which focus on our wisdom and on God's Word. In chapter 10, he begins by addressing some misconceptions that people have about what it means to be wise. For instance, some people, he says, mistakenly think that in order to be wise we need to understand the ins and outs of what God is doing and why. We might think that living wisely means discovering the specifics of God's plan for our life and then following that plan. But that's not how the Bible teaches us to think about wisdom.



*The truth is that God in his wisdom, to make and keep us humble and teach us to walk by faith, has hidden from us almost everything that we should like to know about the providential purposes which he is working out in the churches and in our own lives.*

KNOWING GOD (P. 106)

So wisdom, then, is not a matter of understanding God's plan. Wisdom, Packer says, is a matter of trusting him and following his guidance, even when we don't understand what he is doing or why.

That's the basis of human wisdom - not a sharing in God's knowledge (as Packer puts it at the end of chapter 10) but a disposition to confess that he is wise and to cleave to him and live for him in the light of his word through thick and thin.

### IN THE LIGHT OF HIS WORD

Now that last part is especially significant for Packer. Wisdom is a matter of living for God in the light of his word. That is why in chapter 11, he turns his attention to the Word of God. It's a fairly basic chapter, in many ways, but it's incredibly important. In chapter 11, Packer wants to make two main points.

- 1) First, the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. He creates with his word. He instructs. He commands. He makes promises. In fact, that's one of the most striking things about God as he's made known in the Bible. The God of the Bible is a remarkably talkative God.
- 2) But equally as important, Packer says, isn't just that God speaks. It's that he's truthful. He doesn't lie. And when he speaks, his word is true. Whether that word is instruction or a command or a promise, it is true. You can rely on it. In fact, if you want to live well, if you want to be wise in this world of endless and competing voices, then that is the only thing you can do. Listen closely to and rely on God's word of truth. In fact, Packer goes so far as to say that is what it means to be a true Christian.



*True Christians are people who acknowledge and live under the word of God.*

KNOWING GOD (P. 115)

But then at the very end of chapter 11, he poses a question. Why, he asks, does this description fit so few of us who profess to be Christian these days? Why do we so rarely seek God's wisdom in Scripture and strive to live under its authority in our day to day lives? You will find it profitable, he then says, to ask your own conscience and let IT tell you.

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### Group Discussion Questions

1. What is one thing from this week's assigned chapters that stood out to you?
2. Describe someone whom you regard as wise. What makes that person wise? Where do you think their wisdom comes from? How can you learn from their example?
3. J.I. Packer says that, although God is wise, we frequently cannot understand what he is doing and why. "But God," he says, "knows exactly what he is doing, and what he is after, in his handling of our affairs ... Meanwhile, we ought not to hesitate to trust his wisdom, even when he leaves us in the dark." How do we trust God's wisdom when we don't understand what he is doing? Can you think of a time when you did not understand what God was doing in your life but chose to trust him anyway?
4. On multiple occasions in the Scriptures (e.g., Proverbs 1:7, 9:10; Psalm 111:10), we are told that the "fear of the LORD" is the beginning of wisdom. How would you compare this statement to what Packer says in these chapters?
5. Packer ends chapter 11 with a rather unsettling statement and question. He says that "true Christians are people who acknowledge and live under God's word" and then goes on to ask: "Why does this description fit so few of us who profess to be Christians?" What do you make of his description of "true Christians"? How would you answer his question?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge that the chapters of this week pose to you? What is one practical step that you can take this week to apply and act on the lesson from this week?

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## Outline of Chapters 9-11

<https://ligonduncan.com/knowning-god/>

### Outline of Chapter 9: God Only Wise

Summary: What the implications of the Wisdom of God are for our comfort and the Christian life

1. Biblical wisdom (human and divine) defined (Wisdom: Ours and God's)
2. The wisdom of God in ordering human lives (Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph) (God Dealing with His People)
3. God's wisdom in the upsetting, discouraging, baffling, trying situations of our lives (Our Perplexing Trials)

### Outline of Chapter 10: God's Wisdom and Ours

Summary: What kind of wisdom God gives us and how he gives it to us

1. How we get God's gift of wisdom [1 reverence God; 2 receive God's word]
2. Wisdom is not insight into God's secret purposes (What Wisdom Is Not)
3. Wisdom is understanding and doing what is right in the actual situations of our lives (Realism Needed)
4. God's ordering of the world's course is inscrutable, so fear God and keep his commandments (What Ecclesiastes Teaches Us)
5. The effect of God's gift of wisdom in our lives (The Fruit of Wisdom)

### Outline of Chapter 11: Thy Word Is Truth

Summary: What the nature of God's word is and how we should respond to it

1. God is King, and he speaks, and his word is an instrument of government and fellowship
2. The word of God in its relations to the world, and man within it: (1) fixing our circumstances and environment; (2) Commanding obedience; (3) inviting our trust; (4) instructing us in the mind of our Maker (The God Who Speaks)

The Word of God comes as (1) law, (2) promise, and (3) testimony.

3. God is true, therefore his word is true: (1) his commands are true, and (2) his promises are true: he keeps them (Absolute Truth)
4. A Christian is one who acknowledges and lives under the word of God (Believe and Obey)