

Study Guide

next

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Continue Your Journey



Written By
The Next Step Team
At NewSpring Church



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WELCOME TO next

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NEXT is a conversational small group where you can continue to grow in and explore your faith while experiencing community. It is designed to be a safe place where you can learn more about God and the Bible while also learning how to grow in your relationship with him.

You may have questions about trusting God, reading the Bible, or prayer. Or, maybe you wonder about God's purpose for your life or how to speak up about your faith. NEXT is a place to ask those questions! We'll have conversations about these topics and many more.

We believe God loves you and wants you to experience a deep and meaningful relationship with him. We want to foster that relationship by creating an environment where you can be honest and open while taking another step forward in your faith.

Enjoy the journey!

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Note: You can find brief video messages that correspond with each chapter at newspring.org/nextstudy.





This NEXT guide is designed to help you interact with the Bible as you take your next steps in knowing God.

Each chapter includes three sections. Each section includes passages from the Bible for you to read and mark as indicated. This is to help you develop your skills in observing what the Bible says. As you read each passage, ask yourself questions such as:

- “What is happening?”
- “Who is speaking?”
- “Why is this being said?”

To understand the greater context of the Scripture, consider looking up the passages in your Bible to read the surrounding verses.

Each section also includes questions for reflection and discussion. These questions are designed to draw out your thoughts and perspectives on the topics we will explore. These questions will also challenge you to personalize what you’re reading by considering how it applies to your life.

If possible, please read each chapter and answer the questions before your group meets. This will aid in your group’s discussion and will help you internalize new perspectives.



CHAPTER ONE



Know Me



And we know that the Son of God has
come, and he has given us understanding
so that we can know the true God...

1 John 5:20

God knows us, and he wants us to know him! That profound thought will be the focus of our journey through NEXT, and the Bible will be our guide.

Think for a moment of your greatest hero or the person you admire most. Now, imagine this unlikely scenario:

You're a reporter, and you've been granted a personal interview with your greatest hero. (If your hero is from the past, you can travel back in a time machine for your interview.) This interview is the opportunity of a lifetime!

When the day of your interview comes, you wonder if you will be meeting briefly in an office or a conference room. Perhaps you will be part of a large group of reporters, where you'll have to try to ask your questions over a cacophony of voices in the room.

Suppose instead that on the day of the interview, you are welcomed into your hero's home. When you walk up to the door of the residence, you discover your hero smiling warmly as they greet you. Your hero ushers you in and the two of you sit by the fire, enjoying relaxed conversation with no worry of a schedule to keep.

At first, your mind is racing as you wonder if there's been some mistake. But then, your hero interrupts your thoughts to tell you that they have waited a long time to meet with you in person. As you chat about your life, you become so lost in conversation that you almost forget this is your hero. Not only do they answer your questions, but they invite you to come back again to talk more. Their door is open to you anytime!

As unlikely as this scenario is, let's take some time to consider something even more incredible: The creator of the universe has invited you to know him personally—more and more each day! After all, he already knows you. He knows everything about you, including things even you might not find interesting, like the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7). He knows when you sit down and when you stand up (Psalm 139:2). He even knows the thoughts and intents of your heart (Hebrews 4:12).

For Reflection & Discussion

Who knows you best? What is it like to be known so well in that relationship?

If you had the opportunity to sit by the fire and have a cup of coffee with God, what would be your first question?

SECTION ONE: GOD KNOWS YOU

God knows you. Have you ever pondered that thought? It may be unsettling, but consider the fact that not only does God know you, but he also loves you completely and unconditionally. That thought can bring comfort.

Pastor and author Timothy Keller (2011) describes it this way: *“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us”* (p. 101).

We are known and loved! Let’s explore what God knows about us as we read the following Scripture passage.

Psalm 139:1-6

- ¹ O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.
- ² You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away.
- ³ You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do.
- ⁴ You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.
- ⁵ You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

Take Another Look

- Underline everything God knows about you according to these verses.
- Circle references to where God goes.

Do you feel stress or comfort when you think about how well God knows you? Why?

God's personal knowledge and understanding of you is quite the beginning to your relationship with him—especially when you consider that the Bible says you are known *and* loved by God.



SECTION TWO: KNOWING GOD

Now, consider the value of knowing God—why he desires for us to know him and what that really means.

The book of Hosea in the Old Testament was written at a time when God’s chosen people were being unfaithful to him. This book of the Bible presents the relationship between Hosea and his unfaithful wife, mirroring God and his unfaithful people. It was written to illustrate God’s love for his people, even when they were being unfaithful, as well as his desire for them to know him.

Hosea 4:6

⁶ “My people are being destroyed because they don’t know me...”

Take Another Look

- Draw a box around the word that says what was happening to God’s people.
- Circle the phrase that describes why this was happening.

Hosea 6:3, 6

³ “Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring.”

⁶ “I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.”

Take Another Look

- What is promised to us if we press on to know the Lord? _____
- In verse 6, circle the two phrases that describe what God wants and underline the two phrases that describe what he does not want.

For Reflection & Discussion

God told the people in Hosea that he wanted their heart more than their outward sacrifices and offerings. What are some ways that we focus on outward acts rather than on loving and knowing God?

Why do you think God wants us to love and know him rather than just outwardly obey him?



1 Chronicles 28:9

⁹ “And Solomon, my son, learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately. Worship and serve him with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the Lord sees every heart and knows every plan and thought...”

Take Another Look

- In this verse, King David is instructing his son Solomon, who will soon become king. He knew that Solomon would need to learn many things in order to be a good king, but here he gives him the most important thing. Describe what David told Solomon to learn. _____

Philippians 3:10

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.

Take Another Look

- The Apostle Paul wrote Philippians. Underline the two things he wanted.

Understanding The Language

The Old Testament word “know,” as used in 1 Chronicles 28:9, means to “have personal knowledge of Him, be acquainted with, and understand Him; appreciate, heed, and cherish Him” (*The Amplified Bible*, 1965).

The New Testament word “know,” as used in Philippians 3:10, means “to progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly” (*The Amplified Bible*, 1965).



John 17:3 (NIV)

³ *“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

— Take Another Look —

• How does this passage describe eternal life? _____

For Reflection & Discussion

Based on the definitions of the word “know” that were given, how would you describe what it means for you to seek to know Christ?

The whole story of the Bible is about God creating people to have a relationship with him. Humanity turned away from God, so he pursued us and made a way for us to come back to him. He wants us to know him and experience a loving relationship with him—one that lasts for eternity.



SECTION THREE:

TO KNOW HIM IS TO TRUST HIM

When we really get to know someone, we discover their character. The same is true with God. Knowing God's character leads us to see his trustworthiness, and seeing his trustworthiness enables us to trust him more completely.

For Reflection & Discussion

What does it mean for you to trust someone?

Notice how the Apostle Paul links knowing and trusting as he writes of his confidence in trusting the Lord.

2 Timothy 1:12

¹² ...I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

Trust is the inseparable partner of faith. Faith is something you have, while trust is something you do. Imagine standing on a ledge when someone calls out, "Jump! I'll catch you." To have faith would be to believe they will catch you. To trust would be to jump. In essence, trust is faith put into action.

Since trust begins with getting to know someone, let's look at a few verses that explore God's character.



Deuteronomy 32:3-4

³ “I will praise the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! ⁴ He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”

— Take Another Look —

- Circle every word that describes God or his ways.

Psalms 145:8, 13

⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love...

¹³ The LORD is trustworthy in all his promises and faithful in all he does...

— Take Another Look —

- Circle every word that describes God.

John 1:14, 18

¹⁴ So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son...

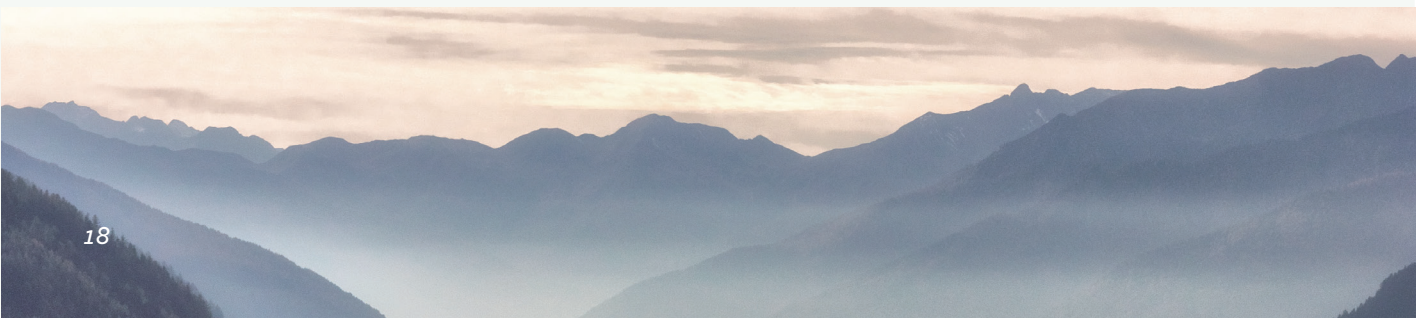
¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son is himself God and is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

— Take Another Look —

- What is the identity of the person described as “the Word”? _____

- Who revealed God to us? _____

- Circle the words that describe “the Word” in verse 14.





Romans 1:20

²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

—Take Another Look—

- Underline all references to time.
- Circle everything that describes God.

For Reflection & Discussion

Do you find it easy or difficult to see God as trustworthy and to believe he has good intentions?
What makes it difficult or easy?

Nahum 1:7

⁷ *The LORD is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes. He is close to those who trust in him.*

Isaiah 49:23

²³ *“...Those who trust in me will never be put to shame.”*

Isaiah 40:31

³¹ *But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 26:3-4

³ *You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!* ⁴ *Trust in the Lord always, for the LORD God is the eternal Rock.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.*
⁶ *Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*

Take Another Look

- In the verses above, underline every occurrence of the word “trust.”
- Looking back over the verses, list the benefits of trusting in God.

For Reflection & Discussion

Knowing the benefits listed above, how would your life be different if you more fully trusted God?





Bottom Lines

- ✕ God graciously invites you into an intimate relationship with him—he created you for that very purpose.
 - ✕ An ever-growing desire to know God is evidence of a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - ✕ Our ability to trust God will grow as we know him better.
 - ✕ Our trust and faith are highly valued by God.
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Try It Out

- ✕ Grab a notebook or a journal (or open a note on your phone) and start a list of words that the Bible uses to describe God. You have a great start just by jotting down the words you circled in this chapter.
- ✕ Add to your list as you discover more words the Bible uses to describe God.
- ✕ Reflect on your list regularly to help you know God's character and trust him more.

