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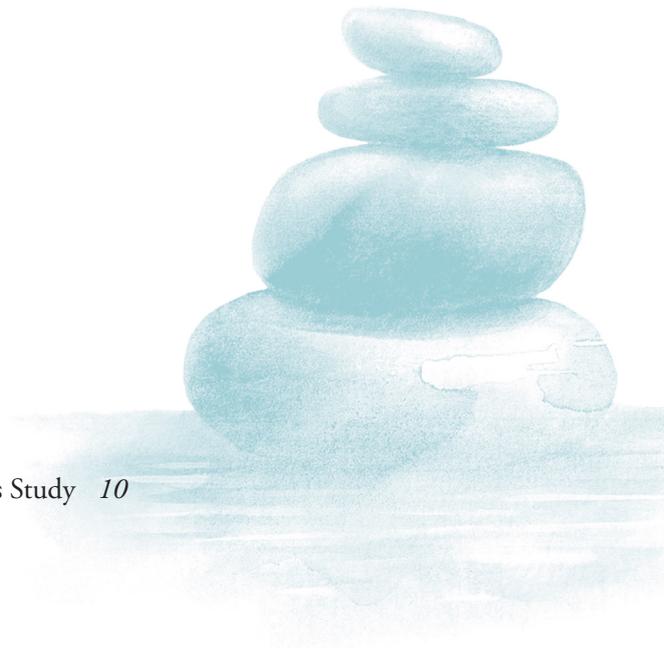
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The Blessed Journey

Let Him lead thee blindfold onwards,
Love needs not to know;
Children whom the Father leadeth
Ask not where they go.
Though the path be all unknown,
Over moors and mountains lone.
Give no ear to reason's questions;
Let the blind man hold
That the sun is but a fable
Men believed of old.
At the breast the babe will grow;
Whence the milk he need not know.

—GERHARD TERSTEEGEN, 1697–1769 (TR. UNKNOWN)



WEEK ONE

a known God

DAY 1: The Naming of a Known God

DAY 2: When We Make Little gods Instead

DAY 3: Powerful Knowledge

DAY 4: What Did She Know That I Don't?

DAY 5: Sovereign, Powerful Creator

MEMORY VERSE:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” ACTS 17:24–25

The desire to see what lies ahead lives within each of us. We wonder. We dream. We anticipate and hope. But at times we also worry. We fret. We fear. All that leads us to want to control events. When we lose our grip on control (which happens quite often since we aren't really in charge of things), anxiety appears. At times, it clutches us, taking our very breath.

This week, we will encounter the One who gives us our very breath. The One who spoke and created all we see and all we don't. The One who holds the universe together while we're worrying. The One who sees our future and is not shaken or surprised by any of it.

My prayer for us this week:

Almighty God,

Show us more of who You really are, not who we've made You to be. Open our eyes to see Your grandiosity. Your majesty. Your unique power and the ways You sustain the world. Exchange the graven images we've carved for You, the actual God who cannot be contained.

Amen.

INTRODUCTION TO WEEK 1

A KNOWN GOD

Remember the DeLorean? The plutonium-fueled, time-hopping machine that carried Marty McFly back in time? Let's be honest here. Wouldn't you love to have a shot at a little time travel? Maybe you'd like to go back in time and undo that thing you regret. Maybe then your current reality and future would look a little different. Or maybe what you really want is to jump a few years ahead and see how this thing you're waiting for pans out. You long to see how your kids grow up or if you get this job or if that relationship works.

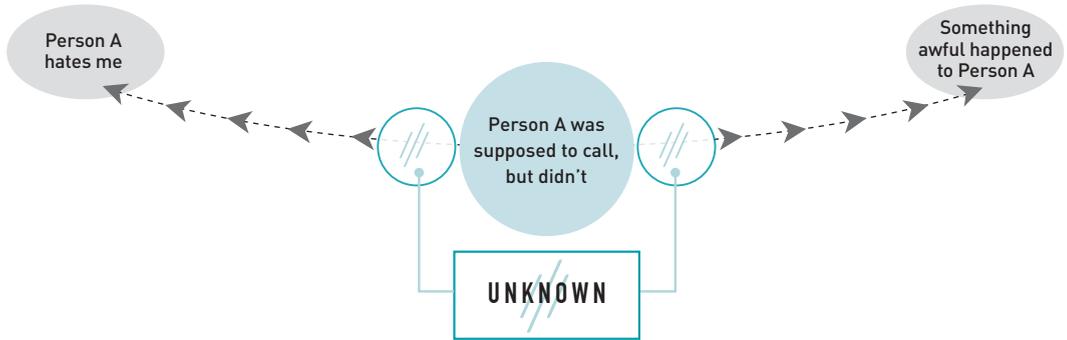
Which direction would you go? Back or forward? The reality is we don't get to do either. It's just not possible. So we must live right here, right where we are in this current space and time.

In the absence of the ability to time travel, our view is limited. We can't go back and change past mistakes and we can't foretell the future. So we tend to try to control absolutely everything in the current moment to ensure that what happens next will be what we want: a future void of pain and a life free of suffering.

That kind of life existed in the very beginning in the beautiful land of Eden and it will exist again in the New Jerusalem, but for now, we're stuck—in the midst of the broken paradise.

Jesus told us we would indeed have trouble in this world. But He also said to take heart, for He has overcome the world—the broken paradise (John 16:33).

I know I can't control the future. I can't predict it. I can't force it to go a certain way, but I still try. Day after day I try to control what will happen. Then when I hit a wall where I can't, I end up in the downward spiral. Let me explain what I mean.



Person A (could be anyone—a spouse, a friend, a coworker, a family member) was supposed to call, but didn't.

We have two paths from this moment.

One path ends with “Something awful happened to Person A!”

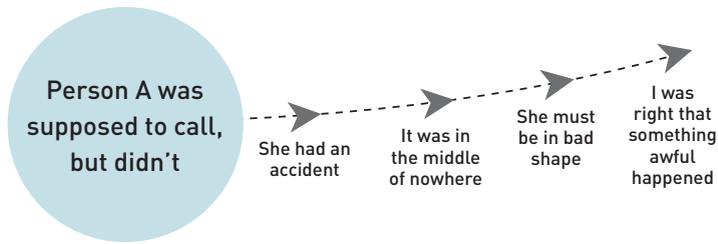
The other path ends with “Person A hates me.”

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But it's what we do.

There's a gap between what we know and what we don't know. We are going to call that gap the unknown.

UNKNOWN

We try to fill in the unknown. How we do that is likely not entirely accurate, but we don't like having gaps in what we know, so we fill it in however we can. But we don't just jump all the way to the end; no, there are multiple stops along the way to get to these outlandish destinations.



On the right side of the diagram are the external circumstances. Person A was supposed to call, but didn't, so now I imagine she had an accident. It was in the middle of nowhere, where there are no first responders. A is obviously in bad shape. So I was right that some terrible thing befell Person A. Sounds reasonable, right?

On the left side of the diagram are the internal circumstances. Person A was supposed to call, but didn't. Clearly, I've offended her by some comment I shouldn't have made. I'm such an idiot and just can't keep my mouth shut. She must be angry with me. Person A hates me.

These scenarios are certainly possible. They could happen. But the likelihood of it happening every single time the expected call doesn't come is slim. Yet if that is the case, why is it that our brains re-create this scenario so often?

In this downward spiral, we begin filling in the gap of the unknown, and once we begin traveling down this road, it spirals down and down. We can't stop it. At least it feels as though we can't. But we *can* learn to think differently.

When we dwell in the downward spiral, allowing it to shape how we view our reality, we've left out God, thinking He's nowhere to be found. We end up dwelling on the things we don't know and can't know. We've chosen to focus on the unknown, which breeds fear, instead of on what we *do* know. Just like the whispers of the Holy Spirit during my journaling, God asks us, "Tell Me what you *do* know."

What do we really need to know then? Do we need to know what our future looks like or do we need to know the One who holds it? Perhaps instead of trying to fill in the downward spiral gaps or hopping into a DeLorean, we need to walk hand in hand, step by step with the One who does know.

You see, God already knows our future. He's not bound by time.³

He's already ordained all our days before they have even come to be (Ps. 139:16). He's never surprised by your situation or mine. He's not pacing back and forth worried about what we've gotten ourselves into. No matter the circumstances, He sits on the throne, unchanged by our choices, without fear, and with a plan to redeem and restore us.

When we align ourselves with God, understanding and knowing who He is, we experience a peace we will not find in trying to control our situation. God will not change (Ps. 55:19; James 1:17).

Maybe you've got the control thing down and it's working for you. You're rockin' your schedule and are determining outcomes right and left. At some point, however, it will break down. *It's also exhausting*, because we weren't meant to run the world. We weren't made to hold it all together. That's God's job, not ours. Sometimes I can't even run my own household, let alone the world!

When we think through the long list of unknowns, it's hard to understand why we would choose to dwell in the unknown when we worship a God who has made Himself known.

Remember that gap—the unknown? This week we will dive into Acts 17, where Paul encounters an altar built to an unknown god and boldly proclaims to the men of Athens the God who is known.

The people of Athens filled their city with idols, and Paul grieved at the sight of them. He first went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews there about the

3. Peter Kreeft, and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 93.

Messiah and at the town market with the God-fearing Greeks. But one day he had a different audience. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers overheard his vibrant discourse and entered the conversation. Calling him a babbler, they brought him before the Areopagus, a religious and educational council⁴ in Athens, to explain the new teaching he shared. These philosophers spent a great deal of time eloquently trying to explain unknown things.

Paul described the Athenian desire to worship as seen in their religious attempts throughout the city. He explained how he had even found an altar with the inscription “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). This altar was used as a failsafe, just in case they missed one of the gods along the way.

But Paul did something remarkable that day. He took something unknown and showed how it had already been made known. He declared, “So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.” Then Paul began to describe the living God:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” (Acts 17:24–28)

Paul meets the men of Athens right where they are. He even proves himself as an amazing communicator in this moment when he references their own poets, speaking a language they understand immediately. He tells them about the grandeur of God, the way He cannot be contained. In a city where they created idols constantly, this truth is significant. If you make an idol, you must craft it with

4. Acts 17:19, *Areopagus* from the *Pyrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 1347.

your own two hands (Isa. 44:12), and who wants to worship something you can make yourself?

How often do we take the space of the unknown and fill it with something that isn't God? Something that has absolutely no power? We create and craft a false god or a false savior. God wasn't created—He *is* the Creator. He isn't fashioned—He alone fashions. When we worship Him, He doesn't say, "Thanks for the reminder, guys. I forgot that I was God." He has the ability to speak and create complex things. He doesn't need us, but because of His great love for us, He wants us and made a way for us to come into His presence and to have a personal relationship with Him.

Even in Paul's discourse, he reminds us that God's purpose in all this was so that we would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him (Acts 17:27). He is both transcendent and immanent. He is majestic, powerful, above all, and simultaneously personal, near, and with us. It's astonishing to know and accept that a God who is *that* big and *that* powerful would want to have a relationship with someone like me. The reality is that God's message to us is, "I want you to know me. Since I cannot be in the presence of sin, I will cover you with the righteousness of My Son, Jesus. Then you can know Me."

The Greek language contains two definitions for the word *knowledge*. The first word is *gnosis*. This type is factual knowledge. These are things you know *about*. The second word is *epignosis*. This type is experiential knowledge. These are things we really truly know. It's the difference between knowing about a celebrity or acquaintance and knowing your spouse or children. In the experiential relationship, you anticipate needs. You understand glances. You have been a student of the person long enough to know and predict what they're thinking and feeling. You can't get to *epignosis* unless you go through *gnosis*. In our contemporary language, we sometimes differentiate these by calling them "head knowledge" (*gnosis*) and "heart knowledge" (*epignosis*).

The list I wrote in my journal were things I've experienced with God over time. I read about them first in His Word or heard stories from the experiences of others,

but through the course of my journey with Jesus, I witnessed them for myself. He taught me those things in the peaks and valleys of my own walk with Him. Some of it I learned in the pit with Jesus. I had to stay there and allow Him to love me. I had to grab His hand and allow Him to do the work. We work it out in real life and in real time. It doesn't happen quickly.

As we grow in our *gnosis*—our factual knowledge of God—it should lead us to this *epignosis*—true experiential knowledge of God. That's the way God longs for us to know Him. God wants us to seek Him and find Him. The God of the universe—the One who cannot be contained—wants you to *know* Him. And He's made a way for that to happen.

LISTEN AND LINGER

Read through Acts 17:24–28. Write out the phrases that are the most meaningful to you.

What do you notice about God in this passage that speaks to your fear of the unknown?

Remember how the Holy Spirit whispered to list what I did know instead of dwelling on what I didn't? If you made a list today, what would you put on it? Write what you do know. Place that list where you will see it often.

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

THE NAMING OF A KNOWN GOD

I imagine it was quite a scene. Paul, the preacher, philosophizing with the most educated in Athens. What a sight it must have been! The open air swarming with questions. The rhetoric dancing all around them. The quizzical glances peering from those accusing Paul of being a babbler even though deep in their souls they wondered about this God he was describing.

Today, we're going to spend some time sitting in this scene, asking God to stir our imaginations. What would it have been like to be right there with Paul? How would it have felt to be listening to the debate? What would the surroundings have been like? How would we have responded to Paul? To the questions of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers?

The Athenian culture was very similar to ours, so it wouldn't be too hard to imagine what everyone was thinking or how Paul's explanation of who the "unknown god" is would have received starkly different reactions.

We're going to read this passage a couple of times, looking for the answers to the questions below during each reading.

Take some time to visualize what the scene was like. Read these words Paul spoke as if you were in the Areopagus searching for truth and it was the first you'd heard about the God he's describing. How would you respond?

Read through Acts 17:16–34 slowly with these questions in mind. After reading, set aside the text for a moment.

Now begin to imagine the scene as if you were right in the middle of it. Answer the following questions:

What do you see?

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

What's your position?

Who else is there with you?

What are you feeling?

What's the mood of the crowd?

What is your response to all of this?

What questions do you have?

What fears do you have?

Don't worry about historical accuracy. Just allow God to bring the story to life. These people we read about in Scripture were real people who walked the earth and had feelings and thoughts much like ours.

Write down some of the things you are noticing from your responses.

Now read through Acts 17:16–34 again.

Ask God to reveal to you what He wants you to see.

What are your observations about the text?

What is God calling you to do as a result of reading this passage?

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Lord, You are the God who made the world and everything in it. You are the Lord of heaven and earth. I know You do not need anything, including me. I'm grateful You have chosen to have a relationship with me anyway. You are a God who has made Yourself known. Thank You for that truth. Help me to believe it and live what I know is true. Amen.

My Prayer:

Journaling Prompt:

What unknown am I facing right now? What do I need to know about God right now in the midst of the unknown? How have I seen God show Himself to me lately?