

# PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH



## WHO IS GOD?



# Welcome to Mount Vernon!

## STAFF

Aaron Menikoff.....Senior Pastor  
menikoff@gmail.com x240

Bryan Pillsbury..... Associate Pastor/Missions  
bryanpillsbury@mvbchurch.org x225

David Carnes..Associate Pastor/Corporate Worship  
davidcarnes@mvbchurch.org ..... x223

Brad Thayer .....Assistant Pastor/Administration  
bradthayer@mvbchurch.org x224

Bethany Saunders.....Minister to Children  
bethanysaunders@mvbchurch.org x236

Chip Cofer ..... Recreation Director  
chipcofer@mvbchurch.org x235

Jacob Hall..... Pastoral Assistant/Youth  
jacobhall86@gmail.com x228

Boo Elliott..... Senior Pastor's Assistant  
booelliott@mvbchurch.org x229

Anne Russo ..... Financial Assistant  
annerusso@mvbchurch.org x241

Bert Neal .....Administrative Assistant  
bertneal@mvbchurch.org x221

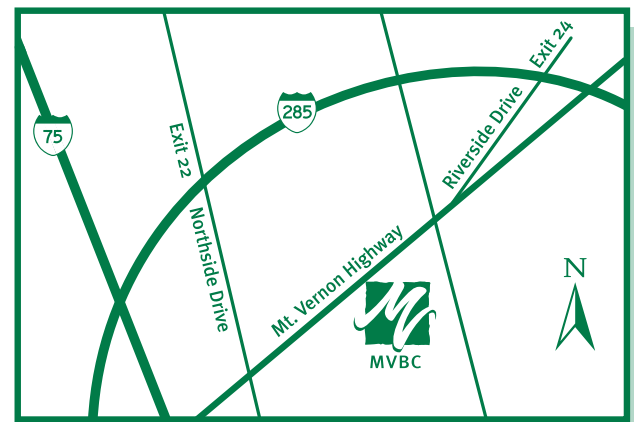
## SERMON SCHEDULE

Dec. 7 ..... *An Ideal Faith*  
Matthew 6:19-34

Dec. 14 ..... *The Significance  
of the Incarnation*  
Luke 2:1-20

Dec. 21 ..... *An Ideal Journey*  
Matthew 7:1-29

Dec. 28 ..... *Jesus is Coming*  
Revelation 22:6-21



850 Mount Vernon Highway NW  
Sandy Springs, GA 30327

Telephone: 404.255.3133  
Fax: 404.255.3166

# New Members



JOIN US FOR A FIRST LOOK AT MOUNT VERNON!  
COME AND LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR CHURCH AS  
YOU MAKE YOUR MEMBERSHIP DECISION.





# WHO IS GOD?

We don't define God, God defines us. What is it God said to Job? "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:3). However, God has not left us in the darkness. We know something of His nature and character from what He created. He is powerful, He is eternal. Anyone can look at what has been made and know God stands behind it (Rom. 1:20). God has done more than this: He has disclosed Himself to us through His very words. We need not guess what He is like—we know what He is like. This does not mean we know everything about Him, it does mean we know a great deal.

There are, however, several misconceptions about God today. Many people are confused either by a world that does not seem to make sense, or they are offended by a Bible whose God does not live up to their expectations. Some argue that God is at odds with himself. Jack Miles wrote a national bestseller called, *God: A Biography*. Miles examined the Old Testament and came to the conclusion that the God of Scripture is like a two-headed beast:

The Lord God's character is contradictory, and he is trapped within its contradictions . . . If he were, for example, either the omnipotent Lord of Heaven or the solicitous Friend of the Poor but not both, he could escape the trap. But he is indeed both, and he cannot escape.

Others conclude that, whoever He is, God doesn't care. The famous thinker, Mortimer Adler, wrote *How to Think About God*. He concluded, on the basis of philosophy and logic, that there is a God and He is all-powerful. Excellent! However, Adler found no evidence that this all-powerful God really cares about His creation. What a sorry conclusion: to believe there is a God, but to doubt His benevolence. It brings to mind the tragedy of a real-life father who ignores, or worse, abuses his children. Then there are those who argue that God is flat. In other words, their view of God is so shaped by their own experience and expectations that they cannot accept the notion that God is triune. In effect, they flatten the robust, scriptural presentation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into a generic "God" who could find your lost keys but could never reveal Himself as three in one and one in three.

Lastly, there are many whose God is simply too small. They subtly deny His power, His holiness, His sovereignty. They deny the reality that all of life hinges upon God. Even as you read these lines, you are drawing breath because God is sustaining the universe. As Christians, we gather for worship because God builds His church. He is a God who has counted the hairs on our heads, the atoms in our body, and the molecules in the wall. He is a God who knows our thoughts, and works in us "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

God is not small. Too many of us so shrink Him that we cannot face nor experience some of the most basic biblical truths. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2). This is possible only for those whose God is big enough to take a difficulty and, like a sculptor crafting a magnificent work of art, use it to chisel us into men and women able to reflect His glory. Or, as James put it, a God big enough to be called the Giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17).

Misconceptions aside, who is God? What must we say about Him and believe about Him to worship Him rightly? We must say a great

deal about His character, about His promises, and about His decision to redeem a people for Himself. But I've already alluded to one reality that strikes at the very core of God and His purposes. It is a truth about God too often overlooked today: God is triune.

God is triune; He is one in three and three in one. This is a mystery. He is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is distinct yet each person of the Trinity is fully God. It has been said that to know the Trinity is to know the Gospel. How is this the case? Why would anyone say that? Isn't the doctrine of the Trinity the stuff of theology textbooks and the truth of the Gospel the stuff of everyday life? That is not a fair representation of the glorious truth of the Trinity. Each person of the Trinity plays a unique role in the salvation of souls from sin and death. Each person of the Trinity is on display in the Good News of Christianity.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit conspire together for the salvation of sinners. It is the Father who is described as the author, the ordainer, of salvation. Paul praised the Father as the one who "chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4). The Father worked, planned, and prepared for our good. God the Son is the sacrifice, the payment. John called him "the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). God the Holy Spirit makes it possible for Christians to live out their salvation. "Live by the Spirit," Paul wrote the churches in Galatia, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal. 5:16, 22). It makes no biblical sense to think of our salvation without thinking of the unique roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

GOD IS TRIUNE;  
HE IS ONE IN THREE  
AND THREE IN ONE.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make true worship possible. Consider that it is the Holy Spirit who fills us, who reminds us of our sin and, therefore, our need for a Savior. Consider that it is Christ who, through His death and resurrection, carries us to the Father. Through the ministry of the Spirit and the power of the Son, the Father draws us to Himself. We can pray with hearts that have been transformed. We can sing with a message beyond compare. Because Jesus is our great high priest, we can approach God's "throne of grace with confidence" (Heb. 4:16). God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit conspire together so that our worship is not merely a show for ourselves or others, but so that it is something of weight and substance.

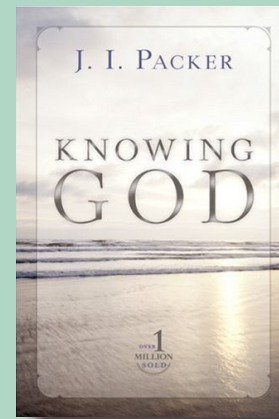
What should we do in light of God's tri-unity?

We should pay attention to God as we read our Bibles. We should look out for what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. There is no special code to unlock the secrets of the Bible, but there is a God who has disclosed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will never rightly read the Word of God until we see God for who He truly is and how He is working.

We should give God the credit He deserves by offering Him the worship He demands. This includes praising Him for who He is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our worship will only run deep if our knowledge of God runs deep with it. Our hearts will be stirred only after we turn the attention away from ourselves and toward Him.

We should know God personally. What does it mean to know God?

# Knowing God by J. I. Packer\*



Reviewed by Mark Lamprecht

## Overview

Do you know God or just know about Him? Do you seek to know God through Scripture or through personal experience? Are you skeptical about the Bible being divine revelation from God?

In *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer sets out to answer who God is as revealed in the Bible and how we are to know Him. Packer asserts that 'ignorance of God' is seen as the root weakness in today's church. He examines the ignorance of God's ways and also as they relate to daily living (12).

To address these issues Packer breaks the book into three main sections:

- I. "Know the Lord"
- II. "Behold Your God!"
- III. "If God Be For Us . . ."

## I. "Know the Lord"

Packer begins with the "Study of God," which is theology, and explains its importance. He also handles objections to studying theology. He writes, "Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder though life blindfolded" (19). Five basic principles for knowing God are laid out as a guide. In brief, they are the Bible, God is Lord, God is Savior, God is triune, and living by God's Word (20).

Packer moves on to explain that this knowledge of God must be applied to daily living. The first section of the book will challenge the reader on what it means to know God and to be known by God.

## II. "Behold Your God!"

This section surveys the characteristics of God and how they are displayed in His actions. (This is the longest section of the book.) Packer moves from God being unchanging and majestic, and then through other characteristics such as wisdom, love, grace, justice, etc. He contrasts God and man, showing how man should act and think of himself in light of God's revelation of Himself.

Packer explains that while God gives wisdom about Himself to Christians, this does not give them the ability to understand His secret purposes (101). In addition, God's wisdom helps us depend on God and live godly lives.

Packer's in depth exploration on the love of God will help the reader gain a fuller understanding of what the Bible reveals in this area. For example, Packer explains that the phrase "God is love" is one of the most misunderstood statements in the Bible (117). Following love is the understanding of God's grace. Packer explains that many church people don't have a concept of grace (129). Packer wrote, "Grace and salvation belong together as cause and effect" (132).

Any man who wants to get to know a woman will try to know her as she really is. Where is she from? What does she like? Who are her friends? Only when those questions are answered can real intimacy take place. The same is true of our relationship with God. Only when God is known as He truly is will our intimacy with God grow. He is a Father who created us to know Him. He is a Son who died and was resurrected that we might have peace with Him. He is a Spirit who works in us and through us to make us more like Him. In other words, the God of the Bible is personal. Talk to Him—share your life with Him.

We should care more about what God thinks than about what people think. We all know what it is like to treasure somebody's opinion. Every day we are making mental calculations along the lines of "Who should I believe? Who can I trust?" These decisions factor in numerous variables: the character of the person, his reputation, his stature in his field, and his track-record in our lives. Then we encounter God. There is no one like Him. He executes justice and exercises mercy. He demands holiness and provides it. He promises salvation and guarantees it. He is unlike us. We are quick to seek vengeance but God told Hosea, "I am God, and not man – the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath" (Hos. 11:9). We are one-in-one, God is one-in-three and three-in-one. He is unique and wonderful. All of this should lead us to care about God's opinion. We should trust that when we encounter Him in His word we are encountering someone worth believing and worth believing in. When we are tempted to place all our faith in people we should remember that only the sovereign, triune God is dependable. When we are crippled by another's expectations, we should care less about what they think and more about what God thinks.

Who is God? He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let us care about what He cares about: our salvation, our holiness, and His church. Let us value what He values: every creature made in His image and likeness. And let's work toward His goal: the exaltation of God's holy name.\*

~ Aaron Menikoff

\* This was originally delivered as a Sunday Evening devotional on September 21, 2008.

Packer teaches that in trying to grasp the wisdom, love, and grace of God there is the often overlooked wrath, justice, jealousy and relation of goodness and severity. He explains that there are more references in Scripture of God's anger, fury and wrath than of God's love. (149) Packer paints a picture in these chapters so that the reader can see the greatness of God and his own helplessness.

## III. "If God Be For Us . . ."

Lastly, Packer comes to the Gospel and the concept of adoption as children of God. He wrote, "the Gospel tells us that our Creator has become our Redeemer" (189). Packer demonstrates that God is also our guide. He shows that, for many, guidance is a chronic problem (230). He argues that the basic mistake is looking inward for a prompting of the Holy Spirit apart from the written Word (234). Packer explains that the essence of Christianity is found by knowing God in Christ (278).

## Evaluation

*Knowing God* is a Christian classic on God's character and the Gospel. First printed in 1973, it was re-printed in 1993 for its twenty year anniversary. The utility of this book ranges from personal devotion to small group settings. There is also an optional study guide available. *Knowing God* is practically useful because it systematically spells out who God is and how to know Him in a biblical framework.

Both new and maturing Christians will find this book useful yet challenging, and may find it helpful to work through with a mentor. More mature Christians will also be fed by its teachings. Some readers may be challenged by the theological vocabulary that Packer uses, but this is another opportunity to learn and grow. *Knowing God* will help the reader understand biblically who God is and who we are in Jesus Christ. This book is not only relevant to today's Christian, it is an essential read.\*



\* J. I. Packer is Board of Governors' Professor, Theology, Regent College, MA, DPhil (Oxford). He recently celebrated his 82nd birthday.





Parents, do you need  
a little bit of...



this christmas season?

Bring your kids to  
**PARENTS' DAY OUT**  
December 6  
12:00 pm - 3:00 pm

\*Register online at [mvbchurch.org](http://mvbchurch.org) by 12/01/08

### PRESCHOOL MINISTRY IN NEED OF TEACHERS

The preschool ministry is looking for Discipleship teachers for our winter High 5 session. Discipleship classes for Preschool will begin on January 7, from 6:15 pm to 6:50 pm on Wednesday nights. If you are interested in helping our little ones learn about God's Word, contact Bethany at 404-303-8033 x236 or at [bethanysaunders@mvbchurch.org](mailto:bethanysaunders@mvbchurch.org).



Thursday, December 4  
6:00 pm

### Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

Our church's goal for this year's Lottie Moon  
Offering is:

**\$25,000**

Christmas  
at

*Mount Vernon*

December 14, 2008  
6:00 pm

Featuring:

ARMENIO SUZANO  
Jazz Saxophonist

•  
DAVID CARNES  
Pianist

•  
THE  
MOUNT VERNON  
CHOIR



850 MOUNT VERNON HIGHWAY NW  
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