

Know Who God Is • Psalm 100:3

What do you predict for this winter's weather? Do you think this will be an unusually cold winter? Or do you think it will be warmer than usual? Do you agree with the forecasts of the commodities industry or the National Weather Service? If you're an investor in heating oil futures the decision of which predictor to believe could make millions of dollars of difference.

USA Today ran a special section on the science of forecasting. It dealt with weather, the stock market, retail sales, political elections and the direction of interest rates. The conclusion of the article seems to be that the best of forecasters are wrong more often than they are right. The newspaper reviewed economic forecasts from interest rates to Gross Domestic Product to the Dow Jones Average and S&P 500. Basically all the prognosticators missed the mark. The explanation for all of the errors was simple. Forecasters only have the past upon which to base their predictions, but the future has variables that the past did not have. There are too many changes the forecasters could not have known and did not include in their calculations.

We live in a time of so many changes. We belong to a generation that lacks certainty. Relativism reigns. Absolutes are denied. New countries are emerging. Old diseases are returning. Lifetime employment is disappearing. Families are wobbly. Many people are scared.

In the midst of all of this what we need is something certain, something sure. We need absolute truth that never changes and that can carry us through anything we will face. More than ever we need the certain declaration of Psalm 100:3: "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

There are three transforming truths in these lines, and if we get all three we can face anything that comes our way in life. We can face every circumstance with certainty, with worship and with shouts of joy!

If we can actually "Know that the Lord is God" we are well on our way to living a transformed life. We need to understand that there is an intellectual side to knowing God. It is the rational belief in the reality of God. But faith is more than mental assent. To know God is to have an inner acceptance of who he is.

We often hear that belief in God is simply a matter of faith, and that's true. But never think that faith is to be uninformed or anti-intellectual. Christianity is a thinking person's religion. Christianity is not afraid of careful thinking or scientific evidence or critical questions. The truth is that Christianity has a long tradition of leading intellectuals from around the world and throughout history who have diligently searched before coming to the conviction that "the Lord is God."

Psalm 100 was first written in Hebrew. The word that is translated "Lord" is the Hebrew word "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" which is the primary Old Testament name for God. The word translated "God" in Psalm 100:3 is the word "Elohim" which was the ancient word for god or gods. At times it can even refer to the gods

of false religions. And so the Bible acknowledges that there are many persons and things that claim to be god or are presented as gods. Travel almost anywhere in the world and you can see huge idols and shrines that are objects of worship for millions of people. They believe that these creations of their minds and hands are real gods.

But Psalm 100:3 urges us to know that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is the only real God. Belief in Yahweh therefore means renouncing every other god as false and acknowledging that the God of the Bible is the one true God.

Throughout the Bible the Lord, or Yahweh, is presented as absolutely amazing. He is without beginning or ending. There was never ever a time when God did not exist. There will never ever be a time when God does not continue to exist. He is

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not like us. He is not human; he is not mortal; he does not change. He knows everything and can do anything. God is absolutely perfect. He is absolutely loving and generous and kind. God is willing to do anything for our good, including sacrificing his own son for us. God makes everything work together for good, no matter how long that may take and no matter how impossible it may seem.

Knowing that the Lord is God means that the Lord is in control of the world and that he is in control of our lives. We may not always think that way. We may think it's really politicians or parents or enemies or our critics or an employer or cancer or AIDS or the economy. But none of these or anyone or anything else is greatest and most powerful in our lives or in our world. "The LORD is God!"

Knowing this Lord as the only true God is a life transforming truth. We are confident that the Lord is in charge. We know that what he says is true. We have a fixed point in the universe that is always dependable and always good. Everything else can be defined and understood in terms of him. "Know that the Lord is God!"

The second transforming truth is to know who we are. When we know ourselves and understand how we fit into this world we are powerfully enabled to have self-definition and self-confidence. There are a lot of people who spend their entire lives trying to figure out who they are and what is the meaning of life. It can be a frustrating and destructive journey of self-discovery. And if I can't figure out who I am there is little chance that I can find purpose in life or happiness or be much good to anyone else.

According to the Bible, we are creations of God. "It is he who made us and we are his." If that is true and if that is believed then all of life has immediate and eternal meaning.

God made us in order to love us. The Lord certainly didn't create us in order to hurt us. He didn't create us in order to hate us. He didn't create us in order to make us miserable. There is great self-identity in knowing that God made us.

We continually identify people and things by their source of origin. I was born in New Jersey. Although I've lived far longer in Minnesota than

I ever lived in New Jersey I will carry the "made in New Jersey" label all my life. Volkswagens are made in Germany. Volvos are made in Sweden. Harley Davidsons are made in the USA.

It is transforming to live life realizing "I was designed in heaven and made by God!" That gives me a worth that is far greater than a label that has to do with New Jersey, Germany, Sweden and the United States combined. But, especially important is that it tells me who I am.

God created us and God owns us. Actually he doubly owns Christians. God owns us as our Creator but he also owns us as our Redeemer. We humans are notorious for wanting our independence. We have rebelled against God's ownership and control of our lives even though our Creator has every right to do with us whatever he wants. That independence is called sin. Sin rots and ruins our lives.

I read an interesting story about a man who owned a 1958 Chevrolet Impala convertible when he was a teenager. He loved that car. But, as he grew out of his teenage years he sold it and lost track of it, and the car was resold many times. When he reached his forties he wanted his '58 Chevy back again. He hired a private detective who found each owner through interviews and motor vehicle registrations. He tracked the car across thousands of miles through multiple states and finally found it in a junkyard. It was wrecked and rusted.

When the detective found the car he called the man who had hired him. The man then traveled across country to the junkyard and bought the wreck. He invested thousands of hours and tens of thousands of dollars rebuilding and restoring his once beautiful 1958 Chevrolet Impala convertible. He wanted to make it the beautiful car that it once was. And eventually he did. It was as good as new. He had given it his best. He just loved that car. It became a car twice loved and twice owned.

God has done far better than that. God first owned us as our Creator. When we wandered away our lives became wrecked and ruined. Some of us ended up in the junkyard. But God does not easily give up. God tracks us down. He finds us and works on us. He rebuilds and restores us through Jesus Christ. He makes us the way we were meant

to be, no matter how long it takes.

So, who are we? We are those whom God has made and we are his. His ownership is not a bad thing; it's a good thing. His ownership is not burdensome. As Christians we do not resent it. We know that he made us and he loves us. We are proud to wear his name and get our identity from him. In the words of the psalmist, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his."

Knowing who God is and knowing who we are leads to the third transforming truth about our relationship to God: "We are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

God could have defined our relationship with him in slave terms, but instead he chose to use shepherd terms. It is technically and legally true that God created us and he owns us, so we are totally subject to his orders. "We are his people" and he can do anything he wants with us.

While this is not the primary emphasis of the Bible, it is one that we shouldn't forget. The Lord is God and we can never overpower or overrule him. Sometimes we as humans act as if we are God and can tell God what to do. But we can't.

God is God. He owns us. He can love us or hate us. He can give us life or he can give us death. That's why it's wise for us to remember who God is and what our relative position is and that we follow the Bible's advice to "fear the Lord". But fearing the Lord can have different definitions. If we are Christians with hearts for God, that fear of him is really enormous respect and admiration. But if we are rebellious and antagonistic against God, we should fear his anger and our consequences for our rebellion and sin against him.

God's emphasis is not on controlling us as slaves but on caring for us as sheep. "We are the sheep of his pasture." Shepherds love their sheep. Shepherds care for their sheep. The safest and best place any sheep can be is in the shepherd's pasture. The pasture is where it's easy, where there is plenty of food, where dangers are fewer and, most of all, the pasture is where the shepherd is always close by.

There are some marvelous words in the Old

Testament in Isaiah 40:11 that tell us: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." It's the description of a shepherd with sheep. It's the description of God with us.

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That picture is carried over into the New Testament where we read that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Think about that. We are his sheep. Jesus the shep-

herd loves us enough that he actually died on the cross for us.

All of this is God's way of saying that our relationship to him is to be the very best. He has done and he will do everything to keep that relationship as close and as good as can be. God is watching out for us with love in every detail of our lives during every day of our lives.

Put all these truths from the Bible together. Drive them like pilings into your life so that you are able to sustain hurricane force winds or mountain moving earthquakes. Memorize these truths. Repeat them a dozen times or more every day. Know who God is. Know who you are. Know your relationship.

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