



Knowing God

Pocket Principles

Knowing God

Laying Foundations

What is a Pocket Principle?

Each Pocket Principle focuses on a single topic necessary to the growth and maturity of a believer.

Pocket Principles are designed to be read in chronological order. Because the goal of disciple building is Christlikeness in character and conduct, we have included suggested application ideas at the end of each Principle.

Relating to God

You have begun a journey to know God, but did you know that you are actually joining a story in progress? God has desired to have a relationship with you for a long time and has prepared the way for you to enter into that relationship. When a person comes to faith in Christ and passes from spiritual death to life, a transaction takes place that has many far-reaching implications. One of these is complete and full reconciliation with God and the start of a new relationship. It is a relationship that is fuller, deeper, and richer than anything we can possibly imagine.

This invitation to relationship should not surprise us since God, at His core, is a relational being. Ken Boa, in his book *That I May Know God* writes “As a communion of three Persons, one of God’s purposes in creating us is to display the glory of His being and attributes to intelligent moral creatures who are capable of responding to His relational initiatives.” Later in the same book he writes, “If I had to choose one word to summarize the theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, that word would be relationship.” The truth is, we will never want to know God as much as He wants to be known by us.

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There are fundamental differences between God and man that impact the relationship and make it unlike human relationships. For example, God is infinite, while we are finite. He is all knowing, while we have very limited understanding, both of the world we live in and the people around us. God is the Creator; we are created beings. He is invisible; we are visible. He is unchangeable; we change. God is perfect; we obviously are not.

Some of these differences may seem to make our relationship with God more challenging than ordinary relationships. For example, it can be hard to talk to someone who isn’t visibly present. It can be difficult to listen to someone who doesn’t generally speak audibly to us. It can be intimidating to think about a close relationship with someone who is so different from us.

However, the differences between God and humans also offer the opportunity to have a healthier relationship with Him than we ever can with each other. Much of the dysfunction in human relationships is a result of our posturing and pretending and our attempts to protect ourselves from hurt and disappointment. There is no need to play these games with God, although

we often still try. He is unchanging and always true to His character. He is utterly dependable. We never have to worry what kind of mood He is going to be in or whether He is going to respond in a certain way or not. These truths should give us a great deal of confidence in our relationship with Him.

As with any relationship, our relationship with God is reciprocal. There are certain things that God does to establish and maintain the relationship, and there are specific things we must do for the relationship to grow and develop. Understanding this dynamic and how it affects the relationship is very important.

We can better understand the reciprocal nature of our relationship with God by understanding our different roles. In a nutshell, the primary difference in our roles is that God is the initiator, and we are the responders.

We are free to be totally open and honest with God because He knows all about us anyway.

King David of Israel, known as the psalmist because of the many Hebrew poems (psalms) he wrote, uses rich, colorful language to describe His understanding of the nature and character of God. It is fitting to consider the psalms in the context of relationship

because they are written out of the author's personal relationship with God. There are many places in Scripture that speak of God's initiative toward us, but one passage, Psalm 139, perhaps describes this better than others. These verses convey the following truths.

God takes the initiative in His relationship with us.

He knows us intimately. (Psalm 139: 1-4)

God knows everything about us — our actions, our movements, our thoughts, our words. In fact, because He is all-knowing and exists outside of space and time, He knows these things before they even happen. He knows us far better than we know ourselves. Knowledge can be scary in human relationships. We choose what we think is safe to disclose to one another, and we go to great lengths to protect information we don't want others to know. We are free to be totally open and honest with God because He knows all about us anyway. And the amazing thing is that He loves us unconditionally despite full knowledge of all about us that is unlovely.

He protects and shields us; He is our security. (Psalm 139:5-6)

"You hem me in, behind and before," writes the psalmist. "You have laid your hand upon me." The laying of God's hand upon us is a picture of his all-encompassing care for us. In other Psalms, David uses many pictures to describe God's care of him including

that of a shield, a fortress, a hiding place, a refuge, and a shelter. He paints the following picture in the first two verses of Psalm 91: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ ”

God is completely attentive to and involved with us. (Psalm 139:7-12)

“Where can I go from your Spirit?” wonders the psalmist. “Where can I flee from your presence?” He then reflects that no matter where he could possibly go, God would always be there for him. David knew that He could never go beyond the reach of God’s personal concern.

This is a significant distinction between our relationship with God and that with any other person. No human, no matter how much he or she may want to, can ever always be there for us, either physically or emotionally. At some point, distance or other factors will prevent it. However, we can never go anywhere that God will not be with us.

Donald Glenn, in his book *Tradition and Testament*, tells of an old mariner’s chart, drawn in 1525, on display in the British Museum in London, which outlines the North American coastline and adjacent waters. The cartographer made some intriguing notations on areas of the map that represented regions not yet explored. He wrote: “Here be giants,” “Here be fiery scorpions,” and “Here be dragons.

Eventually, the map came into the possession of Sir John Franklin, a British explorer in the early 1800s. Scratching out the fearful inscriptions, he wrote these words across the map: “Here is God.” Our dragons and giants may be different than those feared by the early explorers, but we have them just the same. We should remember that whatever or wherever they may be — there, too, is God.

God created us and sustains us — physically, emotionally, and spiritually. (Psalm 139:13-16)

One of the things we most value about those we are close to is that there is a strong bond of understanding between us. These special friends seem to understand what really makes us tick. Who knows better what makes a clock tick than the craftsman who builds the clock? Likewise, who knows us better than the God who created us? He knows us inside and out, better than anyone else ever can. He created us in His image to reflect His glory, yet He has created each of us uniquely with a predetermined number of days that we shall live upon this earth.

The verses discussed above demonstrate that God desires to know us. Of course, King David lived 1,000 years before God even more clearly and forcefully demonstrated initiative by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. When humankind asked Jesus how much He loves us, He opened wide His arms and died for us. In a foreshadowing of what would one day

be accomplished on the cross of Calvary, David wrote “as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

We have responsibility in our relationship with God.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,” was God’s word to the Jews living in captivity (Jeremiah 29:10-14). The heart represents the center of one’s being; the seat of emotions and will. Scripture includes several commands that relate to the heart: We are told to love God with all of our hearts (Deuteronomy 6:5 and elsewhere), to trust with all of our hearts (Proverbs 3:5), and to repent with all of our hearts (Joel 2:12).

Our seeking is not to be a casual endeavor. Consider the contrast between two men who go on separate camping trips. The first man realizes during the week that he has misplaced his pocketknife. It was a good knife, although relatively inexpensive, and one that he had owned for several years. He would like to find it, and every day he keeps his eyes open for it in case he should happen to stumble across it.

The second man realizes the night before he is to leave to return home that he has lost his car keys. Early the next morning, he receives a call from his wife saying that their teenage son has been in

a car accident and is in intensive care in the hospital. There is no casual searching here. He has got to find those keys! He scrambles around on his hands and knees, tears his tent and camping gear apart, and frantically retraces every step he made the previous day. The first man’s search for his knife is a half-hearted effort; the second man’s search for his keys is with his whole heart.

A teacher of the law asked Jesus, “Of all the things we’re expected to do, what is the most important?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

According to the response that Jesus gave to the teacher, everything taught in the law can be summed up in this one commandment.

We have a responsibility not simply to acknowledge God’s existence or even to acknowledge His rights as creator, but to love Him with our hearts, our souls, and our minds. This is another way of saying that we should love Him with every part of our being.

We also have a responsibility to obey the commands of God. This is love in action; love with shoes on. According to the words of Jesus, obedience is how we show our love for God (John 14:21). The Apostle John, who recorded these words, later reiterates Jesus’ words by stating flatly, “This is love for God: to

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obey His commands” (I John 5:3). John also argues that if we say we have come to know God (have a relationship with Him) yet do not obey His commands, then we are lying (I John 2:4).

James, the brother of Jesus, writes, “Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). This verse speaks of another responsibility we

He will not force Himself on anyone. He will allow Himself to be found and enjoyed by anyone who calls upon Him.

have in our relationship with God. It also speaks of our outward actions (wash your hands) and our inward thoughts and motives (purify your hearts). Each is important as we draw near to God.

Because we are sinful beings, we will continue to do things that create distance

in our relationship with God. Each time we become aware of this distance, we should once more humble ourselves, confess our sin and draw close to God. We draw near in need; He draws near in fullness.

Notice that each of the responsibilities discussed above comes with a promise—a positive benefit for us as we fulfill the responsibility. This pattern further illustrates the reciprocal nature of our relationship. When we seek God, He allows Himself to be found by us, and He reveals His

gracious plans for us. When we demonstrate our love by obeying God, He shows His love to us and reveals Himself to us. When we draw near to God, He draws near to us.

Ultimately, our response is always to God’s initiative.

God is the initiator; we are the responders. We can never “get the draw” on God. He has drawn first. After all, it was He who placed within us a “God-shaped vacuum,” spoken of by the French mathematician Pascal, expressly so that we would seek to fill the vacuum with Him. God’s initial words to Adam, the first man, after he had fallen into sin, were “Where are you?” This same call has echoed down through the corridors of history as God continually reaches out for relationship with us.

However, God does expect us to respond to His initiative and follow after Him. In fact, there is no relationship apart from our positive response to Him. He will not force Himself on anyone. He will allow Himself to be found and to be enjoyed by anyone who calls upon Him. As we focus on God’s initiative toward us, and the response He desires, we gain a better understanding of what Jesus meant by the “abundant life” in John 10. When we respond to God’s love, we are able to love Him and others, and enjoy healthy relationships with God and with those He has placed around us.

Application Suggestions:

- Meditate on the Scriptures in this Pocket Principle, especially Psalm 139.
- Participate in times of praise and worship to God, acknowledging His love, initiative and accessibility.
- What will you do this week to respond to God's initiative and work in your life?

We believe that materials such as these are always “in process” and able to be improved. We will be grateful to receive any feedback you have to share with us. Please send any comments and/or suggestions to:

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NOTES: In the interest of editorial brevity and simplicity, these documents treat gender-neutral and gender-plural references with the masculine pronoun “he” rather than “she,” “he or she” or other constructions. When clarity is better served by other words, we follow whatever usage seems to aid readers best. Worldwide Discipleship Association follows Scripture in joyfully recognizing that God created man and woman in His image as equal recipients of His grace and mercy.

We recognize that there are theological and denominational distinctions between God’s people. These celebrate our diversity even in the midst of our unity. In our materials, WDA has tried to approach Scriptural truth from a perspective of classic historical orthodoxy. Whenever possible, we have tried to avoid focusing directly on issues that we know are points of difference. However, we know it is inevitable that there will be points within the materials at which there are disagreements. If you find one of these points as you use these materials, we encourage you to substitute the information important to your tradition and understanding.

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