



# Knowing God

## Pocket Principles

Attributes of 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.

## The Attributes of God

What we think about God is of vital importance in determining our relationship with Him. Because our response to God is based on our thoughts and feelings about Him, it is critical that we know what He is really like. A true relationship with God is based on a Biblically accurate understanding of His attributes (or personal characteristics).

Unfortunately, our impression of God usually has been colored by hundreds and thousands of inaccurate images of what He is like. Imagine having heard about someone you had never met from several different sources over a long period of time. (Some of the reports may have even been slanderous and misleading.) Most are limited to minor events related to this person.

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Others are varying accounts of his personality and behavior.

When you finally meet this person, the beginning of your relationship is colored by assumptions and expectations based on these second-hand reports. If you want to know what this person is truly like, you will have to make a point of trying to understand him. This might involve discarding some of the false impressions that you

have already formed. It will certainly take time and many shared experiences for the picture of this person to come into clear focus.

In a similar way it is possible that we can misunderstand God's attributes and have conflicting views of what He is really like. We can have an intellectual view based on what we know about Him. We can also have a very different, emotional view based on what we feel about Him. Just as accurate vision requires two correct lenses, so a true relationship with God must be based on proper thoughts and feelings about Him.

Unfortunately, our feelings often mislead our thoughts, resulting in wrong ideas or false mental images of God. Correcting these false images can be difficult, but there are steps we can take to gain a clear view of who God is.

### ***Studying Biblical Images of God***

God reveals Himself to us in His Word. From Genesis, the first book in the Bible, to the last account in Revelation, the Scriptures describe God in many ways and help us appreciate His character and values. Often the biblical account lists different names for God. These names give us insight into His character and personality. For example He is variously called: "Almighty God," "Everlasting God," "The Lord of Hosts," "Lord Who

Heals," "Judge," "Lord Who is Present," "Father," "Lamb of God," "Good Shepherd," Savior" and "Spirit of Truth." By carefully considering the meaning of His names, we gain a clearer picture of who God is and what He does.

Throughout the Bible we can also see important character descriptions of God. Some of these qualities reflect human relational attributes, enabling us to connect with God more personally. As we contemplate these qualities we begin to realize that He is a perfect example of how we should be: truthful, faithful, loving, good, patient, merciful, holy, just and righteous.

The Bible also reveals attributes of God that we can never share. These characteristics clearly demonstrate that God is very different from us and worthy of worship. Unlike us, He is a spirit, self-existent, unchangeable, eternal, infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful, sovereign and present everywhere at once. Each of these attributes should cause us to wonder in awe as we contemplate His majesty.

### ***Understanding God's Attributes***

God's character qualities are essential to who He is. To have a true knowledge of God, we must take care not to disregard any of His attributes or focus on some to the exclusion of others. He is all of these things, all the time. Nevertheless, it is helpful to have a unifying principle to focus our appreciation of His attributes.

The Scriptures often mention God as a heavenly Father who loves and cares for His children. (Isaiah 9:6 and Matthew 6:9 are just two of many references to God's fatherhood.) Seeing God as Father properly unifies all of His attributes. Because this is a primary way the Bible teaches us to view and address God, it is important to embrace healthy images of fatherhood and strive to correct any unhealthy views we may have adopted. Unlike earthly fathers who make mistakes, God is holy and perfect in His attributes.

### ***Correcting False Images of God***

Many people struggle to establish and maintain a true, Biblical view of God as Father. Wrong ideas about God often come from

early life experiences within their families. This is especially true if human fathers disappointed or hurt them. They might mistakenly view God as Someone who holds impossible expectations of them, or One who is emotionally distant, abusive, unreliable, or absent. Because wrong ideas about God can make it very difficult to relate to Him, we must work to correct our false perceptions.

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There are steps we can take to clarify

our view of God. First we must recognize that we often have competing views of God. One view is presented in Scripture, the other is the one we feel is true, based on how we interpret our early life experiences. Identifying the negative experiences that distort how we view God helps us reevaluate these experiences in the light of God's truth. Psalm 73, for example, shows David's change of perspective when he brought his struggles to God in prayer and gained fresh insight from the encounter.

As you look back over your life, especially the difficult times, ask God to show you what He was trying to accomplish. Ask Him to reveal His heart toward you. Our feelings can be unreliable, so it can be useful to have someone help us see God's purposes for us. When we have a Scriptural perspective (cf Romans 8:28-29), we can reinterpret everything in a proper context.

Finally, we should reinforce a Biblical view of God by meditating on the truth of who God is. We can ask others to help us recognize when we begin relying on our feelings instead of what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture. By choosing in faith to believe the truth of God's Word instead of relying on our (often misdirected) feelings, we can create new relational experiences, built on a true knowledge of God. This is a process that requires time and discipline, but it pays great rewards!

## Summary

The Bible tells us that God knows us perfectly. By studying the character of God and working to correct distorted images of Him, we can know God better and grow closer in our relationship with Him.

- How we respond to God is based on our view of Him.
- God reveals His character in the Bible and His dealings with us.
- We can study God's names and attributes in the Bible.
- The concept of God's fatherhood focuses our view of God's attributes.
- We can correct false views of God.

## Application Suggestions:

- Spend time studying the character of God. (See the Handout entitled "The Attributes of God".)
- Make a list of "pressure points" in your life; where your life experience conflicts with truth.
- Work through correcting any false views you may have of God. (See Handout entitled "Correcting False Views of God".)

## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

### God's Attributes We Can Share

The characteristic of God whereby He is:

TRUTHFUL: God is completely honest, genuine. John 1:14, 14:6

FAITHFUL: God is completely trustworthy and loyal to His children.  
II Thessalonians 3:3, Isaiah 49:7, I Peter 4:19

LOVING: God's is unconditionally compassionate, caring and devoted  
toward us. His ultimate love was demonstrated by Jesus on the cross.  
I John 3:16; 4:9-10

GOOD: God is complete, right, excellent. Luke 18:19; Exodus 33:19

PATIENT: God demonstrates forbearance and endurance towards mankind. II Peter 3:9

MERCIFUL: God is actively good toward those in distress. He does not treat them  
as they deserve. (They deserve death because of their sin.) Romans 9:15-16,  
Exodus 33:19

HOLY: God is totally pure, perfect and complete. He is set apart and above  
all His creation. Exodus 15:11, Isaiah 6:1-4

JUST: God always acts in a right and fair manner. John 5:30, Psalms 89:14, 97:2

RIGHTEOUS: God is morally perfect. Psalms 89:14, 97:2

### God's Attributes We Can Never Share

The characteristic of God whereby He is:

SPIRIT: God is invisible, immaterial, does not have a body.  
Genesis 1:2, John 4:24; I Timothy 1:17; Colossians 1:15

SELF-EXISTENT: God is everlasting; has no beginning and no end. Exodus 3:14; Psalms  
90:2

**IMMUTABLE:** God is unchanging in His character and in His purposes.  
Numbers 23:19; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8

**ETERNAL:** God is everlasting and immortal. Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40:28;  
I Timothy 1:17

**INFINITE:** God is unlimited. He is above time and space, unlike His creation.  
I Kings 8:27, Psalms 147:5, Jeremiah 23:24

**OMNISCIENT:** God is all-knowing. He knows Himself and all things perfectly  
(and exhaustively). He knows all the possibilities and probabilities. Psalm  
139:1-4, 147:5; Isaiah 40:13,14

**OMNIPOTENT:** God is all-powerful and almighty. Isaiah 40:21-26;  
Jeremiah 32:17; Job 42:2, Matthew 19:26

**OMNIPRESENT:** God is present everywhere at once. Psalm 139:7-12, Acts 17:24,27,28

**SOVEREIGN:** God has supreme authority, reign and control over His created  
order. Ephesians 1:11, Isaiah 46:9-11

## CORRECTING FALSE VIEWS OF GOD

Correcting false views involves several steps:

**1) Identify false views of God that you have:**

- a. We often have two competing views of God.
- b. One view is the one presented in Scripture. The other is the one we feel is true based on how we interpret our experiences with God. (Note David's change of perspective when He took His struggles to God in Psalm 73.)

**2) Identify the sources of these false views:**

- a. Most false views are based on early life experiences, primarily those involving our families.
- b. These experiences often taint our interpretation of our experiences with God.

**3) Reevaluate your interpretations of God (i.e. reinterpret your experiences)**

- a. As you look back over your life, especially the difficult times, ask God to show you what He was trying to accomplish in those times and what His heart is toward you (Romans 8:28).
- b. You may need help being objective since it is easy to just react to your feelings, which may be unreliable. Ask someone else to help you see God's greater purposes in your life.

**4) Reinforce right images of God**

- a. Meditate on the truth of who God is.
- b. With the help of others, recognize when you begin relying on your feelings instead of what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture.
- c. Identify a reoccurring situation in your life in which you have a false view of God based on your feelings.
- d. Determine specific action steps, based on truth about God, that you will take to correct this misunderstanding.

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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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated are from the New International Version of the Bible, © 1978 by New York International Bible Society

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.

***Knowing God, Pocket Principles, Laying Foundations***

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