

FOREWORD BY
BILLY GRAHAM

A man in a white shirt and dark trousers is sitting in a yellow doorway, looking thoughtful with his hand to his face. The background is a white wall with several other yellow doorways, some of which are empty.

DO I KNOW GOD?

Finding Certainty in Life's Most Important Relationship

TULLIAN TCHIVIDJIAN

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Some names and minor details in stories have been changed to protect privacy.

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To Mom and Dad

*You were the first to teach me that Christianity
is first and foremost about having a relationship with God.*

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Foreword

The book you now hold in your hand contains the message I have spent more than sixty years of my life proclaiming. From my first book, *Peace with God*, published in 1953, to my most recent book, *The Journey*, I have sought to help people understand how they can truly know God.

As I near the end of my life in this world, it has been my earnest prayer that God would raise up a new generation of voices committed to proclaiming the good news that, in the person of Jesus Christ, God came into this fallen world to rescue sinners from their sin, turning slaves into sons. This book, written by my grandson Tullian Tchividjian, is an answer to my prayer. God has raised up Tullian for such a time as this, to boldly proclaim to the next generation that there is nothing more important than knowing God.

As you will come to find out in these pages, Tullian struggled significantly as a young man before God brought him to this sobering conclusion. Even though Tullian was raised in a loving Christian home, he determined to walk away from all God had given him. After years of searching for satisfaction and certainty apart from God, God answered our prayer by opening Tullian's

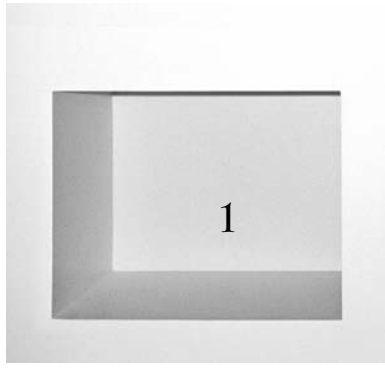
eyes and helping him to see that only a relationship with God can quench our thirst for contentment.

Almost overnight my wife and I saw a radical change in Tullian. His God-driven pursuit of truth was infectious to us all. He spent the next seven years of his life in college and seminary, studying the Bible, philosophy, our culture, church history, theology, and biblical languages. He has taken the advice of my friend John Stott to be a man of double listening—listening to both the questions of the world and the answers of the Word.

His unique combination of life experience and theological ability makes him a biblically wise counselor for his generation. A dynamic preacher and an accomplished church planter, Tullian here puts his thinking down on paper. He makes his case clearly, compellingly, and—most important—biblically.

My prayer for you, the reader, is that you will listen carefully to what my grandson says here. Apart from the Bible, this may be the most important book you could ever read, because it will help you answer the most important question you could ever ask: Do I know God?

—Billy Graham



The Hope of Certainty

Is knowing God really possible?

*I know whom I have believed,
and I am convinced that he is able to guard
until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*

—APOSTLE PAUL (2 TIMOTHY 1:12)

It was the week after Christmas, and the office was quiet. Most of our staff at New City Church were either out of town or at home with family. I'd taken the week off too, but one morning I stopped by my office to pick up some books. A few minutes after I arrived, someone walked through the front door. His name was Mike. He and his family had been attending New City for a while. Holidays or not, Mike had a question that couldn't wait.

He slumped down in the chair next to the window. He confessed he'd been sitting in the parking lot for more than an hour debating whether he should walk in and talk to me. He had finally mustered the courage to come inside to ask me a single question: "How do I know if I know God?"

As we talked, it became clear that the question had been eating at Mike for at least a year—ever since I'd preached a sermon on Matthew 7. That's the chapter where Jesus warns there will be many who go through life thinking they know God, only to hear chilling words when they meet him in eternity: "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (verse 23).

Those eleven words—"I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness"—were haunting Mike. He was haunted by the simple, stark tragedy they convey: that a guy can be so badly mistaken about such an important relationship he can go through life thinking he knows God, only to hear a shocker at its end.

"Is it even possible, Tullian, to *know* God?" asked Mike. "I mean, *really* know him?"

Mike took his question further. If knowing God in this life determined whether we received an eternal welcome or its very disturbing opposite, then the stakes were even higher. "How can I *know* that I know God?" he asked.

One look at Mike's face showed me he hadn't driven to my office during Christmas week just to play Stump the Preacher.

Mike was confused and distressed, besieged by doubts. And he wanted answers. No, he *needed* answers.

There's a story behind the story that you should know about Mike, something that might have been pressing him to get at the facts about knowing God. Before Mike started attending New City, he'd never been a churchgoing guy. When he fell ill with cancer, that changed. On his first Sunday at our church, Mike introduced himself and told me about his cancer. He asked me to pray with him and his family, and I did. Today, thankfully, Mike's cancer is in remission. But anyone who's had a brush with death is more likely to think deeply and courageously about life's big questions.

Of course, Mike isn't alone. I meet people almost every day who are struggling with whether God is knowable and, if he is, what it means to have a relationship with him. Recently I received an e-mail from a friend named Curt. Although Curt says he's a Christian, for some time he and his girlfriend had been struggling to integrate their relationships with God into their relationship with each other. They recently broke up. Heartbroken and confused, Curt has been questioning the genuineness of his relationship with God ever since. When he discovered I was writing this book, he wrote:

Ever since Jill and I broke up, I feel as if I'm slipping away from God, and I need help. When I read your

e-mail about the book you're writing, I almost didn't read it all the way through, but something told me to keep reading. I can't help thinking that God wants me to take my relationship with him a little more seriously. I've been meaning to make an appointment with you, but I've been too full of pride to admit something—I don't really know God as much as I thought I did. I know you're busy, but when things aren't so hectic, I'll be around.

THE HUMAN NEED TO KNOW

The questions Mike and Curt are asking lead me to make an elementary but critical observation: all people throughout history can be divided into two groups—those who know God and those who don't. Simple. True. Potentially devastating.

Fortunately, though, that isn't the end of it. Not by any means. For example, the Bible makes it clear that if you're confused about which group you belong to, you don't have to remain confused. If you do have a relationship with God, he wants you to know it. And if you don't have a relationship with God, he wants you to know it.

The Bible also shows that the flip side of these dramatic statements is true. God does not want you to think you have a rela-

relationship with him if you don't. And he doesn't want you to think you do not have a relationship with him if you do.

In this matter, ignorance is not bliss. And thankfully, neither is it necessary.

At our core, you and I have been created to want and need God. In fact, as we'll see in the pages ahead, he designed us specifically to be in a close, life-fulfilling relationship with him. That's why when we're out of relationship to him or we aren't sure where we stand with him, we feel restless, numbed, somehow incomplete. It doesn't matter who we are or how much security we experience in other areas of our lives—as beings created in the image of God, we long for the kind of certainty that only an authentic relationship with God can satisfy.

Do you resonate with this deeply human need for clarity and certainty regarding a relationship with God? If so, then this book is for you. It is my attempt to give Mike, Curt, and every other sincere spiritual seeker credible answers to the all-important question “Do I know God?”

OUR UNCERTAIN GENERATION

Let's admit something right off: most people today are deeply suspicious of the word *certainty*. For one thing, nothing seems certain anymore. Our world is racked by war, social upheaval, natural

disasters, recurring pandemics, racial and sectarian hatred, and terrorism. And the list could go on. For another thing, on a more personal level, millions struggle every day with job insecurity, family and marriage breakdowns, financial hardship, and fear.

In a world this unstable, it is hard to believe that we can be certain about anything. Or—if we're honest—that certainty is always desirable.

We all learned about the fanatical religious certainty that drove the terrorists on September 11, 2001. For good reason, we've come to distrust and fear those who operate by any absolute and extreme code, especially a religious one. No wonder our generation is more comfortable with pluralism, tolerance, and the language of statistical probabilities.

It might not be far from the truth to say that doubt is the new absolute. A recent *Time* magazine article suggested that embracing spiritual doubt is the key to defusing the political and cultural tensions between East and West. After all, the writer concluded, spiritual doubt is the only honest position to take: "If God is beyond our categories then God can't be captured for certain."

Is this what you and I are left with then in our quest for certainty with God—spiritual doubt as our only conviction? Given that God is infinite and we are finite, that he is perfect and we are imperfect, is absolute certainty even possible when it comes to knowing God? After all, Isaiah 55:8–9 says:

My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

My first response to the driving question of this book is a true story. It is the story of a genius who said, “It is not certain that everything is uncertain.” His name was Blaise Pascal.

A PHILOSOPHER’S ENCOUNTER WITH FIRE

On August 19, 1662, the French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher Blaise Pascal died at the young age of thirty-nine. Pascal was, according to British scholar Malcolm Muggeridge, “unquestionably one of the greatest intellects Europe ever produced.” Following his death, Pascal’s servant discovered a piece of parchment sewn carefully into his coat. A cross was inscribed at the top of the parchment, and underneath it were these words, now famously known as the “Memorial”:

The year of grace 1654
Monday, 23 November...
.....

From about half past ten in the evening until half past
midnight.

Fire

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,”

[Exodus 3:6] not of philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ...

“My God and your God.” [John 20:17]

“Thy God shall be my God.” [Ruth 1:16]

The world forgotten, and everything except God.

He can only be found by the ways taught in the
Gospels.

Greatness of the human soul.

“O righteous Father, the world had not known thee,
but I have known thee.” [John 17:25]

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy,

.....

Let me never be cut off from him!

He can only be kept by the ways taught in the
Gospel.

Sweet and total renunciation.

Total submission to Jesus Christ and my director.

Everlasting joy in return for one day's effort on earth.

“I will not forget thy word.” [Psalm 119:16] Amen!¹

What prompted such an outpouring? On November 23, 1654, Pascal barely escaped being killed when his carriage almost plunged off a bridge. Fifteen days after his brush with death, Pascal experienced a personal encounter with God so powerful, so potent, that he penned those words. For the rest of his life, Pascal kept them near to his heart (literally) so he would never forget his “night of fire”—the night that changed his life forever.

Pascal’s near tragedy led him to a joyous experience of God’s presence—“Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.... Let me never be cut off from him!” But what I’ve always found fascinating about Pascal’s “Memorial” is how he tied his experience of joy and peace to certainty. For example, he discovered the certainty of God’s supreme value—“The world forgotten, and everything except God.” He was certain of God’s grace and compassion. He was certain of God’s love and favor. He was certain of God’s goodness and mercy. He was certain of his future reward as a result of total submission to Christ—“Everlasting joy in return for one day’s effort on earth.” He knew God, and he *knew* that he knew God—“not of philosophers and scholars,” but the living God. And it was this assurance that endowed his life with a wholeness—a greatness of soul—that he had never known before.

Few men in history have thought more deeply about the nature of reality than Pascal. Writes Robert E. Coleman of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, “At an age when others had hardly

begun to see the light, [Pascal] had completed the cycle of human knowledge, and seeing its emptiness, directed his remaining energies to knowing him in whom is hidden all the wisdom and the glory of God.”²

What Pascal discovered on that fiery night was simply this: a man or woman *can* know God. And to *know* that you know God changes everything.

GOD IS NOT SILENT

Of course, most of us aren't genius physicists, philosophers, or mathematicians. Nor have many of us experienced a fiery night with God. So it's only reasonable that we might wonder, *Is certainty with God something that he makes available for ordinary persons who must endure very real limits?*

Again, the Bible's answer is heartening, because we encounter a God who both wants to be known and chooses to reveal himself to all. As the title of a Francis Schaeffer book so memorably put it, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. Of course, we can't know everything about God, but what we must know, we can know. As theologian R. C. Sproul wrote:

The incomprehensibility of God does not mean that we know nothing about God. Rather, it means that our knowledge is partial and limited, falling short of a total or

comprehensive knowledge. The knowledge that God gives of himself through revelation is both real and useful. We can know God to the degree that he chooses to reveal himself.³

The first revealing of God is nature itself. Ancient Jews saw the physical world as the garment of God: a shining, sometimes terrifying skin that both covers and partially reveals the Divine Infinite. David the psalmist wrote:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
 and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
 Day to day pours out speech,
 And night to night reveals knowledge. (Psalm 19:1–2)

God's fingerprints are on everything—black holes, nebulae, pink salamanders, ice crystals, a leaf bud unfurling in spring, mold, an atomic particle, a baby's cry, a grandfather's face, you, me. As C. S. Lewis said, "We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him."

Everything in nature points to an exultant, good, and glorious God. Paul described what every pagan in the Roman Empire had already witnessed of this revelation: "What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine

nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:19–20).

Since every created thing reveals the Creator in some way, we can say with confidence that God has made himself known—certainly. But the most indispensable and precise revealing of God is in his Word, the Bible.

While God unveils himself generally in nature and in everything good and true, God does so specifically in Scripture. Creation displays the greatness of God; the Bible goes beyond displaying his greatness and reveals how you and I can know this great God. The Bible is God’s story. In its pages we learn about God’s unfolding plan to restore a broken world. The Bible reveals God “as more than a distant cosmic architect...or an impersonal life force. He is the living God, present and active everywhere.”⁴

As we read the Bible, we come to find that the central figure in God’s plan, the hero of God’s story, is God’s own Son, Jesus. According to Hebrews 1:3, “[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” He is the Savior sent by God to right all wrongs, mend all that is broken, and reconcile separated, fallen human beings like you and me to God. In nature we learn that we are creatures who depend on a Creator. In Scripture we learn that we are sinners who depend on a Savior (more about this in chapter 2).

In the person of Jesus, we learn something vital about God: he deeply desires to be in relationship with people. He desires this

so much, in fact, that he paid the ultimate price so that genuine, unbroken relationship to him could be ours—forever.

THE SURE ANCHORING OF YOUR SOUL

As we explore answers to the question “Do I know God?” we’ll first examine what a relationship to God actually means, how we enter into an authentic one, and what we can expect as a result—both now and in our future. Since there is so much confusion today regarding what it means to be spiritual or religious, this book will also identify six ways people deceive themselves into thinking they know God when they do not.

Second, this book will assist as you “examine [yourself], to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5) in order to help you “make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). The outcome of this rigorous personal inventory for Christians is that we can then confidently enjoy the sure and steadfast anchoring of our soul that true relationship with God promises (Hebrews 6:19).

And finally, this book will suggest practical spiritual disciplines that can help you not only maintain this most significant relationship but flourish emotionally and spiritually in it. I encourage you to use the accompanying study guide either for your personal benefit or in a group of like-minded seekers.

To know your Creator, to know that you are loved, and to

know that you know—that's the simple but profound promise of this book. When you finally understand that truth, your life will be transformed. My earnest prayer for you as you read is that by the last page you will be able to say with passionate certainty in your heart,

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
This is my story, this is my song.⁵