

Confidence in Love, Tim Keller

The scripture reading this morning is from John, Chapter 14:7-11.

⁷If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” ⁹Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me who is doing his work. ¹¹Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

This is the word of the Lord.

[00:01:10.410] - Speaker 1

John 13-17 is Jesus’ training session with the disciples the night before he dies. He’s sending them out into the city, out into the world, and he’s training them to go out and represent him. One of the reasons why we this year are reading through this entire section studying John 13-17, is that through the Rise Campaign, we have also been asking God to take Redeemer and to send us out in the city in a heightened and new way. So, we’re studying the same material as those disciples. And, John 14 is a wonderful, marvelous chapter, in that, in this chapter, Jesus gives the disciples a number of gifts, I think would be the best way to put it. A number of gifts, knowing how hard it is to represent him in the world, knowing how hard it is to live in the world. He gives them a whole set of treasures, and it begins with hope. He says, “For the future, I’m going to prepare a place for you in my Father’s house.” The end of the chapter is, “Peace, I leave you; my peace, I give you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you.” So, Jesus is giving us peace for the present. He’s giving us hope for the future, there’s a number of other things. However, in some ways, what he offers us here is maybe the greatest of all. One of the ways you can see how great it is, is Philip asks for something in verse 8. He says, “Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” It’s a lot like Moses on Mount Sinai saying to God, “Show me your glory.” Philip is doing something I think most Christians can identify with. He’s saying, “We believe in the Father, we believe in God, but it’s hard. It’s hard sometimes to live for God when he feels so remote and so unreal. So, give us a vision. Let us have just one vision, one actual sight of God. Show us the Father, and that’ll be enough for the rest of our lives.” And Jesus, as we see here, is exasperated with Philip. Essentially, he says this, “Philip, I’m offering you something greater than a vision with your naked eyes of God. Through me, you can know the Father.” In other words, Jesus Christ is talking about something that he calls knowing God. By putting it over as greater than a vision of God, we can see how great it is.

[00:03:52.710] - Speaker 1

Let’s look at what this is. Let’s look at, first of all, what is possible, according to Jesus, and that is through him, we can know God. How it’s possible, that is, how does it actually happen that you come to know

God, and why is it possible? **What is possible, knowing God. How is it possible to know God, and why is it even possible to know God.** So first, let's look at the thing that he's offering. What is possible knowing God? Jesus makes a remarkable statement in his exasperation, and he says, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such for a long time? You've been around me, Philip, and yet you really don't know me." It's pretty interesting. "I've been with you, you've been with me, but you don't know me." It's a remarkable statement. Philip is not just somebody who shows up, attends church every so often. Philip is a pillar of the church. He has been studying Jesus' words. He's been learning all about what Jesus is teaching. He's gone out and he's healed people and he's done miracles. And Jesus looks at him and he says this, "It is possible to be around me. It's possible to know a lot about me. It's possible to study my words. It's possible to attend church. It's possible to be extremely active in Christian activities, help people, minister to people, and not know me at all." Because informational knowing is not personal knowing. You can know about suffering and not really know suffering. You can know about Mr. Jones, but not really know Mr. Jones personally. Jesus says that's not only possible with him, but it's common. Now, three Bible passages that drive this idea home, which we need to have it driven home. Here's three passages. One of the most, probably most famous and the most scary is Matthew 7:22, where Jesus is talking about what's going to happen on Judgment Day. He says, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? And in your name drive out demons and perform miracles?' And then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Depart from me." Okay, now when he says he's going to meet people who are saying, "We preached in your name. We did miracles in your name." Jesus is saying it's possible to be a theologian.

[00:06:27.120] - Speaker 1

It's possible to be an extremely successful minister, and not know me personally at all. Never have really given me your heart. Have no saving personal relationship with me at all. Another verse that drives us home is later on in this, in John 17, we'll get to it later this year. In John 17, at one point, Jesus is praying, and he says, "Father, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. This is eternal life, that they know you and Jesus Christ, whom you sent." So, see, knowing God, whatever this is, is not just something for spiritual elites. It's not just something for super-religious people. There is no eternal life without knowing God. So, it's possible to be incredibly busy in a church, know lots and lots of Christian doctrine, do all sorts of ministry, and not know him at all. But if you don't know him, you don't have eternal life. The third passage, just to note, is pretty famous because it's so eloquent. It's Shakespearean, sort of, is Jeremiah 9, where God is speaking through Jeremiah, and he says, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me."

The reason that is so rhetorically powerful, here's what God is saying. He says, imagine being the consensus smartest person on earth. Every university, every government wants you to work for them. Or imagine being consensus the greatest athlete on the earth. Or imagine being the richest person in the world, which today would really take a lot, by the way. I don't know what, 100 billion or something like that. Imagine that you had achieved something like that. Would that be satisfying? Would it feel good? Yeah, it would really feel good. It would be incredibly satisfying. And yet God says, "And yet that is

nothing compared with the depth of fulfillment and the sustained richness of knowing me.” And by the way, everyone I've ever met who's had a major taste of the first satisfaction and a major taste of knowing God, agrees. So obviously, the average person, you ask them, “What is a Christian?” They're going to say, “Somebody who goes to church services or somebody who believes certain doctrines or somebody who follows certain ethical rules.”

[00:09:26.290] - Speaker 1

The answer is, yes, yes, yes. No, Philip. No, Philip! Because you can do all those things, Jesus says it several times, you can do all those things and actually not know God at all. Do you see the necessity of it? Do you see the centrality of it? Do you see the possibility of it? Jesus says how important this is, knowing God. So, it's possible. Okay, well, then how is it possible? How does it happen? How does somebody know God? There are three elements in here. If you, if you ponder and meditate on this, there's three elements. They're not necessarily stages, like you do three weeks of this and this one. And yet they do have a logical order, but they're all here. Here's what I would say. Through the words of Jesus, you have to see Jesus, and to see Jesus is to see the Father. First of all, the words of Jesus. Jesus says something in verse 10 that is actually pretty interesting. It's worth pondering because it's actually surprising. Okay. Verse 10, Jesus is saying, “The Father is in me.” Then he says, the second half of verse 10, “The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father living in me...” Who what? Now, wouldn't you expect him to say, “The words I say to you, I do not speak in my own authority, rather it's the Father living in me who is speaking.” Wouldn't you think that's what he should be saying? But he doesn't. He says, “...who is working.” What Jesus is getting at here is one of the... It's something the Bible says from beginning to end. In Genesis 1, God says, “Let there be light.” Then he doesn't go off and turn on the lights. He says, “Let there be light,” and there is light. See, when you and I say, “Let there be light,” then you have to go turn them on. In other words, our words have to be backed up with deeds, but God's words are deeds. Jesus is saying, “Philip, you don't want God to be working in your life through a vision.” You say, “Boy, if I had a vision, that would be enough. Then I know God's working in my life.” But I said, “No, no, no, Philip. I want you to realize that when you read my words, when you really listen to my teaching in my words, that is how God is powerfully present and working in your life.”

[00:11:51.120] - Speaker 1

John 7, the religious leaders send a bunch of soldiers to go and arrest Jesus. So, they go to arrest Jesus. They're going to get their man, but they come back empty-handed. And the religious leaders say, “Why didn't you bring him back?” You remember what did they say? They say, “No one ever spoke the way this man speaks.” In the old King James Bible, it says, “Never a man spake as this man spake.” What had happened there was the words of Jesus had revealed such an unearthly beauty that they said, “This guy's for real.” See, look, I don't know what you... Don't argue with people about Jesus or think about Jesus or ponder Jesus, read books about Jesus. Go to the page and listen to what he says. If you do, secondly, you will see Jesus. What do I mean by seeing Jesus? Well, this is what happened to the soldiers. The

soldiers, by hearing his words and studying his words, they weren't just studying his words. They were seeing that the words reveal an unearthly person.

Remember singing in the Rain? Remember that musical movie, Gene Kelly? One of the characters, there's a character in there named Lena Lamont. Remember her? She is a star of the silent screen because the movie takes place when at first, movies were all silent movies. She's a star because she's drop dead gorgeous. But then there's a crisis. There's a crisis that comes up in the studio because talking pictures come in. Do you remember Lena Lamont's voice? She's beautiful, but her voice reveals that she is shallow, vain, and spiteful. She has an incredibly whiny, complaining voice that's just awful. By the way, the most famous line is, "What do you think I am, dumb or something?" Do you remember that? Except she says it a high wine. I'm not going to try to jive your memory by trying to imitate her. The point is her words revealed, in spite of how lovely she looked on the outside, it revealed her character. If you listen to Jesus' words, it's not just... When they came back and says, "No one ever spoke like this man spoke," the reason they didn't lay hands on him was that the words revealed that there's never been anybody like this. Now, if you go and you actually begin to listen to his words, you'll start to see him.

[00:14:35.500] - Speaker 1

What do I mean by that? Well, Jonathan Edwards, great sermon, The Excellency of Jesus Christ, best thing I've ever read on this subject. Edward says that Jesus Christ, the reason he had this impact on people who were really listening to him and looking at him, both in person back in those days, but on the pages of the New Testament now. The reason it has this impact is because, Edward says, he combines traits or virtues that we would never expect to be combined in the same person. There are traits and virtues that if you have one, it tends to push the other one out. But in Jesus Christ, they're combined, and that's what gives him this special unearthly beauty. Of course, it's a testimony to the fact that he's not just a human being, that he's divine and human. That's the reason why he combines these virtues. What are they? Well, Edwards it goes through them, but he says, in Jesus Christ, this is what's so breathtaking about him, in Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ combines high majesty, yet deep humility, strong commitment to justice, yet infinite mercy, tenderness, yet with no weakness, boldness without any harshness, humility without any uncertainty, in fact, towering confidence, unbending conviction, yet totally approachable, insisting on truth, yet bathed in love.

[00:16:04.290] - Speaker 1

Power without insensitivity. Power without insensitivity. Integrity without rigidity. Passion without prejudice. In human beings, when you have one of those virtues, it tends to push out the other, but not in Jesus Christ. The more you look at him, you just start to see an absolute beauty. It's testimony. No one ever spoke like this because no one was ever like this. Because he's divine and human, he's a lion and a lamb. When that begins to dawn on you and you begin to see that unique beauty, that leads to seeing the Father. "If you see me..." See, he was saying to Philip, "Philip, actually, you've been around me, but you've never really seen me. But when you begin to see me, you'll see the Father." Now, what does that mean? What does it mean? It's important to think about this because in the end, knowing God and seeing

the Father are the same thing. When Jesus says, "This is the word see, he can't mean a vision with the naked eye because that's his whole point. Philip's asking for that, and Jesus saying, I'm going to give you something else. Well, then what does it mean? To know God, rather than just know about God, is to see him.

[00:17:16.260] - Speaker 1

When Jesus uses sensory language, sight is one of your five senses, he is giving us a hint about what it means to know God rather than just know about him. Psalm 34:8. The Psalmist says, O taste and see that the Lord is good. O taste and see that the Lord is good. Now, what is he asking the listeners to do? Is he saying, be convinced that the Lord is good? Is he saying, I know you guys don't believe that God's good, but I want to argue that he is good. No, he's not saying... He's assuming his listeners know that that's the doctrine, God is good. He says, I don't want you to just know God is good or just believe God is good. I want you to taste and see. Now, what he's doing is when he evokes sensory language, he's reminding you of all the times in your life when you move from a head knowledge to a sensory knowledge of anything and how different that was. If somebody says to you, The Grand Canyon is incredible, so you believe it's incredible, but when you actually see it, or these mountains, or this is incredible, you believe it, but when you see it, you realize that the words you had before could not convey the greatness that the actual sensory experience of seeing it brings.

[00:18:39.120] - Speaker 1

You just can't. Now, here's God's point. Here's Jesus's point. Here's the Bible's point. Your heart. Your heart doesn't just have feelings, it has sense. There are some things that have become more real to your heart, just the way that the greatness of the Grand Canyon becomes more real when you actually see it. So there's a way in which the heart has a sense as well. So let me give you an example. Listen, I could choose a zillion examples. I'm going to use two women who are both engaged because I can actually think of two women who are both engaged, we went through this. I could use two men. I could use not just engaged. I could use in a career. I could use a million. It doesn't matter. I'm just going to use these two, okay? So don't give me a problem with this. Just anticipating objections. Here's two women. They're both engaged. They both go to church. They both believe God loves them. They're both professing Christians. You say, "Do you believe God loves me?" "Of course. I believe you died on the cross for my sins." Fine. Both of them break up with their respective fiancés.

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It's terrible. It's horrible. One never gets over it. One does. One gets so bitter, and that bitterness just stays in her life. She never really gets over it. The other one gets through it. What's the difference? Well, there's one person to whom God's love was an abstraction. She knew with a head, but not with a heart. She knew God loved her in an abstract way, but she never seen it. It was never real to her heart. The other woman didn't only know that God loved her, but actually had some heart experience. She knew God. See, when you have actually experienced God's love and you know it personally, it puts a

sweetness into the bottom of your cup, the bottom of your heart, that other problems and difficulties, the bitterness just can't get down there. It can't go all the way to the bottom. Or put it this way, for the first woman, the guy's rejection was more real to her heart than the love of God. But the second woman, God's love was more real to her heart than the guy's rejection. Who she was was more shaped by God's love than by what the guy said.

[00:21:11.010] - Speaker 1

She'd tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Got it? The words of Christ lead to seeing Christ. If you see Christ, you see the Father. If you're asking something practical there, well, how does that happen? Maybe you have seen one thing. Look, you can know the Bible without knowing God, But you cannot know God without knowing the Bible. I've already shown you. You can know all kinds of things about the Bible. You can have Bible knowledge. You can study the Bible stories, you can know all about the Bible. You know a lot about the Bible without knowing God, but you can't know God without knowing the Bible. Why? Because where do you hear the words of Jesus? Where do you see the beauty of Jesus? Where do you see the unearthly beauty of Jesus? Where does that draw you in? So that you can start to see God, the answer is only on the pages of the Bible. Now, let me be practical in one more way before going to our last point. Let me give you four marks. See, some of you are out there saying, I don't know. Do I know God?

[00:22:17.380] - Speaker 1

Okay, I'm glad you're asking that question. I don't want to throw you too much into doubt, but I'm glad you're asking that question. Here's four ways to test yourself. I need to start right off by saying there is a spectrum here. It is possible. There is a Matthew 7:22 person who actually is active in church and that does not know God at all. And according to what I've shown you, if you don't know God at all, not only is there no eternal life, but you actually have no real ballast or poise or any... You have no ability to handle the shocks of life. So, there are plenty of people in a church that don't know God at all. But for most people in church, most professing Christians, there's a spectrum. Therefore, these four things I'm going to tell you, the more true they are of you, the more you probably know God. I don't want you to think it's all or nothing here. But here's the four. Number one, people who know God have a more sustained, steady prayer life. Many people pray when they're in trouble, and then when the trouble passes, they don't.

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They pray when there's time, but when they get busy, they don't. Why? Because in their prayer life, they're trying to get things from God, but they're not trying to get God. They're not after knowing God. A person who's tasted and seen that the Lord is good, prays in order... Yes, obviously they pray about all the worries, pray about all the things we need, but also prays just to be with him, just to get him, not just to get things from him, just to get him. Therefore, the more you know God, the more you are likely to have a sustained prayer life instead of an all or nothing prayer life. A second mark of knowing God is the more you know God, the more you actually have experiences of God in your prayer life. Now, I've got to be

very careful about this because there can be seasons, they can be episodic, but sometimes you actually sense God. You're not just thinking about God, you're not just talking about God, you're not just praying to God, but sometimes you sense his presence. Here's a guy who was having a particularly good season, and he's more eloquent than me or you.

[00:24:36.700] - Speaker 1

That's why I'm reading it to you. But this is Daniel Steele. He was an English Methodist Minister in the 19th century, and he was writing a friend about his prayer life, how great things were happening in his prayer life. This is what he says. He says, "Almost every week and sometimes every day, the pressure of his great love comes down upon my heart. With the light of his radiant presence, the spot before untouched has been reached, and all its flintiness has melted in the presence of that universal solvent, love divine, all love's exhaling." Now, it's quite lovely, but you notice what he's saying here is almost every week, and he's having a very fruitful season. He says, "Almost every week, and sometimes every day, the pressure of his great love comes down upon my heart." See, he's using sensory language. There's no other way to talk about it. He's not actually feeling pressure on his heart. Doctors, you don't have to actually worry about, "Oh, my goodness, why do you feel that pressure?" He's not talking like that. He's not about physical pressure on his heart, just like he's not talking about physical sight. When he says, "I see the love of God, finally, I see that he loves me."

[00:25:55.130] - Speaker 1

And yet you have to use sensory language to make the difference between the abstraction and the experience. Your heart actually has a sense to it. What he's saying is almost every week and sometimes every day, and that's a good prayer life right now, but here's what I'm trying to tell you, is that the more you know God, the more often that happens, the more often you actually don't just say your prayers, but you actually meet God in prayer and you experience his present. So, first of all, people who know God have a more steady prayer life. Secondly, the more you know God, the more often you actually experience God in your prayer life. Number three, and I could go back to the Daniel Steele quote in here. Number three, the more you know God, the more you see long term deep changes in your heart. I really love the fact that Daniel Steele says, "The spot before untouched has been reached, and the flintiness has been melted or is being melted." Now, listen, I think an awful lot of us would have to say that there is a spot at the very center and that it takes just to be told God loves you or just to try to strengthen your life or just even go to counseling or just try hard to be a better person does not reach the spot.

[00:27:23.610] - Speaker 1

What does he mean by flintiness? Well, I don't know, but it could be this, anger. There's some of us who have, not me, particularly, but some of you have experienced an awful lot of injustice in your life. When you've experienced a lot of injustice in your life, it can create, you can have an anger problem. You feel like, I always get the wrong end of the stick. Things never go right for me. When that is, that creates a hard spot in the very center of your life, and it gives you a problem with anger. I'll tell you, all the anger

management classes and all the therapy, you can find out why you're angry. That doesn't actually deal with the spot. All the therapy in the world can tell you why you're angry, but not deal with the spot. All the anger management can help you at least control the worst parts of it, but it doesn't deal with the spot. But what will melt that spot? A deep understanding of God's unconditional love in Jesus Christ that you experience bit by bit by bit, and it starts to finally change it. Nothing else will reach that spot.

[00:28:25.160] - Speaker 1

Another possible meaning of flintiness could be, well, like that woman, you've been hurt. And so now you're hard, you cannot commit. You just can't. You just keep things at arm's length. You can't be vulnerable. You can't open up. What's going to change that? What's going to reach that? What's going to reach that spot, that hardness of heart? Only a sustained prayer life with a repeated experience of God's love over the years, only seeing Jesus and through seeing Jesus, really knowing God. The more you know God, the more steady your prayer life, the more you actually experience God in your prayer life, the more you have deep long-term changes, the spot that nothing else can touch gets touched. And you can see the changes. You can see yourself becoming less angry. You can see yourself being able to open up to other people. And nothing else could have made that happen. And lastly, you get a sense that the Bible is a divine book. Sorry to just throw this in here at the end, but the point... There's a lot to say. Here's what happens. You may struggle with things the Bible teaches, and you may be confused about things the Bible teaches, and you may find difficulties in the Bible.

[00:29:40.170] - Speaker 1

But the more you know God, the more you sense God speaking to you through that book, you know, Psalm 119 says, *The unfolding of your words gives light*. The unfolding of your words gives light. The more you see depths, infinite depths in the Bible, no matter how often you come back to it, you see new things. Psalm 119, the Psalm says, *Open my eyes to behold wondrous things in my law*. The more you see God speaking to you, the more you see Jesus, the more you find this book is God's book, this is a divine book, this is not just any book, the more you experience the self-authenticating nature of the authority of the Bible. I could tell you other stories, but no, let's go to the last point. The last point is, why is all this even possible? You know what? It's very easy to miss, but notice one little word. One little word tells you in the very first sentence, If, you really know me, you will know my Father as well. And from now on... Actually, three words, sorry. I was wrong. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

[00:30:56.440] - Speaker 1

From now on. What do you mean from now on? Why? What's happening? Of course, the answer is Jesus is about to die, of course. This is the hour of his death. He's just about to die. He says, "It's only from now on that you will really be able to see me and know me." He's actually letting Philip off the hook a little bit because obviously, Philip has no idea what Jesus Christ is about to do for him. If you don't have any idea, you cannot know him. But it's only as you begin to understand the greatness of what he did for you that you can really know him. At one level, one aspect of Jesus' death means that I can know him because

objectively, my sins are taken away and the Holy Spirit comes into my life. We're going to read more about that as we go along. That's why I'm not going to say anything more about it here. As we go along in these passages, we're going to see Jesus is saying, "The reason why God can send the Holy Spirit into your life so that your heart can be changed, and so you can actually begin to experience God in your heart, even in that central spot, is because your sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ going to the cross."

[00:32:08.220] - Speaker 1

There's a sense in which we can know God because objectively, God, the barrier on God's side is taken away. But I just like to end like this. It's only when I know what he's done for me that I want to know him. Something has to move me on my side. I know some years ago, I talked to a woman after one of the services here, and she was saying, "I believe in a loving God. I absolutely believe in a loving God. But on the other hand, I don't believe in Jesus. I think he was just a nice guy. I don't believe he died on the cross for my sins. I just don't believe in him. But I believe in a loving God, so, basically we're the same. You believe in a loving God, I believe in a loving God. I don't think you need to believe in Jesus to believe in a loving God." I remember having this conversation, and it had much more of an impact on me than her. I said, "Well, I don't think that's right. I don't think you and I believe in a loving God in the same way." She said, "How so?"

[00:33:14.350] - Speaker 1

I said, "Well, what did it cost your God to love you?" She thought about it and she said, "It was nothing." I said, "Well, if I believe that God loved me, but it didn't cost him anything, I'd be happy with that, and I would want to know about him and know him, maybe. And deal with him." But I said, "What if God was not just loving but holy, and he hated evil, which I'm glad of, and I think we all should be glad of, but therefore, because we're all complicit in evil, he knew he couldn't love us unless somehow the penalty for our sin was dealt with. What if in Jesus Christ, he came to Earth and took that penalty himself?" You see, when Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, and especially on the cross, says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Do you know what he's saying? He's saying, "Father, I can't see you." Just imagine the prayer life Jesus Christ had. It would have been an incredible prayer life. But you see, the curtain had come down, even, I think, when he got to the garden. And by the time he was on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

[00:34:32.340] - Speaker 1

Meaning what? "I can't see you. I could always see you, but I can't see you." Why can't he see us? Why can't he see his Father? Because he's experiencing the darkness he's experiencing the darkness that we deserve. Because he's experiencing the darkness that we deserve, we can see God. When I see him doing that, the flintiness, it starts to do something to my flintiness. See? When I see him doing that for me, I realize my heart is so stupid. I think God is a killjoy. He's not. I think God is against me. He's not. I want to know this God. You see what he means when he says, Why is it possible for us to know God? From

now on, once you understand what I'm about to do for you, the greatness of what I am going to do for you, now you can know me. Do you really know him? Do you know a lot of things about him? Or do you know him just a little, but not very well? Know the Lord.

Let us pray. Thank you, Father, for this tremendous gift. We thank you that you're not an impersonal force that we can only sense in some impersonal way. We thank you you're not a remote God who never came to Earth and suffered like we have. Lord, you are of all the gods that are even out there on offer to the human race, to the religions of the world, there is no God like you, a God that can be known. Oh, Father, help us to know you and Jesus Christ whom you sent. Make us a people who know you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.