

A Passion to Know Him

by Charles Stanley

In 'A Passion to Know Him', Charles Stanley emphasizes the importance of developing an intimate and profound relationship with Jesus Christ above all worldly pursuits.

Duration: 1:03:41

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, Philippians 3:3-4, Colossians 3:2, James 1:2-4

Topics: "Knowing God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of knowing Jesus Christ not only as Savior but also as Lord. Many people are content with knowing Jesus as their Savior because it means they are forgiven and redeemed. However, few are interested in knowing Him as Lord, which requires submitting their will to Him and allowing Him to guide their lives. The speaker encourages listeners to be observant of how God works in their own lives and in the lives of others, and to learn from these experiences. Finally, the speaker urges listeners to look for evidence of Christ in every circumstance of life, even if they don't always understand it.

Transcript

When you hear the word passion today, most of the time we relate that to some sensual or sexual idea, but the word passion means an overwhelming, intense, strong desire towards something or someone else. Passion is not to be limited to something that is sensual, but passion can also be directed towards something that is spiritual, that is, a passion to know God, a passion for God. And that is exactly what I want to talk about in this message, and I want to begin a series today by that very theme title, and that is a passion for God, and the title of this message, A Passion to Know Him.

A strong, intense, overwhelming, emotional desire to know God in Christ Jesus. Now, if you'll turn to Philippians chapter three, because probably of all the text in the Bible, this is the one that best describes and expresses the passion of the Apostle Paul to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you'll recall also that in this book, all through this epistle, he's talking about rejoicing and praising the Lord, though he's writing this from a prison.

And in the third chapter, he has just made the statement in the last part of that third verse, put no confidence in the flesh, that is, don't depend upon our own self-achievements and accomplishments for anything spiritual. And then he begins by verse four saying, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh, if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more. He says, now, first of all,

you shouldn't put any confidence in the flesh, that is, don't base your acceptance by God on the basis of your past heritage accomplishments or achievements.

But he says, if anybody had the right to do so, he said, I would for the following reasons. And then he tells us what they are. Verse five, he says, I was circumcised on the eighth day.

I was of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. But whatever things, referring to these, were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. And then he says more than that, I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect in these things, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Now, if somebody says to you, do you know so-and-so? If you've heard of them or if you've been around them or if you've talked to them, more than likely you say, yes, I know them. When in essence what you mean by that is on a very surface level, I do know something about them.

But to know someone and to know something about them is entirely different. And so most of the time when we say, yes, I know them, we don't really and truly mean that we really know that person. We know about them.

We know something about their reputation or where they live or who they are married to or their children and so forth. So I want to ask you this question. Do you really and truly know Jesus Christ? If someone should say to you, who is Jesus Christ? How long would it take you to explain to them who Jesus is? Would you say something like this? Well, he's the Savior of the world.

He's the Son of God. He was born of a virgin. He's the Lord of life.

He was crucified, buried, and risen again, and he's ascended to the Father, and he's sitting at the Father's right hand. He's coming again. Would you stop with that? Or could you tell them who Jesus really is in an intimate fashion as your friend, one who's accepted you, one who loves you, and one who walks with you every day, one who's become not only your Savior and your Lord, but your very life, one in whom you trust, one upon whom you rely? Could you begin to explain to that person who Jesus Christ really is? Far too many people sit in church houses on Sunday, and far too many people listen to tapes, listen to the radio, watch television programs that are religious or spiritual, and think they know who Jesus is, but really do not know who he is.

And the Apostle Paul in this passage of Scripture says, the passion of my heart that is the most intense, strong, overpowering, yearning, hungering, thirsting desire of my life is to know Jesus Christ. Could you say that? If I should ask your wife, does your husband really know you? Many women would say, not really. If I should ask you as a husband, does your wife really know you? Some of you would say, not really.

Because you see, real, genuine, true knowledge goes beyond the surface when it comes to knowing someone. It has to do with something far beneath what we see and what we feel on the surface. To know someone involves a great deal more than that.

And so the question comes, why would the Apostle Paul say, I count everything else in my life as mere rubbish compared to knowing Jesus Christ? Well, let's see why. Because that should be the desire of our own heart to know him in that fashion. And there must be something very special about Jesus for a man to say, everything else is mere rubbish compared to him.

So let's look at it, if you will, in this third chapter. And first of all, let's get a proper understanding of what he means by knowledge here. And you can tell by the priority that the Apostle Paul puts on his desire to know the Lord Jesus Christ, this has to be certainly more than factual knowledge, some theory or some principle about Jesus.

When he says what he desires is far more than that. So what does he mean when he says, above all else, I desire to know him? That kind of knowledge involves three things. First of all, it involves understanding Jesus Christ.

It involves experiencing him personally. And thirdly, it also involves an intimacy with him. So it means understanding him, his ways and why he operates the way he does and how he seemingly responds to us and works in our life.

It involves not only an understanding, but it involves an intimacy with him. That is an ever growing, deepening relationship of oneness with him that is continually growing. It involves a relationship of intimacy and understanding.

It involves a relationship that is ongoing and life effecting. To know the Lord Jesus Christ never leaves a person the way they were before. To know him by experience, to know him in intimacy, to know him with understanding.

This is what Paul is referring to here when he says, but I count everything is lost compared to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, in the Old Testament, a word that is similar to this word for knowing here is the word, yada, which means to know. And in Genesis chapter 4, I believe in the King James version, it says that Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and brought forth a son.

And so they use the word know to explain the physical intimacy between a husband and a wife. Because you see genuine, true knowledge is beyond the surface and it goes into that intimate relationship. Why did Jesus say that a man is to love his wife like Christ loved the church? Jesus doesn't love us merely on the surface.

He loves us in an intimate, deep, ever growing, ever life changing fashion. Husbands and wives are to grow in their intimate relationship with each other, far above and beyond the physical, because the spiritual intimacy that a husband and a wife are able to experience with each other goes far beyond any kind of physical relationship. And so Jesus said to the apostle Paul that a man is to love his wife in such an intimate relationship.

It is like Jesus loving his church in a fashion that can only be experienced and probably never fully explained. The apostle Paul is saying in this passage, the passion, the deepest yearning, the overwhelming emotional desire of my heart is to know this Christ. And so when he talks about knowing

him, he's talking about knowing him in that fashion, to know him in such a way that he can never be the same again.

If that knowledge of him is growing, that means I'm growing. If my understanding is growing, then I'm growing. If my intimacy is growing, then I'm growing.

If my relationship with him is such that it is affecting all of my life, then I too am maturing on the basis of my knowledge and understanding of who Jesus Christ is. It is a continuing daily experience with Christ. Now let's think about it for just a moment.

I wonder how much you and I really truly want to know him because you see most people are satisfied with knowing Jesus as Savior. Now watch this. The reason most people are satisfied with knowing Jesus Christ as Savior is because knowing him as Savior means I'm forgiven of my sins, I've been redeemed from them, and ultimately the penalty has been removed, and therefore I am now receiving something as a result of knowing him as my Savior.

But now watch this. Far too few people are interested in knowing anything about Jesus Christ as Lord because you see to know him as Lord says I know him as the boss, I know him as the controller, I know him as the guide, I know him as the director, I know him as the one who's controlling my life. Am I interested in knowing Jesus Christ as my Lord? Am I interested in submitting my will to him? Am I interested in walking subdued before him and yielded to his will? Or am I only interested in knowing him as my Savior because that's the way I get the forgiveness of my sin? And then how many people know Jesus Christ as their life? If someone should ask me what is the greatest truth you have ever known or discovered since you've been a Christian, I can tell you right now what that is.

The greatest truth I have ever discovered in all of my Christian experience second to nothing is this simple truth that Jesus Christ who is my Savior, my Lord, and my life is my sufficiency for all my needs. I am complete in him and I can respond to every circumstance based on who I am in him, who he is in me, drawing for every temporal and spiritual need from the inexhaustible resource of the person of Jesus Christ, the all-sufficient one. That is the greatest truth I have ever discovered in life.

That is knowing him in a far greater and more intimate way than something that is on the surface. That truth has absolutely radically revolutionized and changed my whole perspective of the Word of God, of the church, of God, of Christ, myself, and my whole outlook on the world. Paul said, I have a passion.

I have a passion to know him. You see, most of us want the stretch of our hand to him, not our heart. We want to know him as the giver.

We want to be the receiver. We are far more interested in knowing him as the one who answers our prayers and gives us what we need rather than just to know him for who he is. Isn't it strange how many people can quote certain very popular people who are in the area of sports or politics or the theater? They can tell you all about their score, everything that's happened in the past few years, all the good things that they have done, the achievements, the accomplishments, the awards.

Whether it is in the area of politics, the theater, sports, whatever it might be, it is amazing how much real knowledge about some people they have. And then when it comes to Jesus Christ, there's a void. Let me ask you a question.

Is he worth knowing? Do you know what a wife thinks when her husband doesn't really want to know her? Here's her conclusion. I'm not worth knowing, which is a devastating response, but that is exactly what a woman thinks. I must not be worth knowing.

I wonder when Jesus looks at your life and mine and our interest in him, if he sort of sometimes comes to the same conclusion according the way we respond to him. And of course he knows better. He is indeed worth knowing.

But how much do you care to know about him? Are you satisfied just knowing him as your savior, that you're forgiven of your sins and you go into heaven? Or is there something inside of you that drives you, that motivates you, that stirs up your keen interest? You want to know, who is this Christ in whom I've trusted my whole eternity? Who is this Christ who answers my prayer? Who is this Christ who loves me, cares for me, forgives me, meets my needs, accepts me just the way I am? Who's written my name in the Lamb's book of life? Who's going to take me to heaven? Who's preparing a place for me? Who understands me fully? And who loves me just the same? Who is this Christ? Are you dissatisfied as long as you know you're going to heaven and you've been saved by the grace of God? The apostle Paul was never satisfied. He says, the passion of my heart is to understand and to know this Christ. Listen, to know him in such an intimate fashion that I am absolutely and totally perfectly satisfied being in his presence asking for nothing.

When you kneel to pray or when you come to him in prayer, are you always asking for something? Do you always have your hands outstretched, oh God, my needs here, there and yonder? Or can you honestly say, I'm just satisfied being in his presence and talking to him and listening to him and asking for nothing? Do you really know this person whom you serve and whom you claim to be your savior? And if you know him, how intimately? How deeply? How lovingly? Or are you satisfied to have your mind barraged with all the information the world has to give? All the things that pour into your mind day after day after day, remembering this and that and the other and whatever happens to our knowledge of Jesus Christ. All of that is so temporal and passing and changing. And remember this, listen carefully.

What we genuinely know of the truth of him never changes. I didn't say that our understanding wouldn't deepen. And I didn't say we wouldn't understand more, but I'm saying the truth that we know about him never changes because the truth of him is always the same.

Everything else in life, all the knowledge is continually changing. But knowing Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul said, the knowledge that I'm talking about is of such priority that I put that knowledge above every other thing in all of my life. Now, what happens when a young man gets interested in a young woman? What happens? He wants to know her better.

When a young lady gets interested in a young man, she wants to know him better. They don't just say, well, how you doing? Good to see you again. But there is an ever growing desire toward reaching out, pursuing, seeking after, desiring to know one another.

Let me ask you a question. Since you have been saved by the grace of God, what have you done to really and truly know Jesus Christ as your savior? Listen, what would motivate a man to say what the apostle Paul says in this passage? Now look, if you will, in verse seven, he says, what things were gained to me? Speaking of the things he had just mentioned in verse five and six concerning his family relationship, his relationship to the nation of Israel, his position as a Pharisee and his position as far as keeping the law, he says, whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as lost for the sake of Christ. So not

only do we need a proper understanding of what he means by knowing, but the second thing I want us to notice here is this, and that is the profound value the apostle Paul places on knowing Jesus Christ.

So he says more than that. I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus for my Lord, for whom I've suffered the loss of all things, count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. Now look at that for a moment.

He says, here's how I value this knowledge of Christ. First of all, he says, as I look at my past, my achievements, my accomplishments, my possessions, my heritage, he said I count all of that as of no value compared to intimately understanding and experiencing knowing Christ Jesus. Not only that, he says, those things that were gained to me, verse eight, more than that, he says, I count everything as a total loss compared to knowing Jesus Christ intimately, understanding him, experiencing him in my daily life.

He said there's nothing to compare with it. And then he reaches his climax at this point when he says, more than that, I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value. Listen, he says when it comes to knowing Christ, there's nothing to be compared with the priceless privilege.

He says with the overwhelming value, the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing value and the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ. He says there is nothing to be compared to that. And then notice how he says it.

He says, knowing Christ, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them, but rubbish. He says, here's the way I view everything else in life. You can put my family heritage, my possessions, my prestige, my prominence, my position, my authority in the past, everything I've achieved, everything I've accomplished, everything in life that has any value, you can put that on one side of the scale.

You can put knowing the Lord Jesus Christ on the other scale pan. And what happens is there is absolutely no comparison whatsoever. And when he uses the term rubbish here, the apostle Paul chose the worst word in the vocabulary he could possibly use to describe, listen now, to describe the comparison with everything the world has to offer compared to knowing Jesus Christ.

And I'm going to say it just like what that word means. He says knowing Jesus Christ puts everything else on the level of rubbish, trash, garbage, piles of manure. That's what he means.

What in the world did the apostle Paul know that would cause him to say none of those things that my friends, that my brethren, that the world considers important, none of these, these altogether have absolutely no comparison. They bear no worth. They bear no value compared to knowing the person of Jesus Christ.

What would motivate a man to say something like that? Let me ask you, what is it in your life that you want to know more than you want to know Jesus? What is it you have a passion for? When you hear people say, well, she's just my life, then their priorities are totally out of order. When someone says, well, you know, he's my life. No.

When somebody says, oh, my vocation is my life. No. There should only be one person who can fit that category.

And that is Christ. The apostle Paul writing out of a prison said, rejoicing in the Lord. He said, everything I know, everything I have, everything I have ever experienced and every promise of the world has to offer is mere rubbish compared to intimately experiencing and understanding the person, a relationship that I have with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's the man who knew the Lord. How do I know that? Who wrote the epistles? Who wrote Philippians and Ephesians and Colossians, three great epistles that unveil the person of Jesus Christ in such a fashion that you and I will never be able to fully comprehend all the truth that is wrapped up in those three epistles. They're not the only three, but the apostle Paul said more than I want anything else in life.

This is what I want. He didn't say, I sure would like to be free. Paul, what do you want most of all? You're a preacher of the gospel, a statesman and a missionary.

Don't you want out of prison? Don't you want the freedom to get out there and preach the gospel and establish more churches? No. He says, the passion of my heart is not to get out of jail. The passion of my heart is not to be unchained.

The passion of my heart is to know this Christ. And when people sit hour after hour, night after night, watching television programs that do nothing but pour trash into their minds and read books and magazines and articles, and they know all about what's happened in Hollywood and who's married to the fifth, who's had the fifth husband and who's had the fifth wife and on and on and on they go. And somehow there's this awesome sense of barrenness about wanting to know any more about Jesus than the fact that I'm forgiven of my sins.

I can remember hearing testimonies and you have heard them too. And people have shared about how they got saved. And I can remember, especially years past of people when I was growing up who came to church and gave testimonies.

And I can remember the tenor of so many of them. They'd say, well, you know, when I came to Jesus, I gave up my career. Oh, when I came to Jesus, I gave up marriage to this person.

Oh, when I came to Jesus Christ, my family turned me out and I gave them up and they go on and on and on and went on and on and on talking about what they gave up when they came to Christ. And I would sit there and think, wait a minute, wait a minute. And let me ask you how many of you have given up anything and sacrificed anything to come to Christ? The only thing you and I've given up to come to Christ is our sin and our rebellion and disobedience.

And what have we gained? We have gained everything. Listen, don't ever tell anybody that you sacrificed to come to Christ, that you gave up something to come to Jesus. Friends, you didn't give up anything that you ought to have.

You didn't give up anything that would not have destroyed you ultimately. And what you laid aside, you laid aside, not because you lost it, but because you gained something. Listen, you do not hear this out of the apostle Paul.

Oh, as in prison, I've given up being a Hebrew of Hebrews and being a Pharisee and the acceptance of my brethren in the synagogue and the opportunities to stand there. You hear not one single regret from a man who is in a prison cell. And what is he saying? He's saying, hey, you want to know what motivates me? You want to know what the passion of my heart is? It is this insatiable, hungering, thirsting, yearning,

overpowering desire.

Who is this Christ whom I know and whom I serve? That's what he wants to know. You know why the apostle Paul wanted to know it? Turn over, if you will, one book, Colossians chapter 2. Paul knew something about him. He knew him and he was growing in his knowledge.

And you see, it isn't that Paul doesn't know anything about Jesus when he says this or does not know him at all. But he says, my desire is to know him more intimately and to experience him in ways that I'm yet to experience him. Colossians chapter 2. If you could wrap it all up in one phrase, Paul says, this is why I want to know him.

Verse 3 of Colossians 2. He says, because in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Listen to that. He said, in Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

When you know the Lord Jesus Christ and you really know him, what happens? You begin to understand your comprehension, your discernment, your perception, your whole perspective on life, God, heaven, future, eternal things, temporal things. Everything begins to change as you and I grow in our knowledge and understanding of him. He says, if you want the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, where do you find that? In knowing Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you this. What is the passion of your heart? What is the thing that you are pursuing above everything else? Is it a ministry? Then it's the wrong passion. Is the passion of your heart somebody? It's the wrong passion.

When Jesus Christ becomes the objective, when he becomes the object of my affection and the passion of my heart and the obsession of my life, everything else that I need and desire, God will provide in its perfect and proper timing and place. But when my obsession is someone and when my desires for something or achievement or accomplishment or recognition is anything other than the person of Jesus Christ, everything's out of balance. You said, does that mean we should have no desires? No.

Does that mean you should have no desires? But absolutely nothing should compete with our knowledge and desire to know the Lord Jesus Christ. What is more valuable in life than knowing him? Who is more valuable to you than the person of Christ? What relationship is more valuable to you than that of Jesus Christ? I can answer that. In many people's lives, their relationship with someone, their relationship to something, their relationship to some opportunity is far more valuable to them than knowing Christ.

So I ask you a simple question. Do you really know him other than knowing him as Savior? Do you know him intimately? Do you know him as a friend? Do you know him as the one who walks with you moment by moment, day by day, with whom you can fellowship and converse? Do you understand his ways while he operates the way he does? Can you sort of foretell sometimes what he's going to do because you've seen him operate that way in so many times heretofore? How well do you know him? Are you just sort of running along in your Christian life, doing your thing and calling on him just when you need him in times of desperation, trouble and heartache and problems and trials? Or are you like the man and woman who takes the time to genuinely, intimately love the Lord Jesus Christ and to get to know him? Let me ask you a question. If you love somebody today, you want them to know you.

Amen? You really want them to know you if you love them. And the Apostle Paul says, when I look at every single thing in life, he says, here's my conclusion. You can put all of that on this scale and you put

knowing Jesus over here and he says there is absolutely no comparison whatsoever.

And listen carefully. If you're sitting here asking yourself the question, but what is there to know about him that would cause anybody to think that? Well, your question reveals a great deal. And my friend, when you begin to understand who he is, then you won't ask that question anymore.

You'll begin to say, wow, why did I not pursue this earlier? Why did I not give myself to find out who is this Christ in whom I have believed, in whom I trust, in whom I follow and whom I serve and whose name I have named myself, follower of Jesus, Christian. Well, listen to what Paul says. He says, verse 10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death.

So not only do we have to have a proper understanding of what he means by knowledge, and we understand here what he means when he talks about this profound value he places upon Jesus, superlative, beyond and above all other knowledge or experiences relationships. Then he comes to give us here that is his primary goal of knowing him. What is it that he wants to know specifically about Jesus Christ and what does he want to experience in him? And so he tells us what that is.

Look at this, if you will. He says, if you'll notice in the last part of verse 8, he talks about gaining Christ. That doesn't mean that Paul wants to get saved because there's already been saved sometime before he writes this.

And he talks about being found in him. First of all, Paul says, here's my goal. He says, I want to know the Lord Jesus Christ, first of all.

Now follow this. First of all, I want to know him. I want to know him and experience his righteousness.

That is, Paul was already saved. He says, I want to fully understand and experience. He says, I want such an intimacy with him that I understand what it means to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

You see, the apostle Paul had lived most of his life trying to keep the law, trying to keep the ten commandments, trying to keep the Mosaic law. There came that time on the Damascus road when he was struck down, he was saved by the grace of God. God placed in his heart a desire to know this Christ.

And he said, my desire is to know what it means to live and to walk and to experience the righteousness of Christ. That is, I am clothed in his rightness. I am clothed in his holiness.

I want to experience that to the deepest intimacy of my relationship and my capacity to know what it means to be fully redeemed and fully justified and fully glorified in the righteousness of Christ by faith and faith alone. No works of my own, no achievements of my past, no promise of doing something better. You see, one of the reasons that I say to you week after week, I say something about the all sufficient substitutionary, sacrificial, atoning death of Jesus Christ, hoping that I will say it long enough and intensely enough, often enough that you begin to say, what does he mean by all sufficient, sacrificial, atoning death of Jesus Christ? Why does he keep saying that? I'll tell you why.

Because until you know Jesus Christ, until you know him as the all sufficient sacrificial savior, until you know him as the son of God, virgin born, who came to die on the cross for your sins, until you know him in the suffering of the cross for your sins in mine, until you know him in that way, you don't really know Christ until you know him as the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Paul says, I want to know him

intimately in that fashion. But secondly, listen to what he says.

He says not only that, verse 10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. Paul said, I want to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and I want to be able to intimately walk with him in the same power that he experienced after his resurrection. That is the power of the Holy Spirit, walking in such a fashion that his life was not only meaningful, listen, not only leaving an impression, but his life made an indelible eternal impact on the people he met and the people with whom he associated.

He said, I want to know the intimacy of Christ. I want to experience what he experienced when he lived in resurrection power, which he promised to every single believer. The presence and the power of the Holy Spirit operating in your life and my life, making it possible for each one of us to make an impact on those about us.

He said, I don't just want to know about him, I want to experience this same overwhelming sense of resurrection power that my life can make an impact like that of Christ. But he says, I want to go a step further. Look at this.

He says, and I want to know him, the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death. Now, usually we'll look at that and say, well, Paul wanted to suffer like Jesus suffered and die like Jesus died. Well, that's true, but let me explain what he means by suffering and death.

He's not saying that I want to go to the cross like Jesus went, but here's what the apostle Paul is saying in his desire to know him. You see, the apostle Paul wanted to know Jesus Christ in a very practical way, nothing just theological and ethereal and philosophical and probable. He wanted to know Jesus Christ in a very practical way, moment by moment, day by day, where as he walked, as he sat in prison, who is this Christ? And he says, I want to know him in the fellowship of his sufferings.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was here, he suffered trials, tribulations, heartaches, harassments, attacks. And you know what he did? He always responded in a holy fashion. He never responded in a sinful fashion.

He always responded with love and forgiveness. And when he says conformed to his death, here's what Paul was saying. Fellowship of his sufferings, yes.

I want to be able to experience what Jesus experienced and respond the way he responded. I want to know him in such a fashion that it'll be just as natural for me to respond to these things as it was for him to respond. And when he said being conformed to his death, that's the only time I believe that word is used in the New Testament.

And it's almost like Paul coined the word and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course. And he says, I want to be as crucified to sin. I want to be just as dead to sin.

That when I suffer and I am persecuted and I'm tried and I am rebuffed and I am criticized and I face tribulation and heartache and suffering, I want to be able to be just as dead to the responses that are natural. I want to be able to respond just the way Jesus did. I want to know him so intimately that I will be able to live as crucified to sin as he was crucified for my sin.

I want to be able to walk in public on the basis of what my position is in private with Christ. He says that's the way I want to know him. I want to know him in a fashion that no matter whether I'm in prison or whether

I'm out preaching the gospel, no matter what, that my response to life is the same response that the Lord Jesus had, and that is forgiveness and loving and acceptance and death to sin.

It had no appeal. And the apostle Paul wanted to know Jesus Christ not just head knowledge, no philosophy, no ethereal kind of puffy, cloudy, fuzzy, hazy, foggy kind of idea about him. He said I want to know him intimately.

I want to experience this man. I want an intimate relationship with him. I want an understanding of who is he, how does he operate, because it is affecting my whole life.

Well, when you look at how Paul gauged all of that, here's what you have to come to. This man knew something about Jesus that was so practical, so real, so life-changing. He said, listen, even though I know him, the passion of my heart is to know him even more.

Listen, whatever the apostle Paul had discovered about Jesus only stirred him, motivated him, built a passion in his heart to know him better. Let me ask you a question. How did you and I get so satisfied knowing so little of Christ? How did we get so satisfied? Did we learn enough? Did we learn something we didn't like? Did we learn something that was not true? Did we learn some error? Here's the man who says, the more I know of him, the more insatiable my desire to know more of him.

You see, Paul said, here's what I want to know. I want to know him so intimately that when I'm tempted and tried, it isn't struggle, trying, counteracting sin, trying to counterbalance it, praying and pleading and begging and crying out to God. But he said, I want to be in such an intimate relationship with him that it'll be natural for me to say, I choose death to that and walk on in my Christian life without halting or stumbling or falling.

He said, I want to walk in such intimate knowledge with him and understanding of his ways and the power of his resurrection, that sin will have no appeal to me whatsoever, that I will live as crucified to the appeals of the world as Jesus was crucified for my sin on the cross. That's what he's asking. And then he says, and beyond that, verse 11, in all of that, he says that one of these days I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

That's not an implication that he thinks maybe he may not, because he already knew what salvation was all about. He knew the righteousness of Christ. He'd experienced that.

What he's really saying in this, the desire of his heart is to know Christ in that ultimate, final, ultimate, complete resurrection that Jesus Christ literally experienced when he followed the cross to the grave and then was resurrected. Now, here is the error of our thinking oftentimes about this whole passage. I read this passage and I was reading it one morning and all of a sudden, it's just like God turned the light on for me.

And I've read it many, many times. And I thought how practical, how simple, but how often I had read this and overlooked this very simple truth. You see, what we want to do is to take Paul's declaration here of his desire to know Christ and, and say, well, now all of these big things over here, I'm willing to give up prominence and prestige and wealth and authority and all of these things.

And somebody's saying, well, you know, I don't have any of that to give up anyway. So what does it matter to me? And here's the whole key. I read that passage and all of a sudden it dawned on me.

Here's the way it works out practically in our life. And I can tell you, it has done something for me personally. When I began to realize that the way you apply this to your heart is this, every time we have an appeal from Satan, whatever the temptation may be to say, think, do, act, how do we respond? Well, when I look at that compared to knowing him, that is rubbish.

Lay it aside. I'm to respond to life moment by moment, day by day. When I respond to life with a passion to know Christ, here's what happens.

The struggle with sin somehow dissipates. The power of the appeal of Satan begins to diminish. It loses its attraction.

Listen, when it comes to comparing knowing him intimately, understanding him, experiencing him versus Satan's appeal, there is no comparison. And you know what happens? Day by day, you can say, no, thank you. No, thanks.

Not interested. Now, if you can't do it, listen carefully. It means that there is a desire in your heart that exceeds your desire for Christ.

It's really helped me to understand that. Hey, what in this world can compare with a deeper, more intimate understanding and relationship and intimacy with Christ? Nothing is to be compared to that. And you know what happens? The things that have appealed to you in the past will lose their appeal once you get a glimpse and a taste of knowing who Jesus Christ is.

So, let me ask you this question. Satan has fired one of his arrows that is all aflame with temptation and passionate desire for something, some experience, something, some person. Ask yourself this question.

How does his offer compare to an intimate, loving, understanding, and experience, deepening experience of Jesus Christ? And my friend, if you choose what Satan has to offer above knowing Jesus Christ even deeper, you need to get on your knees and cry out to God. Cleanse my heart. Create within me such a desire for Christ that sin will have no appeal and that the overpowering passion of my heart is Christ, not what the world has to offer, which is so destructive and so divisive and has no real eternal value to it.

You see, here's a man sitting in prison and what is his desire? Not freedom, but a yet an even deeper understanding of who Christ is. Some of you men know your business very well. You are thoroughly and completely equipped in your business.

How does that compare to what you know in your relationship to Christ? And some of you moms, you know your children very well. You've made it your business to understand them and that is all very, very, very good. How well do you know Jesus? And some of you students, you studied diligently in order to pass or in order to prepare yourself for your vocation and you give it hours upon hours upon hours upon hours of diligent study.

I'm not saying you shouldn't study. You should give it all you can. But what I want to know is this.

When you get out of four years of college, you know a lot of science or math or English or history, computer science, whatever it might be, and you don't know anything about Jesus, do you think you are equipped for life? Not really. You see, the world's degree will get you a job. Christ's degree will give you peace and joy and happiness and true success and genuine contentment and everything your heart needs and much of what your heart will desire.

We're so mixed up and confused about where the priority is. The Apostle Paul said you can put it all over here, but you just give me an intimate understanding, a relationship, an intimacy with Christ, and there is no comparison value. Now, the question is this.

If everything I have said to you is true, how many of you really and truly want to know Christ? Well, you say, well, I like to know him. I just don't know how to know him. I'm going to tell you something that grieves my heart.

I'm going to tell you this. This really makes me sad. What makes me sad is to think about people who are saved, who go to church, who go to Bible studies and prayer meetings and all the rest, but who don't really and truly have any strong desire for Jesus Christ enough to do anything about learning who he is.

And you see, one reason I repeat some things over and over and over again is my attempt to get you to want to know what I know is absolutely important to know, but I can't make you do that. And I'm saddened oftentimes when I see people who are satisfied just interested in going to church and hearing another sermon when Jesus is so exciting and to know him absolutely revolutionizes everything about your thinking processes. And sometimes when I say, let me tell you what I believe God's told me.

Somebody said to me, well, he doesn't speak to me. It's because you don't listen. What I want to know is, do you really want to know who Jesus is? And once in a while, somebody will say, you know, I just don't know the scriptures.

Now I can understand that from somebody who's 16, but not 66, who was saved when they were 16. Where does our interest lie? Do you really want to know Jesus Christ? The two people who have made the greatest impression upon my own heart to know him, first of all, was my granddad, whom you've heard me refer to many times. And the way God used him to create that desire in my heart is listening to him talk about his relationship to God, to Christ.

And I remember thinking, Lord, can I know you the way he knows you? Will I ever be able to talk about you and to talk to you the way my granddad does? And then reading Oswald Chambers, my utmost for his highest, the one thing Oswald Chambers said to my heart over and over and over again in that devotional book was, the most important thing in life is knowing Christ. The only thing that really matters is who is he? And what does he want to do in my heart? Nothing else is really important compared to that. And the question is this, hey, listen, do you want to know him? Are you going to keep on being satisfied just knowing about him, knowing him as your savior? What about Lord and life? Listen, knowing him as your life will absolutely transform your whole perspective.

If you want to know him, I want to give you seven suggestions. And those of you who want to know him are going to get them down. Do I really want to know this Christ? Number one, if I want to know him, I must study the scripture.

This is where God has unveiled and given to us the intimate person of Jesus Christ in the word of God. Secondly, I must be willing to spend time alone in prayer, meditation, and worship of Christ. Not just asking him for things, but just being alone with him, talking to him, listening to him, allowing him to speak when oftentimes maybe I don't understand what he's saying.

Or maybe it may appear that he says nothing, but spending time alone with him. Notice I said alone, listening, praying, worshipping, meditating upon him. Thirdly, I must trust him.

If I'm going to know him and he tells me to do something, I must trust him. Fourthly, I must obey him. Not only must I believe what he says, but I must do what he says if I'm going to know him.

Because you see, the only way I'm going to know how he operates is to do what he said, when he said do it. Number five, if I'm going to know Jesus Christ, listen very carefully, I must observe and record. I must observe and record how God works in my life and in the lives of other people.

I must not only be very sensitive to what he does in my own heart, but I need to be sensitive to what I see God doing in somebody else's life. When I say observe, I mean carefully ask what's going on. Why did that happen? Why did he fail? Why did not God do this? And so why did God do this? Why did he respond the way he responded? Why did this circumstance turn out the way it did? You see, if you're going to learn the ways of God, you cannot be self-centered.

You've got to be caring for other people. You must be observant. What is God doing in the life of someone else? Why did God do that for them? If God will do that for her, will he do that for me? You know what part of our problem is? We're too proud to ask.

We must be willing to watch the way God operates in other people's lives, as well as our own life, and record it. Here's what God did. Now I understand why this happened the way it did.

Now I can understand why he responded. Now I can see what God was up to. Now I can understand that God knew ahead of time what was going to happen.

You see, if we run through life and don't look for and record and observe and become sensitive to God's ways, you'll never know him. Listen, the people you live around, the people you work around, the people you fellowship with, the people you play with, the people you worship with, every single one of them is a potential object lesson in knowing Christ. Look what God is doing in their life.

We put on our blinders and we run through life, and the only thing that matters is we get what we want, and we never know the one who is the giver. But then number six is this. I must look for the evidence of Christ in every circumstance of life.

Look for him in every circumstance. If you want to know him, look for him. He is in every single circumstance of life.

I don't always understand it. I can't always figure it out. But eventually, in the word and looking at that, eventually, most of the time, it clears up.

And then number seven, if you really want to know him, if I want to know him, I must be willing to lay aside every single thing in life that competes with my love and loyalty and devotion for him. I want to tell you something. You can't live in deliberate sin and know Christ.

You cannot. You cannot choose day after day disobedience and rebellion toward God and ever know this man, Jesus Christ, who is God. Now you say, well, how do I get started? Just start with number one and open the word of God and start with Philippians and tell the Lord, Lord, here I am at this age in my life, and my knowledge of you is so barren.

I know so much about so many other things, but oh, dear Lord, I know so little about you. But I choose this day to begin to know who you are. And I want a passion to know you.

And I want a passion to know you that overrides and supersedes every other single desire of my heart. And my friend, your life is about to get exciting. And you know what you're going to be saying? Why didn't I start before now? Why have I waited so long to discover who is this Christ? Now, you can do one of two things with this sermon.

You can say, well, it's time to go home. Or you can say, oh, dear God, etch this truth so deep in my thinking that it is inescapable and no desire and no appeal of Satan will ever even begin to match this all-consuming desire of my heart to know Jesus Christ. And if that is your response, every day your life is going to change because you're going to grow and your understanding of Jesus Christ is going to deepen and become more personal and more intimate every day.

Lord Jesus, when I think of who you are and what you have to offer, and when I think of how willing you are to unveil yourself and to show us yourself, reveal yourself and give yourself, and when I think of the appeals of the world in comparison with you, with the Apostle Paul, we say, rubbish, rubbish, rubbish. Death to all of that and life to you. Create within our hearts such an intense, overpowering, overwhelming, emotional, mental desire that everything else will lose its appeal in comparison to our desire to know you.

And Father, I pray for someone who is unsaved, that they may understand that when the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross at Calvary and shed his blood, it was atoning blood, that is, debt-paying blood, paying the sin debt for that one for all eternity. And the moment that they're willing to place their trust in Christ as your only begotten Son, the Savior, trusting you for the forgiveness of their sins, their life is in that very moment transformed. They become a child of God, saved by your grace, your unmerited favor, based on nothing other than your wonderful capacity and desire to accept us the way we are in the moment of your forgiveness.

I pray for all the rest of us. Oh, dear God, would you so work in our hearts that everything will lose its appeal in comparison to our desire to know you? And Lord, it is my prayer that everything that is not of you will lose its appeal. That we can walk in your righteousness, uprightly before you, moment by moment, day by day, in the joy that is ours through knowing Christ Jesus, with understanding, in experience, and with intimacy.

In his name we pray. Amen.

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