

“In this engaging little book, Gary Millar is able to communicate, with good humor, colorful illustrations, and biblical faithfulness, the most significant truths a person needs to know to live out the Christian life. I anticipate giving plenty copies of this book away to people wanting to understand the basics of life in Christ.”

NANCY GUTHRIE, Author; Bible Teacher

“Gary Millar’s book on living the Christian life is the first book I would give to new Christians (and it can help older Christians too!). People read less today, but here we have a compact and winsome explanation of what it means to be a Christian. Don’t let the simplicity of Millar’s writing style fool you. There is deep and profound and life-changing theology in this book, and it is perfect for discipling new believers.”

THOMAS R. SCHREINER, Professor of New Testament,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“I have been a Christian for sixty years, and I benefited from this book for beginners, and loved being challenged and encouraged by it. I wish I had been given it when I started out, but it would be worth reading at any stage.”

PETER JENSEN, Archbishop of Sydney, 2001-2013

“It’s overwhelming to think of all the things I’d like to tell someone who is starting their journey of following Christ. I’m so glad Gary Millar wrote this book; he distills and explains what you need to know in a way that anyone can understand. This book is clear, faithful and relatable, and will be a joy to start giving away to friends!”

GLORIA FURMAN, Author, *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full* and *Labor with Hope*

“I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Gary Millar has given us that rare combination: an accessible book written in a warm, engaging, realistic style but with content that has a depth arising from a thorough and thoughtful biblical and theological understanding. It will be a thoroughly useful book, and I commend it warmly.”

CHRISTOPHER ASH, Writer-in-Residence, Tyndale House, Cambridge

“Because more and more people who come to genuine faith in Christ have little or no Christian background, it is becoming more and more important to orientate them to Christian life and thought. What is needed is something of a cross between a gentle introduction to basic Christian belief and a ‘how-to’ manual. This book is it.”

D. A. CARSON, Research Professor, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“Gary Millar may be trained as an Old Testament scholar, but he has always had an eye on the practical questions, concerns and needs of ordinary Christians. In this book, he does what he is most passionate about: explaining and applying the basic principles of the Christian faith in an accessible and attractive manner. This little book is as edifying as it is entertaining.”

CARL R. TRUEMAN, Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Grove City College

“This book tells you what you need to know to live the Christian life, and it does it with clarity, honesty, realism, humour and graciousness. Millar’s style is very practical and down to earth. We’re left with a real sense of both the privilege and the responsibility it is to live for Jesus, and a clear idea of what this will look like in everyday life.”

JANE TOOHER, Lecturer, Moore College

“This is a concisely comprehensive little book. It provides so much for so many different kinds of people. Enlightenment for the suspicious. Challenge for the complacent. Guidance for the seeking. Instruction for the questioning. Refreshment for the forgetful (people like me). Gary not only tells but shows how the gospel is for everyone... and how anyone can take their next step forward.”

JOHN ONWUCHEKWA, Lead Pastor, Cornerstone Church, Atlanta

“If there is one profound yet simple book to read that will help you watch your life and doctrine closely, this is it. Gary Millar has written an engaging, Bible-saturated and Christ-exalting guide to the gospel-shaped life, which he clearly lives.”

RICHARD CHIN, National Director, The Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students; Author, *Captivated by Christ*

“You were made to know and enjoy God. This book may be short and seemingly simple, but it will point you in the direction of solid and serious joy that begins now and lasts forever. Short doesn’t mean trivial. This book addresses the most important quest in the universe, and Gary Millar is a good guide.”

DAVID MATHIS, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Author, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines*

GARY MILLAR

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INTRODUCTION

I have a love-hate relationship with flatpack furniture.

I love it when I'm looking at it online or in the store. As I browse the stylishly designed, ingeniously practical and (here's the important one) *fully assembled* furniture, I grow more and more excited at the idea of having it in my home. The small print assures me that no expertise (or co-ordination) is needed to put it together. So I say to myself, "This time will be different!" and part with my hard-earned cash.

Then I get my new purchase home and open the box. What I thought would be straightforward now seems overwhelming...

As I unpack the carton, there are so many nuts and bolts, wood-veneer panels, and bits and pieces of plastic that my head starts to spin. It's confusing. It's overwhelming. And inevitably, I do something wrong. Over the years I have managed to put the top on the bottom, the front on the back and everything else upside down. I have lost

pieces, sheared screws and accidentally snapped vital components. This catalogue of disasters often unfolds to the soundtrack of members of my family offering “helpful” advice or pointing out what has gone wrong.

The really annoying thing is that every time, my mistakes could have been avoided if I had just taken five minutes at the start to read through the instruction sheet. It would have told me everything I needed to know. I may not be a practical person, but I can read. The trouble is that I prefer to just rush into things, and then act surprised (and get frustrated) when stuff inevitably goes wrong. I would have saved myself so much time (and pain) if I’d slowed down right at the start to think through the basic steps I needed to take.

Living as a Christian can sometimes feel a little like assembling flatpack furniture. Maybe you’re at the overwhelming, just-got-everything-out-of-the-box stage. You signed yourself up for this Christian thing on the basis of the picture in the catalogue—but now you’re not quite sure which bit goes where, or what to do next (and there are *lots* of weird words for things). Or maybe you’ve been a Christian for a while, but you’re starting to wonder whether it’s meant to look like this (especially as when you peer through the windows of other Christians’ lives, their flatpack furniture seems to be in a far better state than yours).

Much like assembling flatpack furniture, when it comes to living for Jesus, there are some basic principles and key steps that we need to take (and keep taking) if we are to

pull it off. The great news is that not only has God spelled out for us really clearly in the Bible what life with him involves, but he has also given us his Holy Spirit to help us live for and with him. (I'll explain all that in the chapters that follow.)

This book is intended to set you up for living for Jesus with the whole of your life for the rest of your life. In this book, we'll call this living the "gospel-shaped" life—one that is completely moulded around the good news about Jesus.

I've tried to make this book really clear and simple (but more interesting than an instruction manual!). I've also tried to keep it short. Whether you are a new Christian or have been one for a while and feel in need of a refresher, or have been around church for years but are finding things have only just clicked into place for you, I hope you'll find it helpful. It doesn't even begin to try to say everything that could be said about the Christian life, but it should give you the essentials—what you really need to know if you're going to follow Jesus.

I do hope that this book will whet your appetite to read more and more about what it means to live for Christ. For almost 2,000 years, some of the greatest minds in history have poured their energies into writing about God and what he asks of us. In the few pages that follow, I have tried to distil what they have said into just over a hundred pages of fairly large type. It's very much a broad-brush introduction which assumes you'll then want to look more closely at the details for the rest of

your life. But hopefully, as you do, you'll realise that even though the details come into sharper focus the longer we go on in our faith, the big picture itself—the shape of the Christian life—doesn't change.

There is one key difference between putting together a bookcase or a coffee table (or even a rocking chair—my finest achievement to date!) and living as a Christian. Even though it may take a while (and a few mis-steps) to assemble flatpack furniture, eventually the job is done, and we can stand back and admire our handiwork. But living a gospel-shaped life is a “project” that we never finish in this life—we'll never feel that we've “made it” as a Christian. It's an exciting lifetime project of changing and growing and being transformed, bit by bit, to be like Jesus—until God finishes the work in eternity.

And that's why this book is worth reading. Because there really is nothing better than that.

1. KNOWING THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

(John 17 v 3)

It's always hard to resist listening in on other people's conversations.

A couple of years ago, I happened to be having breakfast with an astronaut (as you do). Colonel Jeff Williams had spent a total of 564 days in space, so over breakfast I asked him all the questions that I have wanted to ask an astronaut since I was a kid. Are you scared when you're basically strapped to a giant bomb ready for lift-off? What is it like looking out at space when you're on a space walk? How's the food? When we started to talk, it was just us in the quiet hotel breakfast room. About 45 minutes later, I realised that the room had filled up, but *nobody else was saying anything*. One by one, they had come in, heard Jeff mention NASA or the International Space Station, and

just started listening to our conversation. I would have done the same! Listening in on an astronaut is fascinating.

John 17 is one of the most remarkable chapters in the whole Bible for this reason. It comes at the end of a section of John's Gospel which gives us a detailed account of the final things Jesus said to his disciples on the night before he died (chapters 13 – 17). Chapter 17 gives us the opportunity to listen in not on an astronaut but the living God, as Jesus prays to his Father in heaven.

Now that's pretty astounding in itself—this is God's "private conversation", as God the Son talks to God the Father. But it's what Jesus actually *prays for* that's even more remarkable.

Here's how the conversation starts:

¹ Jesus ... looked towards heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

This whole scene is very intense. The "hour" that has come is for Jesus' death (v 1).

So on the last night of his life, what's Jesus thinking about? He is thinking about us. Jesus is about to do the unimaginable—he is about to die for people like you and me. He's about to step in to face the punishment that we earned and to face the Father's anger which we had provoked. He is going through with this so that he can give people like us an unparalleled gift—*eternal life*: “For you granted [your Son] authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him” (v 2).

Eternal life. Generally in the Bible that means *life with God that starts now and goes on for ever*. But here Jesus gives us an even simpler definition of this life than that—he calls it *knowing God*: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (v 3). To be a Christian—to have eternal life—is to know God. We don't often think of it like this, but *knowing God* is the very heart of the Christian life.

So I hope you've got this: Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, within 24 hours of his excruciating death, as he prepares to bear the full weight of the sins of the world, is preoccupied with one thing. He's preoccupied with us—and in particular, with our life.

What does Jesus want for you? *Jesus wants you to know God*. That's because at its heart, Christianity isn't really about us—it's about God. It's important to get that straight (and it makes the whole “living for Jesus” thing much, much easier!). That's why this first chapter is all about God—and, more specifically, about *knowing God*.

So what does that involve? Two things: the rest of the Bible makes it clear that *to know God is to meet the Trinity* and *to know God is to be united to Christ*.

KEY TRUTH 1: TO KNOW GOD IS TO MEET THE TRINITY

I pointed out earlier that one of the amazing things about John 17 is that we get to listen in on God's private "family conversation". This is God (the Son) talking to God (the Father). And even that simple statement tells us so much. For a start, it makes it clear that the Father and the Son aren't the same "person". They aren't just God playing different roles. The Father doesn't just morph into the Son when the situation demands. The fact that they are speaking to one another shows that they are clearly distinct. A little earlier in the evening, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the Spirit in a way that shows that he too is a distinct person (for example, in John 14 v 16-17: "And *I* will ask the Father, and *he* will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever—the *Spirit* of truth.")

The God of the Bible, it turns out, is like a loving family of three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—where each member is completely God and completely in step, and yet completely distinct. That's what Christians mean when they talk about God as the Trinity.

For many of us, the idea of the Trinity sounds... well, it sounds weird. God we get. Jesus we get. We may even

get the Holy Spirit. But as soon as we start talking about how they “fit together” and using the “T” word (which, as some people are quick to point out, isn’t actually used in the Bible), most of us switch off. We’ll leave that stuff to the theology nerds, thank you very much. The problem is that if we do that, then not only will our Christian life be severely impoverished, but we will almost certainly lose the plot completely somewhere down the track.

It may seem strange now, but for the first 400 years or so of the Christian church, more energy was poured into working out the right beliefs about (or “doctrine” of) the Trinity than anything else. Men like Irenaeus, Augustine and Athanasius (who were so influential that, like Beyoncé, they only needed one name!) carefully explained what the Father, the Son and the Spirit are like, and how they relate to each other. They did it because they knew that knowing God is at the heart of the Christian life, and so knowing what God is like and how he works really is very important. They made it very clear that *to know God is to meet the Trinity*.

And that’s really clear in the rest of Jesus’ prayer in John 17. He says to his Father: “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world [the disciples]. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word” (v 6). Jesus insists that everything that he has achieved is actually down to the Father. Even his message came from his Father: “Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the

words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me” (v 7-8). In fact, Jesus goes as far as saying that he has nothing apart from his Father: “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine” (v 10). The Father and Son are perfectly in step with each other, and with the Spirit too. When it comes to rescuing us, it is very definitely a team effort.

But it gets even better—because by rescuing us (or, as verse 2 puts it, giving us eternal life), we get to share in this perfect loving, giving relationship! We get to know this God. Here’s how Jesus puts it in verse 26: “I have made you known to them [all his followers], and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them”. We don’t just get to “feel the love”; we are caught up in it! It’s not as if we’re standing on the edges of the schoolyard, watching a game which looks fun from the outside. We’re invited in to play! Not only are we loved by God, but we start to love like God—and this can only happen because the Father, Son and Spirit work so beautifully together.

How does this work? It’s not complicated—Jesus introduces us to his Father (“I have made you known to them”, v 26). But there is a bit more we can say. Did you notice the little phrase at the end of verse 26? “That I myself may be in them.” That’s the key. In order to share his knowledge of the Father with us, Jesus Christ the Son “moves in” to our lives through the Spirit, as the Spirit

comes to dwell in our hearts. He does it so that we are brought to the heart of God's family. And the great thing about knowing God is that this relationship goes on for ever. (I guess that's why Jesus calls it eternal life.)

So knowing God is not a warm and fuzzy feeling when we close our eyes or sing particular songs; it is a soaring reality which encompasses every part of our minds and hearts. To know God is to be drawn into the warmth and light of the relationships within the Trinity itself—so that we know and share in and delight in God's love. This is what the gospel enables. To know God is no small thing!

And this is something very intimate. If I asked you whether you know the person sitting beside you, what would you say? It could range from "No—I haven't even made eye contact with them yet" to "Yes, they are my best friend, and I would trust them with my life—they know everything about me". When Jesus speaks about us knowing God, he has something more like the latter in mind.

When Christians talk about having a relationship with God, we're not talking about having someone's personal email address or a vague friend-of-a-friend connection. We're not talking about having read about someone or studied them, collecting information about them. When Jesus prays that we might know God, he is shooting for something so far beyond that—he is praying that the Father might draw us to share in the love that he has shared with the Son through the Spirit since before the

foundation of the world. We are brought to a place where we could not be more “in”. This is huge.

When you’re trying to explain to someone what it means when you say you’re a Christian, remember this: Christianity is not a mindset or a worldview or a philosophy of life (although it does produce all these). Christianity is founded on and flows from and leads to knowing and enjoying God the Trinity for ever.

KEY TRUTH 2: TO KNOW GOD IS TO BE UNITED WITH CHRIST

All that sounds great. But it should leave us with a question: how can ordinary people like us have a relationship with this totally self-sufficient God? Surely it would be a bit like a human going out for a drink with an ant. God is perfectly happy without us, doesn’t need us, and is so far superior to us that we can’t even begin to articulate the extent of the gap. How can people like us meet a God like this?

Like many guys, it is a great mystery to me how I managed to marry a woman who is smarter, prettier, wiser and generally nicer than me. The fact that she not only agreed to marry me in the first place but has stuck with me for the past 26 years can only be described as an act of mercy and sacrifice (and if you heard me snore, you’d definitely agree). But for better or worse, she’s joined to me: now her family is my family, her stuff is my stuff, and we go through life together.

God forms a relationship with us which is more intimate, more permanent and more satisfying than even the best marriage. And how does this happen? As we saw in John 17 v 26, it happens when Christ “moves in” to bring us life—or, to use the New Testament’s favourite way of talking about this, when we are “united to Christ” by faith. From our side, this happens when we hear the gospel, believe it and entrust ourselves to God through Christ. When we do that, something changes for ever—we are joined to Christ permanently.

A little while before Jesus prayed the prayer we’ve been looking at, he spoke about this reality to his disciples. He compared being united with himself like this to a branch being grafted onto a vine: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15 v 5). Everything depends on being united to Christ. It is because we are “in Christ” that we can know God and enjoy everything that God has done for us in him. We come to know God through union with Christ.

You may not have thought of it like this before, but it is only because we are “in Christ” that we get all the good stuff that God longs to give us. We can’t even approach God on our own, but when we come before God, not merely with Christ but in Christ, we are suddenly able to call the Father “our Father”—we become God’s children because we’re joined to God’s Son, and we share in this relationship of sonship. This is who you are. By grace

through faith, we have been inextricably, unbreakably, inseparably joined to the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can ever separate us from him, reduce us to the status of second-class citizens, or relegate us to the cheap seats—we are his and he is ours.

It's because we are joined to Christ that we get to start enjoying eternal life now. It's because we are united to Christ that his death counts for us. It's because we are joined to Christ that we can be sure that we'll share in a resurrection like his, with a new supernatural body someday. It's because we are "in Christ" that we will—incredibly—get to rule with him over the entire universe for ever in eternity. I'm not sure if you've picked this up, but God's kindness in uniting us to Christ is a very big deal!

So let me spell this out: if you have faith—if you're trusting in the Lord Jesus as King of your life—then YOU ARE united to Christ. And that means that you enjoy all the advantages of the Son's relationship with the Father. Because you are united to Christ, what's true of him is true of you. Together, we share in Christ the Son's relationship with the Father and the Spirit. I don't know about you, but I think that's great!

THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Here's what we've seen: to know God is to encounter the Trinity through union with Christ. Jesus sums all that up in a very simple phrase (the one we started with): "This is eternal life: that they know [God]" (John 17 v 3). Back in John 10 v 10, Jesus said, "I have come that they may

have life, and have it to the full”. Now he explains what exactly that life is all about: it is knowing God through being joined to the Son by the Spirit. This is the heart of the Christian life now and will be for ever.

Which leads us to the most important question—so what? What difference does any of this make? We’ll spend the rest of this book exploring how these truths are the engine of the gospel-shaped life. But for now, let’s look at the difference it makes both to what we should expect, and to what we share.

WHAT WE CAN EXPECT

If God has marshalled all of his resources to make it possible for us to know him through the Lord Jesus Christ, then shouldn’t this relationship be the central reality of our lives? Surely it should. But we do need to be quite clear about what the Bible leads us to expect in this relationship. If we are to take a biblical view of knowing God, I think there are three things we can say with absolute confidence about our relationship with God—three components, if you like, which together make up a healthy relationship with God.

First, knowing God is theological. Theology is the study of the truth about God (just as biology is the study of living things or psychology is the study of the mind). Our relationship with God is made possible by the fact that he has *revealed himself* to us through the “living word”, the Lord Jesus (which basically means that Jesus is God speaking to us, John 1 v 1), and the written word, the Bible (which shows

us Jesus, John 17 v 8). Our relationship begins with God's words, is defined by God's words and is nurtured by God's words, as we'll see more in the next chapter. Do you want to know God better? Then read his word. And read great books about his word. Study theology. Aim high when it comes to thinking about God and relating to God.

Jesus is a person, not a bunch of facts—but he is a person who is known through the Scriptures. It's possible to read the Bible without knowing Jesus any better or deeper. But it's impossible to know Jesus better and deeper without reading the Bible.

Second, knowing God is personal. That may seem almost too obvious to say, but it is worth underlining. God is not like the Force in the *Star Wars* movies. Our God is a Trinity of love who invites us to know and delight in him. Our relationship with God is never individualistic—his plan is to save a whole family of believers—but it really is personal. We are not swallowed up in the great mass of God's people spread across time and space. As Jesus said to his friends, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12 v 6-7).

One of the remarkable things about the Bible is that it is littered with the names of ordinary people from beginning to end. And it is no accident because knowing God is personal. The God of the universe knows you by name and invites you into an eternal relationship with him.

Third, knowing God is experiential. It's something you feel. Now, we need to tread carefully here: we should not be driven by our feelings. That would be fatal. Nor is everyone's temperament or personality the same. I am relatively extroverted—a room full of people gives me a buzz. My friend Katie is more introverted—she'd rather spend her Friday evening having dinner with her flatmate. I react to the world in extremes—most things are either fantastic or awful. My colleague Andrew is more balanced—most things for him are just ok. You get the picture.

Our temperament and personality are generally reflected in our relationship with God. (So if you don't cry much at all, then it's unlikely that every time you pray for people who aren't Christians you'll shed tears. But some people might!) God made us and deals with us as we are. But we cannot escape the fact that knowing God—having a relationship with the Trinity—is experiential. As God speaks to us through his word by his Spirit, it will have some effect on us. In general, it will make us *feel something*: amazed, grateful, happy, sorrowful, humbled, and a hundred other emotions beside. However messed up our emotions and feelings have been by the effects of sin, however tired we are on a given day, whatever we are going through—engaging with God as he reveals himself to us through his word is a real-life event.

Knowing God is theological and personal and experiential. I would go as far as to say that if any of these qualities are missing, then our relationship with God is seriously

deficient. We have been made and rescued to know God in this full sense. Do you?

It is, of course, very possible that this is completely foreign to you. Yes, you've been along to church a few times—or perhaps regularly for years. You've read the Bible and maybe a couple of Christian books that one of your mates gave you, but you never realised that the gospel makes it possible to know God in this richest of ways. If that's you, the great news is that God is holding out to you the immeasurable privilege of knowing and enjoying him for ever—do not miss out on that!

Of course, you may have known about all this for years—it's just that you have been slow to take advantage of what God offers. You know it's possible, but you just haven't invested in it at all. Is your "God knowledge" still at an infant's level? Then now would be a great time to step up.

Or perhaps you simply need to hear and take hold of the fact that our God—Father, Son and Spirit—is deeply and personally committed to *you*. God is not a block of wood, and neither are you. So it is perfectly reasonable for us to expect to know God in a way which is theological and personal and experiential.

WHAT WE SHARE

If we've grasped how great these truths are, then inevitably we're going to want to talk about them—especially with those who don't know Jesus. That's a great thing to do! When we do, we need to make sure that the gospel we

proclaim is big and high and wide and broad enough. It's not that you've just "got into" church the way that some people might get into cycling. When you chat to your friends about Jesus, what you hold out to people is the offer of knowing the God of the cosmos, the ultimate being, one God in three Persons, who is love in his very nature. It is *this* God who offers us forgiveness, peace, security, satisfaction, freedom and all the other benefits that flow to us through the gospel.

If I had to define the gospel in a tweet, I'd say it is this: *the announcement of what the triune God has done in Christ to make it possible for us to know him and enjoy him for ever.* That is a BIG announcement. Let's make sure that the way we talk about Christianity is positive enough and points to where the Bible points—to the glorious reality of knowing God and delighting in him for ever. You'll probably find that it's sometimes the Christians who've been going the longest that have the smallest view of this message. Don't let that be you.

Knowing God is the ultimate privilege of the gospel, as God joins us to the Lord Jesus and draws us into the very life of the Trinity to share in his love for ever. This is eternal life. And this is what we have every confidence to expect.