

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Knowing Christ Today

by

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CAN FAITH EVER BE KNOWLEDGE?

1. What is the difference between knowledge and faith (pp. 15–16)? How is faith, as defined by commitment to action often beyond our natural abilities and “based upon knowledge of God and God’s ways,” different from the idea of faith as a “blind leap” (p. 20)?
2. Dallas Willard observes that you are thought to be intolerant if “you *know* what your religion holds to be true,” in contrast to “merely believing, being committed to, or professing it.” Having such certain knowledge today seems to “make a bigot of you; you will be close-minded, dogmatic, arrogant, and high-handed” (p. 26).

* Study guide by Jan Johnson.

But he asserts that knowledge of Christ isn't the real issue behind bigotry. What, according to Dallas, is the real issue? Do you agree or disagree?

3. Dallas also maintains that tolerance is not merely indifference (thinking, "Well, certain things don't matter"). Instead it is "a generous regard and even provision for those who differ from us on points we deeply care about" (p. 29). What might "a generous regard" and making "provision for" look like between a Christian and a Muslim?

EXACTLY HOW WE PERISH FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

1. How does knowledge give us access to reality? Why is that important? When have you suffered or done without because you didn't have certain knowledge and therefore no access or limited access to reality (pp. 38–39)?
2. Think about the last movie you saw or novel you read. Based on the main character's life and action, how might he or she answer these four questions (pp. 45–50):

What is reality?

What does it mean to be well off or have well-being?

What is a really good person like?

How do individuals become deeply, genuinely good?

Here are Jesus's answers to these questions (pp. 50–55). What feelings do they evoke in you?

Reality is God and God's kingdom.

A *well-off person* is anyone who is alive in the kingdom of God.

A *really good person* is anyone pervaded with self-giving love.

We *become really good* by placing our confidence in Jesus Christ and becoming his student in kingdom living.

3. How are these four questions answered in the nirvana story and the naturalist or secular story (p. 62)?

HOW MORAL KNOWLEDGE DISAPPEARED

1. In what circumstances today do you see human desire as the point of reference in personal decisions? In public decisions? In church decisions? In any of those cases, did desire prevail over what you believed was good or moral?
2. Do you agree that the recognized values and principles of Christian moral understanding (moral knowledge) have disappeared? If so, which of the causes and influences cited in this chapter saddened or surprised you?
3. How do you explain the connection between love and justice in this statement: "Justice without love will never do justice to justice, nor will 'love' without justice ever do justice to love" (p. 83, where love is defined as willing the good of what is loved)? Give some examples

of love without justice and of justice without love.
When have you experienced either?

CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS?

1. According to the biblical vision, what is God like (pp. 96–97)? What is God like based on what we see in the universe (pp. 110–11)? Does Dallas present God differently than you regarded God before reading the book? If so, how? How does the book's description make you feel about God?
2. What ideas are presented in this chapter to show that “a cause or source that is not a physical condition or event lies at the origin of the causal order that is the physical world” (p. 105)? Do you agree with this idea? If so, what everyday image might you use to explain the origin of the world (such as a series of dominoes falling)?

THE MIRACULOUS, AND CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN OUR WORLD

1. What is the difference between a deist and a theist, especially in relation to God's intervention and God's presence in the world? How do deists and theists think differently about whether human beings are able to speak and act for God and with God (p. 119)?
2. Think of examples of how humans interrupt the normal course of nature (as a miracle does), such as refrigerating decaying food or watering a dried-up plant

(p. 126). Have you experienced things that you suspect might be miracles?

3. Dallas declares that Christ rising from the dead is the “only plausible explanation for what happened after his death and what still exists today as a consequence” (p. 134). On what events and ideas does he base this statement? If this is true, what practical difference does this make to the daily life of someone today who “trusts Christ”?

KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. Dallas says that everything in the book up to this point leads to one truth: “Those who really do know Christ in the modern world do so by seeking and entering the Kingdom of God” (p. 139). Try to put the following ideas about this in your own words or in words a child could understand.

“To know Christ in the modern world is to know him in *your* world *now*.”

This means you can “*live interactively with him right where you are* in your daily activities.”

Christ is “now about *his* business of moving humanity along toward its destiny in this amazing universe. You don’t want to miss out on being a part—*your* part—of that great project.”

“You want to be sure to take your life into his life.”

How do you feel about these ideas?

2. If you accept that Jesus’s “teachings, even mangled and broken, have an incredible power to disrupt all human systems” (p. 147), where would you like to see that happen within a certain institution (church, corporation, college, government, global system)? When, if ever, have you seen such disruption and, subsequently, such positive change occur?
3. Which, if any, of the three features of the spiritual life (pp. 161–63) would you most like to experience at this time? Why?

KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN PLURALISM

1. How does a biblical view of God, faith, knowledge of Christ, and the spiritual life logically shape how we treat those we disagree with (even if we find it difficult)? If you’re comfortable doing so, tell about a typical conversation or situation where you would like to be “appropriately modest and nondogmatic” about your views, understanding that you are not infallible and could be wrong about some things” (p. 171)?
2. What is meant by saying that the only justifiable pluralism can be found “beyond religion” (p. 181)? Why is religion just not enough?

PASTORS AS TEACHERS OF THE NATIONS

1. In what ways do you see sensuality (worship of feeling, pleasure, and desire) as the practical guide to life in our

culture (p. 199)? Can you identify a person or group of people who highlight goodness, love, generosity, and kindness, instead of sensuality, as a practical guide to life?

2. In the introduction, Dallas says that belief not based on knowledge “undermines the spiritual life of those who would follow Jesus Christ” (p. 7). After finishing the book, how do you think a person’s spiritual life is negatively affected by lack of knowledge of Christ? How is a person’s spiritual life positively affected by this, for instance in the life of the apostle Paul (p. 204)?