



Overview Lesson ~

What's In a Name?

Names are Important!

Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me is something we used to say as children to convince ourselves that names were "just words" and had no power over us. The truth, of course, is just the opposite. Names are much more than something we call each other or *labels* given to distinguish one person from another. Names (good or bad) are loaded with emotion and meaning and are very important to us. We take great care in choosing names for our children, our businesses, our organizations and our pets! If names were just identification tags, it would probably be more efficient and less confusing to assign everything a number. A number, however, is the most impersonal and insulting name of all!

Take a few minutes to discuss some of the following questions with your small group.

- ♥ Is there some special significance or family story behind your name?
- ♥ If you have children (or pets!), how and why did you choose their names?
- ♥ How do you feel when someone forgets your name or calls you by the wrong name? **Why** do you feel this way?
- ♥ What are some names you are called by different people in your life that imply a **relationship** with that person?

Names During Biblical Times . . .

As important as names are to us in our culture, they were even more significant in biblical times. Names in these ancient cultures not only identified the person, but also reflected the **nature** and **character** of the person (1 Samuel 25:25). When choosing a name for their child, parents from ancient cultures might consider the circumstances of the child's birth, their gratitude to God for the child, their hopes and prayers for the child's future, or their commitment of the child to God. For example, *Elisha* means "God is salvation"; *Daniel* means "God is my judge"; and *Isaiah* means "The Lord is salvation."

In biblical cultures, names often became an extension or expression of the **actual person**. The name *Isaac* reflected the "laughter" of his mother at his birth (Genesis 21:6). *Jacob* was named "supplanter" because he grasped his brother *Esau's* heel (Genesis 25:25-26). *Moses* received his name because he was "drawn out" of the water (Exodus 2:10). *Naomi*, which means "pleasant," changed her name to *Mara*, "bitter," when she returned to Bethlehem without her husband and sons (Ruth 1). *Barnabas*, "son of encouragement" was given his name by the apostles who valued his compassionate nature.

- ♥ If **you** had lived in Biblical times, what might **your name** be or what **meaning** might your parents have emphasized?
- ♥ Who do you know that has a name that was chosen for them because of its *meaning*? Do you think the name given to them has any bearing on the kind of person they are? What kind of impact *could* a person's name have on the person's nature or character?
- ♥ If you could choose a new name, what would you like it to mean?

God's Names are Extra Special!

If biblical names often reflected the essence, character and nature of a person, one would expect that the names of God would do the same thing. And, indeed, they do! God favored his people by revealing himself through several names that offered special insight into his love, character and nature. Many of his names speak for themselves; *Yahweh Jireh* – *The Lord Will Provide*; *Yahweh Rophe* – *The Lord Heals*; *Yahweh Rohi* – *The Lord is my Shepherd*; and *Yahweh Shalom* – *The Lord is Peace*. So, we can see that God's names do reveal who he is and the provision he makes for us in our time of need.

As we get to know and understand God's names, we will also come to know *who* God is, *how* he acts and *what* he will provide. Each of God's names can be thought of as a promise from him – a promise that he will **be** and **do** what his name expresses. But the exciting thing about God's names is that they are *much more* than just revelations of his character and promises. God's names also contain God's *presence*.

When the children of Israel were preparing to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them that they were to worship at the place **where God would put his Name**:

But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go . . . Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name – there you are to bring everything I command you . . .

Deuteronomy 12:5, 11.

The word *Name* is capitalized in these verses because it represents God's presence. We know from these verses and other Scripture that the place where God puts or uses his name is the place where God chooses to dwell. In other words, God's names are equal to his presence! The *NIV Study Bible* footnote to **Psalm 5:11** puts it this way: "*The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. It has no separate existence apart from the Lord, but is synonymous with the Lord himself in his gracious manifestation and accessibility to his people.*"

This is something we must remember as we study and learn about God's names. When God's name is **called on, prayed, believed and worshipped**, God is there! We cannot separate God from his names. When we **know** the names of God, **pray** the names of God and **trust** the names of God – we are encountering God himself! This is why God's name is always to be treated with reverence and respect. God's name is much more than just a name. God's name is God himself!

Now that we know this truth about God's name, discuss with your small group the significance and importance of the following Scriptures.

Exodus 20:7

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Matthew 6:9

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored.

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

- ♥ Share with your small group any new understanding you have about God and his names.
- ♥ What are some ways we might misuse God's name and what are some ways we might honor his name?
- ♥ What is the purpose of a "strong tower"? What are some ways God's name can keep you safe?

Why Does God Give Us His Names?

We cannot know anything about God unless God chooses to reveal himself. If God had decided to keep himself completely hidden, we would have no way to discover him and it would be impossible to know anything about him. God is infinite, so there is much about him that we *do not* know (**Deuteronomy 29:29**); but – there is also so much about him that we *do* know simply because he has shown himself to us.

- ♥ What are some reasons why you give someone your name or ask them their name?
- ♥ Why do you think God gives us his names? What are some assumptions we can make about his desires toward us because he has given us his names?

Exchanging names implies relationship and it is an invitation to know each other. When God tells us his name, he is opening himself to us because he wants to be personally and intimately known.

According to the verses below, how important, would you say, is it to God that he be known by us?

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let those who boast, boast about this: that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

- ♥ What value do *you* put on knowing God? Where does it rank in importance in your life?
- ♥ How will learning about God's names help you know God better?
- ♥ What are some things that prevent our knowing God intimately?

God also gives us his names because he is telling us something about himself that we may not know, but need to know, in order to have a close relationship with him and to live life successfully. Each name that God reveals is intentional and is given for our benefit. As we learn about God's names, we need to ask ourselves, "Why does God want me to know this about himself? What is the benefit he wants me to experience?" and "How can I experience these benefits?" The lessons, *Knowing God by Name*, will help us answer these questions for each of the names of God.

- ♥ Why don't we automatically know God? Why does God need to reveal himself?
- ♥ Why are there misunderstandings and wrong concepts of God? How do they get started? How can they be corrected?
- ♥ How would you describe your present relationship with God? How would you like it to be different?

Whose Names are They, Anyway?

The Bible tells us that there is one, true God who exists in three persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. One might wonder, "To whom do the names of God refer – the **Father**, the **Son** or the **Holy Spirit**?" Since Jesus, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are not fully revealed in the Old Testament, does that mean that the names of God belong to God the Father?

God is a society of three, infinitely complex persons who are in a loving, interdependent relationship with each other. Father, Son and Spirit are so closely bound together by love that they are inseparable; the life of each flows through the others and all three need each other to exist. Father, Son and Spirit are so closely linked that even though each Person has a unique, specific ministry, none of their ministry or work is done independently of the others. We could say that in some way they share everything.

Why is this important and what does it have to do with the Names of God? (I'm glad you asked!)

First, it means that Father, Son and Spirit are equal in **nature and character**. For example, it is not possible for God the Father to be *Love* and *Light* without God the Son and God the Spirit also being *Love* and *Light*. It is also not possible for God the Son to be *more loving* or *more powerful* than God the Father or God the Spirit. God's attributes or characteristics are equally shared by Father, Son, and Spirit. Since God's names reveal his nature and character, we will see that the names of God really belong, in some way, to all the members of the Trinity for they all possess the same nature and character traits.

Second, because of the close bond of Father, Son and Spirit, it is not possible for us to relate to any of them independently of each other. For example, we often *pray to the Father*, in the *name of Jesus*, by the *power of the Holy Spirit*. Any encounter we have with God will in some way involve all three persons of the Trinity because they are One Being. So, as we come to know God through his wonderful names, we will encounter all of God – Father, Son and Spirit. This curriculum, "*Knowing God by Name*" is based on the Old Testament names of God, but we will also be looking at New Testament Scriptures to learn all we can about God's good and beautiful character.

- ♥ Do you feel more "comfortable" or familiar with one person of the Godhead over another? If so, why?
- ♥ Whose work or ministry are you most familiar with – *God the Father*, *God the Son* or *God the Holy Spirit*? Who of the Three would you like to know better? Why?
- ♥ Does it make sense to you that Father, Son and Spirit possess the same character, nature and traits – things like goodness, power, love and beauty? Why or why not? Can you think of some reasons why this is important?

Getting the Most from These Lessons

We cannot get to know God better and benefit from what he teaches us in his names by just learning more *about* God. If we truly want to know God, we must *put into action* what we learn about him. If we want to benefit from what he reveals about himself in his names, we will need to put some *time* and *effort* into the *relationship* – just like we would with any other person with whom we desire a meaningful friendship.

The *Knowing God by Name* lessons have several different parts:

- ♥ *Heart Talk* – sharing with your small group what you are learning and experiencing through the suggested exercises in the lessons;
- ♥ *Heart Preparation* – quieting and opening your heart to God before you begin the lesson;
- ♥ *Scripture and Questions* – reading and reflecting on Scripture by answering questions;
- ♥ *Heart Questions* – a choice of questions to discuss with your small group to help apply the truth you have learned in Scripture;
- ♥ *Heart Therapy* – suggestions of things you can *do* to spend quality time with God and put into *action* what you have learned in the lesson.

God has placed in our hearts a desire to know him and to become the persons he created us to be – people whose hearts are full of God's love and who have peace in every circumstance because we trust God to take care of us. However, we do not become this kind of person through willpower, by trying harder or by accumulating more knowledge and understanding about God and the Bible. Rather, it is the combination of **learning** (mind), **action** (training) and **community** (the encouragement of other Christ-followers - your small group), all **empowered by the Holy Spirit** that will bring a *transformation of heart and character*. You will get the most from these lessons if you give each part of the lesson some time and effort, asking the Holy Spirit to empower you as he teaches and guides you. Together, we can become the persons God created us to be!

Wrap-Up

- ♥ What are you most looking forward to in this year's study, "*Knowing God by Name*."
- ♥ What benefits do you think you will receive by studying God's names?
- ♥ What spiritual goal(s) would you like to set this year as you study God's names?
- ♥ What is something you would like to ask God to do for you through this study?