

God knows our names (Isaiah 45:1-7)

We want to know God, but we also want to be known.

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Like most parents, my husband and I put a lot of thought into naming our two children. With each pregnancy, we made long lists, compared sounds and meanings, and asked our families and closest friends for suggestions.

We wanted to choose names that would reflect our ethnic and religious heritage, as well as convey our hopes for each child. More importantly, we wanted to start calling our kids by name, even before they were born. After all, there was so much we couldn't know while we waited to meet each baby. What would our daughter's personality be like? Would our son have his dad's eyes? Would their hair be curly or straight? But somehow we understood that naming our children would be a movement toward knowing them.

In this week's Old Testament reading, God says as much to a chosen servant: "I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me." And just before that: "I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name." Clearly, knowing and naming matter to God.

God is speaking here to Cyrus, the Persian king chosen to deliver the Israelites out of Babylonian captivity. Although Cyrus is a foreigner, ignorant of Israel's God and unversed in the religion of God's people, God assures him that he is both known and

chosen. He has a role to play in Israel's salvific history, whether he comprehends that history or not.

In the church, we put a lot of emphasis on knowing God. We encourage worship, prayer, contemplation, and Bible study, all in the hope that these practices will lead us into a deeper knowledge of God. This is right and good, and it speaks to a deep desire of the human heart: we want to *know*. Know ourselves, know God, know each other.

But this week's reading suggests that God understands something much more elemental about our hearts: we want to *be known*. As the old theme song from *Cheers* has it, we want to go where everybody knows our name.

As I read this passage from Isaiah, I'm challenged to consider where my ultimate security lies. Am I safe because I know God? Or because God knows me? I think we please God when we desire to know God more deeply. What's unhealthy is the fear-based assumption that our well-being depends on how well we know God. "I call you by your name," God tells Cyrus, "though you do not know me." The bottom line is, we can't bear to know God's fullness, and that's okay. Our security lies in God's perfect and total knowledge of us—not in our patchy comprehension of God.

And if God knows me by name, then God knows my story, my heritage, my beginning, and my end. Knowing me by name means knowing the very core of me. Everybody *won't* know our names, not in this lifetime. But God will. God does. And God's perfect knowledge—not ours—is our salvation.