

KNOWING GOD BY NAME

A Girlfriends
IN GOD
FAITH ADVENTURE



SHARON JAYNES
GWEN SMITH
MARY SOUTHERLAND



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*This book is dedicated to our husbands:
Steve Jaynes, Brad Smith, and Dan Southerland—
three of the most precious men God ever created.*



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Introduction



What's in a Name?

Three Bedouin shepherd boys wandered a hillside near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, in search of a lost goat. One tossed a rock into the dark opening of a cave, hoping to startle the wayward animal out of hiding. When the rock made contact, what the boys heard was not the muffled sound of a goat's bleat, a ricochet off a cave wall, or even a thump against the hard dusty ground. It was the sound of shattering pottery.

The boys ventured into the cave and discovered there in the Judean desert a cache of mysterious clay vessels stuffed with ancient Hebrew writing—the first of what we've come to know as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Hundreds of jars. Hundreds of scrolls. Thousands of words. Precious parchments rolled up and tucked into clay jars, only to be discovered in 1946, some two thousand years after they were penned. Over the next several years, fifteen thousand fragments were retrieved from eleven different caves.

A few years ago, a museum in my (Sharon's) hometown hosted a traveling exhibit of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I walked into the dimly lit room expecting to look at a piece of history, but I experienced so much more. God's presence was thick. The Holy Spirit hovered close to the writings He'd inspired centuries earlier. My soul was stirred.

Enshrined in glass cases surrounding me were ancient parch-

ments. Below each fragment of Hebrew or Aramaic text, the English translations were provided—translations that matched almost perfectly the words in my very own Bible. I was struck by the unchangeable authenticity of God’s Word through the centuries. So far, more than 230 biblical texts have been found among the 972 manuscripts, representing every book except Esther. Genesis. Psalms. Isaiah. Deuteronomy. Old friends. Holy words. Unscathed by time. Unchanged by man.

As I stared in awe at one particular scroll fragment from the book of Deuteronomy, I noticed four dots where the Hebrew letters for *Yahweh* should have appeared. Four dots. Then I saw it again in the book of Isaiah: “In the wilderness prepare the way of • • • •” (Isaiah 40:3, ESV).

And then it hit me just how deeply the scribes revered and revered the name YHWH. They wouldn’t say the Name. They wouldn’t even write the Name. And yet YHWH is the name that God said would be remembered from generation to generation (Exodus 3:15). And while God is exceedingly holy, He is also intimately personal. He reminded Moses, “I am . . . the God of Abraham, . . . Isaac and . . . Jacob” (verse 6).

And, friend, He is the God of Sharon, Gwen, Mary—and you!

Infinitely holy. Intimately personal. Our God wants not only to be worshiped but to be known. In 1 Chronicles 16:10–11, David urged his people:

Glory in his holy name;

let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

Look to the LORD and his strength;

seek his face always.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Of course, if we're to "glory in his holy name," it makes sense that we'll need to know what that name is. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were surrounded by cultures that worshiped a variety of gods with many different names. However, the one true God made it clear that He alone is to receive our worship. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," the Shema begins (Deuteronomy 6:4). And while He is one God, He has many names.

In the sixty-six books of the Bible that were written over approximately fifteen hundred years, God revealed various names that reflect His multifaceted character and infinitely diverse ways. To the outcast Hagar, He was El Roi, the God Who Sees. To the needy Abraham, He was Yahweh Yireh, the Lord Will Provide. To the rock-toting teen warrior David, He was El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One. In each of these instances, God revealed a new aspect of His being to show that He was sufficient to take care of every need, all powerful to take care of every foe, and all present to take care of every circumstance.

In ancient times names carried powerful significance. In addition to distinguishing one person from another and connecting family members, names were thought to reflect a person's character, nature, and destiny. Joseph's two sons were named Manasseh, meaning "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household," and Ephraim, meaning "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering" (Genesis 41:50–52). Abraham's name meant a "father of many nations" and the name of his wife, Sarah, meant "princess—the mother of many nations"¹ (Genesis 17:5, 15–16). Then there was Jacob, whose name meant "trickster," Esau whose name meant "red," and Jabez whose name meant "pain." If

you're familiar with their lives, you can see how these names are intricately connected with each person's story.

God has many names in the Bible, and just like the names of the people to whom He revealed Himself, each one brings to light something about His character and His ways—who He is and what He does. Our finite human minds can barely comprehend even a fraction of the depth of His wisdom, the breadth of His love, the magnitude of His power, or the height of His grace. But like a multifaceted diamond, each name invites us to glory in a different aspect of our amazing God.

KNOWING GOD INTIMATELY

In the pages to follow, we'll be introducing you to forty different names and attributes of God. But we don't want you to simply know God's names. We want you to know God Himself—on a personal level. We want you to call Him by name and to call *on* Him by name. And you can be sure of this: He knows your name. . . . He calls your name. I love God's promise to us: "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have *called you by name*; you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1, NLT).

Our purpose is not to cover every name of God mentioned in the Bible or to study every theological nuance of the names we do cover. Rather, we long for you to draw closer to the heart of God by gaining new insights as to who God is and what He does on your behalf. We pray that as you reflect on the various names of God, you will experience Him in fresh ways and with deeper intimacy.

We hope you read our previous Girlfriends in God book, *Trusting God*. It's the perfect introduction to this study. These two books are knit together with the purpose of drawing you closer to God. We believe the more you know Him, the more you'll trust Him. Isaiah

wrote, “Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, *trust in the name of the LORD* and rely on his God” (Isaiah 50:10). The psalmist wrote, “Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Psalm 9:10). Oh, girlfriend, you can know God by name and you can trust Him.

For most of the names of God, we'll include the Old Testament Hebrew or Aramaic or the New Testament Greek rendering of the name as well as the English translation. Just as in our Girlfriends in God online devotions, we'll include Today's Truth—a Bible verse in which the name is used. And each devotional closes with a prayer. For Day 6 of each week, we've provided questions to help you reflect more deeply and personally on the five names or attributes covered in that particular week. We encourage you to gather a group of girlfriends into GiG groups and study the names together. We know from our own friendship that there's so much to be gained by sharing with one another what you're discovering about God. In fact, the three of us have created free online videos for each week, and we'd love to join you in this study. So grab a cup of coffee, click on www.girlfriendsin-God.com, and find us on the Knowing God by Name page.

So let's get started! We can hardly wait to hear what God reveals to you as you open the treasure chest of His Word and begin to know God by name.

Girlfriends IN GOD

Sharon Jaynes, Gwen Smith, and Mary Southerland



The people who know their God will display strength and take action. (Daniel 11:32, NASB)

Day 1



The Creator

Elohim

Sharon Jaynes

Today's Truth

In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)

Friend to Friend

Elohim is the first name for God in the Bible, and it is found in the first sentence of God's Word. "In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). So let's begin our journey of knowing God by name...in the beginning.

Before the creation of the world, there was nothing. Our human minds can't even conceive or imagine *nothing*. But into the nothing God spoke, and what was not became what is.

When God hung the sun in the morning sky and the moon in the inky expanse, when He sprinkled the stars to dance in the night, when He separated the waters of heaven from the waters of the earth, when He shaped the dry land, scattered seed for vegetation, stocked the seas with marine life, and filled the skies with winged fowl, He did so with words. "And God said, 'Let there be,'" and it was so

(verses 3, 6, 14). “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

But on the sixth day, God did a little something different. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26, NASB).

So the holy hand of God reached down, gathered dust from the ground, and with sacred fingertips formed man. He then leaned over the lifeless form and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

After each of the first five days of creation, as the sun set over the horizon, God said, “It is good.” Six times, at the end of each phase of His handiwork, He reiterated His approval. In reading the story, we ride the rhythm of repetition only to be brought to a sudden halt by the Creator’s words when He looked at the lone man with no suitable companion: “It is *not* good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:21–22, NASB)

Actor and author Bruce Marchiano paints a beautiful picture of God fashioning Eve.

He shapes her frame and shades her skin. He molds her mind and measures her stature. He sculpts the contour of her face, the almonds of her eyes, and the graceful stretch of her limbs. Long before she has even spoken a word, he has held her

voice in his heart, and so he ever-so-gently tunes its timbre.
 Cell by cell, tenderness by tenderness, and with care beyond
 care, in creation he quite simply *loves her*.²

Eve was the “crowning touch of God’s creative masterpiece and the inspiration of man’s first poetry.”³ She was not an afterthought, but God’s grand finale—His magnificent masterpiece. God concluded the first week of the world’s existence, and the curtain fell with the words: “God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*” (Genesis 1:31).

Now let’s take a closer look at the very first name of God found in the Bible: Elohim. The Hebrew word *Elohim* is the plural form of the Hebrew word *El*, one of the oldest designations for divinity. It means “mighty one or strong one.”⁴ The name Elohim encapsulates the truth of God’s creative power, majesty, and might, as well as His sovereign rule over all creation. The fact that it is the plural form of *El* points to the truth of the Trinity—God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are the collective *Us* in Genesis 1:26. Elohim is used over two thousand times in the Old Testament to name God, and thirty-two of those occur in Genesis 1:1–2:3.

Knowing God as Elohim answers three big questions all of us face: *Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here?*

Who are you? You are an image bearer of God. Elohim said, “Let Us make man in Our image.” And then, “Male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26–27, NASB).

Where did you come from? God fashioned you, formed you, and created your inmost being. David wrote:

For you created my inmost being;
 you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
 your works are wonderful,
 I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you
 when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
 your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book
 before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13–16)

Why are you here? You were created for God and to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7), because it pleased Him to do so (Ephesians 1:5). The concept of glory can be difficult to wrap our human minds around. Simply put, *God's glory* is how He makes His presence known. You, my friend, are a platform from which God displays His magnificence and makes His presence easy to see.

Knowing you were created *by* God and *for* God confirms that you have great value and great purpose, regardless of how you feel about yourself, regardless of how you came into this world, regardless of what others have said about you in the past. Every human life is sacred, no matter how it began.

Now let me go a little deeper. As you ponder God's speaking the universe into existence, do you think anything in your life is too difficult for Him to take care of? Any problem too complex for Him to solve? Any illness beyond His power to heal? Any child too rebellious for Him to tame? Any marriage too far gone for Him to restore? Oh, sister, nothing is impossible for Elohim, the mighty Creator. He can breathe life into any seemingly hopeless situation that comes your way. "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37, NLT). You can depend on Elohim to weave a design out of the tangled circum-

stances of your life, even when they seem as shapeless and dark as the earth prior to His first utterance of “Let there be.”

Let's Pray

Elohim, mighty Creator, I praise You that You spoke, and what was not became what is. From the minutia of an atom to the grandness of the sea, the whole earth shouts the truth of Your creative glory. I thank You for Your mighty power that can create order from my chaos, fashion beauty from my brokenness, and bring light into the darkness of my world. I rest assured that nothing is too hard for You to handle. In Jesus's name, amen.

Day 2



The Everlasting God

El Olam

Jwen Smith

Today's Truth

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. (Genesis 21:33, ESV)

Friend to Friend

My curiosity begs to understand life. My mind longs for logic. I am not overly fond of ungraspable concepts. When I was a child, I asked a million questions. *Why is the sky blue? Are angels all men? Why do bad things happen? Why can't we send my brussels sprouts to the starving children in Africa? Who created God?*

I wanted answers.

I still do.

Give me a story that grabs my attention at the beginning. Fill it with intrigue. Throw in some high conflict and drama in the middle, and then catch the bad guys, tie up the loose ends, and call it done. Cue the applause. Strike up the band! Bring down the curtain. But don't even think about leaving me hanging...and certainly don't ask me to *tune in next week* for the missing story-pieces.

Now that you are clued in to a bit of my “crazy,” you can imagine how I reacted as a youngster when the concept of infinity was introduced in math class. Suit me up in a straitjacket and take me to a rubber room. I thought my math teacher was nuts. *You mean I’m supposed to comprehend, work with, and accept something that has no beginning and no ending? Really? That’s not neat. It’s not simple. It makes my brain hurt to even think about it!*

Pure frustration, packaged in a sideways figure eight.

A mind-maddening math mystery.

Infinity.

Once I rose above the psychological drama-trauma of this new math concept, I figured out how to solve problems with infinity, even though I couldn’t wrap my brain around it. I completed my homework assignments and passed the tests—without running my fingernails down the chalkboard in a defiant, adolescent tantrum of revolt. Miracle.

Despite my coming to terms with infinity, God’s eternal nature is one of several divine characteristics that I find difficult to grasp. As much as my inner four-year-old would like it to, the Bible does not begin with “Once upon a time,” and it does not end with “And they all lived happily ever after.” The love saga of God, written in crimson by Christ, is a mystery that began before the dawn of time and continues forever. God’s existence transcends space, matter, and time.

Let the reality of the Everlasting God blow your mind for a minute...

Behold, God is great, and we know him not;

the number of his years is unsearchable. (Job 36:26, esv)

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable. (Isaiah 40:28, ESV)

God is God.

He is great.

Unsearchable.

There is no one like Him, not one. Not now. Not ever. He is uniquely and mysteriously eternal. In Genesis 21:33, we read, “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God” (ESV). Abraham called out to El Olam—the Everlasting God. As we discussed yesterday, *El* is the ancient Hebrew designation for “mighty one.” *Olam* means “world, universe, everlasting time or space.”⁵ God’s existence cannot be featured on a time line because it does not come neatly packaged with a clearly defined beginning and ending. In fact, He *is* the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last.

Moses also referred to the eternal nature of God. Just before he died, Moses called God Elohei Kedem, the Hebrew name that means “eternal God,” when he handed out blessings of strength and security to the people of the tribe of Asher.

There is no one like the God of Israel.

He rides across the heavens to help you,
across the skies in majestic splendor.

The eternal God is your refuge,
and his everlasting arms are under you.

(Deuteronomy 33:26–27, NLT)

I would guess that, like me, you love the thought of God as your refuge. My heart completely resonates with the concept of His everlasting arms beneath me. Holding me. Protecting me. Guiding me. Do I fully understand it? Not at all. But it sure does help me accept the concept of God's eternal nature, helping ground my experience of this mind-blowing truth in something tangible.

When we invite the One who is beyond space, matter, and time into *our* space, matter, and time, we position ourselves to experience El Olam as a refuge for all eternity. You and I run out of energy. We grow weary. We lose heart. God *never* does. The everlasting God does not faint or grow weary, and when we call out to Him, He renews our strength and revives our hope.

The Bible pulls back the curtain of eternity in the book of Revelation to give us a glimpse of what forever looks like. Do you realize what's going on before the throne of God in heaven right now? Unparalleled worship. Celestial creatures with massive amounts of eyes and wings—strangely foreign to us, but at home in the sacred throngs of heaven—surround the throne, raising their voices to exalt the everlasting God. Day and night they never cease to declare,

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come! (Revelation 4:8, esv)

Yeah. I'm the girl who wants life to make sense, but I've been learning that there are some things in life that we just need to accept rather than understand. Things we need to take at face value...at *faith* value. For me, this is one of them. I worship El Olam—who was and is and is to come. Infinite grace. I don't need to know how God's eternal nature works to believe it is at work in our world and in my circumstances. I'm so grateful that on the day my lungs exhale

my final earthly breath and my eyes lift to see Jesus face to face, all my questions will be not only satisfied, but also forgotten. Not just for a moment, but for all eternity.

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.
Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.
(Isaiah 26:3–4, ESV)

Let's Pray

Heavenly Father, El Olam, Everlasting God, You surely are great! You are the most amazing mystery I will ever know. Help me to trust You, beyond my understanding. Increase my faith, and help my life to reflect Your infinite grace. In Jesus's name, amen.

Day 3



The Lord My Rock

Yahweh Tsurì

Mary Southerland

Today's Truth

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:2)

Friend to Friend

Through the years, the mountains of North Carolina have been a favorite vacation spot for our family. I recall one summer in particular when our son, Jered, was nine and our daughter, Danna, was six. We had heard so much about Grandfather Mountain and decided the kids were finally old enough to handle the physical demands of such an adventurous climb. Our excitement grew as our faithful old van wound its way up the mountain to the visitor center. The kids jumped out, yelling for us to hurry, ready for the adventure to begin!

The first leg of the expedition required us to cross a high, swinging bridge to enjoy the most spectacular view offered by Grandfather Mountain. With the confidence of veteran climbers, we traipsed across the bridge with ease and in absolute awe of the mountainous beauty. None of us really wanted to move from our scenic overlook,

but when the crowd grew larger and the cold winds started picking up, we decided it was time to go. Reluctantly, we began walking back to the van. Then we spotted the sign pointing to hiking trails just ahead—and we love to hike—so we decided to try out a few trails.

At the starting point of the climb, we saw a large wooden billboard warning all hikers to make sure they were fully equipped for the trails ahead, listing necessities like water, food, hiking gear, and first-aid kits. When I pointed out the sign to my husband, he said, “Honey, that sign is *not* for Southerlands!” Of course! What was I thinking?

After sauntering past the billboard, we embarked on what seemed to be a pleasantly easy climb. Soon we came to an ambiguous fork in the path. There were no maps or signs and not a single person to guide us. As we were contemplating which path to take, a group of college students came rambling down one of the mountain paths, laughing and chattering about the “excellent” climb they had just made. We asked if the trail they had just taken would be easy enough for the kids. Assessing our young children clad in shorts, T-shirts, and newly purchased slip-on sneakers, accompanied by their two ill-equipped parents, the students assured us we could handle the hike with no problems at all. Off we went!

It wasn't long before we realized we were in serious trouble. The path grew harder and steeper. We met fewer and fewer climbers until it seemed as if we were the only ones left on the mountain. I do remember thinking, *Now tell me again, God, why I married this man!* Of course, I knew why. It was just a momentary lack of resolve brought on by the increasing panic.

On we climbed, scaling huge boulders, plastering ourselves against massive rocks as we found ourselves on an extremely narrow path that skirted a deadly drop of several hundred feet. At one point,

Dan and I were literally grasping our children's feet and planting them in safe places, holding them steady in order to prevent a fall off the mountain. We could not turn around. The paths were so steep that our only option was to climb over the mountaintop and make our way down the other side. With every step my alarm grew until we rounded the last curve and found ourselves looking at the highest point of the mountain. It was a breathtaking view and a terrifying prospect all in one, because one last boulder loomed in front of us—the biggest one of all. As we drew closer, that boulder became a thing of beauty! Someone had been there before us and bolted metal stakes into the side of the boulder, forming a ladder we could use to scale that massive rock and reach the other side and the path that would take us safely down the mountain. We finished the climb, realizing that God does indeed take care of the faithful and the foolish, as well as those of us who vacillate in between.

As we were driving home, the perfect provision of God swept over me in sweet relief. Just as surely as God took care of us on that mountain, He takes care of us every minute of every day. God truly is our Rock—our Yahweh Tsur.

The Bible is filled with references to God as a rock. The Hebrew noun *tsur* is often translated “rock” or “stone,” while *petra* is the Greek word for “rock.” The ancient writers emphasized this aspect of God for good reason. Rocks provided shade and shelter in the wilderness and were used to create altars, temples, houses, and city walls. Piles of stones memorialized important events in Israel's history. What's more, God's commandments, given to Moses, were etched on stone so that all generations would learn His Law. The word *rock* epitomizes God's persistent faithfulness.

I can't think of a better word than *rock* to represent God's nature and character. He is faithful and His love endures forever. His

presence offers protection and shelter from the storms of life. When we pray to the Lord our Rock, we are conversing with the never-changing God whose purposes and plans remain fixed and steadfast. The New Testament identifies Jesus as the spiritual rock that accompanied the Israelites during their challenging journey through the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4). He is also the stone the builders rejected but which has become the very cornerstone upon which God's church is built (Acts 4:10–11; Ephesians 2:20–21).

I first realized just how precious Yahweh Tsurī was and would be in my life when I found myself at the bottom of a dark and lonely pit called clinical depression. My world simply crumbled around me. Everything I had counted on my whole life suddenly seemed uncertain, even my faith in God. How had He let me fall into this pit? I had no idea how I had gotten to such a desolate place, and even more frightening, I had no idea how to get out. I cried out to Him with a desperation I had never experienced before—and let me tell you, I was no stranger to desperate times. My life story includes an alcoholic father, a poverty-ridden childhood, a mother who battled cancer, being molested as a teenager, a struggle with infertility, the stress of ministry, the anxiety of my husband's heart problems...the list of crises I've encountered is formidable. Yet depression and its threat to smother my faith was worst of all. While I sat at the bottom of that pit, God gave me the promise of Psalm 40, a promise that redefined my very being and formed the foundation for the life and ministry He has given me today.

I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,

out of the mud and mire;
 he set my feet on a rock
 and gave me a firm place to stand. (verses 1–2)

When the storms of life come, as they surely will, and when the world around us begins to tremble, as it inevitably will, we need not be shaken. The Lord who is the Rock eternal will be there, giving us a firm place to stand.

God is faithful and He proves that promise to us over and over again. “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,” the psalmist proclaims (Psalm 100:5, ESV). If God came through yesterday, He will come through today. If God was faithful yesterday, He will be faithful today. His love never changes, He holds each tomorrow in the palm of His hand, and He has gone before us, through the darkness of every trial and over each mountain erected by the circumstances of life, making a way.

Rejoice, girlfriend! Your faith’s firm foundation is the Lord your Rock—your Yahweh Tsurì.

Let’s Pray

Father, You are my Rock. When I can count on nothing else in this world, I can count on You to be my shelter, my strength, and my peace. Help me remember and celebrate each victory You have accomplished in my life. I stand in Your power alone, Lord, and declare my faith in You, Yahweh Tsurì, my Rock and my Redeemer. In Jesus’s name, amen.



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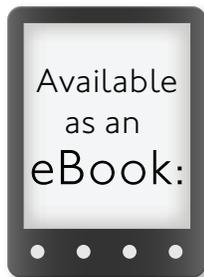
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