

A

CONTRARIAN'S

GUIDE
TO
KNOWING
GOD



SPIRITUALITY FOR THE REST OF US

LARRY OSBORNE

Praise for
A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God

“This book will speak to everyone who has ever felt ‘left out’ spiritually. Larry’s insights cut through the commonly accepted, guilt-induced world of religion as he captures the raw essence of New Testament relationship.

Reading this book feels like a conversation with Jesus over coffee—simple, profound, biblical, yet completely opposite of what I’ve learned from America’s polluted version of Christianity.

Every year one book grabs my attention and speaks to my soul. *A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God* was one of those books.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, senior pastor of Life.Church
in Oklahoma City

“What a great, fun book! Larry Osborne’s *A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God* made me cringe at certain intersections; at other times I felt the thrill of someone putting into words what I’ve always felt. He takes the cookies off the top shelf and puts them where we all can enjoy them, as he finishes our incomplete sentences and makes us feel like geniuses.

It’s a quick read that’s filled with brilliant, disturbing insights. He may not change stodgy theologians, but he may just annoy them closer to Jesus.”

—WAYNE CORDEIRO, senior pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship in Hawaii

“Larry Osborne has mapped out a brand-new path for spiritual formation in *A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God*. This is one of the only books I know that takes you on the path to God without insisting that you be more disciplined and more structured and that you read a lot more. Finally, a book for the rest of us!”

—DAVE FERGUSON, lead pastor of Community Christian Church and visionary for NewThing Network in Chicago

“Rich wisdom brilliantly communicated by a very talented writer. Takes the blinders off and opens your eyes to some strange and unique ways God works.”

—STEVE ARTERBURN, founder and chairman of New Life Ministries and radio host of *New Life Live!*

“Larry Osborne hits it out of the park with *A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God*. Practical and engaging, this book calls each of us to a new way of thinking about what it means to build a great relationship with God.

It does what every great book has always done: it causes some of us relief, it causes some of us great consternation, and it causes all of us to stop and think about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it.

The concepts Larry shares have blessed and encouraged me as a follower of Christ and a leader in his church. I will definitely move this book to the top of my must-read list for our church family.”

—TOBY SLOUGH, lead pastor of Cross Timbers Church in Argyle, Texas

“I’ve known Larry for years, and he always mentors me personally with his insights into following Jesus. For the first time, he’s captured those simple lessons in this great book.

A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God brings fresh insights from the Bible to help us conquer the nagging fears and doubts we have about our walk with Christ. This confident work, clearly illustrated by Scripture and life stories, helps leaders and believers realize that the key essentials in a growing relationship are not what we think.”

—DAVE TRAVIS, CEO of Leadership Network in Dallas, Texas

“I’ve heard all my life that God created each of us uniquely. Larry opened my eyes to the truth that God desires us to know and follow him as an expression of that uniqueness.

With a keen mixture of wit, wisdom, and God's Word, *A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God* provides a refreshing and insightful look at how the 'average guy' can enjoy a meaningful, guilt-free relationship with God."

—CHIP HENDERSON, senior pastor of Pinelake Church
in Brandon, Mississippi

"This is another amazing book by my favorite author. I have no idea how he does it. One classic right after another. It must be a result of his stellar upbringing."

—CAROLYN OSBORNE, Larry's mom

"Finally! In the midst of all the left-brained spiritual growth strategies available, Larry has written a guide for the rest of us. If your soul is yearning for practical, real-time help that works on Monday as well as Sunday, this book is for you."

—JIM DENISON, founding president of the Denison Forum
on Truth and Culture

"Larry Osborne puts into words what many of us have wondered about for years but never had the courage to voice publicly. This book affirms us as individuals with unique personalities, learning styles, and gifts while offering sound counsel on the importance of deepening our relationships with God and with each other.

A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God gives us permission to trade our feelings of spiritual inferiority for the confidence to pursue a life with God at the very center of who we are and how we choose to live each day."

—LINDA STANLEY, vice president and team leader
of Leadership Network in Dallas, Texas

"I read the book in one sitting. It is engaging, convicting, maddening, and encouraging. I hope it is widely read to correct spiritual

abuses and encourage the majority of everyday Christians (whom Osborne calls “cobblers in Corinth”).

When I finished *A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God*, I felt free and relieved. Osborne took off weight after weight of spiritual ‘churchy’ expectations for someone who sincerely wants to be godly. I felt like singing ‘Trust and obey, for there’s no other way...’

Larry’s book opened my eyes to ways I have distorted the simple New Testament picture of godliness because of my zeal to motivate. My congregation should thank Larry for saving them from *me*.”

—BRUCE MILLER, senior pastor of Christ Fellowship
in McKinney, Texas

“This is a refreshingly helpful book for everyone who loves Jesus but has struggled with tidy formulas for spiritual growth.”

—MARK DRISCOLL, pastor of Trinity Church in
Scottsdale, Arizona

“If you’ve ever thought you were the only one challenging a cookie-cutter approach to faith, you need to read this book. Thank God! Osborne shows us how our relationship with God is not a one-size-fits-all approach.”

—BILL EASUM, founder and president of the Effective
Church Group

“Larry challenges current notions of spiritual development in a healthy and thoughtful way. Whether you are beginning your journey with God or have been at it a long time, this book will be a powerful blessing and guide.”

—BOB ROBERTS JR., senior pastor of NorthWood Church
in Keller, Texas, and founder of Glocal.net

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A CONTRARIAN'S GUIDE TO KNOWING GOD

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Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

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To Jesus my Savior, the one who knows me most
intimately and still likes me anyway.
My hope is that I've helped a few people to
know you better and please you more.

To Nancy, Nathan, Rachel, and Joshua,
thank you for the love and joy you bring my way.
You've been the greatest gifts of my life.

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A DIFFERENT PATH

IT'S NO ACCIDENT that Jesus was raised in a backwater town and used simple illustrations to convey profound truth.

It's no accident the New Testament was written in the simple language of the marketplace rather than classical Greek—which was far more eloquent but way beyond the grasp of the common man.

It was all part of God's plan to make the inaccessible accessible.

When Jesus burst onto the stage, he confronted a religious system that saw God as anything but accessible. Spirituality was reserved for the elite—those with pedigree, education, and a commitment to rigid self-discipline.

He countered this with a different path, one that farmers, fishermen, carpenters, even little children and sinners could follow.

He raised the bar of righteousness. But he lowered the bar to entry.

This book aims to follow in his footsteps. It's designed to challenge many of our modern-day, widely accepted, and deeply entrenched ideas about what it means to know God, and about what it is that actually produces spirituality. Because too often, in our own zeal to

honor God, we've reraised the bar with definitions of spirituality that are once again beyond the reach of the common man—and more importantly, beyond the heights set by God himself.

While genuine spirituality at its core is quite simple (obey God and follow the unique path he's designed for each of us), it can be extraordinarily complex in its outworking and its many facets. We'll explore those facets as if examining a diamond, closely inspecting and pointing out the beauty and flaws in each one.

In the first section we'll attempt to define spirituality—what it is and what it isn't. In the next, we'll explore what it takes to get there from here. And in the final section, we'll examine in depth what God wants and expects from each of us as individuals.

While you'll find many of my observations to be contrarian, I've attempted to carefully run everything through a biblical grid. I encourage you to test it in that light. Hold on to what fits; cast out the rest.

What's Here for You

I've written with three kinds of readers in mind.

First, many of us have tried the standard recipes for knowing God but found them wanting. If that's you, this book is designed to offer hope—and some practical paths to get there.

Second, many of us have learned to play the church game well but we're haunted by nagging doubts—especially about whether everything really works as advertised. I've tried to ask those tough questions and perhaps give a few surprising answers along the way.

Finally, you may have mastered the standard disciplines of spirituality and found them to be incredibly helpful. This book will help you understand the rest of us.

These pages aren't meant to denigrate or devalue the spiritual

disciplines. It's not meant to downgrade the help they've given so many. It's simply meant to offer insight into the minds and hearts of those who don't read so well, who work with their hands instead of their minds, who still show a few symptoms of ADD, or who view three days of reflective solitude in a monastery as worse than hell itself.

I think you'll discover that such people aren't necessarily lazy, spiritually dull, or uninterested after all. Often they're just wired differently. And that means their path to spirituality and knowing God will look a lot different from the well-trod and well-signed routes.

Still a Contrarian

I'm often asked which of my books is my favorite. I always name this book. That's why I'm excited to see it updated and rereleased by Multnomah for a whole new generation of readers. I've added a couple of chapters dealing with some subjects that weren't on the front burner when the first edition came out. But after looking over the bulk of the book, there's little I wanted to change. I'm still a contrarian. I still want to know God. And I still believe that for the most part what I wrote back then is the best way I know how to say it today.

—Yours for the King and the kingdom,
Larry Osborne, 2018

PART ONE

GENUINE SPIRITUALITY

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SPIRITUALITY FOR THE REST OF US

I'VE NOTICED that much (if not most) teaching on spirituality is a lot like books I've read on marriage.

My wife and I always thought we had a great marriage until we started reading books and going to the conferences designed to tell us how to have a great marriage.

Our relationship was characterized by oneness of spirit, soul, and mind—a connectedness that made two truly become one. But the books and conferences informed us that we were doing it all wrong. We weren't eating enough meals together, the TV was on too much, our date nights were far too rare, and our prayer time as a couple was sorely lacking.

The message was clear: The fact that we had a strong marriage didn't matter; how we got there was what mattered most. And we'd apparently gotten there the wrong way.

Their *tools* for building a great marriage had somehow become the *measure* of a great marriage.

And on that scale, we didn't measure up.

Cookie-Cutter Christians

When it comes to having a great relationship with God, the same thing often happens. The tools and spiritual disciplines that can help us get there frequently become an end in themselves. Books and conferences on the inner life end up presenting a cookie-cutter approach to spirituality that focuses more on the steps we take than on the actual quality of our walk with God.

The emphasis of this book is that God wants a great relationship with all of us, but it can't be found in a one-size-fits-all approach.

It's the end result that matters, not the path we take to get there. If something produces a great walk with God for you, it's a great path to take. If not, it's probably a waste of time, even if lots of other folks highly recommend it.

Fact is, what works for one can be worthless—even harmful—for another. The way we're wired really matters. Whenever we project what works for us onto everyone else, we create frustration and legalism. When we let others project their stuff onto us, we too often end up with unfounded guilt or a nervous twitch. Neither of which is very helpful when it comes to producing a great relationship with God.

Does God Play Favorites?

As a new Christian, the more I pursued what it meant to know God and experience genuine spirituality, the more I found many of the standard answers confusing.

The conventional paths to pleasing God seemed heavily tilted in the direction of certain personality types. The playing field didn't appear to be level. I wondered if God played favorites.

On the one hand, I was told that spirituality was within the reach of everyone. On the other hand, I noticed that almost all the

books on spirituality and the inner life were written by introverts—smart ones at that.

I got the distinct impression that God was somehow partial to reflective types with high IQs, impressive vocabularies, and lots of self-discipline. And that left a lot of us on the outside looking in.

Almost all the books on spirituality and the inner life are written by introverts—smart ones at that.

Do Good Readers Make Better Christians?

I also noticed that reading seemed to be rather important. I'm obviously not down on reading, or why write a book? But I'm not quite sure how the ability to read well became the essential tool for spiritual growth.

If I want to know God and experience genuine spirituality, I'm told to read the Bible daily. If I want to grow *really* deep, I'm told to also read the time-honored classics written by the saints of old.

Now, I know the Bible is important; no argument there. But if daily Bible reading and mining the depths of the ancient scholars and mystics is the key to knowing God and God-pleasing spirituality, I wonder how regular folks got there before Gutenberg invented his printing press?

Even more to the point, if reading skills are so vital, how can my friend Tony, who's severely dyslexic, ever hope to know God?

Do Bible Scholars Make Better Christians?

I was also puzzled by our widespread emphasis on proper doctrine as central to having a good relationship with God.

I want to make it clear that I personally believe theology and

sound doctrine are important—incredibly important. What I believe about God has an undeniable impact on how I live. Wrong thinking leads to wrong decisions; always has, always will.

But didn't Jesus say something about the kingdom of heaven belonging to those who are like little children? If he really meant it, how does our insistence on sound doctrine being essential for knowing and pleasing God fit in with a child's theological naiveté?

Anyone who has ever been around a children's Sunday school class knows that these kids have some pretty messed-up theology. They haven't got a clue about propitiation, the Trinity, or any of the other important doctrines of Scripture. If asked, they'll say the darnedest things.

But as Jesus pointed out, many of them can and do have a great relationship with God—and often, a relationship worth emulating.

That's caused me to wonder if sound doctrine is perhaps more the *result* of knowing and pleasing God than the primary and indispensable first step before he shows up.

When the Mold Doesn't Fit

Finally, I wondered why I kept running across so many godly people who felt so ungodly.

I now realize it had more to do with our faulty definitions of spirituality than anything else. In most cases, these people felt like spiritual failures not because they were far from God, but because they'd been unable to live up to generally accepted measures of spirituality.

They had stalled out in Leviticus each time they tried to read through the Bible. They were kinetic types who found extended prayer not only unfulfilling, but nearly torturous. Or extroverts

who'd bought one of those fancy leather journals, but never got around to putting anything in it.

Mostly, they were regular folks who for whatever reason didn't fit the mold too well. They tried it, but sadly found it didn't work for them.

A Contrarian's Perspective

As we explore what it means to know God and experience God-pleasing spirituality in a way that's accessible for everyone, you'll notice that we take some admittedly contrarian paths. But rest assured, they're not contrarian for contrarian's sake. If that were the case, they would have no value.

Contrarian thinking for the sake of being contrarian is an arrogant waste of time. Claiming that the world is flat just because everyone else says it's round is a fool's playground.

There's nothing wrong with conventional wisdom when it's right. And most of the time it is.

But when it's not, someone has to speak up.

Contrarian thinking at its best simply asks, *Is that really true?* And it speaks up when the politically correct answer or conventional wisdom doesn't match reality—when things don't work the way everyone says they do or thinks they do.

*Contrarian thinking
at its best simply asks,
Is that really true?*

Contrarianism also represents a much-needed form of candor. It dares to speak the unspeakable, to voice what others may have been thinking but for some reason have been afraid to say out loud. Much like a young boy standing by the roadside asking, "Why is the emperor butt naked?"

That's the kind of thinking, candor, and courage I hope you'll find on the pages to follow.

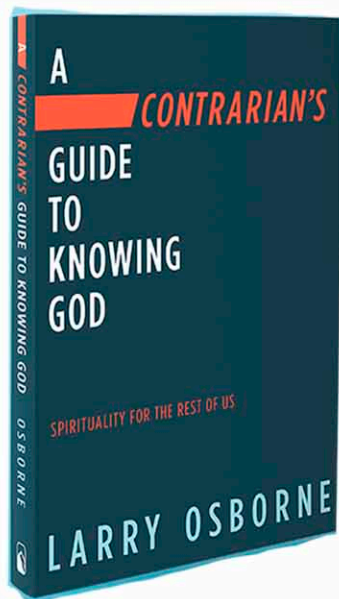
GENUINE SPIRITUALITY

My bet is that you'll find some of it incredibly freeing, some of it annoying, some maddening, and some of it still open to debate.

I also hope you'll find yourself thinking more than a few times, "You know, I always thought the same thing—but I didn't know anybody else did too."

Continue
Reading...

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