

## Does God Learn?

### Introduction

The almost unsettling question:

### Does God learn?

At first glance, the answer seems obvious. Of course not — God is all-knowing. Scripture tells us His understanding has no limit. And yet, when we read the Bible carefully, we see moments when God appears to “change His mind,” to “relent,” or even to say, “*Now I know.*”

So what do we do with that? Does God learn something new? Or is something deeper being revealed to us about how God relates to His people? Let’s search the Scriptures together.

### Theological Balance

- The Bible gives us two tensions:
  - God is all-knowing and eternal — never surprised.
  - Yet, God reveals Himself as relational, responsive, even *regretful*.
- Some theologians (like in “Open Theism”) argue that God genuinely experiences history and responds in real time — not because He learns, but because He chooses to engage creation dynamically.
- In Christ, we see the mystery sharpen: the eternal Son “learns obedience” in time. This doesn’t mean the divine essence gains knowledge, but that God, in His humanity, entered our condition and truly experienced what it means to learn.

### Scriptures Where God Appears to “Change” or “Learn”

These passages suggest God is responsive, or that His course of action seems to shift based on human behavior or unfolding history:

- **Genesis 6:6** – “*The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.*”

Here, God's response to humanity's corruption sounds like regret — as though something was experienced anew.

- **Exodus 32:14** – *“Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”*  
After Moses' intercession, God “relents.” Some translations even say “repented,” which implies reconsideration.
- **Jonah 3:10** – *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented...”*  
God appears to shift His course based on Nineveh's repentance.
- **Isaiah 42:9 / 43:19** – *“See, I am doing a new thing!”*  
Not because God lacked knowledge, but because He enters history with something fresh. This is where your “new thing” idea lands.
- **Hebrews 5:8** (about Christ) – *“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”*  
If Jesus is the image of the invisible God, then the incarnation itself shows God entering a mode of “learning by experience.”

## 2. Scriptures Affirming God's Omniscience (Suggesting He Does Not Learn)

- **Psalms 147:5** – *“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.”*
- **Isaiah 46:10** – *“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”*
- **1 John 3:20** – *“God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”*

These passages suggest God does not *gain* knowledge; He already possesses it.

### 3. Where People Ask the Question

- **Job 21:22** – *“Can anyone teach knowledge to God, since he judges even the highest?”*  
Job essentially raises your sermon’s question: can God be taught? Scripture answers “no,” but the very asking is important.
- **Romans 11:34** – *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”*  
Echoing Isaiah 40:13, Paul insists God is not taught by anyone.

#### I. Abraham — *“Now I Know”*

Abraham on Mount Moriah. God had asked him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son — the son of promise. As Abraham lifted the knife, the angel of the LORD cried out:

**Genesis 22:12** – *“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. **Now I know** that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

Did God not know Abraham’s heart beforehand? Of course He did. Yet He speaks as though something has been revealed in that moment.

Here we learn that God does not only know in theory. He enters into time. He experiences Abraham’s faith as it unfolds. It is not that God lacked knowledge — it is that He chose to walk with Abraham, to know his faith relationally, not mechanically.

#### II. David — God’s Relenting

After David sinned by ordering a census of Israel — a proud act of self-reliance instead of trusting God’s strength — judgment fell. But then the text says:

**2 Samuel 24:16** – *“When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, ‘Enough! Withdraw your hand.’ The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”*

Why did God relent? Because David repented. Earlier in the chapter David had cried out:

**2 Samuel 24:10** – *“David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’”*

God’s relenting is not God learning. It is God living out His character — mercy in response to repentance. As David himself wrote:

**Psalms 51:17** – *“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”*

God relents because His nature is mercy. He responds to contrition with compassion, every time.

### **III. Solomon — The Mystery of God’s Wisdom**

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. He reflects on the mystery of God’s works:

**Ecclesiastes 3:11** – *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”*

We cannot fathom it! God’s knowledge stretches from beginning to end, yet Solomon also marvels at God’s choice to dwell among us.

At the Temple dedication, he prayed:

**1 Kings 8:27** – *“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”*

God cannot be contained — yet He chooses to enter our world. This is the paradox: His knowledge is infinite, but His presence with us is intimate.

#### **IV. The Prophets — Conditional Prophecy**

The prophets also show us how God's word engages with human freedom.

**Jeremiah 18:7–10** – *“If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”*

God Himself declares that His announcements are conditional. He responds to repentance or rebellion.

The same happens in Jonah. Jonah proclaims:

**Jonah 3:4** – *“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”*

But the people repent, and Scripture tells us:

**Jonah 3:10** – *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”*

God's words are not cold decrees. They are living, dynamic, relational. He is not learning, but He is responding in love.

#### **V. Free Will and God's Knowledge**

Now the hard question: If free will is real, does God wait upon us to decide?

Scripture affirms our choices matter:

**Deuteronomy 30:19** – *“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. **Now choose life**, so that you and your children may live.”*

**Joshua 24:15** – *“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then **\*choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**”*

Free will is real. God sets life and death before us and commands us to choose.

How does this fit with God’s perfect knowledge? Two views arise:

- Some say God knows every choice eternally, from His vantage outside of time. He does not “wait” as we do.
- Others say God knows all possibilities perfectly and then journeys with us into whichever unfolds.

Either way, both truths remain: God’s knowledge is infinite, and our freedom is real. The tension is not contradiction — it is holy mystery.

## **VI. Christ as the Bridge**

And in Jesus Christ, we see how the eternal God steps into time.

**Luke 2:52** – *“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”*

**Hebrews 5:8** – *“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”*

God Himself took on flesh, entered into our process of growth, and *learned obedience*. Not because He lacked knowledge, but because He chose to live it with us.

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed:

**Luke 22:42** – *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”*

The fullest expression of free will — freely surrendered. God does not only know obedience; in Christ, He *lives* it.

## VII. Eternity – God’s Living Knowledge

God knows all things, yet eternity is not simply static knowledge. It is the unfolding of life forever.

**Revelation 21:5** – *“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”*

Not, “I learned something new,” but *I am bringing into being what I have always known.*

Philosophically, it is one thing to know, another to experience. You can know what fire is, but until you touch it, you do not *live it*. God knew humanity before we existed, but when He created us, He experienced relationship with us. Not because He was lacking, but because love chooses to live what it knows.

Eternity, then, is not God sitting above us with static omniscience. Eternity is God endlessly unfolding His love, creating, redeeming, making new, forever and ever.

### Conclusion: So, Does God Learn?

So, does God learn?

- Not in the sense of gaining knowledge He lacked. Scripture declares: *“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit”* (Psalm 147:5).
- But God chooses to enter into time. He experiences our choices, our prayers, our repentance. He relents when we turn back to Him. He lives what He already knows.

That is why He can say both:

- *“Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely”* (Psalm 139:4), and,
- *“Now I know that you fear God”* (Genesis 22:12).

God does not learn because He is lacking. He lives with us because He is loving. And in eternity, the One who knows all things also chooses to experience all things with us — forever and ever.