

We're continuing in our series called *Glory: Illuminating Life with God's Virtue*. As followers of Jesus Christ, you and I are in the process of being unveiled. We were created to reflect God's glory, born to bear his image, and although that glory has been veiled or shrouded because of sin, through the work of Jesus Christ, God has redeemed and is redeeming us to reflect his glory again. Every heart has been given a glory of mythic proportions, writes John Eldredge, "and [in and through Jesus] that glory is being restored." When God created the heavens and the earth, he declared them to be *good*. But when God created human beings in his own image, he upgraded the status of creation to... *very good*. Your glory—a reflected glory that comes from God, but that is destined to shine in and through you—starting now—is a glory that when it fully emerges will be greater than any scene in nature that has ever taken your breath away. The glory of God in you, though now partly veiled, is *breathhtaking*. Does that statement shock you? Can you believe that it even describes you? Whether you can or not, it's true.

And that's what we've been talking about in this series. You and I have been created, and are being redeemed, to reflect the glory of Christ's character, and to reflect Christ's character is to be *fully alive*—it is to brim with the abundant life that Jesus came to give us. In that vein, we've been studying, one by one, the character virtues listed in 2 Peter chapter 1, all of which we are all called to grow in as followers of Jesus, as that veil is pulled back, and the beauty of his character is revealed more fully in every dimension of our lives. This is our purpose. This is why we were put here on earth.

Last week, Pastor Kevin got us started on understanding the virtue of knowledge, particularly as it applies to the life focus area of Body and Soul Care. This week, I'm going to pick up where Kevin left off. In the first half of the message, I'll share further about the biblical virtue of knowledge, and then in the second half, I'll share some practical thoughts about how we can reflect that virtue in the local and faith community. Sound like a plan?

Let's begin with a review of our base scripture passage for this series. Please turn with me in your Bible to 2 Peter, chapter 1, and we'll start in verse 2, and go down through to verse 8. As I read this, I'd like you to try to count the number of times you notice the word "knowledge." Okay? Here we go:

² *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.* ³ *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.* ⁴ *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

⁵ *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;* ⁶ *and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;* ⁷ *and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.* ⁸ *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So that's our key passage for this series, and as I've already noted, from that list of virtues we just read, our focus is currently on the virtue of knowledge. Did you catch the number of times the word "knowledge" appears in this passage? Five—which is quite a few in such a short space. A basic rule of Bible study is that when you see the repetition of a word, you pay close attention to it. There's usually some special significance behind the repetition of a word, such as we see here with the word "knowledge."

Let's explore that significance a bit. In this letter, the Apostle Peter is writing to a cluster of churches that were being influenced by false teachers who purported to have special... *knowledge*... special insight about God probably stemming from certain mystical spiritual experiences they claimed to have had. For these false teachers, "knowledge" was probably one of their favourite words to throw around: "We have special knowledge. We get revelations that others don't. You should follow us—and not the other Christian teachers—because we are the ones who are 'in the know.'" In this letter, Peter never really explains the content of what these pseudo-Christian teachers are actually teaching. He concentrates, instead, on how they are *living*. If you jump ahead to chapter 2 you can get an idea of how these false teachers were living. Peter writes that "*they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice [other] people who are just escaping from those who live in error. [These false teachers] promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves to depravity...*" (2:18-19).

These false teachers assumed that God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus gave them a license to live however they jolly-well wanted to: "We can party hearty, because Jesus is just gonna forgive us anyway—he's gonna wipe the slate clean, man." So, they engaged in all manner of sinful behaviour, including illicit sex, eating and drinking to excess, not to mention their greedy pursuit of money—which, by the way, the false teachers had a knack for prying away from the hands of their gullible followers. The special knowledge these false teachers claimed to have, resulted in this type of lifestyle, and by their teaching and example, they were quite effective at enticing believers away from authentic Christian belief and living. After all, it's not all that hard to entice people when you're promoting a spirituality that says, "Live however you want," and then claiming that this message has Jesus' seal of approval.

But in this letter, Peter reclaims the word "knowledge" from the false teachers. He shows us in this passage that the true knowledge of God, the true knowledge of Jesus, will always lead us into a life that is really life—a life that reflects Christ's character—a virtuous character that is manifest in faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and above all, love. "*For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure,*" says Peter in verse 8, "*they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

It is quite possible, then, to be ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. A true knowledge of Jesus will lead you, in due time, to a life that manifests ever-increasing Christlikeness.

And so Peter urges, back in verse 5, “*make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to your goodness knowledge.*” Last month we talked about the virtue of goodness, which has to do with living according to our-God-given life purpose. And as followers of Jesus, our God-given life purpose is... Christlikeness. We are destined, says Romans 8:29, to be conformed to the image of God’s Son. Once we get clear on the fact that our purpose is Christlikeness, and have resolved to live in line with that purpose, we need to add to our goodness, knowledge, says Peter.

What then, is the biblical virtue of knowledge all about?

Last week Kevin gave us this definition: Knowledge is the God-caught understanding of the person, work, and ways of Jesus Christ.

So the virtue of knowledge that Peter is referring to in this passage isn’t just knowledge in any old topic or category. He’s talking specifically about the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The text bears this out. In verse 2, Peter writes that we have grace and peace through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In verse 3, he writes of how we have everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us—and the one who called us is Jesus. And again, verse 8 Peter speaks about our knowledge of... our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the biblical virtue of knowledge is about a very specific and directed type of knowing. It’s not about the mere knowledge of some body of information. The biblical virtue of knowledge is aimed directly at the knowledge of a person—Jesus Christ. The call to add to our goodness knowledge, then, is a call to grow specifically in our personal, relational, first-hand, real-time knowledge of Jesus.

How does the old saying go? It not WHAT you know, it’s WHO you know. That’s the biblical virtue of knowledge. We’re not ultimately called to know *something*, but *someone*.

You see, to truly know someone is not just to know about them. As Mark Buchanan writes, “I can know all about someone—read his biographies, if any exist, tap his FBI file. I can track down his friends, acquaintances, former teachers, lifelong enemies, and pry from them eyewitness reports and tidbits of gossip. But knowing about someone is different from knowing him.”

I know some things about Prime Minister Stephen Harper, but I don’t know him. Dallas Willard is one of my favourite Christian authors, and I’ve read several of his books. As a result, I know a fair bit about him, and what he teaches, but I don’t know him. And even though after 20 years of marriage, there are still any number of things that I don’t know about my wife, Jan (it’s amazing how you keep learning new things about your spouse years into your marriage) I nevertheless know her, as she also knows me, personally, relationally, intimately, better than anyone else in this world.

So again, to truly know someone is not just to know about them. We are called not just to know about Jesus. We are called to know him. Of course, we don’t want to overstate this, because if we’re going to know Jesus, we also need to know about him. Knowing facts about Jesus is not the same thing as personally knowing Jesus, but the knowledge of such facts is a valuable and necessary pathway to personal knowledge. If I didn’t know anything about my wife—like the date of her birth, her personal tastes and preferences, her upbringing and life experiences, her wishes for the future, and so on—there would be no substance to my relationship with her, would there? In the same way, an important part of knowing Jesus is knowing about him.

That’s what Pastor Kevin focused on last week, particularly when it comes to studying and getting to know the scriptures. If you were here, what was the lesson we learned from the rhyme-minister? “To grow in the know, you have to stow ‘n’ go!” We need to be hearers of God’s Word—we need to stow its truth into our minds and hearts—and we need to be doers of God’s Word—we need to go live it out, apply it to our lives. Stow ‘n’ go. Getting to know about Jesus in this way is absolutely vital. As Mark Buchanan writes, “What you know about God is either true or not. If it’s true, it is a doorway and a pathway to knowing him. If it’s false, it’s a barrier to such knowing, a path leading away from him... The lack of theological knowledge [in the church today] is a travesty and a crisis. We’re to love God with all our *mind* as well as all our strength and heart and soul. We’re under an implicit obligation to learn all we can about God.” And John Eldredge writes: “God has given us all sorts of counsel and direction in his written Word; thank God, we have it written down in black and white. We would do well to be familiar with it, study it with all the intensity of the men who studied the maps of the Normandy coastline before they hit the beaches on D-Day.”

I’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately in terms of how deceived many Christians are today when it comes to their knowledge about who God is, about who Jesus is, and what his heart and intentions toward us really are. If we saw—really saw the truth about who God is—we would seek to know Jesus all the more—and that knowledge would be life transforming. I don’t just mean talking and singing about transformation. We’ve already got a handle on talking and singing about it. I mean actually seeing lives transformed throughout this church body. My heart is that more and more people at this church would come to say these words along with the Apostle Paul, and really, really mean them: “... *I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...*” (Phil. 3:8)

Christians who have a distorted view of who God really is—that’s a topic I can’t delve into much further today. What I want you to understand for now is that proper knowledge about Jesus is meant to be a pathway to personal, relational, real-time knowledge of Jesus. Truth is a prelude to intimacy. So when we’re speaking about the biblical virtue of knowledge, we might think of it as **informed intimacy with Jesus**.

One of our goals this year is to connect you with really good resources to help you grow in Christlike virtue. If you go to the church website—our web address is on the back of the bulletin—you’ll notice that we’ve added a new tab on our home page entitled Prayer. Under that tab, we will, over time, be providing a number of great prayer resources. There are a couple that have been posted already, and one of them is a link to a prayer called *Daily Prayer for Freedom* by John Eldredge. If you want to grow in the virtue of knowledge—**informed intimacy with Jesus**—this is a tremendous prayer to pray each day. It is thoroughly rooted in and permeated with scripture—so it’s informed—and it is written in the personal language of prayer—words you can address directly to the living Christ—so it’s intimate. I encourage you to check out the prayer tab on the website, and pray it often. It’s a powerful, powerful prayer.

Let's move on, and talk about what it means to reflect the biblical virtue of knowledge in the local and faith community. We'll talk first about the faith community—the church—and then about the local community. We'll do it in that order because our growth in knowledge as a church body has a direct impact on our mission to make him known in the local community.

One of the many reasons why regular attendance at Sunday worship is so vital is because it is a key context for our growth in the biblical virtue of knowledge. Therefore, the first challenge I want to share with you is this: **Don't be a stranger at corporate worship.**

What did the author of Hebrews write? *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day [the day of Jesus' return] approaching"* (Heb. 10:25). These days it is very common to find Christians who are quite sporadic in their church attendance. They come to worship service... as long as they don't have something else going on that they think is more important.... or as long as they're in the mood... or as long as they don't need the extra sleep that Sunday. Far too many of us have gaps in our church attendance patterns. This suffocates our faith, and hinders our ability to grow, not least in the virtue of knowledge—informed intimacy with Jesus Christ.

For starters, in what other context do you receive a more steady diet of solid, Jesus-focused biblical teaching than you do in Sunday service? In asking that question, I'm not trying to brag on the teaching of our pastoral staff. Bringing you solid, Jesus-focused biblical teaching is simply our job, just as it would be for any teaching pastor in any local church. Where else other than Sunday worship service would you encounter, for example, an extended study of the biblical virtues listed in 2 Peter chapter 1, and how each one applies to multiple areas of our everyday lives, including work, family & friendships, body & soul care, etcetera?

In Colossians 3:16, the Bible says, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."* So not only is corporate worship the primary place for you to receive a steady diet of Jesus-focused biblical teaching, but it's also the primary place for you to sing Christ's praises. Singing Christ's praises is another way that his word comes to dwell in us richly.

Have you ever considered that the music ministry of the local church is a vital contributor to your growth in knowledge or "informed intimacy" with Jesus? All of the songs we sing are rooted in scripture, and often include direct quotations from scripture. Many of the scriptures that are the most burned into my heart are the ones I've learned in worship songs. The songs we sing at Cornerstone are written to help us lift up the name of Jesus, and to declare his excellencies over and over again. As we do so, we grow in both knowing about Jesus as well as knowing him. The songs we sing not only to help us declare truths about Jesus—which they do. But we don't just sing about Jesus. We sing to Jesus, right? In doing so, we engage him personally, together with the rest of the faith community. As we do, what happens? Lots of things. One of them is that we grow in the virtue of knowledge. C.S. Lewis wrote that, "It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates himself to [people]." Listen to that again... (repeat). Scripture says that God inhabits the praises of his people. To worship authentically, then, is to grow in knowledge the knowledge of God; in the knowledge of Christ.

In Psalm 73, which I've preached on before, the psalmist was terribly disillusioned with God, and was on the verge of renouncing his faith. But then, he went into the sanctuary for worship, out of little more than sheer habit. It was in that worship gathering that God renewed the psalmist's perspective with fresh understanding, fresh knowledge, so that by the time he left the sanctuary, this man who had been on the verge of renouncing his faith was now proclaiming, "But as for me, it is good to be near God."

Of course, everybody has those Sundays when they have to miss church. If we're on vacation, or out of town on business, or too sick to come to church, fine. That stuff happens to all of us; no big deal. We're not going to take attendance by name or police your church attendance or anything like that. But will you be among those who make a commitment to be in church every single Sunday you possibly can? Will you be a person, or a family, that says, "We will not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but we will make weekly attendance at Sunday worship a top priority?" After all, we make it to work, to class, and to our workouts regularly (okay, maybe not the workout part). We make sure our kids get to their lessons and practices. Some of us go to great lengths to make sure we never miss a minute of the Stanley Cup final. Will we also be among those who grow in knowledge—informed intimacy with Jesus—because going to church on Sunday becomes... *just what we do?* Would you make that commitment this morning? Make it for a lifetime, if you haven't done so already.

If you open your worship folder, we're providing you with yet another special prayer resource. This one is called *Prayers to Prepare Your Heart for Sunday Worship*. There's a variety of prayers on the front and back of this sheet, under different headings, including one that's called, "When I'm Tempted to Skip Church." I dare you to pray that prayer next time you're so tempted.

The idea of this sheet is that you can pray through some of these prayers on a Saturday night or a Sunday morning before church, and not only should it help your heart be better prepared to engage in Sunday worship, but your prayers will release God's power to bless others in the worship service as well. As God's power is more fully released in our Sunday services, lots of things will happen, not the least of which will be our growth in the virtue of knowledge—informed intimacy with Jesus. By the way, you can also find these prayers under the new prayer tab on Cornerstone's website—which should come in handy for all you mobile device users.

Next, in order to grow in the virtue of knowledge when it comes to your involvement in the faith community—the church—it's important for you to **find ways to get around other Christians who know Jesus well, and/or are hungry to know him better.**

Who are the people in this church community that particularly exude the virtue of knowledge—informed intimacy with Jesus? I'm talking about people who not only know about Jesus, but whose lives and character testify to the fact that they walk with him day by day. How can you get around such people, and learn from their experience? It could happen through a ministry program such as a class or small group. It could happen on a missions trip, or in the context of pastoral counselling. But usually the best way is to ask the person you have in mind. If there's someone who seems to know Jesus well that you'd like to learn from, ask if he or she wouldn't mind meeting up to talk about faith and life now and then. Explain that you're really hungry to grow and are looking to learn

from Christians who are more experienced and knowledgeable than yourself. Seek out such relationships. Learn from as many people as you can. Some people you might connect with just once, others, for a season, and a few might even become longtime friends.

If I think about my own spiritual journey, a number of faces come to mind in terms of those who have helped me grow in my knowledge of Jesus. The list includes the parents of a high school friend of mine, fellow students, pastors, church leaders, professors, colleagues, and so on. What stands out to me about the relationships that were the most shaping for me is that I made the initial approach. I asked.

Of course, that can work the other way around. If you're further along in your walk with Christ, you should be on the lookout for a hungry person that you can pass your knowledge on to. As Paul said to his young protégé Timothy, *"Pass on what you heard from me... to reliable leaders who are competent to teach others"* (2 Timothy 2:2).

Beyond this mentorship aspect, just getting around any other Christians who are hungry to know Jesus better can be a real catalyst to your own growth. Look around. Who are those in this church body who seem really hungry to grow in the know with Jesus? Can you connect with them somehow? Can you group together for prayer, for Bible study, for conversation, to spur one another on in Christ? Again, it never hurts... to ask—as long as you do so prayerfully.

Of course, the body of Christ—the faith community—extends far beyond this local church. The church extends across the world and even across the ages. I have grown greatly in informed intimacy with Jesus by reading the writings of believers who have walked with God throughout the centuries. Some are still living. Some are long dead. Here are a just a few that have been especially influential in my own walk: There's Dallas Willard, who I mentioned earlier. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Greg Boyd. Brennan Manning. St. Benedict. Eugene Peterson. Phyllis Tickle. Scot McKnight. Stanley Grenz. Robert Webber. John Wesley. Brother Lawrence. Frank Laubach. And the list goes on. Not everyone's a reader, I know. But reading is an awesome way to grow in informed intimacy with Jesus, through the Christian faith community that spans the globe and the ages. So even if you're not a reader, stretch yourself. Try to read a little bit every day. A book I'm going through now that is well worth reading—and it's very readable too—is *Waking the Dead* by John Eldredge. As you may have noticed, I've been quoting him a bunch today.

Let me now move on to an application about how we, the members of this faith community, can bring our knowledge of Jesus—our informed intimacy—into the greater local community—into our neighbourhoods, and so forth. We know Jesus, and we make him known.

In his earlier letter, the Apostle Peter wrote this: *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."* (1 Peter 3:15).

This verse assumes two things. First, it assumes that Christians will have relational connections with unbelievers in the greater community. Second, it assumes that Christians will exude a kind of hope in their lives that makes unbelievers curious about its source. Such hope, of course, flows from our knowledge of, from our informed intimacy with, Jesus Christ.

I heard this past week about a woman in our congregation who has been going through some trials regarding her work situation. She's connected socially with some other woman in the local community, and was sharing with them about how God has been helping her through these work challenges. Her sharing impacted one of the community woman in her social circle who is facing some work challenges of her own. This woman is now asking this sister from our church questions about the Christian faith, because she senses her own need for the kind of hope this sister has. It's a case of 1 Peter 3:15 in action.

What I'd like to share with you now is a practice we can use to bring our relational knowledge of Jesus—our real-time connecting with him—to bear in our encounters with folks in the community. It's a practice so simple it might surprise you, but its very simplicity puts it within the reach of all of us. It's something you can go out and start practicing right away. See what happens as you do. **Be a "Jesus-whisperer."**

The practice comes from Frank Laubach, who was a great missionary statesman in the Philippines in the 20th century. Here's what Laubach says:

"We whisper 'God' or 'Jesus' or 'Christ' constantly as we glance at every person near us. We try to see double as Christ does. We see the person as he is, and the person Christ longs to make him. Perhaps there is no finer ministry than just to be in meetings or crowds, whispering 'Jesus,' and then helping people wherever you see the opportunity."

Steve's personal examples:

- At Matthew's baseball practice
- At the neighbourhood BBQ

Before we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, let me conclude by saying that next week, I expect to have a few things to say about the limits of knowledge—particularly in terms of the stuff we know about. If we're not careful what we know about Jesus, about God, about the Bible can turn into a source of religious pride and arrogance—which is not what the biblical virtue of knowledge is about at all. "Knowledge [when used improperly] puffs up. But love builds up," says the Bible in 1 Corinthians. The test of the authenticity of our knowledge of Jesus, then, is humble, loving, Christlike service that builds people up in the Lord. More on that next week. For now, let's feast at the Lord's Table, shall we?

COMMUNION