

# GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST (1)



KNOW, LOVE, SERVE  
PART 2

T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ  
Know, Love, Serve: Part 2  
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## Welcome to *Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (1)*

This is the first of a two-part series on the subject, “Growing in the Knowledge of Christ.” It’s part 2 in our *ReVision* series, *Know, Love, Serve*.

When we truly want to know Jesus better – to know Him personally, truly, continuously, and transformingly – we’ll want to get busy learning. Learning Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24) is foundational to true discipleship, but what does that entail?

This two-part series intends to help you develop the disciplines of learning that can put you on a course for continuous growth and change, and for a deeper experience of Christ in every area of your life. By learning to use the disciplines outlined in this study, we can discover the presence of Christ in His Word and His world in ways that will lead us from the “Aha!” of new insights to the “Wow!” of genuine Christian living.

So let’s get started, shall we?

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

And if you find this study helpful, please let us know. How have you benefited from this study? Go to our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Commit

Opportunities for learning Jesus abound.

*Make me understand the way of Your precepts;  
So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works. Psalm 119.27*

*Begin here*

Believers in Jesus are called to know Him, and to increase in that knowledge, by learning Jesus continually, in as many ways as they can (2 Pet. 3.18; Eph. 4.17-24). As His disciples, we are called to learn, and whatever may be the subject of our learning, it is neither fully understood nor sufficiently resolved until it aids us in knowing Jesus better.

Knowing Jesus, we know God the Father – of Whom He is the express image (Heb. 1.3) – and God the Holy Spirit – the “other” Comforter like Jesus, Whom Jesus and the Father have sent to us, and in Whom we have the very Person of Jesus Himself (Jn. 14.15-18). Knowing God and Jesus is the essence of eternal life (Jn. 17.3). The people who truly know God will grow strong in Him, and in the power of His might, so that they do many good works to manifest His glory and channel His grace to the world. Our light will be brighter, our salt more savory, and our leaven will work its transforming effects as we grow in Jesus, to know, love, and serve Him with all the things He freely gives us each day.

This is what Jesus wants for us, but unless we want it ourselves – want to know and learn Him more perfectly every day of our lives – we will stagnate in our faith and fail in our calling to advance the Kingdom and glory of God. We must make up our minds that we will seek and live within the Kingdom and righteousness of Jesus, and that we will strive to increase in the mind of Jesus day by day.

*Seeing Jesus*

As we do, we will increase in our vision of Jesus; we’ll see Him more clearly as we submit readily and consistently to all the means by which He shows Himself to us.

In his *Treatise on Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards explained the transforming power that comes from seeing and knowing Jesus: “By the sight of the transcendent glory of Christ, true Christians see Him worthy to be followed; and so are powerfully drawn after Him; they see Him worthy that they should forsake all for Him. By the sight of that superlative amiableness, they are thoroughly disposed to be subject to Him, and engaged to labour with earnestness and activity in His service, and made willing to go through all difficulties for His sake. And it is the discovery of this divine excellency of Christ, that makes them constant to Him: for it makes so deep an impression upon their minds, that they cannot forget Him; they will follow Him whithersoever He goes, and it is in vain for any to endeavour to draw them away from Him.”

Is this the Christian life you know, or long to know? Fully engaged with Jesus? Entirely committed to Him? Following Him at every moment, in every situation, with whatever He has freely given to you for glorifying Him? Resisting every temptation to drift from Him, and reinforcing every compartment of soul and life with the Presence, promise, and power of the Lord? Increasing in the righteousness, peace, and joy of His Kingdom, as you carry out your calling to be His witness in the world?

Make up your mind, commit yourself now and every day, that you will press on in knowing Jesus, so that you will love Him as is His due, and serve Him with all your time, strength, and resources. Unless you begin here every day, you will be easily distracted from your highest calling, greatest privilege, and only source of unfailing peace and joy: knowing Jesus Christ.

*Sources for knowing Jesus*

We don't have to look far to discover opportunities for increasing in the knowledge of Jesus. We have the Word of God, which is all about Jesus (Jn. 5.39); and we have the world that Jesus has reconciled to the Father, in which His works declare His character and glory (2 Cor. 5.19; Ps. 145.10-13).

But in making best use of these resources, we need to keep them in proper relationship with one another.

In the revelation God makes of Himself, that which His Word contains has priority of place. The more we understand His precepts, the better able we will be to understand His works. Only God can enable us to understand His Word, so we must look to Him continually for guidance and understanding, not merely of the precepts of Scripture, but of the way of life they commend. As we increase understanding of the Word of God, and begin to see Jesus more fully there, our ability to understand the revelation of Christ in His wonderful works will increase accordingly.

We will not grow in the knowledge of Jesus apart from daily, disciplined, deep consideration of the Scriptures, with a view to discovering all the ways Jesus reveals Himself to us there. This requires faithful reading of all the Word of God, consistent meditation and reflection, comparing Scriptures with one another, and pleading with Jesus to make Himself known to us. It is not enough to know the books of the Bible, nor to grasp the various doctrines Scripture presents. Nor is it enough merely to listen to good preaching, or participate in a Bible study group. These can be helpful, to be sure, but only if we are grounded in the daily disciplines of God's Word. These, as well as whatever else we may gain from other learning resources, are but means to the larger end of seeing and knowing Jesus. We must search the Scriptures, poring over them, making the critical connections, and following every path of revelation as it leads us into the life, death, resurrection, reign, and soon return of our glorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

At the same time, we can begin to seek the revelation of Jesus in His works – works of creation, culture, and all the other gracious works that He ordains and upholds throughout the world. The works of creation and culture are His handiwork, and even though men abuse and misuse His gifts, still, something of His Presence, promise, and power can be discerned wherever we look. As Thomas à Kempis wrote, "From Him alone all creation takes its origin, and therefore all creation has but one voice for us; He, who is its origin, is also its interpreter. Without Him, nobody can understand it, or form a true judgment about it. Until all things become One for you, traced to One source and seen in One act of vision, you cannot find anchorage for the heart, or rest calmly in God."

We must apply ourselves to both books of divine revelation, but the Word in Scripture must be our guide, standard, and touchstone in all things, including how we understand and use the works of God in creation and culture. We must make a daily commitment to know Jesus, and follow that commitment with the disciplined pursuit of the knowledge of our Lord by every available means.

*For Reflection*

1. What does it mean to make a commitment to knowing Jesus?
2. Why must all our reading and study of Scripture end with some revelation of Jesus? How can you make sure that's actually the case?
3. Why do we need to look to both "books" of divine revelation – Scripture and creation – in order to increase in knowing Christ?

*Next Steps – Preparation: Will you make this commitment? Write it out. Put it in your Bible. Share it with some Christian friends. Review it in prayer every day. And get ready for the exciting adventure of increasing in the knowledge of our Lord.*

## 2 Compile

It may be hard and maddening, but we're called to it.

*I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.* Ecclesiastes 1.12, 13

*Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"* Acts 26.24

### *Mad to learn*

To some people, devoting themselves to learning more about Jesus might seem the height of madness. After all, learning is difficult. Most of us are probably happy that we're no longer in school. What little efforts we make at learning – a few minutes reading Scripture a few days a week, listening to a sermon, participating in a Bible study, and maybe reading a book or a newsletter – are about all the learning most of us care to indulge.

Learning is hard work. Many regard reading, study, and the other disciplines of learning as a burdensome task that can drive one mad. And they'd be at least half right in so thinking.

But learning is what disciples do; a lifetime of learning – reading, studying, reflecting, meditating, talking with others, implementing lessons learned – is what God has called us to. He intends that we should "be exercised" with such a "burdensome task"; and while the world may regard our commitment to knowing Jesus as a form of madness, we will know it as a great source of joy, wonder, wisdom, and power to live more fully for Him.

Commit yourself to a plan for learning Jesus, beginning in His Word, and spreading out into as many areas of His works as you can. Know that this is going to be hard work; but keep in mind that the prize of learning Jesus – seeing Him more clearly, knowing Him more constantly with you, and drawing on His power to live for God's glory – is well worth the effort. Take up the disciplines involved in learning Jesus with more breadth, consistency, reflection, and depth, and your soul will "be exercised" so that you will be more like Jesus, more each day like the One you are devoting to knowing, loving, and serving in every area of your life.

### *A plan for God's Word*

You'll need a plan. Begin with your time in the Word of God. How can you improve your reading and study of Scripture, so that you begin seeing Jesus more clearly throughout the Word?

Your plan should include daily reading and meditation, with the goal of getting through all of Scripture, over and over again. Bible reading plans are available in various places on the Internet. Find one that will work for you, and devote yourself to it.

Begin to compile your observations in a journal or notebook. As you read each day, note (1) a key idea that emerges from your reading; (2) how that idea directs you to consider Jesus; (3) and how you should apply that idea in your daily life. Copy out in full passages that speak pointedly to you. By writing things down, you both reinforce the impact of the insights and ideas, and create a record that you can refer back to and build on in subsequent readings.

The notes you take from your time in the Word can serve many beneficial purposes besides helping you to implant the Word in your soul. You can share them with others, use them to prepare for teaching

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opportunities, return to reflect on and improve them over time, or bring them together with other notes for more complete meditation on a particular insight to Christ or His will.

Your plan for the study of God's Word might also include being more active in a Bible study group, where those who take the Word of the Lord seriously can encourage and teach one another (Col. 3.16). You might look to the writings of sound teachers – in commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other resources – to help guide your efforts. Take a course on a Biblical subject (the Internet offers many). Above all, bathe all your time of study in prayer, asking God to open His Word to you, lead you into His glory, show Jesus to you, and do that work in you that finds you being transformed increasingly into the image of the Lord (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

#### *A plan for God's works*

Develop a similar plan for getting to know the Lord Jesus through His works. The Word of God created the world, and the Lord Jesus sustains it. Everything in the earth belongs to the Lord (Ps. 24.1), and we can be sure He intends His works to lead us more deeply into knowing Him. He is the Treasury of all true knowledge, so the more we understand His works, the better we will know Him.

Consider Solomon and Paul. Solomon directed his learning across a wide spectrum of topics – plants and animals, human behavior, international politics, architecture and beauty, and more. The book of Ecclesiastes, together with the book of Proverbs, offer rich compilations of insights from creation and culture that can help us in knowing the Lord, and encourage us in our own similar efforts.

Paul was, of course, thoroughly versed in Scripture. But he also studied philosophy, and was familiar with various Greek poets and thinkers. He even saw in their works insights to truth that, as he reflected on them, reinforced his own commitment to knowing the Lord. Paul understood Roman law; he learned oratory, understood how to organize and manage a system for spreading the Gospel, and – if his advice to Timothy is any indicator – even understood a bit about gastronomy (perhaps Luke had helped him there?).

Or consider Jesus. It's clear He saw His Father's imprint on everything around Him – farms, plants, kings, coins, sparrows, pearls, and much, much more. That He used His knowledge of such works to great effect is clear throughout His earthly ministry.

As you begin to look into the works of God in creation and culture – reading, observing, discussing, meditating and reflecting – it will help you to discover the glory of Christ hidden in these (Prov. 25.2) if you will jot down your thoughts, compiling observations and reflections, and storing them in a notebook.

Some very good note-taking apps can help you in compiling your insights from Scripture and God's works. Or you may prefer, like Jonathan Edwards, just to carry slips of paper, note cards, or a small notebook to jot down your thoughts throughout the day. (Edwards would take slips of paper with him as he went for times of solitude, and pin each new note to his coat; he would sometimes return from these seasons looking as if he'd been in a snow storm.)

Reflect on the world around you, the news of the day, the artifacts that adorn your home or make your work more efficient. Learn what you can; thank the Lord for what you're learning; and compile your observations and insights for future review or other use.

If you'll exercise your mind, heart, and conscience by the discipline of compiling your observations from Scripture and God's works, you will strengthen your ability to see Jesus, and grow in knowing Him day by day. Yes, it's hard work. But the reward is well worth the effort.

#### *For Reflection*

1. What's one thing you could do to improve your reading and study of the Bible? What additional tools



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might help you improve your time in the Word of God?

2. Where should you begin in seeking Jesus through His works? What are you interested in? What's closest at hand? How might you begin to study the works of God immediately around you?

3. What will you do to begin compiling your thoughts, observations, insights, and lessons more consistently?

*Next Steps – Preparation: Take 30 minutes today and write out your plan for studying God's Word and His works. Commit your plan to the Lord in prayer.*

### 3 Concentrate (1)

Mysteries come clear as we concentrate on the Word of God.

*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.* Hebrews 5.9-11

#### *Dull of hearing*

The Christians to whom the writer of Hebrews addressed his book had a serious problem. They were beginning to drift from the great salvation they had received from the Lord (Heb. 2.3). The pressure was on from the surrounding culture and society. It was easier to muffle their faith in Jesus and just go with the flow of life around them, than to hold fast their confession firmly to the end (Heb. 3.6, 14).

The problem was that people had begun to snipe at them for being Christians (Heb. 12.4); and, frankly, these early believers just weren't up to suffering for Jesus. They'd lost sight of the purpose of their salvation, which is to bring the wholeness and newness of Christ to every aspect of life (Heb. 2.5-9). They were coasting in their faith, clinging to familiar and elementary teachings, rather than pressing on to know Jesus more (Heb. 6.1-3). They'd been Christians long enough so that they should have been outspoken teachers for the faith, bearing witness to Christ by their lives and words (Heb. 5.12). Instead, they were slinking back from full faith, and were conforming to the lifestyle of their contemporaries, rather than pressing on in the calling and promises of God. They were Christians, the writer believed, but he wanted them to get back into the fruitful life of seeking the promises and growing in the great salvation of the Lord (Heb. 6.9-12).

Their problem was that they had left off the disciplines of learning, so that they were no longer considering Jesus as earnestly or consistently as their calling demanded. They were sluggish and slow, and maybe even just plain lazy (all meanings of the Greek word, *νωθροὶ nothroi* – *dull*), about knowing and loving Jesus; consequently, their witness had dried up, and they were in danger of demonstrating that they'd never really known the Lord in the first place (Heb. 6.1-8).

The writer's solution was to call them back to the Biblical foundations of their faith, and the promises their forebears sought so diligently. In the process, he urged them to concentrate on some very difficult matters, and to discover by concentrating, more of the greatness and singular significance of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

#### *Consider*

He called them to consider the greatness of Jesus. He is greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than the Law of God and all its religious rituals. If they would just concentrate on what they knew about Jesus, and consider Him in His exalted glory, they would see how all those holy spiritual beings and familiar religious traditions found their fulfillment in Jesus. Why would they want to go back to that which was merely a shadow, when the reality that is our great salvation can be known only in Jesus?

At the apex of the writer's argument, calling his readers to return to seeking the Lord, is his explanation of Melchizedek. This mysterious king is mentioned twice in the Old Testament. Just two mentions, yet the writer considers him the key to bringing his readers back to Jesus. In chapter 5, he wants to broach his argument about Melchizedek, but he says to his readers that it is “hard to explain”. So he detours from Hebrews 5.11 into a scathing rebuke of their laziness as learners – their disobedience as disciples, who had left off the work of considering and knowing Jesus, just to ease the pressure they were feeling from their unbelieving neighbors.

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Jesus is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. In chapter 7, the writer goes on to show how this pronouncement by God in Psalm 110 locks down the eternity of Christ, signifies His superiority over Abraham and the religious laws of Israel, secures the value of His work over that of the Levitical priesthood, and magnifies His greatness as the High Priest Who ever lives to make intercession for us.

If they would just concentrate on what the Bible taught about Melchizedek, they would not prefer their old religious and unbelieving ways to the greatness, majesty, perfections, compassion, power, and indestructibility of Jesus, our great High Priest and sovereign Lord. Because He is a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus has been “perfected forever” (Heb. 7.28). He is seated at God’s right hand, has obtained the more excellent ministry of interceding for us and mediating the New Covenant in His blood, is the Guarantee of better promises, and the fulfillment of all that has gone before (Heb. 8). Fix your concentration on Jesus, and you won’t drift from the great salvation He holds out to you.

Consider Jesus, the writer insists twice (Heb. 3.1; 12.2). Stop being lazy learners. Concentrate on what you know, and think about all this means for your salvation, faith, and life.

#### *The lesson for us*

The book of Hebrews is a timely epistle for us, as well. Many Christians today have left off fervently seeking to learn Jesus and are coasting along in an infantile faith, hoping not to rock any boats or churn any adverse waters. We have all the knowledge we need, thank you; and even though what we have, and what we’re content with, isn’t helping us to be holy unto the Lord, isn’t making us stand out from the rest of the world, and isn’t helping us redeem all of life for the glory of God, well, we’re content with it anyway.

We have become dull of hearing – sluggish, slow, and lazy learners. We like our Bible times light and quick, and our sermons too. We don’t want to dig deeply into the Word, to trace out all the paths that lead to Jesus, exalt Him in His glory, and demonstrate the overwhelming excellence of His Kingdom agenda. We find it a burdensome task to concentrate on spiritual matters, and we consider those who do to be overreaching if not outright mad.

The message to us is the same as it was to those first Christians: You who are lazy learners, covert Christians, and dull disciples, take heed, lest you drift so far from your great salvation, that it becomes evident you never had it in the first place. Consider Jesus! Concentrate on learning Him from every place in Scripture! Read! Study! Think! Think! Think about the infinite beauty, goodness, and truth that are in Jesus, and of how His transforming power can make all things new in your life!

We need to get serious about learning Jesus. And if the world mocks or scorns us, well, that’s nothing more than what Jesus experienced and taught us to expect. Wear it like a badge of courage, and press on!

We have the mind of Christ, and we use that mind as we should when we invest determined and consistent effort in searching the Scriptures to know the Lord (Acts 17.11), increasing in love for Him, and growing in our understanding of how we may serve Him boldly, faithfully, and fruitfully for His glory.

#### *For reflection*

1. How can you tell when someone has become sluggish, slow, or lazy as a learner? Why must disciples of Jesus *not* allow this to describe them?
2. What does it mean to concentrate on something, or to consider it carefully? What kinds of practices or disciplines go into concentrating? Why should we devote more to concentrating on Scripture, that we might see Jesus throughout the Bible?

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3. How would you counsel a new believer not to become “dull of hearing” as he begins his life in the Lord?

*Next steps – Transformation: Have you become a little dull of hearing? What can you do to increase your concentration on learning Jesus? What do you need to do better in searching the Scriptures to learn Jesus? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.*

## 4 Concentrate (2)

Concentration can reveal mysteries in everyday objects.

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”* Matthew 13.45, 46

*[Solomon] spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish. And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. 1 Kings 4.32-34*

*Take up, examine, discover*

On a certain day a pearl did I take up, my brethren;  
I saw in it mysteries pertaining to the Kingdom;  
Semblances and types of the Majesty;  
It became a fountain, and I drank out of it mysteries of the Son. Hymn I.1<sup>1</sup>

So begins the first of a suite of seven hymns in praise of Jesus by Ephrem the Syrian, a deacon in the Syrian Church toward the end of the fourth century. Ephrem was a poet, composer, and bold witness for Christ. He wrote poems and songs about the life of faith and the hope of glory. He defended the orthodox faith against the insidious threats of the emperor Julian the Apostate. And he wrote “The Pearl” – seven brief hymns celebrating Christ and His work, based on careful examination of a single pearl.

Ephrem continues:

I put it, my brethren, upon the palm of my hand,  
That I might examine it:  
I went to look at it on one side,  
And it proved faces on all sides.  
I found out that the Son was incomprehensible,  
Since He is wholly Light.  
In its brightness I beheld the Bright One Who cannot be clouded,  
And in its pureness a great mystery,  
Even the Body of Our Lord which is well-refined:  
In its undivideness I saw the Truth  
Which is undivided..  
I saw therein His trophies, and His victories, and His crowns.  
I saw His helpful and overflowing graces,  
And His hidden things and His revealed things. Hymn I.1

All this in a pearl! As Solomon found the glory and wisdom of God hidden in animals, creeping things, birds, and trees, Ephrem found his knowledge of Christ brightened and enhanced by concentrating for an extended season on a pearl.

*Concentrating on the pearl*

Ephrem set the pearl in the palm of his hand, so that he might examine it carefully – as he says, looking at it

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from St. Ephrem the Syrian. “The Pearl: Seven Hymns On the Faith.” Apple Books. <https://books.apple.com/us/book/the-pearl-seven-hymns-on-the-faith/id526241164>

from every angle, studying its texture, color, and composition, considering its provenance and uses, and in all this looking to discern the glory of Jesus Christ.

Ephrem likened the pearl to tongues singing, voices uttering mysteries, and a “silent harp that without voice gave out melodies” (I.2). He says that concentrating on this pearl filled him with more pleasantness than reading books or hearing explanations of things (I.2). He calls us to join him as he pries into the pearl (a word deliberately chosen because it describes how one must get to a pearl), to explore its deeper meaning, and to “wander” through all aspects of its existence and essence, gathering up our minds in contemplation to discover the truth of Christ (IV.1; V.5).

Ephrem speaks to the pearl, seeking more insight. The pearl responds to Ephrem, albeit not in words, complaining that people never take the time to ponder the deep mysteries locked in her essence, since they are only interested in what she can gain for them (I.3). The pearl tells him that, to discover the secrets of divinity she holds, his searching must be “mingled with thanksgiving” and praise (I.4).

Ephrem likens the pearl to Christ, risen and enthroned. He observes that the pearl rises to life and beauty “from the sea, that living tomb” and so is like Christ in His resurrection, and is thence “exalted to a goodly eminence” as a cherished piece of jewelry (II.1).

In being prepared for its eminent place of beauty in the crown of a king, the pearl reminds Ephrem of the suffering of Christ:

Shadowed forth in thy beauty is the beauty of the Son,  
Who clothed Himself with suffering when the nails passed through Him.  
The awl passed in thee since they handled thee roughly,  
As they did His hands;  
And because He suffered He reigned,  
As by thy sufferings thy beauty increased.  
And if they showed no pity upon thee,  
Neither did they love thee:  
Still suffer as thou mightest,  
Thou has come to reign! (II.2)

The beauty and simplicity of the pearl point Ephrem to the beauty of Christ (III.4), and incite in him a greater desire for oneness with God:

And since I have wandered in thee, pearl,  
I will gather up my mind  
And by having contemplated thee,  
Would become like thee,  
In that thou art all gathered up into thyself;  
And as thou in all times art one,  
One let me become by thee! V.5

We should value Christ now, Ephrem insists, for when we finally see Him exalted in glory, it will be too late, and our clownishness will be our doom:

If one despises thee [the pearl] and throws thee away,  
He would blame himself for his clownishness,  
For when he saw thee in a king's crown he would be attracted to thee. V.2

Six hymns reflecting on the pearl lead to hymn VII, which reviews Christ's work of redemption, and ends with the prayer:

O Lord, make the priests and kings peaceful;

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That in one Church priests may pray for their kings,  
And kings spare those round about them;  
And may the peace which is within Thee become ours, Lord,  
Thou that art within and without all things!

*Concentrating on all things*

Jesus is indeed “within and without all things” – all in and all around all His works – and we may expect to meet Him, even in familiar objects, if we will take the time, as Ephrem did, to concentrate, think, give thanks, and praise God.

Several ideas from “The Pearl” can guide us in learning to concentrate on familiar objects so that they release to us the knowledge of Christ they hold. First, we need to take such objects into our hands, with a view to concentrating on what they can teach us about the knowledge of our Lord. This entails setting aside time and having something in front of us that we can examine closely.

Think deeply about the object of your concentration. Let’s say you’re contemplating a cup. What are its components? Where did it come from? How did you come by it? How do you use it? What colors, shapes, and textures does it reveal? As you are examining the object, give thanks and praise to God for everything you’re learning, even though at this moment these merely objective observations may not be disclosing anything about the deeper mysteries you hope to discover.

Next, “wander” (Ephrem’s term) between what you’re learning about the cup and what you know about Jesus. Try to make as many associations between the object of your concentration and what you know about Jesus, just as Ephrem did. Remember Jesus and the cup of His sufferings, the cup of the New Covenant, or what He taught about the cup of cold water. Is your cup full as you observe it, as Jesus wants to fill your life with Himself (Eph. 4.8-10)? What would it look like running over? What would you look like if Jesus were overflowing from you? Is your cup part of a set, as you are a member of the Body of Christ? How does it complement the other pieces in the set? What work does your cup do for you in bringing refreshment to your body, as Jesus works constantly to bring refreshment to your soul?

Dot down your observations and associations in a notebook, giving thanks and praise to God for each one. Focus on what this everyday object is teaching you about Jesus. Then begin to craft a conclusion. Solomon wrote proverbs and songs to celebrate what he discovered of God’s glory (Prov. 25.2). Ephrem did the same. You can certainly write a prayer, a journal entry, a poem, or perhaps an email to a friend, sharing your thoughts.

Don’t worry if you feel frustrated, or if you’re not quite sure about your observations or conclusion, or if you feel like there’s so much more you could discover. It’s enough to start here. As you learn to concentrate more closely on the things around you, and set aside regular time to do so, you will find your awareness of Jesus’ Presence growing, and your joy in knowing Him increasing. Jesus is within and without all things, but we’ll need to practice the discipline of concentrating to discover the glory He has hidden in His works all around us.

*For reflection*

1. Why is it reasonable to expect that familiar, everyday objects might yield insights to Jesus and His glory that provide great pleasure in knowing Him?
2. Ephrem said he found such times of contemplation more pleasant than reading books. Does that mean reading books cannot be pleasant or useful? Explain.
3. How can such exercises in concentration help to equip you to minister the grace of Jesus to others?

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*Next Steps – Transformation: Set aside one hour this week for an exercise in concentrating on a familiar object. Follow the guidance of Ephrem. Share your conclusion with a friend, and ask your friend to respond. Talk about your experience.*



## 5 Compare and Combine (1)

We need to learn the way our Teacher likes to teach.

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.* 1 Corinthians 2.12, 13

*As for the saints who are on the earth,  
"They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."* Psalm 16.3

### *The Spirit our Teacher*

Jesus has told us that the Holy Spirit is our Teacher (Jn. 16.7-15). We may study a lot, listen to many sermons, take courses, read books, listen to podcasts, and subscribe to teaching letters. And all those are good, and can be very helpful. We should do as much of these things as we can.

But we must always remember that the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. The goal of all His teaching is to transform us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). He leads us into all truth, both that which is to be gained from Scripture, and that which we may learn from others and from the works of God in creation. We need to understand as much as possible how the Holy Spirit teaches, so that we can bring our efforts at learning Jesus into line with His preferred instructional methods.

Here is not the place to unpack that large study. We may summarize the teaching work of the Holy Spirit as Paul does, by saying that He compares – and combines – spiritual things with spiritual things, so that we might learn Jesus, bear witness to Jesus, boast about Jesus, and love as Jesus loves.

And the starting point for all this comparing and combining is the work we do in searching the Scriptures daily, that we might know Jesus better, love Him more fervently, and be more faithful, fruitful, and consistent in serving Him.

Three aspects of the Spirit's work of teaching are particularly important. If we neglect or skip any of these, we will not benefit as much as we might from the teaching of God's Spirit.

### *The core curriculum*

The teaching work of the Holy Spirit – once He has convicted us of sin and brought us to new life in Christ – begins by His laying a foundation in our souls that will enable us to live the love and good works outlined in the Law of God. Put another way, we might say that the core curriculum of the Holy Spirit revolves around the Law of God (Deut. 20.1-10; Ezek. 11.19, 20; 36.26, 27). The Law of God consists of the commandments, statutes, precepts, ordinances, symbols, types, and testimonies God revealed to His people through Moses during their sojourn in the wilderness. We have it recorded in the Old Testament books of Genesis through Deuteronomy.

This is a life-long, progressive, and ever-expanding project. Meditating on the Law of God day and night (Ps. 1) provides the discipline within which the Spirit can do this most foundational work of teaching in our souls. The Law of God is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12); it is *the* go-to place for learning how to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40). And it is here that Jesus in all His sacrificial, priestly, magisterial, and holy glory is first symbolized, typified, taught, and glimpsed in the revelation of God.

The Law of God must be part of our daily, ongoing study and contemplation of God's Word. The Spirit will

### *Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (1)*

teach it to us line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little (Is. 28.9, 10), until He establishes it as a solid foundation for *all* the other teaching He wants us to receive. Skip school here, and you cut the legs out from under your discipleship program.

On that foundation, the Spirit can use two other disciplines to help us compare and combine the spiritual things of God into solid teaching that transforms us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ.

#### *The analogy of Scripture*

The first is what theologians call the analogy of Scripture. It's what we see throughout the New Testament, when writers like Paul pull together passages from various parts of Scripture to shed light on a point they're trying to make. As for example in Romans 3. Here Paul is explaining the power of sin and the reason why we need Christ to deliver us from it. To make his point, he draws on passages from the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Isaiah to outline and support his teaching. The effect of comparing and combining passages like this is to pile the weight of Scripture against a subject, so that it opens to us with greater clarity and power.

The writer of Hebrews provides another excellent example of the analogy of Scripture. He uses the Psalms, Israel's wandering in the wilderness, the faithful example of saints from throughout the Old Testament, and many other passages to argue that Jesus is the only High Priest and Savior we need.

Many Bibles are set up to help us make good use of this discipline. Their marginal notes or footnotes point us to supportive passages where we may find additional light on the matter we're reading, studying, or contemplating. We should look these up, and see how they contribute to our understanding of God's Word.

But we should also begin making catalogs of our own, connecting what we read in one place in Scripture with what we've read elsewhere. Fill your journals with cross-references, parallel texts, and supportive passages for whatever you're studying. Thus we give the Holy Spirit plenty of Biblical material to feed our souls as we are growing in the knowledge of Jesus.

#### *The analogy of faith*

A similar discipline is called the analogy of faith. In the analogy of Scripture, we compare Scripture with Scripture, to see how the Bible clarifies itself. In the analogy of faith, we look to teachers, theologians, commentators, preachers, and writers from throughout the course of Christian history, to shed light from their experience into our efforts at learning Jesus.

A wide variety of tools are available to help you use this discipline as part of your regular program of seeking to know Jesus better. Bible dictionaries, single-volume (or two- or three-volume) sets of commentaries, larger tomes from previous generations and contemporary theologians – our libraries ought to have some of each of these. Online resources by the score exist, and you should find a few that are particularly helpful to you. The saints who are in the earth – whether in the ground or living on the earth at present – can bring us much delight, confirmation, and expansion of learning as we consult the spiritual things the Spirit has taught them to help us in growing to know Jesus better.

We said this was hard work – a “burdensome task” to recall Solomon – but learning Jesus from the Holy Spirit is the most exciting thing you'll ever do. To see Him in His glory, increase mightily in love for Him, and become better equipped to serve Him day by day is the greatest adventure anyone can know. But we'll need to rely on the Spirit and His curriculum and compare-and-combine teaching method, if we're going to benefit as much as we can.

#### *For Reflection*

1. How can we know what the Holy Spirit wants to teach us about Jesus?

*Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (1)*

2. Why is it important to compare Scripture with Scripture as we're trying to increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ?

3. Why is the analogy of faith an important discipline for learning Jesus?

*Next Steps – Preparation: How will you bring these three disciplines into your own growth program? Share your thoughts about this with a Christian friend.*

## 6 Compare and Combine (2)

Wisdom and praise for Jesus are everywhere to be found.

*All Your works shall praise You, O LORD,  
And Your saints shall bless You.  
They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,  
And talk of Your power,  
To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,  
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.* Psalm 145.10-12

*There are four things which are little on the earth,  
But they are exceedingly wise:  
The ants are a people not strong,  
Yet they prepare their food in the summer;  
The rock badgers are a feeble folk,  
Yet they make their homes in the crags;  
The locusts have no king,  
Yet they all advance in ranks;  
The spider skillfully grasps with its hands,  
And it is in kings' palaces.* Proverbs 30.24-28

### *Seeking wisdom*

Like Solomon, Agur must have been a man committed to learning the wisdom of God. As the end of his days approached, he shared his longing for wisdom with two men, Ithiel and Ucal, who evidently wrote down Agur's words, which are preserved for us in Proverbs 30.

Where can he find wisdom? Agur knew the Word of God is a reliable source of wisdom: "Every word of God is pure" (v. 5), and he must have made recourse to as much of that Word as was available to him. But what he read there turned his eyes to the works of God, that he might learn more of God's glory and power, and make known to others what the Lord revealed to him.

Thus, most of what he learned about wisdom, as expressed in Proverbs 30, consists of a report of observations he made from the works of God in creation, and the conclusions he drew from these. In verses 24-28, he notes four things which share two common features: they're all small, and they all teach something about wisdom.

As Agur contemplated the ants, the conies, and the locusts, which he could observe in the creation around him, and a solitary spider weaving its web, perhaps in his room, he noted their diminutive size. They were small, he reasoned, but they must have something to tell us about wisdom. Agur persisted in concentrating until insights concerning wisdom emerged from his comparisons: All these small creatures had something of wisdom to share with those who take the time to concentrate on them, and to consider what God would teach us through them. Plan ahead! Shelter in the Rock! Hang together! Hold on tight!

By combining his observations of these creatures, and comparing them with each other – as he did in other sections of this same chapter – Agur gained insights to wisdom, which he wanted to pass on to those who would succeed him. He didn't know much about wisdom, but what he had learned from God's Word he combined with his observations of the creatures around him, comparing them to discover a measure – albeit small - of the wisdom God wants us to know.

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*Concentrate, combine, compare, celebrate*

The 19<sup>th</sup> century English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins kept notebooks of the many observations he made during walks in the countryside, or through the city where he served as a priest. He wrote down what he observed, made sketches, and drew preliminary conclusions. These became the fuel for long seasons of contemplation, as Hopkins sought to learn the wisdom of God, so that he might draw closer to his Creator, Savior, and Lord.

Some of his greatest poems came from these Agur-like experiences, including one of my favorites, “Pied Beauty” (“pied” means having two or more different colors):

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise Him.

(Note: “brindled” is a corruption of the Middle English, “brindled,” meaning a tawny coat of skin mixed with other colors.)

This is a poem of sheer joy. Hopkins was delighted by the great variety of things in his world – creatures, fields, people at work, tastes, and so forth. The world, he observed, is full of variety and change, and he was filled with joy to contemplate it. So filled, in fact, that he combined all his observations into one brief poem; and, as he compared them with one another, he was struck by what they in common reveal about God: The God Who “fathers-forth” all this change and variety is beautiful beyond all change, and therefore worthy of praise. His poem begins and ends in blessing and praise to our all-beautiful and unchanging God and Savior.

*Our Father’s world*

The hymn, “This Is My Father’s World,” captures the variety of creation, and celebrates the greatness and beauty of God, Who made and keeps it all. Rocks, trees, birds, grass, sunlight, skies, seas – everything in creation calls us to consider the greatness of God, and to manifest His glory in song.

Don’t you think your life would be richer, fuller, and more consistently joyful by taking the time to concentrate on the things around you, comparing and combining them to discover the knowledge of Christ hidden in them?

As we bring together in meditation and prayer our observations of the things around us, we’ll begin to see ways of comparing and combining things that will yield insights to the beauty, majesty, greatness, goodness, wisdom, and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. That insight can lead us to praise Him for some aspect of His Being or work, and add spice and wonder to our witness for Jesus.

As we concentrate on individual things, making notes in a journal, or just mental pictures and reminders, we will see many ways that He Who “fathers-forth” all of creation is making Himself known to us. And as we increase in the knowledge of our Savior, comparing and combining like Solomon, Agur, and Hopkins, our joy will increase, our love for the Lord will grow, and we will be more ready with a word of praise or witness to Him as opportunities for such arise.

*Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (1)*

Praise Him!

*For reflection*

1. Have you begun observing and concentrating on the things around you? What are you learning that is helping you to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ?
2. Can you see how this comparing and combining of observations is a way that the Holy Spirit “compares spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2.12, 13)? Explain.
3. How does Psalm 145.10-12 encourage us in this effort? What will doing this work of concentrating on creation and comparing and combining our observations do for us?

*Next Steps – Transformation: Make a point to jot down some observations of the world around you today. Before retiring tonight, meditate on these observations. Do they have anything in common? How do they lead you to bless and praise the Lord?*

## 7 Connect (1)

The road to knowing Jesus wends from “Aha!” to “Wow!”

*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh... Acts 2.14-17

*A Pentecost “Aha!”*

It is instructive to imagine ourselves among that early band of believers, as they spilled out of the upper room into the crowded streets, proclaiming the “wonderful works of God” (v. 11) in languages they had never learned.

Surely some of them, like the people to whom they proclaimed the Good News, wondered what was happening? What was this all about? Jesus had promised them power to bear witness, and now here they were, witnessing for Jesus with all their might. Was this the promise they’d been seeking during those ten days of continuous prayer?

Imagine Peter, the leader of this troop of witnesses, moving among them to encourage and join his words with theirs, as he began to hear the crowd’s explanation for these events: “They are full of new wine” (v. 13).

I’m sure Peter knew all along that this was the promise, come finally to power in the lives of God’s people. Suddenly, this unschooled fisherman, the one who had denied Jesus three times before a servant girl, now stood boldly before the multitudes, to connect the dots for them about the promises of God, these strange tongues, Jesus, the last days, the salvation of the Lord, and the hope of the world.

Peter’s sermon on that first Christian Pentecost is important for many reasons, not the least of which because it demonstrates the promise of Christ’s restoration, and of His initial vision for Peter (cf. Jn. 21.15-19; Matt. 16.13-19). More to the point for our purposes, however, Peter’s sermon shows us how as we concentrate deeply, and compare and combine what we’re learning from God’s Word, connecting Scripture with people and events, our lives can open wide horizons of vision, hope, commitment, obedience, and joy.

*This is that!*

The Holy Spirit gave Peter the understanding he needed to combine various Scriptures with great power. Beginning with the promise of the Spirit from Joel 2, Peter immediately turned the focus on Jesus of Nazareth. All those hearing him had heard of Jesus – of the many “miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him” (v. 22). They also knew that, less than two months previous, Jesus had been crucified by the Romans. Peter made it personal: “you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (v. 23).

But God, Peter insisted, raised Him from the dead, just as He had promised in Psalm 16 (vv. 24-28). Peter declared that he and his friends had experienced Jesus alive from the dead, and that now Jesus, exalted in glory (Ps. 110), had sent the Spirit through them to proclaim the day of salvation to the world (vv. 33, 34). Now seated at the Father’s right hand, Jesus is “both Lord and Christ” (v. 36), and all who call on Him can be forgiven of their sins and know the salvation of the Lord (v. 39).

Peter connected his understanding of Scripture to the surprising events unfolding in the city of Jerusalem.

*Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (1)*

The words of Joel and David played out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He, from His place in glory, had poured out His Spirit onto His people, just as He had promised, so that now those words were happening them as well. What the crowd in Jerusalem was seeing and hearing was the firm connection between the promises of Scripture, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and the actions of His faithful people, filled with the Spirit, as they bore obedient witness to the Lord.

Peter and the others in that upper room moved from the “Aha!” of Biblical insight and understanding, to the “Wow!” of Scripture as living and powerful, and proving itself in their lives.

*Getting to Wow!*

When we’re studying Scripture – concentrating on a passage, comparing and combining that passage with others – our interest is not merely in *understanding* the Bible more clearly. The Bible was given to equip and move us for lives of good works in the world (2 Tim. 3.15-17). It’s one thing to experience that very exciting “Aha!” of having discovered something new and brighter in the Word of God. It’s quite another thing for that “Aha!” to be proved and validated in a “Wow!” life of obeying the Word, growing in Jesus, and becoming a conduit of His grace to the people around us.

The “Wow!” that awaits us in our daily lives is, like Peter and those first believers, knowing Jesus alive *in us*, and at work *through* us, to make known the Good News of salvation for a perverse and dying world.

Every “Aha!” moment – great or small – of concentrating in God’s Word, comparing and combining Scriptures to gain new insights and clearer understanding, should lead to some next step of obedience, which we take by faith. As we take that step, the Spirit engages us from within, engendering faith and leading us to experience courage beyond our courage, wisdom beyond our wisdom, skill beyond our skill, power beyond our power, love beyond our love, and joy that comes only from knowing Jesus, being transformed into His image, and living for His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12).

And when we live that way, connecting what we’re learning about Jesus from His Word with our calling from Jesus in our lives, Jesus increases in and through us. Then we know the “Wow!” of being new people, Kingdom citizens and ambassadors, and men and women who can turn our world rightside-up for Jesus Christ.

*For reflection*

1. Why must every “Aha!” experience of Scripture lead to some “Wow!” moment in life?
2. What does this suggest about how we ought to be reading and studying Scripture?
3. The essence of the “Wow!” we seek is Christ at work within us, willing and doing of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13). What is our role in getting to that (Phil. 2.12)?

*Next Steps – Preparation: Jot down any “Aha!” experience you have during your time in the Word, whether it’s large or small. Seek the Lord for one way that “Aha!” may become a “Wow!” in your life today. Then prepare yourself in prayer – like the disciples in that upper room – to work out your salvation in obedience today.*



*Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (1)*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. Have you made the commitment to know Jesus better? How would you explain that commitment to a fellow believer?
2. What would you say are the keys to concentrating effectively on the Word of God? On the works of God?
3. What kinds of “spiritual things” does the Holy Spirit compare and combine in helping us to increase in the knowledge of Jesus? How can we make sure we’re doing this as well as we can?
4. Everything we concentrate on and compare or combine should connect with our lives in some way. Explain.
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.