

GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST (2)



KNOW, LOVE, SERVE
PART 3

T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)
Know, Love, Serve: Part 3
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

Copyright, 2019 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Cover image: Yahoo images.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Welcome to <i>Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)</i> | 4 |
| 1 Connect (2) | 5 |
| 2 Commune (1) | 8 |
| 3 Commune (2) | 10 |
| 4 Converse | 12 |
| 5 Evidence of Growth (1) | 15 |
| 6 Evidence of Growth (2) | 18 |
| 7 The Fragrance of Knowledge | 20 |
| Questions for Reflection or Discussion | 23 |

Welcome to *Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)*

Here we conclude our study of the disciplines essential for growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus reveals Himself to us primarily in His Word, we need to devote ourselves to always improving in our ability to learn and know Him there. From there, we can turn to the works of Jesus in creation, and discover many complementary insights about His nature, purpose, and glory from everyday things around us.

But we need to learn the disciplines such study requires, and to devote ourselves to it. For we are called by God to be a fragrance of the knowledge of Christ in the world, and we won't be able to fulfill that high and holy calling apart from diligent effort and continuous improvement.

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, and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Connect (2)

As we learn Jesus, we connect our lives to Him.

*O LORD, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all. Psalm 104.24*

The witness of creation

We have been saying, following the teaching of Scripture, that the works of God in creation and culture display His handiwork, manifest His wisdom, and thus can serve as guiderails along the path of increasing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose of divine revelation – whether in His Word or His works – is threefold. First, God displays His many excellencies – His immensity, greatness, beauty, wisdom, incomprehensibility, holiness, power, goodness, and more – so that we might *know* Him better. Supremely, He has revealed Himself in Jesus; if we wish to know God, we must let all our knowing lead us to Jesus. In and through Him, we may come to know God as fully as possible.

Second, God reveals Himself to us so that knowing Him, we might increase in *love* for Him. Loving God is that for which human beings have been created. It is our *raison d'être*, source of all joy, means to all goodness, fount of all wisdom, wellspring of all wondrous mysteries, and purest satisfaction of all our desires.

As we increase in love for Jesus, we will know more of joy, peace, purpose, and resolve, so that we bear Kingdom fruit in our lives and by our endeavors. And this is the third reason God reveals Himself to us, that *knowing* and *loving* Him, we might *serve* Him in every aspect of our lives, worshiping and bearing witness to Him in everything we do.

Jesus has called us His disciples – *learners* – to know Him increasingly, and to devote ourselves untiringly to the study of His Word and His works, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This life of learning to which Jesus calls us is difficult – a “burdensome task”, as Solomon put it. We must be firmly anchored in His Word; but from there, we must seek Him in all His works. The Lord rejoices in His works (Ps. 104.31); and He commands us to do so as well, because by studying the works of God, we may *know*, *love*, and – as we connect what we’re learning with our everyday lives – *serve* Him more consistently and fruitfully.

How can the works of God lead us to serve Him? Let’s consider three ways by examining a well-known hymn.

Rest

In the hymn, “This Is My Father’s World”, Maltbie Babcock (d. 1901) meditates on the creation around him, concentrating, and comparing and combining his observations, to derive some revelation of Christ from them. In each of the three stanzas, Babcock lets the works of God lead him to an action step, thus connecting the revelation of Christ in creation with Babcock’s calling as a disciple. Here’s the first stanza:

This is my Father’s world,
And to my list’ning ears
All nature sings, and round me rings

The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas—
His hand the wonders wrought.

Note that Babcock takes the time to *listen* to the creation – concentrating on the sounds immediately around him, and imagining those that pulse throughout the entire creation. He finds this listening to the combined sounds of creation – the wind through the trees, birds singing, perhaps the trickling of water somewhere nearby – leads him to think of the “music of the spheres”, that ancient notion that all the planets and galaxies emit harmonious sounds too sublime for us to hear, but essential to the integrity and order of the cosmos.

He reflects that this world is his Father's world, and He is shining out through all the sounds around him. And this makes him want to *rest* in the secure knowledge of the sovereign wisdom, power, and love of God.

Rest is an important way of serving the Lord, as He Himself has indicated by setting one day of each week aside for us to do just that. As we rest in the sovereignty of God, we banish anxiousness, refresh our souls, refortify our bodies, and delight in God as our Creator and Redeemer. God commands us to rest, and it is an important part of our service to Him that we rest as He intends.

Praise and proclaim

In the second stanza, Babcock is caught up in creation's proclamation of God's praise:

This is my Father's world:
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

Babcock lets the praise of creation instruct him in how to praise and proclaim the Lord, and he composed this hymn for precisely that purpose. Babcock saw Jesus in songbirds, the dawn of a new day, and a white lily, and he heard Him rustling in the grass wherever he went. All these observations come together in Babcock's hymn, and they and he teach us that praising the Lord and proclaiming His beauty and goodness are works we must take up as well. Creation declares God's sovereign Presence and love, and Babcock connected the praise of creation with his own need to praise and proclaim the Lord.

Join

Finally, Babcock turns to the world of men and culture, and he observes that much work remains to be done in turning the world rightside-up for Jesus:

This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
The battle is not done:
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heav'n be one.

Wrong is everywhere strong, and the struggle for men's souls continues. But God, Who is sovereign throughout creation, is sovereign over nations and cultures as well. Jesus will not be satisfied until all the world He has reconciled to the Father is in fact restored to Him, in all its variegated goodness. And this hymn is Babcock's declaration of intent to stay engaged, to *join* in Jesus' work of redeeming the world. Through this hymn, for well over 100 years now, Maltbie Babcock has connected with believers like you and me to celebrate the beauty and sovereignty of Jesus, resting in Him, praising and proclaiming Him, and joining Him in His ongoing work of making all things new.

And if Maltbie Babcock can connect himself and so many others with the sovereign rule and reconciling work of Jesus, revealed through the works of God in creation, then we can do the same. As we discern the Presence and power of Jesus in the things of this world, let us make connections to our daily lives – our priorities, plans, ways of working, and opportunities for witness. And let us share these with others, that they might realize the benefit we are gaining by thus growing in our knowledge of, love for, and service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

For Reflection

1. Why should we expect creation to reveal things about Jesus? What kinds of things would you expect to learn from creation?
2. How can you make sure that what you learn from creation makes a connection with your daily life?
3. Creation offers fruitful opportunities for bearing witness to Jesus, as we see in Acts 14.17. Explain.

Next Steps – Demonstration: What one thing can you learn about Jesus from observing His works today? Be patient. Concentrate on your surroundings. Let the Scriptures speak into your observations. Then jot down what you learn about Jesus, and make a connection from that with something in your daily life. Commit what you have learned to the Lord in prayer.

2 Commune (1)

Let what you're learning about Jesus enrich your times of worship.

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20.27, 28

"Worshipping Thomas"

Poor Thomas. He gets a bad rap over his refusal to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, until certain conditions of knowledge were met. "Doubting Thomas" is not an epithet we go seeking. We want to be true believers, in nothing doubting (Jms. 1.6, 7).

That's as it should be. However, looked at another way, Thomas' hesitation can be seen as laudable, and his response as instructive. He was absent when the Lord revealed Himself to the others (Jn. 20.24). He wasn't going to believe in something so unprecedented and unlikely as the resurrection of Jesus, until he experienced it first hand. For Thomas, the reports even of his trusted friends weren't enough. He wanted to know Jesus, alive from the dead, for himself, personally.

And Jesus granted that request, accompanied by only a mild rebuke to Thomas, and a not-so-veiled word of instruction for us: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We have not seen Jesus, but we believe in Him, because of the testimony of those who have seen Him throughout the ages – whether in person, like Thomas and the disciples, or by the Word and Spirit, like saints from every place and time.

And notice how Thomas responded to this increase of knowledge about Jesus: He worshiped: "My Lord and my God!" Here Thomas provides an excellent example, which is all too easy for us to overlook. Why don't we ever call someone, "Worshipping Thomas"? Could it be that we have missed the main point about knowing Jesus?

Our chief end

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* reminds us that "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." That's mostly correct; however, it assumes a very important aspect of our reason for being, for we will only glorify and enjoy God to the extent that we *know* Him. And the knowledge of God comes to us through Jesus Christ (Jn. 14.6; Heb. 1.3).

Our chief end in life is thus to *know* Jesus, and in the joy of *knowing* Him, to love and serve Him, in the first instance and above all, in worship. Thomas had it exactly right. As he suddenly came to a fuller knowledge of the risen Christ, he didn't just blather away about how happy he was, or rush off to take on some good work or to bear witness. He worshiped, because worship – communing with the Lord Jesus – is the first and surest indicator that we know Him, and the chief end of all human existence.

This is why, in the book of Revelation, we see the saints in glory worshiping the Lord continuously. They may be doing other things as well, for all we know, just as we will be doing many other things once we have arrived in the new heavens and new earth. But whatever we are doing, chief among and pervading everything we do, will be worship – basking in the joy of Jesus, marveling at the greatness of Jesus, bowing before the grandeur and might of Jesus, celebrating the unfathomable goodness and love of Jesus, and being renewed in the Presence of Jesus, for showing and declaring Jesus to the world.

All our efforts to increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ will bear holy and lasting fruit as they lead us to improve and increase in the worship of Jesus, our Lord and our God!

Public worship and the life of faith

Public worship is about Jesus. He is the *focus* of public worship. Everything we do in worship should aim at bringing us into His Presence, showing us something of His majesty, mystery, and might. Our reason for being in worship is the same as 'Thomas' – we want to see Jesus, see Him more clearly, know Him more surely, love Him with more of our soul and strength, and be renewed in and transformed more into Him and His glorious image.

Whatever in worship does not direct our minds, hearts, consciences, and lives to Jesus is a perversion of worship, and must be condemned.

Jesus is the focus of worship. He also shows us the *forms* of worship by which we may approach Him – the components that make up true worship, and the proper order in which those components should be used. All the Word of God, especially in the psalms, commends a pattern of worship that is pleasing to and brings us into communion with Jesus. Our worship will be most fruitful and joyful when the forms Jesus commends are all present and properly arranged.

By His Spirit, working in each worshiper, Jesus gives us *freedom* in worship, to pray, to sing, to meditate, to hear the Word, and to participate in His body and blood by the Supper. That experience will be different for every worshiper, and it will be true and beneficial to the extent that our individual communion with Jesus causes us to become more like Him in all aspects of our life.

And Jesus prescribes the *fruit* that should issue from public worship: a *life* of worship and service in His Name. If we go away from worship unchanged, and if we do not bring Jesus from public worship into every area of our lives – if we check Him at the door as we leave the church – then we have no right to claim His Name or take His covenant on our lips (Ps. 50). Public worship should bring out public fruit in all of our lives – the bold, joyful, fruitful, transforming manifestation of the fact that we have been with Jesus (cf. Acts 4.13).

As we daily devote ourselves to increasing in the knowledge of Jesus – through all our work of concentrating, comparing and combining, and connecting what we're learning with our everyday lives – we prepare to bring to worship the attitude, longing, and readiness to meet Jesus, to take our rightful place with Him (Eph. 2.6), and to not only put our hands in His hands and side, but to lodge our hearts more firmly in His, and fix our minds more surely and expansively on Him.

Increase in the knowledge of Jesus. Let that increase overflow in joy and devotion during your times of corporate communion and worship.

For Reflection

1. Why does it make sense that worship should be the first and pervasive fruit of increasing in the knowledge of Jesus?
2. In what way is a little healthy “doubting” good for us in growing in the knowledge of Jesus?
3. What can you do to make sure Jesus is the focus of all you do in public worship?

Next Steps – Preparation: How can you prepare for public worship, to make sure that you will commune with Jesus and be transformed into His image? Begin preparing for worship with more focus on Jesus, and plan to leave worship with some specific commitment for how you will serve Him.

3 Commune (2)

What is God worth to you?

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12.1, 2

The meaning of worship

In the Christian community, we traffic in some very familiar terms, some of which, I'm persuaded, we have no idea what they mean.

Take "praise", for example. Have you ever been in a prayer group where the leader says, "Let's spend some time praising the Lord"? And then every prayer that's offered is some variation on, "Lord, we really just praise you"?

Or we say that we want to know God's glory, but we don't realize just how *weighty* a request that is. We just want to say something nice about the Lord; but He wants to crush the sin and unbelief out of us under the weight of His holy magnificence and irresistible power. In the Scriptures, people who were exposed to the glory of God were terrified. Some never wanted to see it again. Others didn't know what to do. Most just covered their faces and turned away out of fear.

And then there's "worship". Worship is something every Christian does, every week, or at least, mostly. But ask a believer to define "worship", and their answer will probably sound something like, "Well, you know, *worship*." They might go on to mention the *elements* of worship – prayer, singing, preaching, and so forth; but these are not *worship per se*, but only the *means* by which we *worship* God as a community.

The word *worship* derives from the word "worth" and the suffix "-ship". *Worth* refers to something of great value, or someone whose office and/or character make them *worthy* of respect, admiration, deference, submission, honor, attention, and obedience. The suffix *-ship* denotes a quality or condition, a status or office, or skill in a certain capacity. God is *worth-ship*. He is of a quality, condition, and status, and He does all things exceedingly well, so that He is *worthy* of our complete, total, unreserved, and continuous admiration, praise, respect, honor, and obedience. *Worship* is what we give to Him Who *is* our Worship, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

A life of worship

We tend to think of worship as an activity reserved for certain times in the week, Sunday morning – or, increasingly (why?) Saturday night. If we're really spiritual, we might try to have a few moments of worship – our "quiet time" or "devotions" – at some point during each, or at least some days of the week.

Is that all God is worth to us? A tip of the hat on Sunday, before we rush home to indulge in a football game or head out to the mall? A nod Monday through Saturday, just to make sure we're in good standing with Him before we ramble off to do our thing? Is that all God is worth?

We might think so. He does not. It is our *reasonable service* to worship God as living sacrifices, every moment of every day, in every thing we do – all our work, conversations, preparations, avocations, and other busyness. We live like, and are conformed to, the world when we act like large parts of our lives have been granted to us for some reason other than to glorify God (1 Cor. 10.31). Do we worship God with our work? With how we

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

drive from here to there? With our studies? How we care for our home? What we read or watch or visit on the Internet? With our conversations? Are we worshiping God, acknowledging – by words and deeds – that He is *all* our provision, *all* our life, *all* our inheritance, *all* our hope, *all* our reason for being, and *all* our joy and delight? And that He is *with us* always?

Believers are called to a *life* of worship, in which we are conscious of God, and communing with Him, amid all the goodness with which He surrounds us, and as we reflect on and delight in His grace and mercy.

In worship on Sunday morning, we don't leave much to chance, especially not the matter of when worship should begin. The call to worship gets our attention, cues us to open the hymnbook – or more likely these days, look up at the screen – and get ready to worship God.

All day long, calls to worship summon us from the Scripture and creation. As Hopkins wrote, “Christ plays in 10,000 places”, and He is playing before us in all His majesty, might, mercy, and marvelous grace at all times, beckoning us to pray, sing, meditate, share His goodness with some, rest our trials in Him, and otherwise acknowledge *His unfathomable worthiness* in everything we do.

Fuel for a life of worship

How do we get to the place where worship is not simply something we do at certain times, but it's the way we use all the time of life in grateful devotion and joyful submission to the living God?

By increasing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, from His Word, from our diligent attention to His Presence with us in creation, and by taking to heart the promise that He is with us always, just as He promised (Matt. 28.20).

The more we increase in the knowledge of Jesus – seeing the evidence of His goodness all around us all the time, sensing Him growing within us, experiencing Him expressing Himself in our words and deeds – the more we will find the lifestyle of worship to be the very ambience in which we live, a spiritual envelope of continuous awareness and response. In Revelation 4 and 5, the saints worship God continuously, and we pray that that glorious Kingdom would come on earth as in heaven. Do we realize that we're asking God to enable us to worship like that? Truly? Continuously? And at the slightest cue or call? With unbounding love and joy?

We are made for worship, for communing continuously with our Lord Jesus Christ. But we'll have to work at it if we're going to realize the full and joyous benefits of a life of daily, continuous, heartfelt, prayerful and songful worship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to be a “living sacrifice”? Why is this “reasonable”?
2. What are some ways believers might acknowledge the worthiness of God throughout the day?
3. What kinds of things might function as calls to worship throughout the week?

Next steps – Transformation: Make today a day of continuous worship. What will you do? How will you prepare for it? How will you remind yourself to listen for God's calls to worship? What opportunities might you have for worshipping with other believers? At the end of your day, reflect on this experience. Then repeat it every day!

4 Converse

As we grow to know Him, we will naturally speak of Him.

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
John 7.37-39

"What does this babbler want to say?" Acts 17.18

Wadi, babbler, or river of life?

The work of God's Spirit, as He uses God's Word and all His works, is to bring believers into the Presence of Jesus and His glory, that we might know Him better, and grow to be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3.12-18). If you are a believer – a *disciple* or *learner* of Jesus – this is what you should expect, and it's what you should give yourself to every day afresh.

Jesus makes it clear that, as the Spirit increases in us, He becomes a fountain of spiritual life, welling up within us and overflowing to refresh and cleanse, by words and deeds, whatever and whoever we come into contact with in our daily lives.

But all too many Christians are not like the river of life that flows through and from the City of God (Ps. 46). Most of us are like *wadis*, dried-up stream beds that don't refresh anyone most of the time. In this country we call them intermittents, because you only see water in them from time to time, and even then, not very much.

Paul was like a babbling brook – a steady stream of spiritual information, trickling off his tongue to any who would listen. As we see during his time in Athens, he was an aggressive conversationalist about the subject of Jesus (Acts 17.16, 17).

We saw this same phenomenon in those who fled Jerusalem, when persecution arose after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8.1ff). In Michael Green's memorable words, these believers went everywhere, "gossiping the Gospel" as they went. As a result, many began to believe in the Lord, and congregations sprung up in Samaria and Antioch, and in many other places.

As we grow in the knowledge of Jesus – gaining insights, understanding, and experience of Him – He will increase in us (Jn. 3.31), and so will a variety of very beneficial assets: the joy of the Lord, firm conviction of His Word, a burden of compassion and love for lost people, and an eagerness to flow the life of Jesus to others. One the most effective ways of doing this is by engaging in conversations, in which we can bring Jesus to the attention of others, affirm and encourage other believers, and pique and challenge those who do not yet know Him.

But we'll need to return to our previous discussion on *commitment*. We have to *commit* to letting the waters of life flow from us every day, and ask the Spirit within us to give us the power to bear witness as often as we may (Acts 1.8). We don't want to be *wadis* for Jesus, only occasionally having anything interesting to share. He wants rivers of living water to flow from us, like a constant and gentle babbling brook, to refresh, renew, convict, and transform the people to whom He sends us in our Personal Mission Field.

What does this involve?

Talking about Jesus

Becoming a conversational Christian will mean that our speech will be sufficiently considerate, consistent, clear, and excellent, so that others will respect and appreciate what we have to say. If we can realize these hallmarks for our conversations, what we say – and how we say it – can be a powerful tool in helping many to consider Jesus, perhaps for the first time.

In our conversations we must be *considerate* of the views of others, listening attentively, asking questions, engaging them concerning their interests, and affirming or disagreeing respectfully at all times.

As for *consistency*, we want to be always ready when opportunities arise (1 Pet. 3.15). The more you work at learning Jesus, the more consistent you will be at starting and conducting conversations about Him. Paul was looked upon as a “babbling” – an image that derives from watching birds peck at and eat seeds. The more we feed on the knowledge of Jesus, the more we’ll be able consistently to talk about Him.

Clarity relates to the subject matter of our speech, and our ability to make ourselves understood. Keeping a journal of our studies will help us to sort through and summarize the topics we’re comparing and combining, so we can be clear in our own minds about how everything leads to Jesus.

Then strive for *quality* in your conversations. Avoid trivialities and vulgarities; speak slowly and clearly; look people in the eye; ask questions and affirm their contributions to the conversation; speak in complete sentences; and don’t be afraid to laugh, get excited, or break out in praise.

Work on these four disciplines, and you’ll find that, like Paul, you can become a babbling brook of refreshment in the knowledge of Jesus.

What to expect

I should be forthright and tell you that when the Athenians referred to Paul as a “babbling”, they meant it pejoratively, not as a compliment: “show off” is the word we would use today.

But they didn’t know what else to think about him, talking all over the place about Jesus. Though they spoke in a derogatory way about him, still, he interested them enough to get an invitation to speak in the most vaunted public forum of the Greek-speaking world. And speak he did.

The responses Paul received suggest what we should expect as well, as we converse with others about the Lord and our growing love for Him (Acts 17.32-34). Some will scoff, some will want to talk more, and some will believe – or have their faith in Jesus strengthened. But the more we converse about Jesus, the more our own confidence will grow, our joy in the Lord will increase, and His grace and truth will flow through us to others, many of whom will join us in giving increased thanks to the Lord for the knowledge of Jesus they have gained through us (2 Corinthians 4.15).

What could be more exciting or edifying than to talk about Jesus? Don’t let your witness dry up to a wadi. Keep feeding on the knowledge of Jesus and growing in Him, and let the Spirit lead and empower you for fruitful and refreshing conversations about His many excellencies.

For reflection

1. On the “wadi-to-babbling brook” scale, where would you place your own practice of talking to others about Jesus? Why?
2. Think of five questions you might use to initiate a conversation that could lead to Jesus. Write them out.
3. Do you have a Christian friend who would agree to meet with you regularly to converse about how you’re

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

both growing in Jesus? Why would that be a good thing to do?

Next Steps – Transformation: Using the five questions you wrote above, initiate five separate conversations this week with someone in your Personal Mission Field. Try to bring thanks to God into each one of them.

5 Evidence of Growth (1)

What will tell us that we're really increasing in the knowledge of Christ?

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. 1 Peter 1.6-8

The mark of a growing Christian

I don't want us to lose sight of the end we're seeking through this investigation of how to increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We're not using "knowledge" in any merely academic sense; our goal is not to add to our information stock about Jesus and spiritual things. Rather, we hope to achieve a greater "knowing" of Jesus – greater understanding and admiration, coupled with more intense and consistent experience of His Presence, promise, and power, and corresponding changes in our life.

The mark of a true Christian is love (Jn. 13.35; 1 Jn. 4.7-11) – love for God and love for others. The mark of a *growing* Christian must therefore be increase in love. If we're only increasing in head knowledge, without the fruit of increased love, then there's no Spirit in our increase; and what we have learned awaits its proper flourishing. We must not be content merely to *know information* about Jesus, whether derived from Scripture or creation. Our desire is to *know Jesus*, so that we "rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls" (1 Pet. 1.8, 9).

Jonathan Edwards saw in these verses the key to true Christian faith. He used these as the basis for what is perhaps his most lasting contribution to theological literature, his *Treatise on Religious Affections*. There, Edwards wrote, "That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference. God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: Rom. xii. 11. 'Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' Deut. x. 12. 'And now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?' And chap. vi. 4, 5. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' It is such a fervent, vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion, that is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and that has the promises of life: Deut. xxx. 6. 'And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.'"

It is only reasonable to expect, Edwards insisted, that as we increase in the knowledge of Christ, the *reality* of Christ will become not merely more real *to us*, but more real *in us*. In *Charity and Its Fruits* Edwards wrote, "If persons have the true light of heaven let into their souls, it is not a light without heat. Divine knowledge and divine love go together. A spiritual view of divine things always excites love in the soul, and draws forth the heart in love to every proper object. True discoveries of the divine character dispose us to love God as the supreme good; they unite the heart in love to Christ; they incline the soul to flow out in love to God's people, and to all mankind. When persons have a true discovery of the excellency and sufficiency of Christ, this is the effect."

The first evidence that we are increasing in the knowledge of Christ is that our love for God becomes more intimate, constant, fervent, and fruitful. Let's take a closer look.

Intimate, constant, fervent, and fruitful

The Scriptures use the word "know" in a variety of ways, one of the most important of which is to describe

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

the intimate relationship of a husband and wife. When we're told that Joseph did not "know" Mary until after Jesus was born (Matt. 1.24, 25), it means they did not consummate their marriage physically until that time. It is this kind of *intimacy* which should characterize our love for Christ, and which we should expect to see increasing in us as we grow in knowing Him.

This is an intimacy of trust, communion, continuous awareness, exchanges of affection, and spiritual stimulation. We look forward to this experience, participate in it gladly, and enjoy the benefits that come from it – the holy pleasure and joy of being one with the Lord. All the other affections of our soul are activated and excited as we increase in the knowledge of Jesus. Edwards: "From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love to God, will necessarily arise other religious affections; hence will arise an intense hatred and a fear of sin; a dread of God's displeasure; gratitude to God for his goodness; complacency and joy in God when he is graciously and sensibly present; grief when he is absent; a joyful hope when a future enjoyment of God is expected; and fervent zeal for the divine glory" (*Religious Affections*).

Intimacy leads to *constancy*; we want more of this kind of relationship, and we want it more often. Just as a husband takes delight in thinking about his wife throughout the day – imagining her about her daily business, recalling times of intimacy, and even to seek her voice by phone or physical presence – so too our intimacy with Jesus grows, and the time we spend consciously delighting in Him will increase as well.

This makes for greater *fervor* for Jesus. Thinking about Him excites us. Talking about Him activates the energies of our soul – mind, heart, and conscience. We become bolder, more confident and animated, and more eager for others to know this One Who is transforming us so completely into His own image.

As we increase in fervor we will also increase in *fruitfulness*. The primary fruit of increasing in love for God is increased love for others, as Edwards observed in *Charity and Its Fruits*: "Love to God is the foundation of gracious love to men; and men are loved, either because they are in some respect like God, in the possession of his nature and spiritual image, or because of the relation they stand in to him as his children or creatures as those who are blessed of him, or to whom his mercy is offered, or in some other way from regard to him."

Delighting in the Lord

Growing in the knowledge of Jesus requires discipline, as we have seen. We must seek Him where He is revealing Himself to us – in His Word and throughout His works – and we must be diligent and earnest about what Solomon referred to as this "burdensome task" of increasing in knowledge of the Lord.

We will know that we are increasing in the knowledge of Jesus as our love for Him – and for all the Members of the Trinity – grows and becomes more intimate, constant, fervent, and fruitful in love for others.

Delighting in the Lord is its own reward, for in His presence are fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11). Aim to know Jesus better, and work hard to do so, in the full expectation that your love for, and your joy and pleasure in the Lord, will increase as you do.

For Reflection

1. What's the difference between increasing in the knowledge of Jesus *academically* and increasing in the knowledge of Jesus *truly*?
2. Can we expect to increase in the knowledge of Jesus *truly* if we fail to let all we're learning about Jesus lead us to more consistent worship (communing with Him)? Explain.
3. What does it mean to delight in the Lord? Why should this be our highest aspiration as we grow in knowledge of Him?

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

Next Steps – Preparation: How would you rate your love for God according to the four criteria mentioned here – intimacy, constancy, fervor, fruitfulness? What can you do to begin delighting in the Lord more?

6 Evidence of Growth (2)

The better we know Jesus, the more we will love as He loves.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:8-10

To know and love is to be transformed

As we increase in the knowledge of Jesus – by all the many and varied means He has provided – we will come to see Him more truly, in all His majesty and might, greatness and glory, wisdom and wonder, compassion and caring, goodness and grace. Seeing Him thus, we will grow in love for Him, which we will express, first of all, as worship in every aspect of our lives. We will offer ourselves to Him more completely and more consistently, so that worship becomes the way of life that issues from the intimacy we enjoy with the Lord.

As Jonathan Edwards pointed out in many of his writings, such a growing love for Jesus cannot help but overflow in love for the people around us. Because seeing Jesus, knowing Jesus, and being with Jesus is a *transforming experience*. Like Moses, descending Mt. Sinai, his face – unbeknownst to him – glowing with the glory of God, so we will be fulgent with the reality of Jesus, as He increases in us, and our old, sinful selves decrease more and more.

For to know Jesus is to love Him, and to love Him is to be transformed by Him, so that we are continuously renewed in Him and His love, and His Spirit overflows from us, like spilled vessels of grace, to refresh the people we see each day (2 Cor. 4:7; Jn. 7:37-39).

And as we see this happening in us, we’ll know that we are truly growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

To be like Jesus

We will be more like Jesus, and so we will relate to the people around us more in the way that Jesus did. This will take some predictable forms.

First, Jesus took the initiative with people, seeking them by the seaside, under a fig tree, in a sycamore tree, beside a Samaritan well, and in a tomb outside the city of Bethany. He reached out to others – to get to know them, to call them into a relationship with Himself, and to impart the grace and truth of God to them by His life and words.

Like Jesus, we will want to grow as *seekers* of the people around us, reaching out to get to know them, and to begin letting them get to know us – and Jesus, Who is in us.

We do not seek people for our ends, but that we might show them the love of Jesus and serve them by our words and deeds. Jesus demonstrated this calling to be a *servant* of others when He washed the disciples’ feet. He saw the need, made the necessary preparations, took the initiative, and carried the task through to completion. Then He told us that we must follow His example and be *servants* to one another.

As we reach out to the people in our Personal Mission Field, therefore, let’s be attentive to ways – large and small – that we might encourage and bless them by our example, by our words, and by good works.

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

But this is just the beginning of a relationship of grace. As we get to know the people we're reaching out to, we must take on the role of *shepherd* with them, as Jesus did with His disciples. This means caring for the souls and spiritual wellbeing of others, encouraging them in the Word and prayer, affirming evidence of growth that we see in them, helping them to take up their calling from the Lord, sharing resources and insights with them, and praying with and for them that they might enter fully into the joy of their Kingdom-and-glory calling.

As part of our work as shepherds, we'll want to bring the Scriptures into our relationship as often as we can. We are called to be *sowers* of God's Word, as Jesus was, to help people discern the will of God and to grow in Him and His calling for them. We can do this by sharing from our own time with the Lord, joining with others to study Scripture, talking about sermons and books, and by many other means. We must keep the Word of God central to our relationships, as much as we can, because then Jesus will be central to them as well.

And we must be good *stewards*, like Jesus, doing the will of God in everything, that others might know His grace and truth through us.

These are roles that Jesus fulfilled during His earthly sojourn. It is reasonable to expect that, as we increase in the knowledge of our glorious Lord, we will take on and improve in these roles as well. Thus we will be able to show the love of Jesus to the people around us by emulating the roles He would be carrying out among them if He were still with us in the flesh.

He must increase

Paul said that Jesus is working to fill the world with Himself (Eph. 4.7-10). He is doing that, first of all, in everyone who believes in Him, and who has taken up His challenge to follow Him, learn of Him, and be His witnesses in the world.

As we grow in the knowledge of Jesus, we will want to show Him to the people around us. What we will show them is the love of Jesus as we seek, serve, shepherd, sow God's Word, and do God's will at every opportunity, in every situation, for the praise of Jesus and the glory of God.

Loving our neighbors as Jesus did is both the goal of all our learning, and the evidence that we are increasing in Jesus, and Jesus is increasing in us.

For Reflection

1. What are some ways that we can follow Jesus by seeking others as He did?
2. We are sent, like Jesus was, to serve and shepherd the people in our Personal Mission Field. How do you need to improve in this?
3. What are some ways you can sow God's Word and do God's will more consistently with the people in your Personal Mission Field?

Next Steps – Preparation: How would you rate yourself (say, 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest rating) in each of these five roles – seeker, servant, shepherd, sower, steward. What is one thing you can do to improve in each of these roles?

7 The Fragrance of Knowledge

God has appointed us to be incense to the world.

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? 2 Corinthians 2.14-16

An aromatic faith

From the beginning, believing in God involved aromas and fragrances. The offerings and incense God commanded as part of Israel's worship were intended more for them than for Him. They were palpable ways of acknowledging that God is the Giver of daily provision, and that being in His presence is sweet and pleasant. The aroma of roasting sacrifices spoke of lives being offered to God, for His pleasure and glory. The sweet incense, pervading the tent or the temple, was a token of the Presence of God in His holiness (cf. Ps. 45.6-8). As those aromas and fragrances were internalized, by deep inhaling, worshipers would be reminded that God works from the inside-out, penetrating our souls with His Word and Presence to make us acceptable and pleasing to Him.

Those holy aromas and fragrances of worship doubtless had a certain "staying power". They would have lingered on the clothing of worshipers as they went from the altar of incense or of sacrifice back into their daily lives, and would have provided solemn and pleasant reminders of how good it is to be with God.

Certain Christian communions have continued using incense during corporate worship, but without ever really explaining why. Just smelling incense as part of a worship service doesn't fulfill God's purpose in prescribing it. We need to know why we do this, and how doing this helps to connect us with God.

Contemporary Christians recognize a certain sensuality about the faith – a certain appeal to the senses; but that gets expressed most ever-louder worship bands, together with klieg lighting and other visual effects. Music degenerates into noise after a certain decibel, and light effects are boring – at least for me. And no amount of mere noise or clever lights and videos can substitute for the things we have set aside as integral to right worship. Like silence. Like confession of sins.

And like the smells of being in God's presence.

A fragrance of Christ

Paul picked up on the aromatic aspects of worship by saying that Christians were to be a fragrance of Christ to the world, both among those who are saved, as well as "among those who are perishing." What is this fragrance of Christ? And how do we acquire it, so that we can fulfill our appointed calling?

Paul says that this fragrance is "the fragrance of His knowledge" which Christians diffuse in every place. The fragrance of Christ comes from the knowledge of Christ. As we increase in knowing Jesus, we should expect the fragrance of Christ to increase in us as well. We are appointed to be the fragrance of Christ to the world, and this should provide powerful incentive for us to work hard at increasing in the knowledge of the Lord, by all the means we have discussed from His Word and His works.

But what does this fragrance "smell" like in our lives? How do others experience it in us? Let me briefly mention seven distinguishing "aromas" that blend together to make the fragrance of Christ palpable in our lives.

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

First is the aroma of *sacrifice*. We do not live for ourselves, but for Christ, and for His sake, for others. We put aside all self-seeking, self-serving ways to pursue life as living sacrifices unto the Lord (Rom. 12.1).

The fragrance of Christ is comprised also of the aroma of *hope*. Christians are not a cynical people. We hope to meet God in His glory, daily and in the world to come; and we strive to live for His glory that others might see the marks of God in everything we do – His righteousness, peace, and joy (1 Cor. 10.31; 1 Pet. 3.15).

The aroma of *truth* pervades all that we do. All our relationships, roles, and responsibilities are grounded in truth and seek the truth of God for making all things new (Rom. 3.4; Eph. 4.15).

Add to this the fragrance of *submission to Christ* in all things (Heb. 12.1, 2). Whether it is our time, our talents, our treasure, or anything else that we are or have, let us be seen to be a people who submit everything for the knowledge, love, and service of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray about everything, because we want everything to be a pleasing sacrifice and aroma to Jesus.

So the fragrance of Christ is also one of *humility, service, and love* (discussed in the previous installment in this series, e.g., Jn. 13.19-35; Phil. 2.1-11).

The fragrance of Christ includes the aroma of *revival, reconciliation, and restoration* in every area of life with which we have contact. Things are not the way they're supposed to be because of the widespread effects of sin. We are a people who want to see everything for which Christ died, and which He has thus reconciled to God, restored to its proper use and place before Him (2 Cor. 5.17-21).

Finally, the fragrance of Christ is comprised of the aroma of a *forward-looking, Kingdom-seeking way of life*, that the holy and righteous and good rule of King Jesus might be everywhere more in evidence in our world, and the divine order of goodness might come to light increasingly (Heb. 2.5-9; Ps. 27.13, 14).

Diffused in every place

Obviously, you as a Christian can't be "in every place". But as Tertullian reminded the emperor of Rome, early in the second century, Christians as a movement and body *are* in every place. If we in *our* place – our Personal Mission Field – are faithful in becoming the fragrance of Christ, and every Christian does the same, soon enough the world will be filled with the fragrance of Jesus, and the knowledge of the glory of God.

But it won't just happen. We can't wish it into being. And, while we must pray for Christ to manifest His fragrance in and through us, those prayers will be of no effect if we do not apply ourselves diligently, and as a very high priority in our lives, to increasing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The knowledge of Christ awaits us in His Word and in all the nooks, crannies, creatures, and processes of His world. But we must diligently seek the Lord if we would find Him in these places (Jer. 29.13).

It remains to be seen whether such a high calling and bold challenge will appeal to this generation of believers.

Does it appeal to you?

For reflection

1. Why is "fragrance" a good way of thinking about the influence we exert for Christ?
2. How would you describe the overall "fragrance" of our world today? Is it the fragrance of Christ, or of something else? And if something else, can we as believers be content with that? Explain.

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

3. Have you committed to increasing the knowledge of Christ? In what ways?

Next Steps – Preparation: Review the seven aromas of the fragrance of Christ. In which of these do you need to increase? How will you work on knowing Christ better to help you increase in these?

Growing in the Knowledge of Christ (2)

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What would you say are the keys to connecting our growing knowledge of Christ with our everyday lives?
2. What is the role of *public* worship in helping us to live *lives* of worship? What should be the effects of a *life* lived in worship on the way we worship in *public*?
3. With whom do you regularly talk about the things you are learning about Jesus? How would you describe the overall state of your witness for Christ at this time?
4. Why are “fragrance” and “aroma” good ways of thinking about the influence we can exert for Jesus?
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?

For prayer:

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.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

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.