

## “Knowledge, Wisdom, & Understanding” | Colossians 1:9-14

Ecclesia

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How do we know what we know?

It's one of those deep philosophical questions.

If you wanted to be fancy, you might refer to it as “epistemology.”

But we're not so worried about that here.

The truth is that we all know stuff.

Maybe we went to school (elementary, middle, high school).

Maybe we loved to learn.

Maybe we went on to college or even graduate school.

Maybe we've read books, or newspapers, or websites.

Maybe we've listened to others (that are a lot smarter than we are).

Maybe we've let others tell us about their mistakes and how to avoid them.

Maybe we've decided not to listen and have learned through the school of hard knocks.

Maybe we've been through some things and made it out on the other side.

Maybe we've had to reap the consequences of bad decisions.

Maybe we've worked a job faithfully for years and years and have picked up a few things.

It seems to me that the main idea here in this section of Paul's letter centers around this idea of knowledge.

In fact, in this section of the prayer, Paul uses three different words for this: he prays for the Colossians' knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

The thing is, though, that Paul isn't talking about just any knowledge.

He has a very specific kind of knowledge in mind:

the knowledge of God and spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Therefore, we might do well to ask ourselves a few more questions.

For example, “Where do we get our information about God?”

I want to suggest four areas emphasized by John Wesley

John Wesley was an Anglican minister born in 1703 (founder of the Methodism)

Wesleyan Quadrilateral:

1. **Scripture** - the purpose of scripture is to reveal God to us and lead into a dynamic, life-giving relationship with God
2. **Tradition** - we are not the first to walk this path. What have other Christians said who have walked this path before us? What questions did they ask? What answers did they come up with? How have they lived out their faith?
3. **Reason** - What does science say? What does logic say? How do we make sense of the evidence before us?
4. **Experience** - What does our common sense tell us? What experiences have we had with God in prayer or in the circumstances of our life?

5. (**Culture**) - For better or worse, Jesus is common figure in popular culture. If we don't question things, we will have assumptions about Christ, about Christians, and about God that we inherit from the culture.

Throughout the history of the church, different groups and denominations have emphasized these sources differently - given more weight to one over the other.

But even if we could nail down all this,  
Even if we could wrap our head around this and comprehend it fully,  
there is always a real danger of confusing knowledge *about* God with knowledge *of* God.  
Of knowing up here (head) and knowing in here (heart)  
Of confusing information with relationship.

For example, take our culture's obsession with celebrities.  
It doesn't matter what kind of celebrity (athlete, musician, movie star, etc.)  
people get obsessed.

For argument's sake, let's pretend that you really love the actor Johnny Depp.  
I mean, you just can't get enough of Johnny Depp.  
You know all the facts about his life: when he was born,  
where he went to school,  
his favorite color  
his favorite food  
his favorite movie  
his favorite hair gel  
the names of all his girlfriends  
and so on.

You've seen all his movies,  
you rank 21 Jump Street as the greatest TV show ever,  
you own all his rock albums (especially his latest one with Alice Cooper and Joe Perry)  
and you named your firstborn child Sparrow.  
But do you know Johnny Depp?

Would we ever say that knowing facts about someone is the same as knowing someone?  
Just because I recognize your face and can tell you the name that is associated with it  
doesn't mean that I have any real personal knowledge of you  
or that we have any meaningful connection.

As one writer put it this way:  
"Knowing someone is a cumulation of shared experiences, of stumbling upon  
mannerisms and quirks. It lends itself to an organic ability to anticipate their reaction to  
things — to know when and how their anger will thaw, what sparks their passion and  
what that passion looks like, what constitutes an expression of their love. It's recognizing  
something as monumental that would appear inconsequential to the untrained — or shall  
I say, unknowing — eye.

It's knowing when they're awkward...  
It's knowing when they're in their element...

It's being willing to be disappointed by them...

It's seeing their flaws — the surface ones, the silly ones, the painful ones, the permanent ones — and respecting, loving, challenging, and accepting them, [in spite of it].

It's allowing the vulnerability to have your own flaws on display — to expose them for scrutiny, only to find that they are respected, loved, challenged, and accepted.

It's coming to see yourself through the eyes of someone whose opinions and thoughts you cherish and respect, and in so doing, learning to further cherish and respect yourself.

It's the simplicity in their presence and its ability to transform monotonous into memorable, the mundane into an adventure.

It's knowing what makes them irreplaceable...

It's knowing which experiences have helped mold them into who they are — which have smoothed their rough edges, which have left them with toughened skin.

It's being as willing to share your secrets with them as you are committed to protecting theirs. It's knowing that at their worst, their best is still visible; that at their best, their worst is insignificant.

It's still knowing useless, nonsensical things about them, and finding relevance in these facts with surprising ease.

It's being comfortable in silence with them, because it is only quiet, not a void in need of fillers...

It's knowing when their silence is serene, and when their silence makes a statement.

It's knowing their vices, their yearnings, their insecurities.

Knowing someone, in all these senses, is not a one-way street. It's a complex, interconnected, beautifully alive and dynamic experience."

"How Do You Know When You Really Know Someone?" by [Corinda Lubin-Katz](http://thoughtcatalog.com/corinda-katz/2014/03/how-do-you-know-when-you-really-know-someone/)  
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Since we last met, Michelle and I celebrated our 14th wedding anniversary

We've been talking about how these past 16 years together have changed us.

We've talked about what it means to continue to grow with one another.

We've talked about the intimacy created from sharing our lives together.

There are things that Michelle knows about me that no one else in all the world has a clue about.

She can read facial expressions that others don't even notice.

From across the room she can tell if I am uncomfortable, in pain, bored, irritated, or just ready to go.

From a tone of voice, posture, or facial expression, she can read me like no other.

She sees some of my sense of humor that most others don't

We share strange inside jokes, goofy fake accents, and many many shared experiences.

This is true with each of us.

It's as though we, each of us, have a series of concentric circles to our relationships.

There are countless numbers that fit into the circle of stranger.

Many who we might call acquaintances.

Coworkers

Friends

Family

Confidant

Companion

The sad thing is that many of us come in here week in and week out  
and many of these people that should be close friends and family are really little more than  
acquaintances.

I was having a conversation with a member this week who said that they had been  
coming to Ecclesia for quite a while and there were still a number of people  
with whom they had never said more than "good morning" or "how are you?"

Is it possible that, for some of us, our relationship with God looks something like this as well.

We come by his house for a couple of hours once a week and wave.

We say things like, "How's it going?" and we smile in passing.

But the conversation never goes any deeper.

We may recognize the face and remember the name, but we don't know the heart.

It's interesting that the Old Testament often uses the term "knowing" in a much different way.

God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden.

There they lived until their rebellion, when they were banished from paradise.

It says that Adam "knew" Eve his, and she conceived and bore a child.

This is an altogether different kind of knowing than just memorizing facts.

This is intimacy of a completely different level.

Could it be that this is what Paul had in mind all along?

Could it be that this was the kind of knowledge he was praying for?

Not a sterile memorizing of facts, but an intimacy with God that defies explanation.

Paul talks about a knowledge that will transform the way we live. . .

a knowledge that will lead to "bearing fruit in every good work."

Maybe all of this can be summed up by a passage from Barbara Brown Taylor.

In her book *An Altar in the World*, she writes:

"When I hear people talk about what is wrong with organized religion, or why their mainline churches are failing, I hear about bad music, inept clergy, mean congregations, and preoccupation with institutional maintenance. I almost never hear about the intellectualization of

faith, which strikes me as a far greater danger than anything else on the list. In an age of information overload, when a vast variety of media delivers news faster than most of us can digest - when many of us have at least two email addresses, two telephone numbers, and one fax number - the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual assent has turned as dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the bread of life, who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more *about* God. *More God.*”

Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*, p. 45

On our own, this kind of knowledge is impossible.

But Paul assures us: “God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

As I read that passage, it made me think of a song by Canadian Bruce Cockburn:  
Here are a few of the lyrics:

These fragile bodies of touch and taste  
This vibrant skin -- this hair like lace  
Spirits open to the thrust of grace  
Never a breath you can afford to waste...  
...nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight --  
Got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight.

Bruce Cockburn “Lovers in a Dangerous Time”

Christ has “kicked at the darkness till it bled daylight” on our behalf.

He has dumped grace lavishly upon us.

He has invited us to an intimate knowledge of God through him.

He has given us his broken body and shed blood to nourish and sustain us.

I think that Paul is saying the Colossians:

My prayer for you is that you do more than know about God.

My prayer is that you know God.

My prayer is that your intimate knowledge and connection with God  
leads to a fruitful life of kingdom living..

for if you know God, it must transform the way you live.

And maybe our real problem, church, is not a lack of information about God,  
but a lack of God . . .

a lack of God’s Spirit . . .

a lack of living in grace.

Maybe what we truly need isn’t another Bible study or conference or book,  
but a transforming experience of the Spirit in and through us.

Let it be, Lord. Let it be.