



## Growing by Knowing

Jonathan K. Dodson | 2 Peter 1:1-2 | August 25, 2016

As many of you know, I was out all summer for a kidney transplant surgery. The procedure went very well, and my kidney is now functioning inside my aunt's body! She is at home living a life free of dialysis and infection. She texted me to express her gratitude saying, "Every day is a miracle thanks to you." But it's not really thanks to me. It's thanks to you for your support, meals, texts, prayers, preaching, cards, and visits. My wife and I were reflecting on our summer, and we feel like you created an enclave of rest for us, for me to heal. No one tugging on us to get back to work. Rather, in our absence, you took on lots of responsibility to serve one another. Thank you. But it's not really thank you or thank me is it? It's thank God, because he didn't just give a kidney; he gave his life. He didn't just take on extra responsibilities *but the fatal responsibility for our sin*. And he didn't do that just so we could keep living life as usual. He wants to change us, renew, transform us. How? As we begin 2 Peter we'll see that he wants to change *what we know, who we are, and how we live*.

### What we Know

Knowledge is primary theme in 2 Peter. We see this immediately in the way he frames the letter. He opens: "[Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord](#)" (1:2). He closes: "[grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ](#)" (3:18). He goes on to say, it's not enough to have faith or even character but "to make every effort" to add to these *knowledge* (1:5). **What is so important to know?** To know *God*, which is why 2 Peter frequently mentions **God's Word**. His Word tells us who he is. In chapter 3, we discover the earth was formed "by the Word of God." He creates! In chapter 1, we learn that the prophets spoke "from God" (21) their words carried along by the Holy Spirit. We also are reminded of the scene where God the Father speaks from heaven to approve of his Son on the mountain where his glory was temporarily revealed. What so we learn about God? That he creates, he relates, and offers approval. It also reveals that he saves, rescues from sin, that he is a Savior, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Now, some of you may be thinking "*I already know that.*" I know who Jesus is, what he's done, and the Bible story. And to be frank, that's why all this is a little boring. You, are like the kid in Sunday school, who when his teacher tells him that Jesus died on the cross for his sins, rose again from the dead responds, "*I already know that.*" But does he? Is this your response to the gospel, the essential message of Jesus? Because it's not Peter's response. Do you think Peter already knew that? Of course he did, he lived with Jesus, he heard his teaching firsthand, watched him suffer, had 1-1s with Jesus, even in his resurrected form, and yet he says [grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus](#). Down in verses 12-13, he says [even though you know the truth and are established in it, I intend to always remind you](#). Now why would he do that? Why would he remind people of things they already know? Because, it's possible to know something and not really know it, to possess the truth but not *know* the truth. See, knowing God is not so much a true or false test, right or wrong (though that's important). It is an essay exam that requires you to apply what you know, to explain in intimate detail who God is. **How do you know God?** Many spiritualities emphasize a process of self-discovery—enlightenment, meditation, introspection, therapy. But Christianity insists, not on self-discovery but Self disclosure. The way we know God is through his self-revelation, his disclosure to us. Some might object by saying, "I see God in

the mountains, in the trees, in the beauty of this world.” But that’s just seeing; it’s not knowing. And if it is knowing it’s deducing a god from own subjective observation, in which we are prone to see only the things we like or only dislike (god of love or a god of wrath), but either way it is a god fashioned by our limited perspective, made from mere observation. But is this how you get to know people? *Say you come up to me after the service to introduce yourself. I take a look at how your dressed, the way you speak, and immediately size you up. I know this kind of person, I tell myself. What do you think? Do I know you? No, we have negative words for that—judgmental, profiling. What would you prefer? That I listen to your speech, hear your story, ask questions, to get to know you.* If we’re to know God, we must hear *his* story, know *his* words, listen to *his* speech. Now this isn’t an ordinary person. There’s limitless depth to an infinite Being so you’ll never run out of fascination, if you’re listening. Knowing God isn’t possessing a static body of information; it’s a dynamic knowing that puts the info to work. This year your elders and leaders are praying it would be a year of biblical depth, spiritual growth and public faith. That we would grow in our *personal* knowledge of Christ. That you wouldn’t settle for secondhand stories, but gain firsthand encounters. That you wouldn’t borrow beliefs from others, but develop primary source convictions, that you wouldn’t form your faith on Christian or cultural hearsay but from direct study of God’s Word *to hear his voice*. That you would not live life as usual, that there’d be no sacrifice to great and no obedience to small *because Jesus gave his life to change you*. So we’ve designed City Seminary courses and sermons with this in mind. Will you lean in and listen to God’s speech? Become a people of biblical depth, spiritual growth, & public faith?

### Who we Are

God wants to change what we know *and* change who we are. That’s why he tells us to “grow” in the knowledge. There’s something about this knowledge that matures you. It changed Peter from a middle class entrepreneur to a first class martyr, a servant: “[Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.](#)” The word for servant is slave; it was a someone without authority or social status in their own right but could carry the authority of their master. Peter boldly puts his status as *slave of Christ* first. He could have listed his accomplishments (and there were many by any standard, try walking on water), but instead, *slave of Christ*. Who are you? What do you put first? What is your *functional* identity? You can know this by asking yourself, “What do I want people to see?” Successful entrepreneur, family man, super mom, spiritual guide or slave of Christ? Peter’s greeting takes us deeper into the challenge of grounding our identity in Christ: “[To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ](#)” (1). This is an unusual greeting. Why would he start by mentioning that his recipients have obtained a faith of equal standing to him and other apostles? Well, chapter two introduces us to false teachers who were promoting destructive heresies, means dogma. And this dogma was insisting that you could reach a spiritual level higher than others, so high that you could rebuke demons. It created a sense of inequality among these Christians. It created an A team/B team religion. The elite As could obtain special power or greater freedom if they denied the gospel. The B team were suckers. Now, haven’t all the heresies been ironed out? Wasn’t that resolved in all the early church councils through the creeds? Not at all. Gospel-denying dogma takes many forms. There are many destructive beliefs today that promise greater freedom than slavery to Christ. One version of this is the

**late modern Self** that says, the highest form of freedom is the freedom of self-expression. You have the right to do whatever you feel, identify with whatever you want, as long as you are true to how you feel in the moment. Your only obligation is to your feelings. This affects media consumption. I was recently scrolling through the movie options, I considered watching a movie that wouldn't be that edifying, and the modern Self said, go ahead you have the right to express yourself in whatever you're into. No higher obligation than to Self, certainly not God. It also affects religious belief by privatizing the faith. You'll say to yourself, I don't need to confess my sins or share them with others because that's personal. I don't have to go to church/cg unless I feel like it. You may prioritize drinking with friends over worshipping with the saints. Why? No higher obligation than Self. The modern Self rejects the slave of Christ identity and turns its back on Jesus. The other, the **religious Self** says, if you believe in Christ and stay true to the rules, you're actually better than the people around you. Your obligation is to the religious code of conduct. This week I sat in a room of pastors and ended up pastoring a lot of them. One pastor even called me afterwards for counsel. As I walked away, I silently congratulated myself for being more spiritual. Do you ever praise yourself for being more faithful in your CG, being the first to serve, or express concern for others or pray? Then your *functional* identity isn't in Christ; it's in the religious Self. It brandishes servant work not rests in servant identity. Both the Selves parlay an identity outside of Christ. In the words of Peter, they promise freedom but are slaves of corruption (2:18). But Peter comes along and says, don't fall that A team/B team business. You've obtained a faith of equal standing with ours.

### How we Live

The gospel changes what we know, who we are, and how we live. How do we live with deeper, more satisfying identity? by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. How does that work? Take the word Savior. The term "savior" doesn't appear in the NT very often but appears in 2 Peter five times in its three brief chapters. What is a savior? We often think of someone who rescues, someone who delivers us out of threatening circumstances. Of the firemen who rescued people from the rubble of 9/11, or the Avengers saving the world from the destruction of Ultron. But Jesus is a whole other category of savior. Why? Because he is a **righteous Savior**. The righteousness of God can mean two things—to be fair or to be morally excellent. If this is the meaning here, we would read our equal standing as the result of the fairness of Jesus. How does that sound? Jude tells us he is the destroyer of those who disbelieve, and Peter the judge of unrighteousness (2:9). Jesus' fairness is our destruction. What we want, what we need *is not fairness but moral excellence*. To be upright with God not hunched over under the burden of self-expression or religion. We need a savior who will enter the rubble of our rebellion and pull us out into his righteousness. To take the likeness of a Self, redeem it, and make it into a true Self. St. Paul puts it like this: put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (4:22-24). A Self in the likeness of his righteousness. The bestselling novel *Lila* is about a poor, uneducated, fearful yet self-reliant woman. She was a feral child, orphaned by her father, living under tables and trees. So when she reflects on her past, she thinks her name was a mistake, the mere *likeness* of a name. And that she has the *likeness* of a woman, with hands but no face at all, because she never lets herself see her

face. She had the *likeness* of a life, because she was all alone in it. *But then Doll (her childhood rescuer) takes her in, and sweeps her away, she felt like she had the likeness of wings.* Only to be abandoned again to settle into ad deserted shack. But then she falls in love with a kind and wise preacher. It takes years for her to settle into his love, and to trust his unwavering acceptance. But by the end of the novel, she settles into the arms of her Savior, the preacher's love and acceptance like the warm coat he used to rescue her from a cold, windy shack. Now she lives in the warmth of his embrace. Like Lila we often settle for the likeness of a life. But turning to Christ, we are swept away on the likeness of wings, carried into his perfect embrace, where he assures us of his love and solid place of equal standing—[the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ](#). This is not fairness; it is excessiveness! To be drawn up into the righteousness of Christ, his moral excellence, his perfect love, his undying acceptance draped over us like a warm coat. **Saved, rescued, lifted upon the likeness of wings into the likeness of God!** God wants to change us, but we must lift our face, take his name, and live as rescued from the rubble. Let's ask God to change what we know, who we are, and how we live. To enjoy equal standing as slaves of Christ, who know and look like God.