

KNOWING

An Personal Illustration

There was a time in my youth where I marveled at the people of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That they were even able to survive from generation to generation, due to the “primitive” conditions and hardships they had to endure, very much amazed me. This perspective was based on my “extensive” study of history in school, which you see, allowed me to compare the then and now from a more current or modern position. I had the hindsight advantage of knowing how far “we” had come as human beings; the evidence of the all so important “technology of the day” and it’s impact on society. It was pretty simple; they used horses and we had automobiles. To be sure, I had a grandmother who was part of that bygone generation, but she had transitioned well. After her husband, the Captain died, she became familiar with the automobile and it’s wonders as a licensed driver. With several pillows added for visibility, she could ably pilot the family’s 1949 Buick at an impressive rate of speed, especially down that straight stretch of South Main Street, right by the fairgrounds. No doubt the ponies on the track admired her skill and daring.

She owned a TV, as well. A black and white model, with associated antennas on the roof for receiving upwards of three channels! Many a wonderful Saturday night was passed with her as we watched “the best” shows, and ate Toll House cookies with milk, during which time my parents happily square danced somewhere else. Okay, what I should clarify is that fact that I did most of the work involving the dispatching of the cookies while she exercised the more

important skills of cooking, serving and loving. There are those who think I should apologize for having been spoiled in such a way, yet I believe Munner, as we called her, knew what she was doing. She was modeling a way of life and teaching me valuable lessons during the time we spent together. As I grew older, we had many conversations on many topics, both practical and spiritual, and I got to know her well. More so than my other grandparents who died before we could have a real exchange of words. Now that I think of it, I had a closer relationship with her than most anyone else at that time in my life and, in some ways, even since. There were times when some family members might have been tempted to point out her shortcomings, but I would hear none of it, knowing that her good heart trumped all minor faults of temperament or disposition.

I received valuable gifts and knowledge from Munner; together we looked out the gable window to watch the robin hatch its young, we cleared brush from around the house and put sawdust on the raspberries, we chiseled bottoms off metal garbage cans and added red worms therein to compost the kitchen scraps, we glazed donuts and drained them on the handles of wooden spoons, we provided fence for the lilies in the beautiful garden where the Lupen and Sweet William loved to grow, and she taught me to make an apple pie in just the right way. When I would visit in later years, she knew my telltale knock on the kitchen door, opening it without lifting the shade to see who was there, receiving me with bright eyes, a beautiful smile and a warm hug.

Such it is, when you really spend the time to get to know someone. This, then, is the start of love.

The Historical Reality

Over the years, I have come to realize the simple ignorance of my youth with regards to the degree of sophistication and knowledge possessed by previous generations, particularly when it comes to what is important in life beyond the mere necessities of food and shelter. The words they have left for us in song, prose and poetry, speak of the eternal truths that give real life and point the way to God. The plain fact is, people have been getting to know God long before you and I were born. Countless hymns and books, written hundreds of years ago, contain words that attest to something greater than we are, and seek to share the truth of His “being with us” for our very benefit. Jefferson once sought to place a Bible in every public school in Washington, yet today God's Word has become an offensive item to those who desire the “politically correct” approach to life. The irony of this fact is enormous; since without the words of the Bible, there is no life. The opportunity to know God is made much more difficult by the withholding of His written Word.

In John 6:63 Jesus states that the Spirit gives life, and that the words he has spoken to the disciples “are spirit and they are life”. When these words are suppressed, there is an incredible cost. That would be the opposite of life. And I am not speaking solely of physical death either.

Is it any wonder then that so many people today are dispirited and aimlessly carry out the motions of life? The words of truth have been withheld from them, perhaps to the extent of the study of any general literature which testifies to worthy virtues as well. As a teen, I learned Portia's “Mercy Speech” from *The Merchant of Venice* to memory; I was

proud to show my father this singular feat. My ego was bruised a bit, when he joined the recitation with me, word for word. The point being, that he had learned it too. How many present day students have heard or learned the verse “it (mercy) falleth as a gentle rain from heaven, upon the place beneath...”? In the several young people I questioned, I found no familiarity with this passage and wonder if basic tenets and virtues contained in literature of old have been expunged from other areas of today's learning in toto and supplanted with more “modern” material. It could be that I might find other sources are being used in schools to inculcate these values that I am not aware of. But even if this were so, the lack of a connection to the very source of these truths, namely God’s Word, is a detriment to our personal well-being and the greatest hindrance to our self-government as well. Certainly this was not a common problem in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where most people in America were conversant with the precepts contained in the Bible.

An historical example that speaks directly to America's former familiarity with the Bible and tells of the country's understanding of its truths, can be found in Lincoln's Proclamation 97, issued in April of 1863. Together, with the United States Senate and Secretary of State, the President called for a “day of national humiliation, fasting, and prayer” to “to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness”. The full text of this amazing document is very worthwhile to read; it can be found by searching on-line for “proclamation 97” and selecting the related www.presidency.ucsb.edu site link.

This true bit of history would make for good study in our public schools, yet few people are aware of its existence. No wonder it is so hard for people today to imagine the extent of biblical knowledge and corresponding truths that most of the citizens of 1863 possessed. Yet it is evident that the majority of men and women of that century possessed a Christian faith that rendered them fully capable to both understand and perform the requests contained in Lincoln's proclamation. They were truly mindful of the importance of God's presence in their daily lives and could even suffer reproach from a sitting president when his call to repent came.

While some people are without spirit, others exhibit spirits of a different nature, having feasted on words they like to hear they run after all kinds of things that seem pleasing to them. Isn't it interesting, that on the one hand, our present society says that we shouldn't fear words and that anyone can and should be able to say anything, yet, hypocritically, they will not allow an opposing view. For example, certain comedians have made their living with the most egregious use of words and are well received by the public. Thought to be wise and full of truth, mockers and scoffers are revered as individuals worthy of attention and are idolized by many.

On the other hand, the Word of God is chastised and demeaned. Makes you wonder what they are afraid of? This issue is nothing new, for in II Timothy 4:3 we learn that the time will come when men will not put up with sound teaching and instruction, but gather around them, those who speak things they want to hear. I believe the King James version says these people have "itchy ears".

Less vehement perhaps, than the preceding comedian example, but still fully able to lead people astray are many useless practices such as astrology, witchcraft, etc. The list goes on, but you get the idea.

The apostle John (1 Jn 4:1) cautions that we should “test the spirits” to see if they are from God. He continues on to show that we should only believe the spirit if it proclaims “Jesus Christ has come in flesh from God”.

Of course, there are times when the situations we face consist of agendas that are dark and murky, without such overt statements to help us in our decision making.

The Point

The solution to the problem is to know the living God in an intimate way that allows for an understanding of who He is and what He produces. How then, can one know God? The short answer is to seek Him and spend time with Him, listening to His Word. You get to know your friends when you spend time with them, listening to what they say. The same is true for God. As a youth, I spent time with my grandmother and got to know her in a very real way, and at the same time, in a much different manner than other people who also spent time with her. This too, is not unlike our relationship with the Lord. When you know someone really well, you have a pretty good idea of what they will think, say or do in many situations, providing they have a stable character. Based on the level of our “knowing” we may describe a person’s actions as “in character” or “out of character” as the case may be, with some degree of accuracy.

Again, you may ask “but how can I really know God?”. This cannot be answered by way of a formula or logic for such knowledge is truly a gift of God. The Bible tells us that God does not want any person to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2nd Peter 3:9). In Isaiah 45:22 God tells all the ends of the earth to turn to him and be saved. Isaiah 55:6 tells us to seek the Lord while he may be found. All is from God's grace and His will; it cannot be quantified by man.

A sinner myself, I have no claim to lofty thoughts or actions that are newer, or truer than what other people know. I can only share with you some of what's been given to me. I believe the words that lead to life have been omitted, suppressed and perverted in our Western society. Much has been lost since 1863, but people still long in their hearts for the joy and peace that only comes from knowing the living God through His son Jesus Christ. If you seek Him, you will find Him and be presented with the opportunity to learn. Not from me, but from Him for it says in scripture “they will all be taught of God.” John 6:45. It is my express hope that these messages will encourage you to seek Him directly. It's always better to see the view from the top of the mountain yourself, rather than rely on another person's description of it. Knowledge of God's character, grace, mercy, beauty and love for you, is just like that view; you have to see it for yourself to really know.

In your journey, you will encounter obstacles. So be of good heart as we discuss next, some of the challenges and the decisions you must make to overcome them.

Summary

- If you want to know someone, you need to spend time with them.
- Historically, many people have spent time getting to know God, and have written extensively about it.
- Current culture is such that the truth of God found in American history is kept hidden.
- The Bible is the true guide to those seeking to know God through Jesus Christ.
- A broken and contrite heart will not be despised by God – Psalm 51:17 A bruised reed he will not break – Isaiah 42:3 & Matthew 12:20
- Search for Him with all your heart – Luke 12:31
- Lean not on your own understanding – Proverbs 3:5

Do we not seek the eternal
in nature,
Which was before us and will be
after us,
For that ineffable degree of comfort
our soul receives from its Creator?
This is His handiwork...
and we are His.