



Our Quest for Knowing

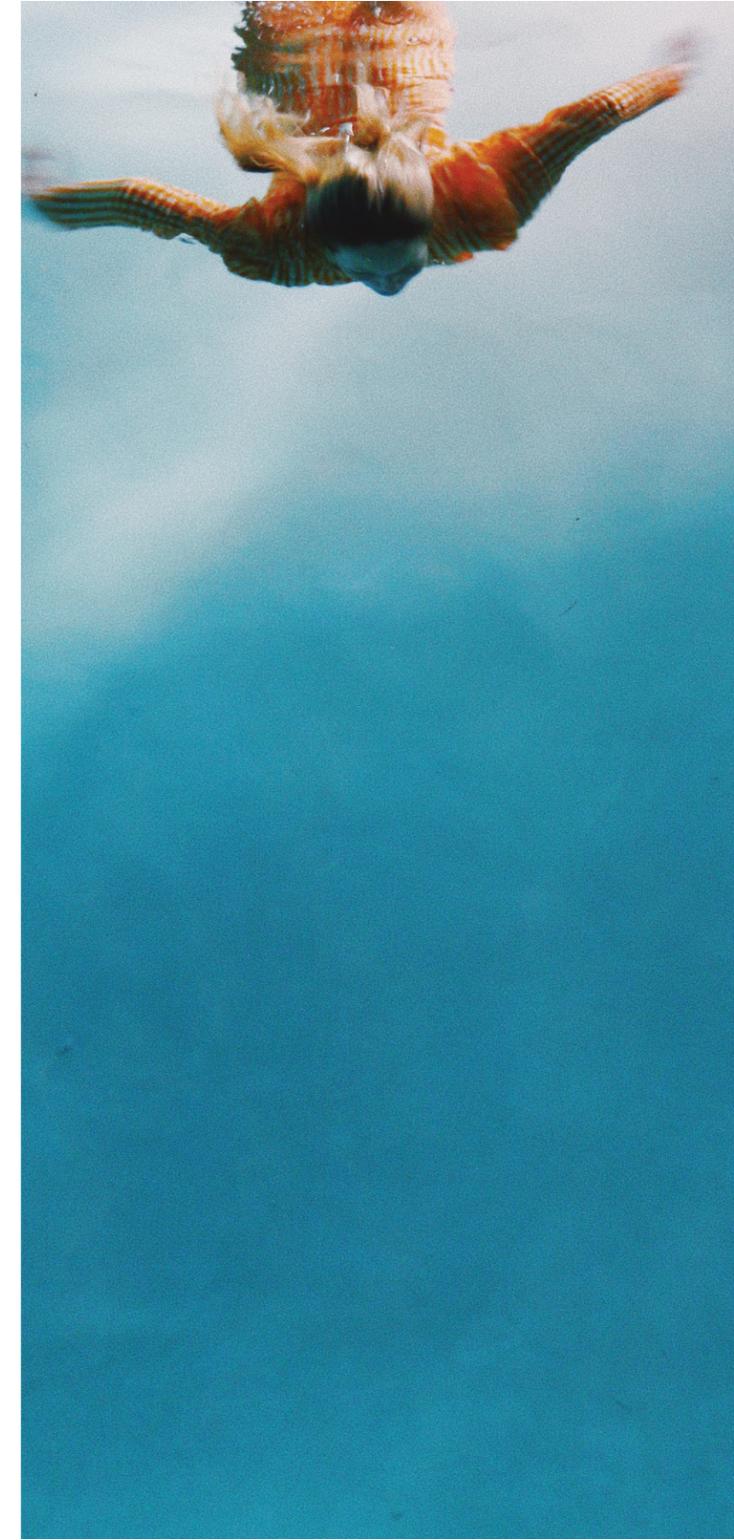


In a time of uncertainty, what can we know?

Isn't it strange that in a day like ours when so much seems up in the air and unstable that people sound even more keen to be sure of what they know? Politicians sound increasingly shrill and strident, always seeking our loyalty and our votes. Self-proclaimed authorities call out to us on the streets of social media, assuring us that they alone have the solutions to the contagions which stalk the land. Activists work tirelessly to reshape our understanding of gender and sexuality, confident that they have unique access to undiluted knowledge.

We might laugh at their certainty, and we might say we are immune to its appeal, but do you know what? We want certainty. More than just want; we need it. We humans need to know what is true about life, what is good about life, what is right about life. This is an urge for knowledge which is always present, no matter what else is going on, but in our recent era, this need-to-know pulls on our hearts with greater passion and pressure. When everything around us is being questioned, we long for someone to come along with answers.

The Bible also appeals to a greater knowledge as a means to assuage our fears, yet it does so in a way that points in quite a different direction than our worldly wisdom. Where we see knowledge as a safe and distant list of facts and figures to be used only according to our whims, the Scriptures draw us to a Person. Where our world sees truth as purely subjective, the always-malleable manifestation of our own inner longings, God's Word calls us to put our faith in Him.



This is a common theme throughout the Bible and in Proverbs in particular. We can think of the very beginning of the book where we see one of the most famous examples of knowing in 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” In Proverbs 3:5-6, the Lord calls on His people to set aside their faith in their own ways and to trust wholly in the sure guidance He provides. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” A few chapters later, we see Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

This is common sense. After all, which is more reliable – our individual understandings, shaped as they are by our frail perceptions, or the eternal revelation of God? Then what about the shared wisdom of our culture? If we are honest with ourselves, I think we have to admit that each of us looks back at our society’s supposed wisdom with more than a bit of skepticism. How do we seek out true knowledge of God that is not reduced to the flotsam and jetsam of trivial knowledge? How do we find genuine relational knowledge that is not just our wishes dressed up as something pure?





It should be no surprise that we receive good guidance about this from the text of the Bible itself. One of the most common words used in the Old Testament, showing up over 800 times, is the term yada. Often translated simply as some version of “to know,” it is used in a great variety of contexts, everything from acquiring information to the intimacy between husband and wife. It is this last that is the most helpful here.

While, for good reason, we often think of this marital knowing as referring to conjugal relations, we have to remember that most of married life is spent in more mundane acts of love. It is simply spending time together, doing the household chores, raising the children, and planning out lives. Over this

extended time, we gain knowledge of one another in a way that neither bookish facts and figures nor expressive perceptions could ever match. It is this style of knowing, living life with another, getting to know a person’s ins and outs, their hang-ups and foibles, that we have true marital knowing. It is this kind of knowing that the Bible calls us to when it tells us to know God.

Another grammatical aid from the words of the Bible pertains to just what we are to know, or, rather Who. When the Bible speaks

of a knowledge that gives hope and wisdom for our daily lives, it is not our understanding of flora and fauna that it has in mind. When we look through the book of Proverbs, it is our knowledge and knowing of God, of His attributes and His nature, of His commandments for living life well, that we find that hope we so desperately seek.

The focus of our quest for knowledge is no mere object which can be examined safely and abstractly, nor is it nothing but our spiritual longings and expectations. It is a He, not an it; a Who, not a what. It is this Who-ishness of God it gives us hope. In the face of a world that seems to have gone even madder than it was before, the voice of wisdom calls us to walk with the One who has created us. We are to learn of Him along a constant and enduring journey. It is a scary journey as we will not always like where He wants to take us. Yet, it is in this journey, this knowing, this yada-ing, that we find our only hope in this day of distress.