

Knowing Jesus versus Knowing about Him

Knowing about something objectively and knowing it subjectively are two very different things. This applies to our knowing Jesus. Knowing about Jesus objectively means we possess some knowledge about Him. But knowing Jesus subjectively means we have firsthand experience of Him. We have personal knowledge of Him. This is the kind of knowing Christ wants us to have.

Knowing about versus knowing by experience: the example of a photograph

We can use a photograph to illustrate the difference between the two kinds of knowing. When we look at a photograph of a person, we learn some information about them on an objective level—their height, hair color, eye color, their general appearance. We see the way they smile, and we might learn their preference in clothing. But even if we examine the photograph minutely, gathering as much as information we can from it, we at most gain only outward, objective knowledge. We can only say we know about the person. We can't say we really know them.

Now let's say we meet the person from the photograph face to face. We hear the way they talk, and we see the way they act. As we spend time with them, we begin to know them personally. We become acquainted with their thoughts, their feelings, their dreams, their likes, their dislikes, and their whole personality. This is very different from merely knowing about them by studying their photograph. This knowing is personal, subjective, and firsthand.

How can we know Jesus personally?

The Lord Jesus is the most wonderful, loving Person in the universe, and He wants us to know Him in a personal and affectionate way. But is a personal relationship with Jesus today possible? The disciples had the opportunity to know Jesus two thousand years ago, but after He resurrected, didn't He ascend into the heavens, leaving us here on earth?

The Lord Jesus did indeed ascend to the heavens, but we can still know the Lord personally and subjectively today because He is also the Spirit who lives within us. Second Corinthians 3:17 says, "And the Lord is the Spirit." Physically, Christ ascended to heaven and is away from us. But today as the Spirit, He is present with us right now.

In a hymn on experiencing Christ, Watchman Nee wrote,

"Because Thy Spirit dwells within,
How real, O Lord, Thou art to me;
Not touched, yet more reliable,
Not seen, yet loved more fervently."

Because His Spirit dwells in us, we can know Christ so subjectively and personally. How wonderful that the Lord can be real to us today as the Spirit!

The Spirit in our spirit

When we received Christ, He saved us from God's judgment, but He also came to live within us. He as the Spirit came into our spirit, the deepest part of our being, and regenerated it with His divine life. This is why 2 Timothy 4:22 says, "The Lord be with your spirit." Christ today is with us in our spirit!

We can know Christ—His likes and dislikes, His personality, His ways—by fellowshiping with Him in our spirit. No one could be nearer or more available to us than the Lord is in our spirit. We can talk with Him, love Him, and enjoy His presence in our spirit. By taking time to be with Him in prayer, we can know the Lord in a subjective, experiential way. We'll experience Him as our life, our peace, our hope—whatever we need. As the Spirit in us, He leads us into the reality of who and what He is to us.

Knowing about versus knowing by experience: the example of food

We can use the matter of eating to illustrate the difference between knowing about something and knowing something by experience. Let's say we're hungry, so we go to a restaurant and read about a particular dish on the menu. Thinking it sounds good, we go on to study everything related to the dish—its chemical composition, how it's prepared, how long it's cooked, its history, where it was grown or raised, its benefits for our health, and on and on. Yet after all our studying, we still only know that dish objectively. And we're still hungry! We might be able to say, "I know all about that food," but what good has our knowledge done us if we're still starving?

To satisfy our hunger, we have to eat the food. Then we really know it by personal experience. We know its taste, its smell, how it makes us feel. We're inwardly strengthened and supplied by it. That kind of knowing is deeper and more subjective.

What's the purpose of a menu? It doesn't exist for memorization or study. It's a guide, a roadmap, to so many foods that can satisfy our hunger. When we eat the food we read about, our hunger is satisfied, and the menu has fulfilled its purpose.

Knowing Jesus by eating Him

In John 6:35 the Lord Jesus reveals that He is the bread of life. Bread is food, a life supply, something to eat to satisfy hunger. This points to the Lord's desire for us to know Him subjectively in the same way that we know bread—by eating! This may be a startling thought, but it's in the Word of God. In verse 57 the Lord Jesus goes on to say, "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me."

What did Jesus mean when He said "eats Me"? He wasn't, of course, speaking of physically eating Him. He explains in verse 63, "It is the Spirit who gives life;

the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” This verse shows us that we eat the Lord Jesus, we take Him in, by taking His Word into us as spirit and life. By this eating, we know Jesus as our real food, as our satisfaction and life supply.

Studying about the Lord Jesus in the Word has some merit, but merely studying the Word can be just like studying about a dish on a menu. We may gain much correct knowledge, but be left hungry and unsatisfied within. We shouldn't be content with having objective knowledge, yet being spiritually hungry. We can and should subjectively know the Lord Jesus as the satisfying bread of life by eating Him, by taking in His Word as spirit and life.

Receiving the Word by prayer

Ephesians 6:17-18 tells us to receive “the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition.” These verses, along with the ones mentioned above from John 6, show us that the way to receive the Word as spirit and life is by prayer. If we come to the Word only to study it, we will at best come to know something about the Lord Jesus. But when we exercise our spirit by praying with the words in the Bible, we touch and receive the Spirit who gives life. We eat the Lord Jesus, as He instructed us, by praying with His Word. By this eating, we know Christ subjectively as life to us. (You can read more about taking in the Word with prayer in our previous blog posts, “What the Bible Really Is” part 1 and part 2.)

Getting to know Jesus every day

We have the Lord as the Spirit indwelling us, and every day is a new opportunity for us to know Him subjectively. When we spend time to fellowship with Him and contact Him in our spirit each day, we get to know more than a “photograph” of Jesus; we get to know a real and living person, personally and subjectively. Moreover, as we daily exercise to pray with God's Word, His words become spirit and life to us. As we eat the Lord Jesus in this way, He becomes our very life supply, and we come to know Christ in a deep and inward way.

The Key to Experiencing Jesus Christ in Your Everyday Life

The day we get saved is a wonderful, momentous day. However, after experiencing the initial joy of salvation, it's not unusual to wonder how to continue experiencing the Lord Jesus. You may have questions like How can I know Jesus personally? How can I experience Jesus in my life? Is being forgiven and saved from God's judgment all there is to the Christian life?

Some may try different ways to experience Jesus like they did on the day they were saved. Perhaps they study the Bible, but though they learn something new, the Lord Himself may still seem far away. It's like trying to enter a locked room with the wrong key; you need the right key to unlock the door. In the same way,

we need to use the “right key” to experience Jesus. So what’s the key for us to know Jesus personally in our daily life?

We’ve been redeemed and reborn

Before we see the key to experiencing Jesus, we need to grasp two important facts.

The first fact is that Jesus redeemed us by His death on the cross. How we thank Him for this! And His redemption made the second fact possible: Jesus has come to live in our spirit! Through Christ’s death, He saved us from eternal judgment; in His resurrection, Christ as the life-giving Spirit came to live in our spirit. Knowing and appreciating this second fact is crucial to truly experiencing Jesus daily.

God created us because He wanted to give us His divine life so we’d express Him in our living. But because mankind fell, two things happened: we became sinful and our spirit was deadened, unable to contact or know God. So we had two great needs: our sins needed to be forgiven, and our deadened spirit needed to be made alive.

When we received the Lord Jesus as our Savior, both of these great needs were met! We were redeemed and forgiven of our sins, and we were reborn in our spirit with the life of God.

Now let’s go on to see the key to experiencing Jesus.

Three realms and three keys

There are three realms in this universe: the physical realm, the psychological realm, and the spiritual realm. When God created us, He equipped us with the three keys that give us access to each realm—a body, a soul, and a spirit:

- The physical realm is the material world, consisting of what we can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. The key to experiencing this realm is to use our body’s five physical senses.
- The psychological realm is the realm of the human soul, which is deeper than the physical realm and consists of intangible things like thoughts, feelings, and decisions. The key to experiencing the psychological realm is to use the faculties of our soul: our mind to think, reason, and analyze; our emotions to experience joy, sorrow, and other feelings; and our will to decide, form intentions, and make choices.
- The spiritual realm is more mysterious and deeper than both the physical and psychological realms. John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit.” In spirit here means in our human spirit. The key to experiencing the spiritual realm is to use our human spirit to contact God, who is Spirit.

To illustrate the importance of using the right key for each realm, let's use the example of the delicious aroma of bread baking in an oven. To try and "experience" that aroma by using the faculties of our soul would be futile. Our soul is simply the wrong key. But with a single sniff, we can use our sense of smell and immediately experience that mouthwatering aroma.

In the same way, we can't experience Christ if we use the wrong key. Jesus Christ is no longer physically present on earth, so our five senses don't help us there. And even using our mind to think about Him or our emotions to try to sense Him doesn't work, because God is Spirit. Using our God-created human spirit is the right key for us to experience Christ, who lives in our spirit.

How to use our spirit

To use any part of our being means to exercise that part. For example, physically we use or exercise our feet by walking. Psychologically, we exercise our mind by studying or considering a topic.

So how do we exercise our spirit to contact and experience the Lord Jesus? The best way to exercise our spirit is by praying. Our prayers don't need to be long or formal. They don't even need to be made in a particular place. In fact, simply calling on the precious name of our Lord Jesus is a good way to exercise our spirit to contact Him in prayer. When we call on the name of the Lord from deep within, we experience Him as living water, satisfying us and quenching our thirst at any time during our day.

Another way to exercise our spirit is to pray with the Word of God. As we read the Bible, we can turn what we read into our prayer. When we pray with the Scriptures, we use not just our mind to read the Word, but more importantly we use our spirit to contact the Spirit in the Word. By exercising our spirit with the Word of God, we experience Christ as our spiritual nourishment.

We can also exercise our spirit by praising and thanking the Lord for all He is and all He has done for us. We can be filled with Him by giving thanks to Him for all things.

By regularly practicing these different ways of exercising our spirit, we can go on from the initial step of salvation to know and experience Jesus more every day.

Experiencing Jesus day by day

The Lord Jesus doesn't want to be an objective figure whom we worship from afar. He redeemed us and regenerated us to live in us and be our life. Jesus lives in us, so we can experience Him subjectively as everything to us in our everyday life. In all matters of our life—whether big or small—we can experience Christ as whatever we need when we contact Him by using the key of our human spirit.

What a joy to experience Jesus by exercising our spirit!
(John 3:16) You will know personally Jesus