

☒ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 12, 2022 | Knowledge

PREPARATION

A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine knowledge in the life of Solomon.

GETTING READY

Who is the most knowledgeable person you know? What makes him or her knowledgeable?

Read the Bible’s account of the life of Solomon either from 1 Kings (1–11) or 2 Chronicles (1–9). The construction of the temple can feel a bit monotonous at times for modern readers but try to read closely to notice important details scattered through these sections.

Pray that God continually transforms you into a knowledgeable person.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

A knowledgeable person is able to find and submit to truth.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

- If you want to be a knowledgeable person from a biblical perspective, you must learn truth and use it in life.

❏ MEDITATE

“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:9).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces a key concept related to biblical knowledge and traces it throughout the life of Solomon.

🗉: *How would you define knowledge?*

🗉: *Is knowledge more or less difficult to obtain today than in the past?*

The word knowledge in 2 Peter 1:5–6 could be defined as “comprehension or an intellectual grasp of something.” It often has additional implications in Scripture. In the Bible, “knowledge” is more than learning mere facts. For example, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” When Paul spoke of “the knowledge of God,” he had more in mind than facts or an intellectual understanding of God. The knowledge of God is something that can be opposed by arguments or opinions, implying an ideology or belief system. In Romans 2:17, Paul said, “Know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law.” His words imply a submission to God’s will, not a mere comprehension of it. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus said of those who do not do the will of his Father, “Then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” Jesus obviously was aware of the existence of these individuals. “Knowledge” in this instance implies a relationship. So, the word “knowledge” in Scripture often implies a submission to, a relationship with, and an investment in truth.

Solomon was the third king of Israel. He reigned during the eighth century BC. His name is more often associated with the term “wisdom” rather than “knowledge,” but there is quite an overlap between these terms when “knowledge” is understood as described above. This lesson examines the life of Solomon to see biblical knowledge in action and to illustrate the importance of this additional nuance of biblical knowledge. Solomon knew more about God’s creation than any other person of his time, yet his life at times was characterized by biblical knowledge and at other times merely by an assent to facts. Furthermore, Solomon shows us that knowledge is not reserved for modern societies who have the benefit of technology and years of scientific research. True knowledge is more than we can gain by looking through a microscope or discover in a library. True knowledge is ultimately found by understanding God and His Word.

Q: *How could you gain knowledge but fail to please God?*

Q: *Are faith and knowledge incompatible?*

APPLICATION POINT – Many people consider faith and knowledge to be contrasting approaches to understanding the world. They believe that once knowledge comes, there is no longer any need for faith. Second Peter 1:5, however, indicates that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. We are to “supplement our faith ... with knowledge.” So, our faith needs to be informed, not blind. Christians have no reason to avoid knowledge or learning. We should never be simplistic in the sense of being unwilling or incapable of understanding complex arguments or difficulties. Nor should we believe that knowledge removes our need for faith. Faith and knowledge work together to make us fruitful Christians who are able to contend for what we believe.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Peter called believers to knowledge. What does a knowledgeable person look like? This lesson examines Solomon’s life to find out. In Solomon, we see someone who kept God at the center and used his gifts to help others prosper. Oh, that his entire life were committed to obtaining and using godly knowledge!

1. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON KEEPS GOD AT THE CENTER.
2. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON IS A BLESSING TO OTHERS.

GOING DEEPER

+This section provides an overview of Solomon’s life to see how these two principles are evident in him. Solomon was a complex character. His life was a mixture of successes and failures. But his wisdom and knowledge cannot be denied, and we have much to learn from him.

1. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON KEEPS GOD AT THE CENTER.

▣ **1 KINGS 3:1–15; 1 CHRONICLES 28:9–10; 2 CHRONICLES 1:1–13**

❓: *Why is knowledge better than much wealth, a long life, and victory in war?*

❓: *How did Solomon's request keep God at the center of his life?*

Perhaps the most widely known event from Solomon's life was an encounter he had with God in a dream during the initial months of his reign. This encounter is recorded in 1 Kings 3:1–15 and 2 Chronicles 1:1–13. In Solomon's exchange with God, we learn that he knew he needed God's help to effectively rule the nation. The encounter began with God asking, "What shall I give you?" (2 Chronicles 1:7). He placed no restrictions on His offer. As God Himself acknowledged, Solomon could have requested any number of things related to his personal prosperity and to securing his kingdom (2 Chronicles 1:11). But rather than asking for wealth, success, or victory over his enemies, Solomon asked for "wisdom and knowledge" to reign over God's people (2 Chronicles 1:10). With his request, Solomon showed a concern for those under his rule and an awareness of his need for consistent dependence on God throughout his reign. Asking for those other things would have shown that Solomon intended to rule over the people from his own power.

Solomon's request illustrates the kind of knowledge intended in 2 Peter 1:5. There would have been nothing commendable in asking for knowledge if Solomon were asking for facts he could use to gain an advantage over the surrounding nations or neutralize threats from within his kingdom. By asking God for wisdom and knowledge, Solomon revealed a desire to submit to God's will. He wanted a close relationship with God and made a commitment to living by God's revealed truth.

❓: *What do you rely on for success? Does this keep God at the center?*

❓: *What would you ask for if God were to offer you anything?*

APPLICATION POINT – The first step to being a knowledgeable person in the 2 Peter 1:5 sense is seeing your need for God. No matter how extraordinary or talented you are, you need God's grace to recognize, submit, and invest in what is true. I have a hard time with this first step. My first instinct, which I believe to be sinful, is to see how much headway I can make on my own before acknowledging my need to depend on God in every situation. When I do this, regardless of whether I'm successful by the world's definition, I have failed to walk in knowledge. A knowledgeable person understands their need for God in every situation.

❏: *Who was Solomon's father? How does this prayer demonstrate the importance of God's promises to Solomon's father?*

❏: *Do you find Solomon's prayer optimistic or pessimistic?*

Solomon was also the builder of the first temple in Jerusalem. Upon the temple's completion, he dedicated it with a prayer and addressed the people of Israel. His remarkable words reveal his character and his knowledge of God more than any other part of his story. Rather than dwelling on the building's magnificence (1 Kings 8:13), Solomon's temple dedication kept God at the center. He began by acknowledging God's faithfulness. He declared that it was God who brought the people out of Egypt by His own power, not theirs (1 Kings 8:16, 21). He fulfilled all the promises He made to David (1 Kings 8:18–20, 24–26). Whatever God promises, He fulfills. Then Solomon proclaimed God's greatness (1 Kings 8:23, 27). No matter how splendid the temple was, it paled in comparison to God.

Solomon went on to intertwine God's grace, judgment, and deliverance. He prayed for God to condemn the guilty who sin against Him (1 Kings 8:32). He acknowledged that any defeats Israel might suffer could be because they had sinned against God (1 Kings 8:33). Later, Solomon even alluded to God's judgment and Israel's exile from the land (1 Kings 8:46). These words of judgment, however, are not the end. He also prayed for God to forgive the people if they turned their hearts toward Him (1 Kings 8:33–34). Even if they had been exiled from the land, Solomon prayed they would be brought back if they repented and turned their hearts to God (1 Kings 8:46–52). Solomon was pleading for, and expecting to receive, God's grace. Finally, he also interspersed his prayer by noting acts of deliverance. We have already mentioned the exodus. In addition, Solomon prayed for God's deliverance from famine (1 Kings 8:37) and from their enemies (1 Kings 8:44–45).

Perhaps the most remarkable part of Solomon's prayer is his appeal on behalf of foreigners. He asked when even a foreigner prayed toward the temple, that God would hear his prayers so all people might know God's great name and fear Him (1 Kings 8:41–43). All of this shows how Solomon kept God at the center of reality. There could be no greater evidence of his knowledge of God and of His will.

❏: *How is God's centrality questioned in our times?*

Q: *How can you appreciate God's hand in history while acknowledging that you do not understand His ways perfectly?*

APPLICATION POINT – We live at a time when God's centrality in all things, including history, is being challenged. As Christians, we may think we are unaffected by the unbelief of our wider culture, but we may be surprised to see how much we have adapted to the worldviews of the modern age. As Solomon reflected on his nation's history and anticipated its future, he saw God at the center. He could not see it any other way. If you were asked to explain America's history to someone, would you describe it as placing God at the center or could you easily describe the major events of American history without any reference to God? There are some differences, of course. America is not a theocracy like ancient Israel. Furthermore, where Solomon had an inspired record of Israel's history, we should be cautious about assuming how God has acted in our history. Nevertheless, I think the ease with which most of us can speak of historical matters without any connection to God reveals a certain comfort with removing God from the center. This was not the case for the major figures of our nation's early history. Even the more unbelieving figures in our past saw evidence of God's providence everywhere they looked. American history is just an example. The point is that even Christians have become comfortable viewing reality without God at the center. We will never attain the knowledge described in 2 Peter 1:5–6 while this is the case.

2. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON IS A BLESSING TO OTHERS.

■ **1 KINGS 3:16–28; 4:24–25**

Q: *What difficulty did Solomon encounter in the case of the two women?*

Q: *What hidden assumption did Solomon make in his judgment?*

Solomon requested and was granted the wisdom to lead his people in 1 Kings 3:1–15. The author of 1 Kings immediately offers examples of Solomon's great wisdom and knowledge. First Kings 3:16–28 contains another famous episode from his life. Two prostitutes came before the king, both claiming the same son. These women lived together and gave birth to sons just days apart, but one of them accidentally smothered her son while they were sleeping. When she awoke, she switched her dead son with the other woman's live son. Today, a DNA test

could settle the issue, but during Solomon's time, there was insufficient evidence to determine to whom the baby belonged. One of the women was lying, but there was no way to tell who. With his God-given wisdom, Solomon quickly discerned a way to ascertain the truth. He suggested the child be divided in two so each woman could have half a son. The child's true mother gave up her son so he might live. The lying woman was willing for the child to die. In this way Solomon learned who the child's mother was. When the people of Israel heard of Solomon's judgment in this matter, they were in awe of him (1 Kings 3:28) because he could discern what was just and unjust even when there was no corroborating evidence. Solomon used the knowledge God had given him to obtain justice for this mother and her son.

Q: *What is intuition? How can it be helpful? When can intuition be harmful?*

Q: *How do you think Solomon was able to conceive of his plan to determine the child's true mother?*

APPLICATION POINT – Our capacity to help others is increased by our knowledge of God and His will. If Solomon had depended on his own intuition in this matter, he could have made a grave mistake. The same is true for us. We cannot be guided by our best guesses and intuitions. Doing so could just as easily bring others harm instead good. If we wish to help others, we must be guided by the knowledge and wisdom of God.

■ 1 KINGS 10

Q: *How does this story relate to Genesis 12:1-3? How does this story relate to Matthew 12:42?*

Q: *Why did the queen give gifts to Solomon?*

Solomon's wisdom was known throughout the ancient world. Sheba was located in southwestern Arabia in what is present day Yemen. The queen of Sheba likely heard of Solomon's great wisdom from caravan traders. It is unlikely that these traders had become believers in Israel's God, but they could not deny Solomon's wisdom and knowledge and spread the report of him throughout the known world. The queen of Sheba could not believe the reports she had heard about Solomon and wanted to meet him to see for herself (1 Kings 10:6-7). When the queen

met Solomon, she was so impressed by his wisdom that she blessed the people and blessed Israel's God (1 Kings 10:9). Solomon's wisdom revealed God's glory to the nations. Of course, we have no idea what the queen's eternal state is, but we know that on at least one occasion she blessed the true God of the whole universe. Solomon's wisdom was a blessing to others, even among the nations. In blessing the nations through his wisdom, Solomon fulfilled the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. The nations of the earth are being blessed through Abraham's offspring. In Christ, who is greater than Solomon, we see a greater fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham (Matthew 1:1; 12:42). Christ will bring the blessing of salvation to all nations (Matthew 28:19–20).

Q: *How can Christians reveal the excellency of God through their own commitment to knowledge and excellence?*

Q: *How does satisfaction with mediocrity diminish our ability to glorify God?*

APPLICATION POINT – There is nothing anti-intellectual about the Christian faith. With Solomon as our example, the clarity and rigor of our thinking should be appealing to unbelievers. We can never compromise on biblical truth. Some unbelievers will classify our theological convictions as unintelligent or naïve no matter how well understood they are. But apart from these unfair criticisms, there should be something appealing to unbelievers in the way believers pursue knowledge of how God has created His world. Since He created the world, acquisition of knowledge is discovering God's thoughts after Him. Nothing should be more enticing for true believers. Be wary of the simplistic Christian who is afraid to pursue knowledge about God Himself or the world around him.

■ 1 KINGS 5:1–18; 7:13–14

Q: *Why did Solomon request the help of the king of Tyre in building the temple?*

Q: *Could Solomon have constructed the temple with materials from Israel? Should he have?*

Sometimes the wisest course of action is to recognize and account for your own limitations. Solomon could do this. At the outset of building the temple, he contracted with Hiram king of Tyre to procure the timber needed to build the temple. The cedars of Lebanon were prized in the ancient world, and ancient kingdoms greatly desired

them for their construction projects. Furthermore, the laborers of Tyre had the experience necessary to harvest and transport the trees to wherever they were needed (1 Kings 5:6). Solomon could have constructed the temple with the resources available to him in Israel, but it would have diminished its architectural appeal. When the time to build the temple furnishings came, Solomon again secured the help of an expert from Tyre. He hired Hiram (a different Hiram), who was “full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze” (1 Kings 7:13–14). Again, he recognized his limitations and got the help he needed to create magnificent furniture for the temple. Surely there were bronze workers in Israel whom Solomon could have called on to make this furniture. But Solomon wanted the best, so he sought help from a neighboring country. Solomon’s willingness to recognize limitations and seek the help he needed is characteristic of one who is walking in the knowledge of God.

Q: *How is recognizing our limits central to the gospel?*

Q: *Is it better to recognize your strengths or your weaknesses?*

APPLICATION POINT – Solomon’s willingness to acknowledge his limitations creates a connection between knowledge and the gospel. We have a problem we are unable to solve on our own. Our sin separates us from God and places us under God’s eternal judgment. There is nothing we can do to atone for our sins. Atonement is beyond our limitations. But nothing is beyond Christ. Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and restore our relationship with God. He accomplished what we could not. If Solomon’s willingness to recognize his limitations reflects the nature of knowledge, then there can be no doubt why Peter believed every Christian should be characterized by knowledge.

Q: *What book does the author of 1 Kings allude to in these verses?*

Q: *What other books in the Bible did Solomon write? How do these verses allude to them?*

Solomon acquired immense knowledge of nature (1 Kings 4:33). He was an expert in the fields of botany and zoology. The author of 1 Kings artfully crafted his statements to reveal how vast Solomon’s knowledge in these fields was. The cedars of Lebanon were the largest plants known in the ancient Near East. Hyssop was one of the smallest, especially when its growth was stunted by a wall. The author uses a literary device known as a merismus, which

refers to the entirety of something by referencing the extremes. The author was essentially saying that Solomon was familiar with every plant known throughout the territory.

The author also said Solomon “spoke” of beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish. An attentive Bible reader will recognize an allusion to Genesis 1 in this statement. For Solomon to speak of beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish indicated a vast knowledge of all the living creatures God has made. The use of “spoke,” however, points to a deeper significance than even just mere knowledge. In Genesis 1, God “spoke” creation into being. Solomon was following after God in this manner, not in the sense of creating new species out of nothing but in the speaking of created beings. As with Adam and Eve, he was made in God’s image and had been given dominion over the rest of creation (Genesis 1:26). Solomon exercised authority over the animal kingdom by speaking as God had also spoken. This is perhaps the most remarkable statement made about Solomon.

Q: *How can humans rule over the earth responsibly?*

Q: *How does learning about God’s creation glorify Him?*

APPLICATION POINT – Humanity was made to have dominion over the rest of creation. Sin has made that dominion more challenging but has not taken it completely away. There are many people today who are concerned with humanity’s “footprint” in the world. They want to minimize or remove it, meaning they want to minimize any sign of humanity’s presence in nature. The idea is that people corrupt nature whenever and however they make their presence known. The Bible has a much different view of humanity’s role within God’s creation. In giving us dominion over nature, God authorized us to cultivate what He has made to make it better and to make it serve us. Our goal is not to minimize evidence of our presence but to use and develop what God has made for our benefit and for the benefit of others. We should look for raw materials in the earth and develop the technologies needed to use them for our benefit. We should scavenge the earth looking for new food supplies and medicines. Of course, when sin entered the picture, the possibility of abusing creation with our dominion became a possibility, and this is something Christians should take seriously. We need to consider whether our actions harm what God has made and create a less habitable place for us. Not taking these things into consideration would be a failure to have the dominion God intended. Like Solomon, Christians need to be knowledgeable of what God has made and rule it responsibly.

NEXT STEPS

Peter called us to be knowledgeable, and by “knowledge,” he included the knowledge of God’s will. Many Christians struggle to understand God’s will for their lives because they fail to see a connection between His will for all of creation and His will for their individual lives. On the top half of a piece of paper, write down your understanding of God’s will. At the bottom of the paper write down His will for your life. In the middle, explain how God’s will for your life is connected to His will for all of creation. Seeing these connections will help you grow in the knowledge of God’s will.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.

God, help me to grow in the knowledge of your will.

Lord Jesus, help me to know how deeply I depend on you for spiritual growth.

Father, give me a curiosity for the world you created. Help me to be knowledgeable of what you have done.

God, show me how all knowledge begins with you. Help me keep you at the center of all things.

