

ETERNAL LIFE AS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION



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Abstract. Spiritual formation currently lacks a robust epistemology. Christian theology and philosophy often spend more time devoted to an epistemology of propositions rather than an epistemology of knowing persons. This paper is an attempt to move toward a more robust account of knowing persons in general and God in particular. After working through various aspects of the nature of this type of knowledge this theory is applied to specific issues germane to spiritual formation, such as the justification of understanding spiritual growth on an integrative and holistic (heart and mind) model, the reality of hearing God's voice, and knowing his activity, as well as how such a theory should change the shape of sermons, evangelism, and apologetics.

Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD (Jer. 9:23–24).¹

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge, like wisdom, faith, hope, and love, is essential for a flourishing life.² In a general sense, knowledge reconciles and ties us to reality.

¹ All Scripture taken from NASB unless otherwise noted.

² I am very grateful to J. P. Moreland and Dallas Willard for many helpful discussions on the ideas in this paper and their encouragement to pursue the wider project this paper is a part of. I am also very grateful to Paul Moser and Michael David Hatcher for helpful comments on the first draft.

The same is true of the spiritual life. Without knowledge of God we perish (Hosea 4:6; Rom. 1:18–25) because full-blooded eternal life actually is *knowledge of God* (John 17:3). Theology and philosophy, however, largely attend to knowledge *about* facts, while knowledge *of* persons—knowing God, self, and others—has received far less consideration. Regrettably, knowledge of God is often reduced to something far less than knowledge, a kind of non-cognitive private experience. In this essay, I demonstrate the distinction between knowledge about things and people and knowledge of things and people. With special attention to knowledge of people, I draw into focus a variety of features this type of knowledge has and make special applications to knowing God and the life of discipleship. This project can be understood as developing an epistemology of knowing God in general and spiritual formation more specifically.

I. KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge, as Henry Holland puts it, brings us into communion with reality.³ It is, after all, the most reliable means of interacting with reality.⁴ More detailed accounts of knowledge will be given below. For now, I am content with considering what knowledge affords. According to Dallas Willard, more often than not:

(K) If person *S* has knowledge regarding *x*, then *S* has the ability to represent *x* as it is on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.⁵

Whatever it is in the details knowledge brings individuals into communion with reality in a way that is reliable, intentional, and communicable. The same cannot be said about mere belief.

Jesus, of course, understood this. He was far less interested in getting people to merely commit, believe, or profess belief.⁶ Instead, his ministry was characterized by making available knowledge of God and his kingdom. But, what exactly is it to have knowledge of God? Is it the kind of knowledge gained through the sciences? Is it some sort of non-cognitive, mystical, or merely emotional experience? Is it simply a relationship? When we press

³ Henry Holland, *The Philosophy of Faith and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Wilfrid Richmond (London: John Murray, 1920), 45.

⁴ This is especially true regarding moral knowledge. See Dallas Willard, “How Moral Knowledge Disappeared,” in *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009); and Willard’s forthcoming book, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*.

⁵ Dallas Willard, “Knowledge and Naturalism,” in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, eds. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31.

⁶ Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, 15–17.

into the issue I suspect the answer to these questions is no and that a robust account of knowing God is much more profound and penetrating. Consider the following knowledge statements:⁷

- (1) "Laura knows Jesus."
- (2) "Laura knows how to write about Jesus."
- (3) "Laura knows who Jesus is."
- (4) "Laura knows when Jesus lived."
- (5) "Laura knows that Jesus was raised from the dead."

These statements express different uses of the term "know." But, as we will discover, these statements express different types of knowledge.

Statements of the form "*S* knows that *p*" (where *S* is a person and *p* is any statement) are commonly taken to express propositional knowledge (PK), which is stated as follows:

(PK): *S* knows that *p* = *df.* *S* has knowledge of some proposition about *x* (i.e., for some proposition *p*, *p* is about *x*, and *S* knows *p*).⁸

A key feature of PK is that the object of knowledge is a true proposition or declarative statement. With this understanding we can evaluate the statements above. Most philosophers agree that every statement above, except for (1) and (2), are expressions of PK because what is known is a proposition.⁹

Clearly, (5) is an expression of propositional knowledge, as its object is the true proposition: "Jesus was raised from the dead." Likewise, (3) expresses knowing true propositions about Jesus: that Jesus is God, that Jesus was a carpenter from Nazareth, that Jesus was a brilliant rabbi, that Jesus died for the sins of the world, among so many other things. Similarly, in (4) what is being known is a proposition regarding when Jesus lived.

What then of (1) and (2)? Classically, (2) has been understood as an expression of *know-how*, understood as follows:

(KH): *S* knows how to *A* = *df.* *S* is able to *A*.

⁷ This is a modification of the list given in, Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 8–9.

⁸ PK may in some cases include a constituent knowledge by acquaintance as stated below. The semantic value of propositions with *de re* concepts such as, a color concept or a pain concept may require KA for the knower. For example, the semantic value of the term "blue," if I am going to know that "the door is blue," requires that I have KA of blue. Thus, we have the distinction between mere PK and PK with a KA constituent. For the purposes of this paper, I am primarily concerned with mere PK.

⁹ This is not recognized only by epistemologists, however. The French language, for example, has specific words for these two kinds of knowledge: *connaître* (to know a person) and *savoir* (to know a fact).

When a child learns how to ride a bike, they typically do so with very little or no propositional knowledge about how to ride a bike. Rather, they are shown how to ride a bike and given the opportunity to learn the skill through practice. Clearly they know how to ride a bike, although they lack the propositional knowledge associated with bike riding. Similarly, I know how to juggle, but lack the propositional knowledge about the physics of juggling. Accordingly, (2) expresses a non-propositional type of knowledge. There is another kind of knowledge expressed by (1). Consider the following case. Sarah is an astute biographer and omniscient with respect to facts about my daughter, Alyssia. However, Sarah has never met Alyssia. After publishing her book on Alyssia, Sarah and I meet. It would not strike us as odd for me to say something like, "Excellent book, Sarah. I learned a lot about Alyssia, but you really do not know her." Further, imagine Sarah meets Alyssia and they spend the day together. Does Sarah come to know anything during that time? Presumably she does, and what she learns is something like what Sarah previously lacked. As Richard Feldman points out,

No matter how many facts you know about a person, it does not follow that you know the person. Knowing a person or a thing is being acquainted with that person or thing, not having propositional knowledge about the person or thing.¹⁰

When Sarah encounters Alyssia, she becomes acquainted with her and thereby comes to know Alyssia in a way not captured by her propositional knowledge about her. This is the type of knowledge (1) expresses. My wife, Laura, knows Jesus in a way that is neither propositional, nor know-how. Laura is *acquainted* with Jesus, such that she has knowledge *of* Jesus. This type of knowledge is broadly characterized as follows:

(KA) S knows x = broadly means: (i) S is directly acquainted with X, where X is a real world object or agent; and (ii) X provides a prominent evidential role in the non-inferential, immediate justification with respect to S's knowledge of X.¹¹

This type of knowledge is commonly referred to as *knowledge by acquaintance* (KA) and has been recognized at least as far back as Plato.¹² The details of (i) and (ii) are attended to in section 2.

¹⁰ Feldman, *Epistemology*, 11.

¹¹ In certain cases KA can include a conceptual component. In these cases S is acquainted with x as y. For example, I am acquainted with the cup in front of me as my cup of coffee. My non-conceptual KA of the cup brings with it my conceptual KA of the cup as my coffee cup. Hence, we have mere KA and KA with conceptual content. This paper makes use of both, but focuses on mere KA primarily.

¹² Francisco J. Gonzales, "Nonpropositional Knowledge in Plato," *Aperion* XXXI, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 235–84.

Notice, I have not offered a definition of knowledge by acquaintance but rather a basic characterization. I am not convinced one can provide sufficient conditions for knowledge by acquaintance. I understand KA to be *sui generis*—of its own kind—and not reducible to know-how or PK. Rather than offer a definition, we can describe the characteristics involved in specific cases of KA and perhaps suggest general conditions, some of which may be necessary, but not exhaustive nor sufficient. *This is achieved by being acquainted with acquaintance, and attending to its phenomenological, ontological, and logical structure. Doing so affords one knowledge by acquaintance through the phenomenon of acquaintance itself.*¹³

To summarize, there is a distinct type of knowledge—knowledge by acquaintance—that is not reducible to propositional knowledge or know-how.¹⁴ This type of knowledge captures a significant aspect of what it means to know a person. In the following section, the much-needed philosophical work is done to explain various essential features of KA. In section 3, I make specific applications of this philosophical work in regards to the transformative life of abiding in Christ.

2. ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE

The contemporary conversation concerning types of knowledge typically makes use of knowledge by acquaintance as a means of distinguishing propositional knowledge, but much more can, and indeed should, be said about KA. To be clear, I am not defending the view of any one thinker. In fact, I have reservations about the details of Russell's theory, for example. Rather, I am drawing from a range of phenomena and philosophical work to reveal a range of characteristics of KA.

2.1 KA as Encounter

Knowledge by acquaintance demands *personal presence*—first hand familiarity. In turn KA necessarily involves an encounter, the direct experience—in many cases the interaction—with the object or agent being known. Encounter is a rich event while experiences are often quite thin. Encounter allows the knower to grasp the object or agent. Willard writes,

Knowledge “at a distance,” knowing certain “facts” about something, doesn't amount to knowing it. It therefore does not have the same

¹³ Richard Fumerton, *Metaphysical and Epistemological Problems of Perception* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 38.

¹⁴ This alone has done much to reveal the prevailing views of knowledge (naturalism and postmodernism) that push Jesus and his church into an ill-perceived irrelevance for life as both shallow and fictitious.

power over life . . . Only the later [knowledge by acquaintance] is the interactive relationship, the “reality hook,” that gives us a grasp of the person or the thing “itself.”¹⁵

This is exactly what is demonstrated in the previous case. Sarah grasps or understands Alyssia in a way that her exhaustive knowledge of facts about Alyssia did not afford her. To really grasp Alyssia, Sarah needed to encounter Alyssia, to be acquainted with her. This is perhaps the most fundamental feature of KA. To be clear, this is much more than mere experience. Knowledge by acquaintance involves an encounter of a particular kind and quality that involves the following traits which go deeper than mere experience.

2.2 KA, the Given and Direct Awareness

Bertrand Russell, the philosopher responsible for the term “knowledge by acquaintance,” explains: “I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object; i.e., when I am directly aware of that object itself.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, he states, “I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation.”¹⁷ At work in the background here is what is referred to as the *givenness* and the *given* of the object being known. Accordingly, an object of perception or experience of some agent or object x (the intentional object) is given in perception or experience in virtue of the givenness x has. The givenness of an object is the property the object has in virtue of which it is given.¹⁸ More specifically,

x is given to a person, $S =_{df.}$ S is immediately aware of x , and x can play a prominent evidential role in the non-inferential, immediate justification of a foundational belief.¹⁹

For S to be directly acquainted with x just means that S 's acquaintance with x is neither mediated through nor inferred from anything. That is, S is immediately aware of x just in case S has a mental state M that is directly

¹⁵ Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, 141.

¹⁶ Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (1929; repr., New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1988), 209.

¹⁷ Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, 210.

¹⁸ Steven L. Porter, *Restoring the Foundations of Epistemic Justification: A Direct Realist and Conceptualist Theory of Foundationalism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 59.

¹⁹ Paul K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 186.

intentionally directed at x . My direct awareness of the cup on my desk, for example, does not require and is not mediated through a concept of a cup or inferred from a chain of beliefs leading me to believe there is a cup in front of me. I simply see the cup.

To clarify, being acquainted with a given object does not entail that one is acquainted with every aspect of the object. That I have KA of an intentional object x does not mean x is wholly present to me or that all of the constituents of that object are wholly present to me. The most obvious cases have to do with persons. Just because I am acquainted with my wife does not entail that I am acquainted with every aspect of her or her character. Neither does it follow that because I am not acquainted with every aspect of my wife, I am not acquainted with her.²⁰

2.3 KA, Concepts and Language

Because KA is non-inferentially justified and direct, it is not necessarily conceptual or propositional. In fact, one can have KA of some object or agent x without possessing the conceptual or linguistic resources to represent x .²¹ Although KA can enable a conceptual state it need not do so.²² This has been confirmed in psychological studies of infants who completely lack language yet have the ability to know and recognize their mother, even replicating facial expressions as early as one day old.²³ There is also fascinating neuroscientific evidence demonstrating this. For example, individuals with *associative agnosia*, which is typically due to damage in the occipitotemporal region of either brain hemispheres, can correctly perceive objects presented visually, evidenced by their ability to successfully perform basic tasks with those objects. However, individuals with associative agnosia lack the ability to identify or describe the object's definitive attributes linguistically.²⁴ While they perceive the object, they do not perceive the object through their conception of it.

²⁰ Fumerton, *Metaphysical and Epistemological Problems of Perception*, 59.

²¹ Richard Fumerton, "Classical Foundationalism," in *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*, ed. Michael R. DePaul (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 13.

²² This is most clearly distinguished between cases of being acquainted with P (which is non-conceptual and non-propositional) and knowing P by acquaintance (which is in part conceptual and propositional).

²³ Eleonore Stump sights the recent collection of papers on these studies in, Naomi Eilan et al. eds., *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy of Psychology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

²⁴ Marie T. Banich and Rebecca J. Compton, *Cognitive Neuroscience*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), 183–85.

In this way, KA is deeply relational as the relation between the two relata (person and world or person and person) is directly encountered.²⁵ More specifically,

(C) If one is directly acquainted with x , then one is aware of x in such a way that one does not need propositional or conceptual relations to x , or any other intermediaries in one's awareness of x .²⁶

Of course, it does not follow that in instances of KA, concepts or propositions cannot accompany acts of acquaintance, only that concepts do not act as a lens through which the act of acquaintance itself occurs.²⁷ That is, the occurrent mental state M that is of the intentional object x has non-conceptual content.²⁸ Concepts do not stand between us and the world, and they certainly do not create the world.²⁹ Even in cases of seeing an entity as *so-and-so*, it does not follow that my seeing the entity must be as *so-and-so*. My seeing an entity as *so-and-so* can be revised in virtue of closer examination.³⁰ If I have an awareness of a statue of an owl as an owl I am mistaken. However, I can come close and realize the statue does not fly away and come to be aware of the statue as a statue. All the while, however, I am always aware of the statue.

In the positive sense, concepts aid in habituating attention toward objects and agents acquaintance. Our concepts, for better or for worse, often condition that of which we are aware. If I have an accurate conception of a sunset I know when and where to focus my attention to encounter a sunset. This is the case because the essence of a concept is that it necessarily portrays the nature of the thing the concept is of.³¹ Hence, if my character is

²⁵ It is worth pointing out that KA is inherently at odds with varieties of postmodernism. A central tenant of postmodern thought is the notion that all perception is theory laden, and, consequently, one's presuppositions are irrevocably blinded by culture, race, sex, and necessarily stand between one's perceptions of reality and reality itself. However, it is becoming clear that knowledge by acquaintance is a legitimate form of knowledge that is direct, unmediated, and non-conceptual.

²⁶ Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 186.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ For more on non-conceptual content, see Walter Hopp, "How to Think about Nonconceptual Content," *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 10 (2010): 1–24; and "Conceptualism and the Myth of the Given," *European Journal of Philosophy* 17 (2009): 363–85.

²⁹ See Dallas Willard, "How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The 'God's Eye View' Vindicated?" *Philosophia Christi* 2, vol. 1, no. 2 (1999): 5–20.

³⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Role of Concepts in Our Access to Reality," in *The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science*, eds. Bruce L. Gordon and William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011), 266–67.

³¹ Dallas Willard, *Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge: A Study in Husserl's Early Philosophy* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984), 23–26.

formed such that I am morally and spiritual sensitive to injustice, I am more likely to be aware of cases of injustice. In the phenomenology of acts of knowing, Edmund Husserl demonstrated that one finds that something is as it has been thought of; that the intentionality—the aboutness quality—of our thoughts or concepts has been fulfilled.³² That is, in acts of knowing, we experience the fulfillment of our thought of something as accurately representing how we thought of that thing. Accordingly, a thought is possible of fulfillment when it is possible for the intentional object to be experienced. Likewise, our intentions are fulfilled when the object intended is actually experienced. The experience of fulfillment, even when only partial, informs us of the accuracy of our concepts. The more detailed and accurate our concepts are, in consequence of fulfillment, the more able we are to reliably gain knowledge and be acquainted with a variety of important objects and people.

2.4 *KA and the Causal Acquaintance Principle*

J. P. Moreland has recently made a fascinating point regarding KA, offering what he calls the Causal-Acquaintance Principle (CA). CA states that necessarily, if a subject *S* has knowledge by acquaintance with a causal fact *x*, then *S* has knowledge by acquaintance with the relevant causal object *y*.³³ Moreland offers the following example: “If *S* is directly aware of a hammer’s causing a nail to move (the causal fact), then *s* is directly aware of the hammer.”³⁴ *S*’s direct awareness of the hammer moving the nail affords *S* knowledge that the hammer caused the nail to move. Consequently, the relevant phenomenological seemings and appearances of the encounter or experience of the hammer moving the nail justify one’s belief in propositions such as, “I have the strong appearance of a hammer’s causing a nail to move.”³⁵ The justificatory role of phenomenological seemings and appearing is central to knowledge by acquaintance, and although Moreland develops this principle with respect to knowledge of one’s self, there are profound implications for knowledge of God which I explore in section 3.2.

³² Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findley (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2: see investigation 6.

³³ J. P. Moreland, “Substance Dualism and the Argument from Self-Awareness,” *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 1 (2011): 28. Moreland represents this as: (CA) $\square (s)(x)(y)(K_a sx \rightarrow K_a sy)$ where *s* ranges over knowing subjects, *x* ranges over causal facts, *y* ranges over the associated causal objects that constitute their causal facts, and *K_a* is “has knowledge by acquaintance with.”

³⁴ Moreland, “Substance Dualism and the Argument from Self-Awareness,” 28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

2.5 Knowledge by Acquaintance with Persons

As I have mentioned, we have knowledge by acquaintance with a variety of things, such as, colors, qualia, the contents of consciousness, and a whole host of extra-mental things such as doors, trees, and chairs. One way to differentiate types of KA is to distinguish the various intentional objects. There is, for example, KA of truths, which according to Richard Fumerton, “is knowledge made possible by direct acquaintance with truth makers and (more controversially) the correspondence between truth bearers and truth makers.”³⁶ This is a very important point, because it implies a non-naturalistic KA with truth itself, which provides good reason to reject the prevailing naturalistic truncation of knowledge that includes only the hard sciences and makes no room for knowledge of the spiritual life as well as the postmodern rejection of knowledge.

What I am most interested in here is KA of persons. This specific type of KA has very unique features. Eleonore Stump draws out some of these features by contrasting Frank Jackson’s Mary thought experiment³⁷ with a modified version of her own. In Jackson’s thought experiment, Mary is a neuroscientist who is omniscient with respect to facts about the brain and how it processes color. Mary, imprisoned by a villain, has never had a perceptual experience of color since birth, but after escaping imprisonment perceives color for the first time. Does she come to know anything new? It seems clear that she does, but she does so in the acquaintance sense, not in the propositional sense.

Stump invites us to imagine that in her imprisoned state Mary learns everything science can teach her about humans from books but has never interacted or seen a human. Suppose she even knows a great deal about her mother whom she has never met. Upon being rescued, Mary is united with her mother who loves her very much. For the first time, Mary will come to know what it is like to be loved by another. Stump writes,

And this will be new for her, even if in her isolated state she had as complete a scientific description as possible of what a human being feels like when she senses that she is loved by someone else . . . Mary will also come to know what it is like to be touched by someone else, to be surprised by someone else, to ascertain someone else’s mood, to de-

³⁶ Richard Fumerton, “Knowledge by Acquaintance vs. Description,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/knowledge-acquaintdescrip/> (accessed spring of 2011).

³⁷ This thought experiment was first introduced in Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 137 (April 1982): 127–136; and more fully developed in, “What Mary Didn’t Know,” *Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 5 (May 1986): 291–95.

tect affect in the melody of someone else's voice, to match thought for thought in conversation, and so on.³⁸

In addition, Mary will come to know her mother—have knowledge *of* her mother—not just what it is like to know and experience her mother. She will have what Stump calls a second-person experience.³⁹

2.6 KA, Truth and Degrees of Knowledge

Truth is a constituent of propositional knowledge. You cannot have PK of something that is false, because the object of PK is a fact. However, the object of knowledge by acquaintance is not a fact, but rather the real world objects to which facts refer. To clarify this, consider the ontology of truth. The proposition, expressed in the sentence, “The door is closed,” is true if the real world state of affairs of the door being closed obtains. If the door is actually closed, the proposition expressed in the sentence, “The door is closed,” is true. Truth is then a property of propositions. Now, if I have knowledge by acquaintance of the door being closed, this can only be the case if the door (the real world object) is actually closed. One can only have knowledge by acquaintance of real world objects and the actual states of affairs that obtain regarding those real world object. If the door is closed at t_1 I cannot have KA of that that door being opened at t_1 . As such, KA can only refer to what is real.

Secondly, knowledge is a degreed property, meaning that one does not need certainty in order to have knowledge. Knowledge does not require *psychological certainty*: the complete conviction that one's belief is true. Neither does knowledge require *epistemic certainty*: that one's belief is grounded on the best possible evidence or reasons. For example, right now I have a great deal of evidence that my car is parked in the garage, and if it is true that my car is in the garage, then I know that my car is in the garage, even though it is possible that my car is not there. This is a standard feature of knowledge.⁴⁰

Knowledge by acquaintance is likewise a degreed property. Although, it is possible the door is not closed, I can still have KA of the door being

³⁸ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁰ Notice that one can have *psychologically certainty* even if their belief is false. Likewise, one can have *epistemic certainty* without having psychological certainty. Such a person may not even know that they have epistemic certainty even though they have it. This can be helpful for people to understand, because they know many things without knowing that they know or feeling certain. However, when they come to know that they know, they experience a type of confidence and trust that aids a life of discipleship that mere emotions cannot sustain.

open, provided I have direct acquaintance of the door being open *and the door is actually open*. Moreover, my direct acquaintance need not be accompanied by certainty (psychologically or epistemologically). If I have KA, I do so regardless of what I think about my certainty with respect to having KA. I can have some doubt or hesitation about attributing to myself KA of *x*, although I do in fact have KA of *x*. The strength or degree of my KA can however be assessed, just as cases of perception can. We do not adopt skepticism about our visual perception, even though we could be and have in the past been mistaken. The same is true regarding knowledge in general and KA in particular.

In summary, knowledge by acquaintance is the type of knowledge we have of other persons and of our self along with other kinds of objects. It is direct knowledge, not dependent on language or concepts, which is gained through encounter and often interaction with reality and does not require certainty.

3. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE

3.1 *Distinct Types of Knowledge in Scripture*

With some reflection, it is not too difficult to see how KA relates to knowledge of God. It fits quite naturally. One can have a great deal of propositional knowledge about God, while not having ever known God in the KA sense.⁴¹ Paul himself recognizes and makes use of this distinction.⁴² Philippians 3:9–10 explains that knowing God is not propositional, but being acquainted with God, as is knowing the power of the resurrection of Jesus and what it is like to have fellowship in his sufferings. In Philippians 4:12 Paul says, “I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty.” His knowledge here is of being acquainted with having little and with having plenty. Similarly, 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Clearly, Jesus has PK regarding the nature of sin, although he is not acquainted with performing acts of sin.

According to Matthew 7:22–23 Jesus will say to some, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” Of course, Jesus knows about these individuals in

⁴¹ Moser’s discussion of this aspect of knowing God is powerful. See Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153–158.

⁴² Ian Scott’s discussion of this is very helpful in his, *Paul’s Way of Knowing: Story, Experience and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 143–156. However, Scott refers to this as a non-cognitive way of knowing. This is a misnomer since our cognitive faculties are fully engaged in such an interactive relationship. I contend knowledge by acquaintance correctly depicts what is actually going on. A deeper understanding of the epistemology and ontology of knowledge involved would have benefited Scott’s work significantly.

the propositional sense, but he does not know them in the acquaintance sense as his disciple. These individuals do not have the knowledge of God that is eternal life (John 17:3). Lastly, Stump persuasively argues that those such as Job, Samson, Abraham, and Mary of Bethany each enjoyed a profound life-altering KA of God, which could not have been gained through propositional knowledge about God.⁴³

3.2 *Jesus' Knowledge of God*

Consider how Jesus knew God, specifically as revealed in his baptism. Jesus knew the Father in a unique loving relationship of encounters with him. Jesus knew he was the beloved Son of the Father, and he related with him as such. This is instructive for us. We are to know the Father as Jesus did, in a loving relationship of profound interaction and encounter where we learn to trust him in the deepest sense possible. Consequently, Jesus used the trust of little children as our example (Mark 10:13–16; Matt. 19:13–15; Luke 18:15–17). Children trust in virtue of stable, loving encounters with their parents. The quality of their trust corresponds to the quality of these encounters.

There is a cultural tendency to drive a wedge between knowledge and relationship. This is almost always held in virtue of its popularity rather than any real discovery. On the one side, it is insisted, is cold hard knowledge, and on the other is warm loving relationship. According to some, the Christian life is one of relationship not knowledge. I suggest this is so far removed from the life and teaching of Jesus that the Apostles would find such a claim puzzling and perhaps even dangerous. First, as I have argued, this distinction is artificial with respect to KA as KA of persons involves relationship.

Secondly, knowledge and love are so intimately tied together that we can only be loved to the degree that we are known, and we can only love another to the degree that we know them. This is just as true of knowing and loving others as it is of knowing and loving our selves. *The truth as that love requires knowledge, and therefore, cannot be estranged from it.*

Lastly, in the life and teaching of Jesus we see there is a particular type of knowledge (KA) which makes relationships possible such that if you completely reject this way of knowing you are either unable to enter into the relationship or have a low esteem of such relationships. Jesus embraced and made available a large variety of knowledge, one of which (KA) is in its essence relational. The failure to recognize the availability of knowledge of God is parasitic on the spiritual life (Hosea 4:6). The recent tendency to eschew knowledge is to eschew the very life Jesus lived and offers us all in his

⁴³ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, chapters 9–12.

kingdom.⁴⁴ The phenomenon among Christians to largely live their lives according to the ideas and infatuations of cultural icons and celebrities rather than Jesus is tied to their rejection of Jesus as one who offers knowledge in all its forms, but especially knowledge of God.

3.3 *KA of God and Interactive Relationship*

According to Thomas Reid, “There is no kind of knowledge that tends so much to elevate the mind as the knowledge of God.”⁴⁵ This is, at least in part, because knowledge of God requires an encounter with the most wonderful person that could ever possibly exist, and encounter changes us. Recall that knowledge by acquaintance involves the direct experience or interaction of the knower with the object being known. In application, if we are to know God in the eternal life sense it will be by acquaintance, which requires us to step into a life of interactive relationship with God. We cannot know him at a distance. However, because one can have KA of someone after they have the encounter, one need not always be interacting with God in order to enjoy the knowledge of God that is eternal life.

The reality of God’s desire for us to encounter him powerfully demonstrates God’s profound love for us. He simply wants more for us than to know him from afar where we are left untouched and unchanged. Moser argues,

As compassionate, God is not satisfied by our merely knowing that God exists. Such mere propositional knowledge falls short of what God values by way of redemption: namely, that all people freely choose to be transformed by God from self-serving to self-giving, loving servants of the God of morally serious love.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Some have seen relationality as cause to reject the traditional “modern” notion of knowledge in favor of the new enlightenment thought of postmodernism. Let me just say that this move is entirely unwarranted. For one thing, many epistemologists think of knowledge by acquaintance as part of the foundation that justifies all other kinds of knowledge. I find much agreement with this view. Secondly, because KA is distinct from PK and KH it is not clear that the validity of KA could possibly undermine PK or KH. Lastly, the Scriptures are teeming with propositional knowledge about God, humanity, and how to live well, among many other things. A great deal of the ministries of Jesus and Paul were spent teaching PK in order to draw people into KA.

⁴⁵ Thomas Reid, “Natural Theology: Lecture 73,” *Thomas Reid’s Lectures on Natural Theology*, ed. Elmer H. Duncan (1780; repr. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 1.

⁴⁶ Paul K. Moser, “Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding,” in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, eds. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 140.

That knowing God is accurately understood as knowledge by acquaintance communicates to us that his love is so profound he will not leave us forever at a distance. Although, God values that we know he exists, he is not pleased with us *merely knowing* that he exists.⁴⁷ He desires for us to be caught up in his love, his life, his kingdom, thereby transforming us at the core of our being. Conversely, rejecting knowledge of God—or even propositional knowledge about God—results in losing an interactive life with God (Rom. 1:19–24). True, God will not force himself on us and will at times withdraw, but only in so far as it aids us in knowing him deeper in a lifetime punctuated by encounters.

Lastly, consider what it means to know Jesus as explained in the New Testament. Paul tells us that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, which penetrates darkness, is found in the face of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6). Regarding this passage James Stewart states,

“The light if the knowledge of the glory of God is”—where? In your dusty books, your neatly tabulated articles, your controversial documents? No! The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is “on the face of Jesus Christ,” which means that the only way to know anything about God is to go and see Jesus for yourself.⁴⁸

Without the distinction between PK and KA, Stewart’s statement is false. We can know many things about God apart from seeing Jesus, but only in the propositional sense. It is true, however, in the acquaintance sense, that seeing Jesus is necessary for such knowledge of the glory of God. Again, this is how Jesus knew the Father, not merely in the propositional sense, but in the acquaintance sense as well.⁴⁹ This is beautifully displayed in the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22). Indeed, Jesus’ sense of sonship was at the core of his self-understanding.⁵⁰

3.4 *God, the Given and Direct Awareness*

The non-conceptual and non-propositional features of KA make it possible to have profound experiences of God without possessing any requisite

⁴⁷ Here I slightly part ways with Moser, as I hold a higher view of natural theology than it seems he does.

⁴⁸ James S. Stewart, “Hearsay or Experience?” in *The Gates of New Life* (London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 55.

⁴⁹ See, Paul K. Moser, “Jesus on Knowledge of God,” *Christian Scholars Review* 28, no. 4 (1999): 586–604.

⁵⁰ For an excellent treatment of Jesus’ experience of God as his Father, see, James G. D. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (1975; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 11–37.

complex conception of God. Children, for example, perceive a large variety of things (trees, the sun, a computer, their parents, their reflection), and they do so without any concepts of those things. Rather, they see these things directly. Likewise, we can have direct experiences of God where we simply receive his presence in whatever way he wishes without preconception. Our concepts are no barrier or defeater to his presence, although his presence may challenge and change our concepts. Consider the two on the road to Emmaus who did not see Jesus *as* Jesus, but nonetheless had a profound transforming encounter with Jesus (Luke 24:13–35).

There is still another interesting feature of KA that may have significant implications. Recall that according to Moreland's causal acquaintance principle, if person *S* is directly aware of a hammer's causing a nail to move (the causal fact), then *S* is directly aware of the hammer (the causal object).⁵¹ In application, if I am aware of the activity of Spirit within me, I am aware of more than the activity (the causal fact), I am also aware of the Spirit (the causal agent). Moreover, *I am justified in believing that the Spirit is active within me (speaking to me in prayer, for example) in virtue of the relevant phenomenological seemings and appearances that are unique to such experiences, as they are consistent with Scripture.*⁵²

A significant element that is relevant for me to know that God is speaking to me is that I become aware of the evidential value of the phenomenology associated with my experience of God, as well as his character and purposes as revealed in Scripture and the history of the church. The more aware I become of the evidential value of these phenomenological seemings and appearances, the more confidence I will have that God is speaking to me, or that his presence has come on another as I pray for them. This is part of the formative project of attunement to the voice and activity of the Spirit in my conscious mental life and my character. The importance of pneumatological realism—the reality of the Spirit's work in the world, my life, and the life of others—is paramount to such a life.

3.5 *The Phenomenological Character of KA of God*

Closely connected with the given is the specific phenomenological characteristics of what is given or presented in KA. Accordingly, when I have KA of another person, I am acquainted with them in such a way that their personality is part of the givenness of the experience. I am acquainted with them in a different way than I am with non-living things. There is some-

⁵¹ Moreland, "Substance Dualism and the Argument from Self-Awareness," 27.

⁵² Of course, this justification is defeasible. If there is enough evidence contrary to the Spirit being active within me, then the evidence of the phenomenological seemings will be overcome. However, this does not give us reason to reject the evidential value of relevant phenomenological seemings.

thing more intimate going on where we experience God. H. P. Owen says this well,

Now, this basic experience of God can be accompanied by its own feeling-tone. The feeling I have in mind is constituted simply and solely by the reality of the object. In being aware of God we can, not merely intuit God's existence as the *ens realissimum* . . . but also feel, or sense it.⁵³

In direct acquaintance with God I become aware of his felt tone—the texture of his manifest presence—which will always have a sense of life, love, peace, wisdom, and joy. “Firsthand evidence of the divine Spirit's presence, then,” Moser explains, “involves a kind of manifested power foreign to natural expectations. This foreign power is divine self-giving love . . .”⁵⁴ This direct acquaintance with God and his loving felt tone serves a profoundly potent transformative purpose. Acquaintance with love is a means of knowing God. Being grounded in love, I *comprehend*, to the best of my abilities, the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17–18) and gain a *true knowledge* of him (Col. 2:2). This direct acquaintance with the love of God provides a non-propositional cognitive foundation for knowledge of God, of his activity, and of his reality.⁵⁵

Moreover, we are known by God in the very act of knowing and loving him (1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9). That is, included in these encounters with God (as with human persons) we are enabled to have the awareness that we are also being known. This is not inferred, but directly and intimately perceived. We directly experience being seen and being known by God. That is, we have KA of God and KA of our encounter with God being aware of us. Additionally there is what Stump calls *dyadic joint attention*: the awareness one has of another person being aware of their awareness of their awareness of them.⁵⁶ Both individuals are aware of each other's awareness of each other being aware of them. Consequently, I am aware of God and simultaneously aware of our mutual awareness of each other. Likewise, God is aware of me, and simultaneously of our mutual awareness of each other.

To be truly seen is rare for many of us. To be aware of being truly seen is both rare and profoundly transformative. This has substantial implications and explains, for one thing, why coming to know God can be profoundly healing and requires trust/faith. In experiencing the presence of God the disciple of Jesus becomes acquainted with being seen and known by God. The felt texture of this encounter will be loving, receptive, and affirming. We experience being seen in our depths by the One who sees all, and, moreover, we are not rejected but received, cherished, and poured into. This is, of course, what we all desperately desire and need.

⁵³ H. P. Owen, *The Christian Knowledge of God* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), 191–92.

⁵⁴ Moser, *The Elusive God*, 147.

⁵⁵ Paul K. Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 136.

⁵⁶ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 116–18.

3.6 *KA of God and Conceptual Analysis*

Recall that concepts habituate attention toward objects and agents of acquaintance. In seeking out specific objects or agents of acquaintance, such as God, having accurate concepts of God, self, and the nature of spiritual formation, are quite valuable. Again, Husserl's insight is helpful: in acts of knowing, one finds that something is as it has been thought of. *Acts of knowing produce trust and confidence in God and that one is actually coming to know God.* For example, if I have the accurate concept that I can take my brokenness to God in humility and repentance, then I will be able to experience the love and acceptance of God. If I had a different concept of how to approach God in my brokenness, I would not be able to enjoy KA of God in my brokenness. I might not ever take my brokenness to him. However, if we understand God as the source of life, that accurate conception will contribute to encountering him as such. The role of understanding evidence as evidence and knowing that one knows cannot be overlooked or underestimated. Such realizations are a wellspring of life and cultivate spiritual formation as they uniquely produce confidence in God and his kingdom.

A very practical implication follows. Although it is popular to talk about concepts and worldviews as functioning like lenses or glasses we look at the world through, this analogy is simply not true. If concepts or worldviews function like lenses, they stand between the world and us, and there is no direct, unmediated knowledge of anything. Consequently, KA of God, self, and others is simply unattainable. However, if what I have argued is correct, then concepts and worldviews function much more like a map that we use to look at the world with, but not through. The glasses analogy is not only false but also unhelpful, especially regarding spiritual formation. Notice that nothing needs to change in me in order for me to change how I see the world on the glasses analogy. I only need to have on the correct glasses. But this divorces inner transformation from the life of the mind. What I need is not a new set of glasses, but a new heart, which will enable me to see, and a map, as it were, to show me what is available in which I can participate.

3.7 *KA of God and the Human Will*

KA commonly does not coercively force itself on anyone. In fact, knowledge in general is not forced on individuals.⁵⁷ Likewise, God is non-coercive in how he makes himself known. He may intrude our life for our

⁵⁷ There are of course expectations, such as, knowledge of my own existence. This can also come in degrees, such as the coercive presence of an individual, which does force knowledge on us. However, in most cases knowledge is not forced, and we can suppress, ignore, and self-deceive to evade knowledge as well as preclude our selves from becoming well suited for knowing.

benefit, but he does not coerce us into knowing him. Rather, we are invited to surrender our will in order to know and interact with God and become, what Moser calls, “volitionally attuned to God’s transforming Spirit.”⁵⁸

This type of reasoning is true of any knowledge discipline. The chemist does not get to decide how she will come to know the elements. Rather, based on the specific nature of any element there is an appropriate way one must yield to it if one is going to gain knowledge of it. One’s volition must act in concert with the nature of the object or person one wishes to know. One must resign their presuppositions and receive the object or the individual as they are, rather than as they want or expect them to be. Consequently, the character of the individual plays a central role in the depth of knowledge by acquaintance they can have. The formation of one’s will is crucial to one’s intellectual functioning.⁵⁹ This is why acquiring knowledge requires humility of spirit. Here we are brought back to the importance of spiritual formation for progress in knowledge of God. There are a great many things we are afraid to know and know about and doing so requires the work of the Spirit to help us grow in knowledge.⁶⁰

4. KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE AND THE LIFE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The implications for what I have presented are far reaching. For example, knowledge by acquaintance is much more plausible given a substance dualist view of human persons. For example, KA is richly phenomenal in nature and as the hard problem of consciousness shows it seems impossible for a physical being to have phenomenal states. I take this as further confirmation of Willard’s thesis that understanding the immaterial nature of the human spirit is crucial for failing to do so makes developing a detailed model of spiritual formation impossible.⁶¹ While many other significant implications follow, the project I have in mind here is to work out the consequences of KA regarding the life of the disciple, and I imagine they are just as far reaching.

⁵⁸ Moser, *The Elusive God*, 157.

⁵⁹ Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), part 1 especially.

⁶⁰ For an excellent article on this see, Stephen C. Evans, “Wisdom as Conceptual Understanding: A Christian Platonist Understanding,” *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (October 2010): 369–81.

⁶¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 82; also, 75, and 79.

4.1 *The Intelligibility of Faith and Discipleship*

First, characterizing encounters of God and the life of faith in terms of knowledge by acquaintance will make those aspects of the Christian life more intelligible. Too often this aspect of life in Christ is thought of as completely non-cognitive, which is both false, as I have argued, and fuels the common frustration with one's lack of growth that such beliefs reliably produce. If we eschew non-cognitive views of faith and adopt a KA approach three insightful analogies emerge: the relationships in marriage, family, and close friendship.⁶² Roberta Bondi writes,

A knowledge of God cannot be taught or learned apart from living out a life that is a reflection of who God is . . . Knowledge of God does not consist of a set of answers to a list of questions. It is more like the way a wife knows her husband, or a husband knows his wife . . . It is a knowledge that grows out of living together, responding to each other's daily interests and needs, being shaped by deep caring for the other. It is a transforming knowledge.⁶³

It is easy to understand how one grows in trust for their spouse, parent, child, or close friend. It is in accord to the degree they interact with them and come to know them as worthy of trust. Said differently, we come to have an appropriate faith (trust, confidence) in others to the degree that we have come to know them by acquaintance as safe. Moreover, the good parent and the good spouse will not be willing to offer only propositional knowledge about themselves. Those with absent parents know this all too well. A loving parent, like a loving God, will offer an interactive life with their children that cultivates trust. The nature of faith in the Christian life understood in virtue of KA is not so otherworldly, but intelligible, relatable, and can be seen as attainable.

One practical implication that follows is that the whole church service (sermon, worship, prayer, sacraments), if they are going to help people grow in faith—their knowledge of God, must be intentionally crafted in order to make KA available to everyone who is open. It simply is not helpful to explain, for example, that we ought to pray more or share stories of others who took prayer more seriously. What we need to do is help people come to know who they are in their depths and thereby come to understand why they do not pray, why they are afraid to depend on love, why they look to other things than Christ for safety and provision. That is, we need to

⁶² For an excellent treatment of the analogy of knowing others in friendship and knowing God in faith, see, H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Press, 1929), 52–56.

⁶³ Roberta C. Bondi, *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 101.

make available to others KA of themselves and of God if we are to help them flourish as a kingdom people with Jesus as teacher.

4.2 *Agents of Acquaintance*

There are also profound implications for what we consider the task of the disciple in evangelism. Evidence, as I have just argued, is of central concern to the Christian life. Evidence can come in the form of argument (Acts 14:15–17, 17:16–32; 1 Cor. 15), which can and does persuade some to faith (Acts 17:2–4), but also comes in firsthand KA of the Spirit of God. There is also KA of those who have been transformed by the Spirit and live in the kingdom of God with graceful transparency. These people can, as Moser says, “[P]ersonally, saliently, and veridically manifest the reality of God’s loving character to others, even if somewhat indirectly.”⁶⁴ One main dimension of the Gospel of the kingdom of God is that God can deal with our sins and our character that is habituated toward sin, and he can and will do so right now. As a result, our character and how people experience us will provide a type of non-propositional evidence for the truth of Christianity that is rooted in their KA of us.

The Christian apologist, for example, should learn to deal in the full commodity of the kingdom. Argument is vital for many, but alone will not do, as it is impotent with respect to KA. We must display, when appropriate and without coercion, the availability of knowing God through logical arguments as well as the love and power of Jesus by the activity of the Spirit in us. Kindness and compassion for others as we walk beside them in intellectual struggles provides a type of comfort and connection with the Spirit of Christ that aids in receiving knowledge by soothing a defensive heart.

Likewise, consider the ministry of healing. The laying on of hands is often not practiced, but it provides a powerful means of knowledge by acquaintance. Love and compassion are made manifest when we lay hands on sick and invite the Holy Spirit to come. This simple act helps draw people into the kingdom. Touch moves people into belonging. It communicates in a non-propositional way that we love them. In our faithful presence the manifest presence of God is made available, both to those praying as well as those receiving. This is all achieved aside from any physical healing taking place. However, when healing does take place, knowledge of God is powerfully present and made available. In our actions and through our presence others can know God in encounter.

Of course, this was the practice of Jesus. In knowing Jesus we know the Father (John 14:8–10). In a somewhat similar way, in knowing a disciple of Jesus we can come to know Jesus himself. The goal is first and foremost to become a loving, faithful, and hopeful presence to those with whom we interact and live. We become available to them so they can come to know us,

⁶⁴ Moser, *The Elusive God*, 151.

and, in virtue of the causal acquaintance principle discussed in section 2.4, they become acquainted with the Spirit of Christ acting in and through us.

Lastly, this KA approach provides a very reasonable and persuasive context for one to take more seriously Jesus and his way of life by inviting them to know more through interacting with him. However, Christian apologetics is often presented so that what is knowable are the arguments that God exists and that Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father. This can be for many an important first step to taking KA of God seriously. In addition, the approach I am suggesting is able to demonstrate that there is more knowledge to be gained by interacting with Jesus. Willard argues,

To come to know him and to clarify who he really is, people have only to stand for what he stood for, as best they can, and to do so by inviting him to take their life into his life and walk with them. If they do just this with humility and openness—which everyone knows to be his manner of life—they will know him more and more as they take his life to be their life.⁶⁵

There is something about the life of Jesus that when put into practice provides a wide range of evidence (including direct, non-inferential evidence) sufficient for one to know that Jesus is Messiah and that there is no other way than his which leads to eternal life. Abiding in his life helps us come to know him as well as our true self in the most profound way.

4.3 *Character Formation and KA*

A strong case in virtue epistemology has been made that character is intimately conjoined with knowing.⁶⁶ Who I am in my character includes specific dispositions that can help or hinder my ability to gain knowledge. Cultivating virtues of being open minded, humble, and careful in my thinking enhance my ability to gain knowledge. Character formation, when it takes into account intellectual virtues under the tutelage of Jesus, produces individuals skilled in gaining knowledge. For example, in Ephesians 1:16–19a Paul prays for the Ephesians that they would be given KA of the greatness and goodness of God’s gifts by having the eyes of their hearts (their whole person) enlightened.⁶⁷ Who they are in their character enables them to

⁶⁵ Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, 147.

⁶⁶ For work in virtue epistemology see: Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jason Baehr, *Inquiring Minds: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*. For work in virtue and education see: Philip E. Dow, *Virtuous Minds: Intellectual Character Development* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013).

⁶⁷ Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 53–54.

know. That their hearts are habituated in faith, hope, and love, conditions them to know by acquaintance with the greatness and goodness of God and his gifts. The absence of such character formation precludes one from such knowledge.

This is easy to see in KA of persons. As I have pointed out, a unique feature of KA of persons is that in knowing others I am often being known and even aware of being known. This form of intimacy is in general a learned skill that depends greatly on our ability to feel safe in such encounters. Those who do not feel safe or do not trust others will struggle in resigning their will towards knowing others in acquaintance. This is especially the case in knowledge of God. Because KA is not knowledge at a distance, the character of the individual will play a decisive role in their ability to enter into KA of persons, including KA of self.

Here we see a significant implication for the integration of spiritual formation into the life of the mind. In cases of KA of persons, the life of the mind and the life of the heart will be intimately connected. We should expect that where there is an imbalance of character between the heart and the mind, that KA of persons will be frustrated. Moreover, the corrective for learning how to grow in one's capacity to gain KA of persons will involve their whole person, not just the mind or just the heart. There will be a particular kind of life that aids in forming individuals as skilled in KA of persons. Such a life will be cultivated in fellowship with the Spirit and church. *Knowledge as it turns out is intimately conjoined with the heart.*

4.4 *Emotional Attunement and Scholarly Pride*

Among those committed to scholarship (especially apologetics, theology, and philosophy) I often see a distrust of emotions and experiences of God. There is an allegiance, spoken and unspoken, conscious and subconscious, to the primacy of rationality in conjunction with a low view of relationality, at least with respect to scholarship. I want to be careful here. Some describe this as an allegiance to the head and not the heart, as if the two function in isolation from one another and are not intimately conjoined. I have already exposed this view as false. Consequently, if we view scholarship as a ministry that is strictly involved with issues of propositional knowledge, then we are not completely defending and developing the knowledge of God that is eternal life.

I propose that integrating knowledge by acquaintance into the academic discussion may help correct this problem. There is already a significant literature defending the legitimacy of religious experience⁶⁸ and the

⁶⁸ See for example, William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Carolyn Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Jerome Gellman, *Mystical Experience of God: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Burlington,

historical and ongoing miraculous work of the kingdom of God.⁶⁹ However, this is often seen as an add-on to the Christian life. If we understand knowledge of God as KA, then experiences of God can hardly be seen as an add-on to the Christian life. Rather, life in the kingdom of God naturally includes various kinds of personal encounters with God. Consequently, the worlds of spiritual formation, philosophy, and apologetics come much closer together, and the sanctification gap for scholars is lessened.

Moreover, recognizing KA and stepping into it with God more fully can help stave off the kind of hubris too often characteristic of scholars. “Just as God uses grace to remove pride about good works (Eph. 2:9),” writes Moser, “he can use revelation to remove pride about self-crediting intellectual means of finding him.”⁷⁰ Along with this positive change comes a view of the life of the heart, character, and emotions that will be much higher and more difficult to ignore providing abundant opportunity to be transformed by the Spirit. Such an approach helps stave off the hubris of philosophy in the flesh (2 Cor. 10:3–5; Col. 2:8).⁷¹

4.5 *KA and the Legitimacy of Spiritual Disciplines*

On the model I am suggesting, spiritual disciplines offer opportunity for KA of God and self. By the habitual practice of what Frank Laubach calls “opening windows” we enter into a space where God’s presence can blow through into our soul.⁷² Recall, these are not just thin experiences or non-cognitive practices. Rather, spiritual disciplines provide opportunity for robust instances of knowledge of the KA kind. Moreover, they do so in such a way that cannot be accomplished by attending only to propositional knowledge.

What is important in recognizing this is that doing so allows one to appreciate the interaction and legitimacy of the various types of knowledge. When properly practiced, spiritual disciplines do not place an unhealthy emphasis on either type of knowledge. Nor do they threaten to overturn or

VT: Ashgate, 2001); Kai-Man Kwan, “The Argument from Religious Experience,” in *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); and Keith Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁶⁹ See for example the seminal work of Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

⁷⁰ Moser, “Jesus on Knowledge of God,” 600.

⁷¹ See, Paul W. Gooch, “Paul, the Mind of Christ, and Philosophy,” in *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays*, ed. Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 97–105.

⁷² Frank C. Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic* (Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Publications, 2007), 1–2.

ignore propositional knowledge as revealed in Scripture. Rather, spiritual disciplines, as a medium for KA, work in concord with PK, and they inform one another. Propositional knowledge does not, on its own, provide encounters with God. Likewise, knowledge by acquaintance does not, on its own, serve as the starting point for doctrine. Consequently, we cannot blame PK for not giving us what is available in KA just as we cannot fault KA for failing to provide what is available in PK. The two, when approached properly, do not compete for the domain over the other. My hope is that understanding this may help champion spiritual formation among those who are skeptical or critical as well as challenge those of us in the spiritual formation community to grow more analytic in our scholarship.

CONCLUSION

In summary, knowledge of God cannot be reduced to a non-cognitive, merely private, thin experience, but is genuine knowledge of God by acquaintance. Moreover, this account sheds light on a variety of issues of special significance for the rational justification of understanding spiritual growth on a relational holistic (heart and mind) model. Likewise, I have offered justification for the reality of hearing God's voice, and knowing his activity, which has important phenomenological characteristics. Lastly, I have applied knowledge by acquaintance to a handful of issues germane to spiritual formation. In these ways, among many others, eternal life is indeed knowledge *of* God, for by knowing God in the acquaintance sense we are drawn into his life and his life is drawn into ours. It is in the encounter of knowing the Triune God by acquaintance that we, by the Spirit, abide in Christ where true life is hidden.

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