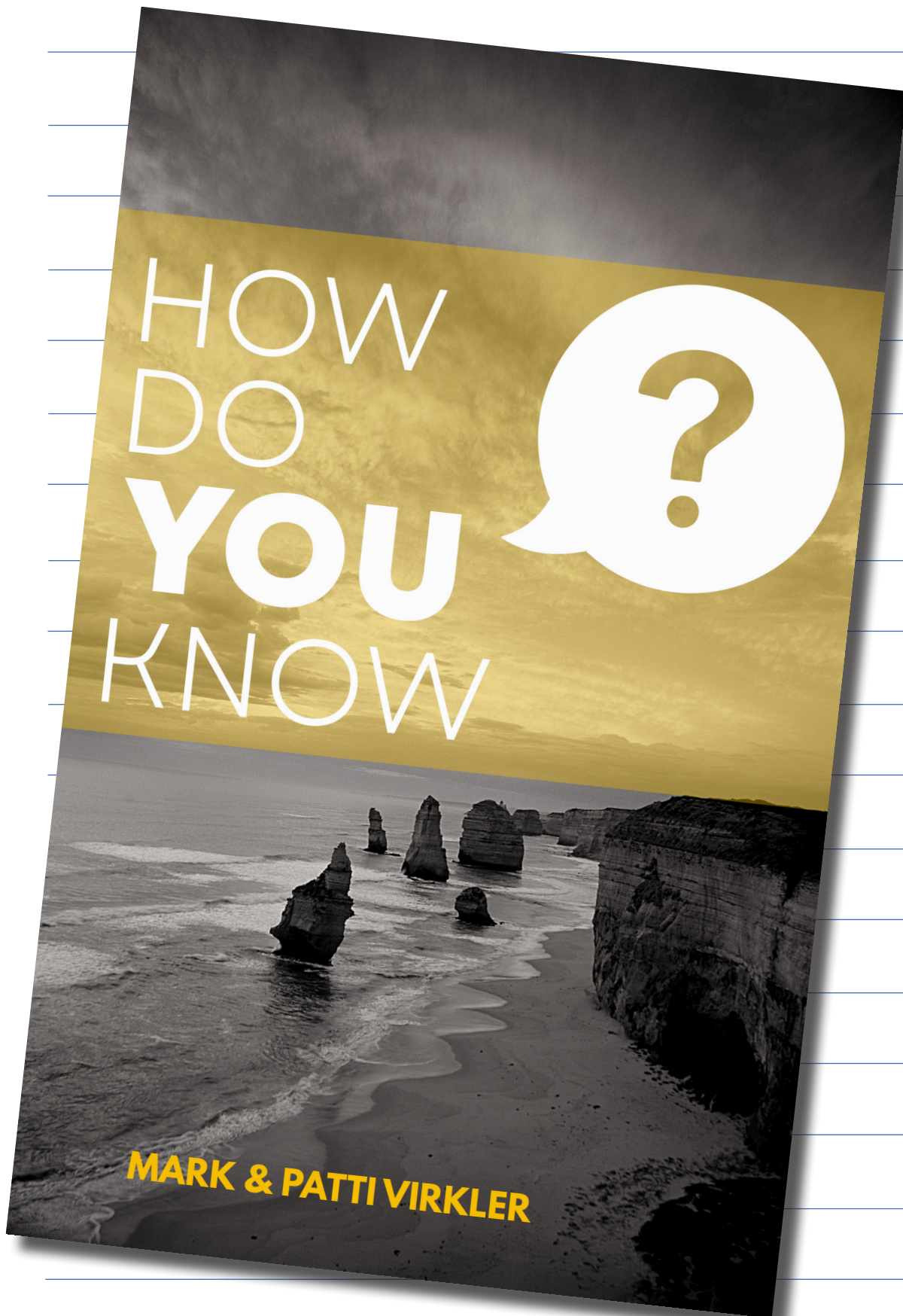


L.E.A.R.N.



LIFE ENRICHMENT AND REVIEW NOTEBOOK

LEARN

How Do *YOU* Know?

Knowing God's Thoughts by the Spirit

By Mark and Patti Virkler

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Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible Updated, unless otherwise stated.

Chapter One – Do You Know How You Know?

EVERYBODY HAS ONE

Every one of us has some sort of paradigm or way that we use to try to determine truth, whether we are aware of that system or not. For example, when I was a young child, my approach was simply that “Mom and Dad say it is true, so it must be.” As I grew a bit older and parental influence was replaced by the authority represented by school, I began to believe that “If my teacher says it is true, it must be true (even if it disagrees with what Mom and Dad taught me).” In college, I was quite sure that if I diligently applied my mind to study an area, I would discover the truth.

Because of the explosion of knowledge over the last hundred years, no one can be expected to know the truth about every subject, so we have come to rely on “experts” in every field to be our source of truth. In my church, like many others, I was expected to believe that whatever my pastor or denomination declared was the truth. Doctors have all medical knowledge. Scientists determine the truth about the physical world. The media decides the truth about world events and tells us only what they believe we should know. Increasingly, politicians and government bureaucrats have placed themselves as arbiters of cultural and moral truth.

WHEN I BECAME A MAN...

I began to realize that all these paradigms had weaknesses that would prevent me from finding the truth I sought. Things I learned in school are no longer considered true today. For example, I was taught that the earth would soon experience another Ice Age as the sun cooled and temperatures plunged. It was predicted in 1971 that Europe would be covered with glaciers by the year 2000. Now they want us to fear rising temperatures and Global Warming!

As I grew in the Lord and my knowledge of the Scriptures, I realized that much of what my church taught me was totally contrary to the Truth of the Word. When I asked them why we couldn't use musical instruments when Psalm 150 clearly encouraged us to use every kind of

instrument to praise the Lord, their response was, “That's not our tradition.” (Didn't Jesus have something to say about setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your traditions?)

I have the utmost confidence and respect for the incredible work the medical community does in trauma care. However, doctors are also supposed to teach us how to keep our bodies strong and healthy, yet they have almost no training in nutrition and rarely see the relationship between what you eat and how your body functions. I would never trust my car to a mechanic who told me that my ruined engine couldn't be caused by the oil I put in the gas tank! Why would I trust a doctor who believed that my weak and degenerating body couldn't be caused by a lack of vitamins, minerals, enzymes and other necessary resources in the “food” I was giving it?

I love the scientific method and am thrilled when true scientific research confirms my hypotheses. However, when “science” declares that their theories about the past and predictions for the future must be embraced with the same confidence as proven and provable facts, it is no longer a dependable source of truth. The Big Bang and evolution are simply alternative explanations for past events embraced by those who have rejected the Creator and His Word. According to “scientists” in 2009, data suggested that the Arctic polar ice cap might disappear in the summertime by 2014-2016. Clearly scientific theories and predictions cannot be considered truth.

At one time, with the typical hubris of youth, I believed that if I applied my brain to explore an area, I would find the truth. But as I grew older, I realized that I kept changing my mind about pretty much everything as I learned and experienced more. I even put a sign on my desk saying, “Don't bother to agree with me; I've already changed my mind!” If increased knowledge and experience made me change my mind, then how could I possibly trust the “truth” my mind had embraced?

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As a strong Baptist, I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. Therefore, I thought, if I have a verse to support what I believe, I must have arrived at truth. Unfortunately, the more I studied the Word, the more verses I found that seemed to contradict each other. For example, I have been able to Scripturally support four very different views of eschatology and three different views of hell! So even *my understanding* of Scripture couldn't be depended on to give me Truth.

(Please note: I believe that Truth is often a many-faceted diamond and our small minds are rarely able to embrace His fullness. Thus, we see contradiction where there is really complement.)

When I embraced supernatural revelation through the Spirit, I believed that what was shown to me in a dream or vision or spoken to me in a prophecy was surely truth I could count on. Unfortunately, experience confirmed that we are prone to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. An impure heart and focus can result in impure revelation. It's way too easy to believe that God has told you to do what you really wanted to do all along, even if it is contrary to His revealed will. Too many people have confidently informed me that: "God told me to divorce my wife." "I dreamed I was supposed to quit my job and move to the beach to evangelize the surfing community." "God showed me a vision of my pastor having an affair with the choir director, and that I am supposed to publicly confront them." Probably not Truth.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

So what am I to do? Just give up and decide that Truth cannot be found? Let everyone have "their own truth" because there are no absolutes? But what about Jesus' promise that "You shall know the truth..."? Surely what Jesus promised is available to me and to all His followers.

Finally, I arrived at a paradigm that I can live with: If (1) what God has revealed to me is (2) confirmed by the Scriptures and (3) the hearts of my spiritual advisors bear witness that it is from God, then I have confidence that it is true.

"I AM TRUTH"

When the Jews brought Jesus before Pilate, demanding that he put Him to death, Pilate couldn't figure out why they were so insistent. His accusers made claims about Jesus that Pilate couldn't substantiate through his own interrogation. Finally, though Jesus tried to explain Who He was and why He was here, Pilate asked (in frustration, perhaps?), "What is truth?"

That is the question that we as Westerners ask. We want truth to be a nice, orderly, logical statement that we can understand, explain, and defend. Yet Jesus had already answered Pilate's question when He spoke with His disciples earlier that evening in the Upper Room: "I AM the Truth." Truth is not detached information; Truth is found in a Person.

The Dictionary of New Testament Theology states, "While the Greeks were concerned with detached knowledge, the Old Testament regards knowledge as something which continually arises from personal encounter" (emphasis added). Both the Hebrew (*yadah*) and Greek (*ginosko*) words for "know" indicate that knowledge comes through intimacy. We must move from expecting we can *get detached knowledge*, and embrace the realization that *truth comes from my personal encounters with Jesus* where He reveals truth to me.

He may do so in many ways: when Scripture "leaps off the page" and into our hearts and minds; when His thoughts spontaneously flow into our minds; through dreams and visions; through His creation; through divinely ordained encounters; through our conscience; through teachers He has placed in His body; and any of the other ways in which He chooses to gift us with a revelation of truth.

Our epistemology (system for discovering truth) must shift from rationalism, where truth is discovered through man's logic and reason to revelation knowledge, where truth bubbles up within our hearts.

Revelation knowledge is the chief cornerstone of a biblical epistemology.

THE DESERT CLASSROOM

Have you ever noticed the prominent place the desert had on the spiritual formation of biblical leaders?

Moses had been raised in Pharaoh's court, educated in all the wisdom of Egypt and her gods, steeped in that pagan culture. At age 40, feeling God's call to deliver his people but without knowing God or His ways, he killed an Egyptian overlord. Rejected by his own people and fearing Pharaoh's judgment, he fled into the wilderness where he lived for 40 years. There He met God, the I AM that I AM.

David spent many years in the wilderness learning from and about God. As a youth, he was a shepherd, tending his father's flocks. When Saul turned against him, he and his men hid in desert strongholds, where he wrote many of his prophetic psalms.

Though John the Baptist was the son of a priest and surely trained in the Law, he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel, and he became strong in spirit.

After Jesus was baptized, He was "led by the Spirit" into the desert. Forty days later, He returned "in the power of the Spirit." Something significant happened in His spiritual life during those days alone with God.

Paul was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisees, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the righteousness which is found in the Law, he was blameless. He was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries. He knew and obeyed the Scriptures. Yet when he met Jesus, he did not immediately consult with flesh and blood but instead went into the desert. When he returned, instead of persecuting the church, he was preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.

What is it about the desert that has such an impact on one's spirit? There are no schools or theological seminaries or books or teachers to guide you. There is no one to impart man's ideas and wisdom to you. Maybe that is the point. Maybe the Lord wants to get you to a place where all you have are the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to lead you into Truth. When

you continue in His word (Jn. 8:31) and listen to the Spirit (Jn. 16:13), then you will know the truth.

PERSONAL APPLICATION AND JOURNALING

- 1) Take a few moments to allow the Spirit to show you your life. Using two-way journaling, ask the Lord, "What do you want to say to me concerning the systems I have used to discover truth?"
- 2) Read Mark 7:6-9. Ask the Lord using two-way journaling to show you if there are any ways in which you are neglecting or setting aside the commandments of God in order to keep the traditions of men. Allow time for the Spirit to search your heart and mind.
- 3) Ask the Lord to talk to you about what it means that truth is a person, and that person is Jesus.
- 4) Ask the Lord to talk to you about the difference for you personally between detached knowledge and knowledge that arises from personal encounter.
- 5) Ask the Lord if He wants to take you to the desert to learn more of Him. If so, get details. What will that look like in your life? What exactly does He want you to do? Set aside a room or a closet in your home where you can be alone with Him? One person we know set up a small tent in the family room where he met with God. Does He want you to meditate on and memorize more Scripture? Does He want you to fast for a time from other teachers and hear only from Him? No doubt He will give you creative ideas that will be perfect for you. If what you hear is questionable in any way (e.g., "Leave your family and live in a monastery for a year"), submit it to your spiritual advisors for confirmation!