

LIVING WATER

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SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND

by Taylor Hogland

There is an old anonymous prayer which states:

"Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand."

Regardless of whoever first prayed these words, it is clear that the underlying sentiment echoes God-breathed passages such as James 1:19:

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak..."

Yet this attitude of seeking **to understand** rather than **to be understood** is especially rare in our me-first culture. Those of my generation (and even those adjacent) have been brought up on the almighty power of **self-expression**: We crave to be heard, seen, and understood - and, for better or for worse, we have *unprecedented* access to a wide variety of platforms that allow us to express our hearts out.

But self-expression, while it has its place, *cannot* be our sole focus - when self-expression becomes our sole focus, it soon begins to resemble **self-worship**. Proverbs 18:2 rebukes this sort of attitude, stating:

"A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."

When our primary goal is to be understood, we forfeit our ability to *understand* - we cannot understand each other, and we certainly cannot understand our God.

Our Creator has made Himself known to us - who He is, what He's like, what He wants and expects from His creatures - **and it is absolutely imperative that each and every one of us comes to know Him!** A creature that does not know its Creator will never properly know itself - *and it is for this reason that self-expression is a senseless pursuit without first knowing the God that made us and endowed us with a "self" in the first place.*

To seek first to understand rather than to be understood is radically counter-cultural, but that is exactly what we're called to do:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:2)

Rather than conforming to the self-consumed spirit of the world, we can (and must) transcend to a new mindset entirely - one in which we no longer seek the fruitless and empty rewards of self-expression, but instead, we seek first to know and understand the only thing that is of eternal value and ultimate importance: **the will of God!**