

Workout 2 ▪ Collecting Beneficial Knowledge or Wisdom

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for Basil the Great

How to Benefit from Reading Greek Literature

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"Basil the Great is excellent in all his works . . . inferior to none." —Photius (Patriarch of Constantinople)

"Basil started out for his life's work with the equipment of the most liberal education which the age could supply. He had studied Greek literature, rhetoric, and philosophy under the most famous teachers." —Blomfield Jackson

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The following workout is related to Basil the Great's short work, *How to Benefit from Reading Greek Literature*, which may be found in the Cave's *The Best of Basil the Great on Reading Literature and Education*.

To read part of it, go to "Basil the Great" in the Cave Library.

"Those who make it their business to collect whatever is beneficial from every writing are like rivers that grow larger by taking in the flow of streams from every side. The poet Hesiod's saying about 'adding little to little' is true not only for the accumulation of money but also for gathering together every kind of knowledge." —Basil the Great

ACCORDING TO BASIL the Great, "Those who make it their business to collect whatever is beneficial from every writing"—poetry and prose, epic and lyric poems, drama, history, orations, and philosophy—"are like rivers that grow larger by taking in the flow of streams from every side."

What are these collectors collecting? They are gathering knowledge—beneficial knowledge. Wisdom. Or, as Basil states elsewhere, they are gathering "some benefit for their souls."

Greek & English ▪ The Greek word for "knowledge" is *epistēmē*.

Adding to his river and streams analogy, Basil goes on to say that "the poet Hesiod's saying about 'adding little to little' is true not only for the accumulation of money but also for gathering together every kind of knowledge."

This "knowledge" is not trivial. The point is not to become a depository of insignificant facts. Rather, the goal is to gather beneficial knowledge, wisdom, the lived experience of others toward the ultimate end of living well.

PROMPT ▪ Respond to the following questions below. What counts as "beneficial knowledge" in contrast with "trivial knowledge"? What is wisdom? Where do I now look for beneficial knowledge or wisdom? What other sources can I go to? What about literature (various kinds)? Or other kinds of media (online content, television, social media, AI conversational agents, the Cave)? What about family, friends, and other people? What else?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Points of beneficial knowledge/wisdom related to how to eat well

WORKOUT 2 • COLLECTING BENEFICIAL KNOWLEDGE OR WISDOM

Points of beneficial knowledge/wisdom related to how to be a good friend

Points of beneficial knowledge/wisdom related to how to practice excellence or virtue (*aretē*)

**Points of beneficial knowledge/wisdom related to
how to develop a good or healthy habit and get rid of a bad or unhealthy habit**

WORKOUT 2 • COLLECTING BENEFICIAL KNOWLEDGE OR WISDOM

PRACTICE ▪ After completing the above exercise (Collecting Beneficial Knowledge or Wisdom), spend a week **collecting knowledge/wisdom** relative to a **topic** or **area of life of your own choice**. In doing so, remember your goal is not mere knowledge, as in a collection of trivial facts, but knowledge or wisdom that will benefit your life and the lives of those around you. Write down the points of knowledge/wisdom you gather below. **Evaluate** how your collection practice went after the week has passed. Then **continue** with other points of knowledge/wisdom related to other topics or areas of life.

Points of Beneficial Knowledge/Wisdom Related to _____ **(my topic).**

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

“If we are wise and moderate, we will acquire from literature [and other sources] whatever is suitable to us and akin to the truth.” —Basil the Great

“Just as bees know how to extract honey from flowers, which to men are enjoyable only for their sweet fragrance and color, even so with literature, those who look beyond the sweet and agreeable aspects of such writings may gather from them some benefit for their souls.” —Basil the Great

3 ACTION POINTS

- **Know** that collecting beneficial knowledge or wisdom is the process of “adding little to little.”
- **Contemplate** the nature of beneficial knowledge or wisdom. **Identify** the various sources where you can find and collect it.
- **Practice** collecting beneficial knowledge or wisdom relative to various topics or areas of life. **Evaluate.**

Extra Space for Answers and Journaling

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