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Chapter 11

THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: CHRISTLIKENESS

Rick Yount

Christ in you, the hope of glory
[Col 1:27]

To Be like Christ

To be like Christ. What a goal! Strong *and* gentle. Just *and* loving. Truthful *and* merciful. Demanding *and* accepting. No one but Jesus has blended the rod and the staff so well. Even Paul, given to religious devotion as much as any man of his time, fully committed to the exalted Christ who saved him and called him as an apostle to the Gentiles, strained to grow toward Christlikeness. We are in a journey, says Paul. More like the Lord today than yesterday. Press on to be more like Him tomorrow. But in the process, Paul says, live up to what you've attained.

To lead others to be like Christ. What a calling! Christian teachers are far more than transmitters of lessons from quarterly to class. Our calling is to help learners grow toward Christlikeness. Paul writes of Christ, "We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me" (Col 1:28-29).

There will be plenty of time spent with commentaries, notes, illustrations, stories, and examples. But the goal of our teaching in Christ

is nothing short of Christlikeness in our learners. How do we begin? How do we proceed? How do we know if we're making progress?

The Christian Teachers' Triad: Then and Now

This chapter uses the Christian Teachers' Triad to frame a synergistic perspective on teaching toward Christlikeness. I developed the triad for the original edition of this text, drawing from both lectures and experiences in principles of teaching and educational psychology classes. My intent was to move away from educational systems that focus solely on knowing and thinking (cognitive theories), or personal valuing (humanistic theories), or competent doing (behavioral theories). Rather, I sought a way to bring all three systems together, simultaneously, in a single perspective. My first formal attempt at the synergism was the original chapter, written in 1994.

During 1995, I used the triad to pull together disparate chapters on learning theories—Skinner's behaviorism, Bandura's observational learning, Bruner's discovery learning, information processing, and Maslow's humanistic learning—into harmony for *Created to Learn*. It was about that time, in class and conference settings, I began defining profiles for thinkers, feelers, and doers. While leading a teachers' conference at Glorieta Conference Center, I described the three profiles. Without a clue about what might happen, I decided to ask participants to group themselves physically in three areas of the room by these labels. Slowly the 60 participants began moving in three directions, the whole breaking down into single participants, and then reforming into three different groups. The groups were roughly equal in size, approximately 20 per group. Most husbands found themselves in a group different from their wives. Over the next hour, as I asked questions about teaching preferences, each group displayed distinct—and often vocal—attitudes about the nature of learning, teaching, and spiritual growth.

I have experimented with many groups since that early conference: classes here at Southwestern, seminars at professional meetings, and many conferences. Specific groups included a seminar with 30 Fort Worth public school music teachers, a conference of 25 Deaf pastors and missionaries at IMB headquarters in Richmond, and still another conference of 300 African-American Sunday school teachers

in Oklahoma City. I began annual teaching trips to the former Soviet Union in 1996 and conducted similar experiments with classes of Ukrainian, Russian, and Kyrgyz pastors. Regardless of the group, people gathered themselves in roughly the same way, reflecting the same three perspectives.

Whenever I find a group of students, whenever I define thinker, feeler, and doer characteristics, the groupings they themselves form always share the same common characteristics, the same likes and dislikes, the same desires for meaningful Bible study. But the three disagree sharply across spheres.

The groups are generally the same size—the larger the class or conference, the more equal the groups. The thinkers group commonly contains more men than women, but there are always women in the group. The feelers group commonly contains more women than men, but there are always men in the group. The doers group contains men and women in roughly equal numbers.

Whenever we lead a group of learners, we can be sure that all three spheres of learning are present. Since each sphere learns differently from the others, this presents a problem. Worse yet, we teachers tend to teach out of our own preferred sphere, and so—and this was the most startling discovery—even when we teach perfectly well in our preferred sphere, we can still fail to engage two-thirds of our class or congregation *every time we teach*.

What do we do to stretch ourselves into better balance? How do we engage all three spheres of learners sitting in our classrooms? This aching passion drove the writing of *Called to Teach* (1999), which used the triad as its beginning point and foundation. Ten years of teaching Russian and Ukrainian students, four to six weeks each year, confirmed the three spheres were as volatile there as here. I found the same on a teaching trip to Sao Paulo and Brazil. These discoveries led to *Called to Reach: Equipping Cross-Cultural Disciples* (2007), in which both Disciples' Model and Christian Teachers' Triad carry readers through principles for connecting with students of a language and culture not our own.

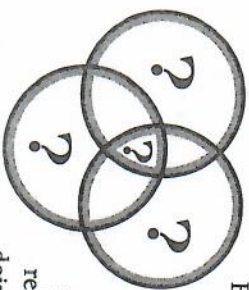
For those of you familiar with these three books or the first edition of our text, this updated chapter will be review. But it was here the triad first got its start. And for those of you unfamiliar with

educational psychology, the updated chapter will introduce you to the breadth, depth, height, and complexity of helping learners grow toward Christlikeness.

The Triad of Life

The three intersecting circles at left represent four areas of human life—three psychological spheres, and, at center, the spiritual. Each sphere is connected to the other two but develops in its own way.

Each sphere can be any size and can overlap the others in an infinite number of combinations. The figure represents an ideal: all three circles are the same size, and all three intersect equally.¹ The three psychological spheres represented by this triad reflect processes of thinking, valuing, and doing skillfully. Let's look at each of these.

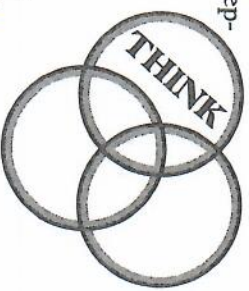


Thinking

The first circle represents the rational—what educational psychologists call the *cognitive*—sphere of life: knowing, conceptualizing, problem-solving, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating. Without a clear focus on “correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15), we open our learners to deception and delusion. The rational confronts

John 3:16 with *conceptual* (objective)

questions: What did God do when He loved the world? What is the *world* that He loved? What does it mean to *believe* in His Son? What kind of *life* do we obtain through this belief? What does *eternal* add to his life?



Jesus said, “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged” (Matt 7:1). What did Jesus mean by *judge*? Are we not to have an opinion? Are we to go through life without evaluating ideas, priorities, and actions? The apostle John writes, “Test the spirits to see whether they

Were we to draw the triad depicting Jesus, we would see all three spheres perfectly overlapped, forming a seamless, single whole.

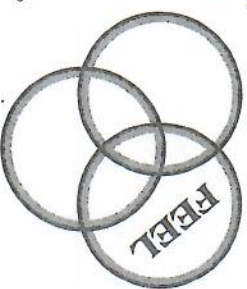
are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Is this testing not a judgment? Did Jesus and John disagree? Is this a contradiction? Just what did Jesus mean by “[Do not] judge”? These are rational questions, which we will delve into a little later.

The classic hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” introduces the second verse with the words: “Here I raise my Ebenezer.” What is an *Ebenezer*? I seldom asked the question until I began interpreting for Deaf worshippers. The second phrase of the second verse helps clarify the meaning: “Hither by Thy help I’m come.” The sense of the verse is, “Here I raise my praise to the Lord, for, right up to now, He has always been my source of help.” The hymn was a favorite for years, but until I studied the meaning of the words, I didn’t understand what I was singing.

If learners grow rationally in the Lord, it is because they move beyond mere words to clear meanings, beyond pat answers to cogent principles. None of us can grow “in every way into Him who is the head—Christ” (Eph 4:15) without a clear understanding of what God’s Word means.

Feeling and Valuing

The second circle represents the emotional—what educational psychologists call the *affective*—sphere of life: listening, sharing, loving, valuing, prioritizing, and reflecting spiritual truths in daily life. Scripture uses the word *heart* to refer to both “mind”² and “emotion.” But the Bible often uses the term to refer specifically to the affective elements of life. “A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken” (Prov 15:13). Here “heart” refers to feeling happy or depressed.



² “Afterwards, Samuel took a stone and set it upright between Mizpah and Shenn. He named it *Ebenezer* [Rock of Help], explaining, ‘The Lord has helped us to this point’” (1 Sam 7:12).

³ “With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness” (Rom 10:10). Strong’s number 2588 *kardia* (kar-dee-ah); “the heart, i.e. (figuratively) the thoughts or feelings (mind).”

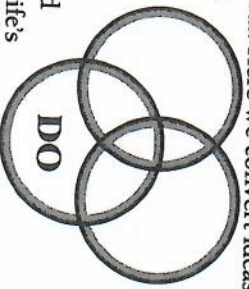
The emotional confronts John 3:16 with *personal* (subjective) questions: How has God loved *you*? How have *you* learned to believe in Jesus Christ? What has been the result in *your own life*? How has *your life changed* through your relationship with Jesus? How have *you experienced* "God's kind of life" since you gave your life to Him?

King David writes, "I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11). This was David's way of reflecting his heartfelt commitment to live by God's Word. While he seriously failed to live up to it, he passionately desired to do so. He displayed this passion in his excessive dance before the Lord (2 Sam 6:16–22) and in his deep grief when confronted by his sin (2 Sam 12:13–20). His heart-centered response was to repent and to embrace his Lord. It may be due to these qualities that Samuel declared this future adulterer and murderer "a man after his [God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14 KJV).

If learners grow emotionally in the Lord, it is because they move beyond historical facts to present experiences, from cold doctrine to warm lifestyle. Further, learners will grow as they move from surface feelings to unrestrained devotion to the Lord, from self-centered agendas to God's priorities for us. None of us can grow "in every way into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph 4:15) without a humble, loving embrace of the Lord and His ways.

Doing

The third circle represents the doing or skill sphere of life—what educational psychologists call the *behavioral*. Here we convert ideas and values into tangible actions. Without a willingness to obey Jesus' declaration—"hears these words of Mine and acts on them" (Matt 7:24)—we open ourselves and our learners to great danger. Those who only hear Jesus' words and fail to act on them will be swept away by life's storms (vv. 26–27). Hearing alone is not enough.



The behavioral confronts John 3:16 with competent *ministry outcomes*. How can I love people in my world this next week? How well will I depend on the Lord this week as I face problems, frustrations,

disappointments, and temptations? What are ways I can exercise my love skillfully, exercising my dependence on God at work and at home? What evidence of God's tangible actions in our lives do we provide one another week by week as we report on our faithful actions and God's faithful blessing?

We may clearly understand "biblical love," but *do we love*? We may love missions, but *do we support missions* with personal time, talent, and money? We can believe in forgiveness with all our hearts, but *do we forgive*? What we do with our lives, what we do in our lives, is a window on who we are. Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets. . . . You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. . . . for a tree is known by its fruit" (Matt 7:15–17; 12:33).

If learners grow behaviorally, skillfully, in the Lord, it is because they move beyond words and feelings to ministry actions, from high-sounding word magic⁴ and superficial feelings to disciplined behavior. Further, learners will grow as they eliminate old bad habits and practice new good habits. None of us can grow "in every way into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph 4:15) without a dedicated, action-oriented obedience to put Jesus' words into practice.

In chapter 10, we established the apostle Paul's view of the work of the pastor-teacher: "for the *training of the saints in the work of ministry*, to build up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12, emphasis added). Such training includes teaching learners and followers to know and think correctly (rational, cognitive sphere) and to embrace joyfully the attitudes and values set before us (emotional, affective sphere). But the proof, the verification, the witness, the confirmation that true preparation has been accomplished is found in service itself, in ministry, in doing what God has called us to do.

The Distortion of Imbalance

The problem, of course, is that God calls us to prepare *people*. People do not come to us prepackaged and preequipped to learn

⁴ Word magic refers to statements that sound important but are actually empty: "If we truly believe, then we will walk forever in His steps!" "We must see people with God's eyes!" Statements like these draw hearty amens, but what do they mean?

and serve. They do not come spin-balanced and ready to roll. Every person tends toward one of the three spheres of the triad. Some emphasize the rational, others the emotional, and still others the behavioral. But imbalance in life, just as in automobiles, causes vibration and eventual breakdown.

While I want to be careful about making broad generalizations, I am bound to tell you what I find in class and conference groupings. Whether in Fort Worth, Texas, or Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, I find adult learners—pastors, missionaries, seminary students—repeating the same kinds of perspectives and attitudes again and again.

Thinkers

Learners who emphasize the rational over emotional or behavioral elements are thinkers. Thinkers generally prefer theologically sound hymns over foot-tapping choruses. They prefer factual and conceptual questions over personal ones. They like well-organized lectures more than group discussions—particularly if the discussion “slogs through” people’s feelings and personal experiences more than the Scripture. Thinkers like studies that are deep, profound, and challenging. They actually enjoy grappling with Greek and Hebrew.

Context is important, both historical and theological. They thrive on conducting word studies or making comparisons and contrasts among biblical concepts. Distilling biblical principles. Considering various (theoretical) applications. They enjoy creating relationships among ideas in the passage more than others in the class. Cold, analytical classrooms are welcome and safe; warm, superficial classrooms can be dangerous—one never knows when a rabbit will be chased³ or an overly personal story shared. Thinkers keep their focus on “thus saith the Lord” and tend to define learning itself as primarily conceptual and rich in content. The classrooms of thinkers reflect the ambience of an old library, lined with great books and furnished with overstuffed chairs, where scholars engage inquiring minds with great truths.

³ “Chasing rabbits” refers to leaving the main point of the study to venture off in tangential pursuits. The term *rabbit trails* is also used. For thinkers, rabbits are usually a waste of time because they seldom support the points being made in the study.

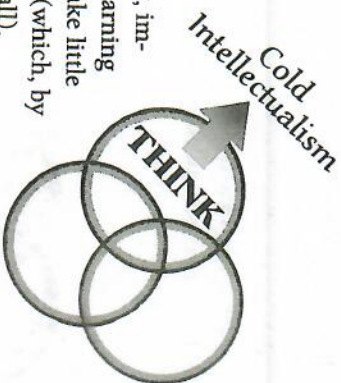
Cold Intellectualism

Such an approach, *taken to extreme*, produces a purely academic Bible study process that focuses on the rational while dismissing the emotional and behavioral. In this environment we find ourselves immersed in cold, rather dry, impersonal abstraction. While such learning may change our thinking, it can make little or no difference in the way we live (which, by the way, rarely bothers thinkers at all).

It is one thing to understand honesty but quite another to value honesty or actually to be honest. It is one thing to understand the plan of salvation, quite another to be saved. One thing to understand Matt 28:19–20, quite another to support and engage in missions. Bible knowledge, doctrinal understanding, Christian principles, and spiritual concepts will lead to spiritual pride unless we integrate them into personal attitudes and actions (1 Cor 8:1–3).

Feelers

Learners who emphasize the emotional over rational or behavioral elements are feelers. They focus on feelings, attitudes, values, and personal experiences. Feelers prefer freewheeling discussions over structured lectures, especially if the discussions engage the lives of learners and touch the heart. Feelers enjoy giving testimonies and hearing the testimonies of others. They want learning to be fun and spontaneous, not heavily structured with explanations of terms or historical background. Feelers want their classroom to be friendly, warm, accepting, and never threatening. Feelers care more about people than principles. More about experiences than teaching points. More passion and less analysis, please! And they consider their relationships with other learners far more important than relations among ideas. And if teachers do not “finish the lessons,” it is no problem so long as “we’ve shared our lives in meaningful ways.” Feelers define learning itself as emotional, celebrative, liberating, and warm. The classrooms of feelers reflect the ambience of evening



campfires, hand-holding, and “Kumbaya,” where counselors love the campers unconditionally, hoping they will understand and practice what they’ve so deeply enjoyed.

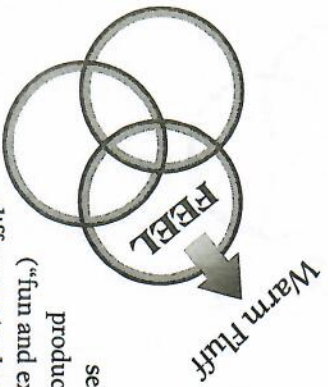
Superficial Emotionalism

Such an approach, *taken to extreme*, produces a purely personal Bible study process that focuses on the emotional while dismissing the rational and behavioral. In this environment we find ourselves immersed in warm, interactive, lighthearted feel-good. Subjective relevance trumps objective meaning. The Bible means *what it means to me*. Learning is superficial and self-centered. While such learning produces a momentary emotional high (“fun and excitement”), it can make little or no difference in the way we live (which, by the way, may not bother feelers at all). Worse, such an extremely subjective process, over time, may well lead to deception and delusion.

It is one thing to get excited about a mission trip but quite another to understand its purpose or develop the skills to help others. It is one thing to “share an experience” about faith, quite another to differentiate between “faith” and “presumption.” One thing to volunteer freely to mow a widow’s lawn, quite another to complete the task and do it well. Joining a group, sharing experiences, having fun, getting excited, letting go, and opening up will lead to spiritual pride unless we graft these emotions into biblical meanings and Christian actions.

Doers

Learners who emphasize the behavioral over rational or emotional elements are doers. Doers focus on practical, tangible outcomes for learning: What are we going to do with this? How can we use it? How can we live and work more effectively? As such, doers are passionately utilitarian. They eschew the paralysis of analysis of thinkers—preferring one clear application that learners can actually make during the week to five “possible applications” that never seem



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to be done. Likewise, they dislike the superficial wandering of feelers as woefully inefficient. While sessions may begin with a concept or personal experience, doers push toward realistic competence, the mastery of life, and ministry skills.

Doers keep their focus on “What doth hinder thee?” and tend to define learning itself as practical, efficient, and focused. The classrooms of doers reflect the ambience of busy laboratories and workshops, where engineers convert theory and passion into life practice through ongoing action-oriented projects.

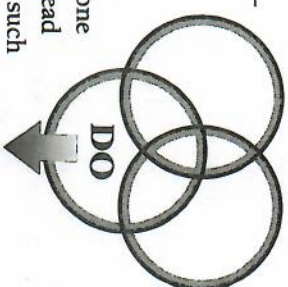
Burnout

Such an approach, *taken to extreme*, produces an action-oriented Bible study process that focuses on the behavioral while dismissing the emotional and rational. In this environment we find ourselves immersed in mindless, unfeeling busyness—one ministry project after another, which can lead eventually to ritual and exhaustion. While such learning may engage us in practical ministry, at least for a moment, it can make little or no difference in the way we live (which, by the way, rarely bothers doers at all). Without understanding the why of ministry, without personally owning the ministry, we simply go through the motions until we burn out and give up.

Striking a Balance

So here is our dilemma as teachers and teacher-trainers: an effective teaching ministry requires thinking, but too much focus on thinking leads to a cold, idealistic intellectualism. An effective teaching ministry requires positive feelings toward the class, the content, and the teacher, but too much focus on feelings leads to mindless, sentimental, impractical fluff. An effective teaching ministry requires skillful doing, but too much focus on doing leads to mindless, unfeeling ritual.

The answer to this dilemma is to balance the rational, emotional, and behavioral elements of our own Christian growth as teachers as well as our teaching. Develop biblical concepts, embrace Christian



values, engage in spiritual activities. Proper understanding provides the foundation for biblical values and ministry. Personally embraced biblical values inject life into biblical exegesis and ministry practice. Christ-centered ministry builds the bridge between Bible study (concepts and values) and the world of people in need.

Making this move toward balance is both frightening and difficult, and it requires intentional effort: for thinkers—to embrace personal emotion and practical action; for feelers—to embrace scholarly analysis and practical action; and for doers—to embrace scholarly analysis and personal emotion. And yet this intentional pain is necessary if any of us would succeed at engaging every learner in our classrooms. It should be no surprise, then, that the Master Teacher reflected the triad in His own teaching ministry.

The Triad of Jesus the Teacher



Jesus reflected this triad of rational, emotional, and behavioral elements in His ministry. Jesus was a prophet (Matt 13:57; 21:11; Luke 24:19; John 6:14), proclaiming the kingdom of God. He used stories and illustrations to explain the kingdom of heaven. He represented the Father to the people and proclaimed the Word of God. As prophet, Jesus focused on the objective element of faith.

Jesus was a priest (Heb 3:1; 4:14). He loved people and gave His life for others. He healed their sicknesses and calmed their fears. He ministered to them. He moved among the people and lifted them to the Father. As priest, Jesus focused on the subjective element of faith.

Jesus was king (Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:37; Acts 17:7). He chose 12 apprentices and trained them for action (Matt 10). He sent His followers into the whole world to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). He is our Leader, our Lord. He called us to action (Matt 5–7; John 17:20) and taught that our fruit (actions) exhibits our roots (concepts, values) (Matt 7:16–17). Our

spiritual wisdom is shown in how we practice His words—not by how well we understand them or value them (Matt 7:24–27).

Jesus demonstrated in His teaching ministry and life the balance we raise as our standard. He is our Model, our Guide, and our Helper as we seek to emulate this balance in our own life and ministry.

The External Influence of the Teacher

How do we provide a learning environment that permits balanced growth in the rational, emotional, and behavioral spheres of life? How do we help learners think clearly, or appreciate warmly, or put into practice skillfully? Here are some practical suggestions.

Helping Learners Think Clearly

A little boy sat in his Sunday school class listening to his teacher intently. She asked, “What is gray, has a furry tail, and stores nuts for the winter?” The little boy thought for a moment and then said, “Well, it sounds like a squirrel, but I’ll say Jesus Christ.” He was not being irreverent. He was doing his best to answer the teacher’s question. And it seemed to him that “Jesus Christ” was the answer to most of her questions. How can we help our learners to think clearly? We will do well if we focus on the meaning of concepts, ask conceptual questions, pose problems, and provide meaningful examples. Let’s look more closely at each of these.



Concepts versus Words. What does the word *run* mean? Here are some sentences that use various meanings of the word *run*:

- Johnny runs (moves swiftly) to second base.
- Judy runs (manages) her business well.
- Tim runs (operates) a printing press.
- The congressman ran (campaigns) for office.
- Water always runs (flows) downhill.
- Jane has a run (defect) in her hose.
- Peter’s team scored a run (score) in the second inning.
- Fido was kept in a nice dog run (an outdoor enclosure).

There is *one word*—run—with *several meanings*. Earlier in this chapter I asked you several questions about Jesus' statement, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt 7:1). Jesus was condemning the nagging, carping, censorious spirit of the Pharisees and religious leaders of His time. He was saying that when we live with a judgmental spirit, we will be criticized by others. Citizens of the kingdom are to avoid the hypocritical, judgmental spirit of religious bigotry. It is not enough to say, "Jesus said, 'Don't judge.'" Unless we *explain what Jesus meant by judge*, we leave our learners to define the word for Him, and their definition of *judge* may not agree with Jesus' definition.

One day a student of mine led the class in a Bible study on "joy" (Gal 5:22). "Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit. Joy is the kind of joy that only God can give. It's the kind of joy we'll experience in heaven. Ohhhh. The joy of the Lord is wonderful!" These words show that he had no clue about the meaning of *joy*. He talked about it, said nice words about it, and even expressed deep feeling. But his words were empty. He might have said something like this:

Joy is similar to the concepts of fun, pleasure, and happiness. In fact, some Christians mistakenly believe that biblical joy means fun or happiness. Notice that all of these terms are emotional. The distinction is that inward joy is detached from life circumstances, while circumstances control fun, pleasure, and happiness. We discover joy in the dark times when we depend on the Lord rather than on circumstances. As we lean on Him, despite our surroundings, He produces a sense of overwhelming joy by his Spirit.

Go beyond words to meanings. Help learners avoid *etsegesis* (reading personal meanings into a passage, which produces heresy). Lead them to embrace *exegesis* (reading God's meaning out of a passage, which changes their perceptions).

Questions versus Answers. We help learners think clearly by asking more questions and giving fewer answers. When we give an answer, it may be little more than noise in the air because learners haven't invested in it. In one ear and out the other. Forgotten by Monday lunch. But when we ask a question, we drive learners into the Bible for answers. We confront them with a dilemma, and as a re-

sult, they process facts, define concepts, relate those concepts to the question, and formulate an answer. Along the way they may develop questions of their own—a sure sign that thinking is taking place. Evaluate their answers. Mold their responses into clear understanding. Help them discover God's answers to your questions.

Posing Problems versus Giving Reasons. We help learners think more by posing problems than by giving reasons. Giving five reasons "why Christians ought to forgive" leaves them with little more than sound bites. An understanding of "forgiveness" will better grow from a confrontation with a problem learners solve. "Based on our study this morning, how would you handle this situation?" Listen to their answers. Correct misunderstandings. Suggest alternatives. Lead the class to see the relevance of "biblical forgiveness" in a contemporary situation.

Examples versus Facts. Love is patient, kind; it does not envy, boast; it is not proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth (see 1 Cor 13:4-6). These are the facts of love. What do these facts mean? What is an *example* of patient? How do you *describe* kind? *Illustrate* envy and boasting. *Explain* proud, rude, self-seeking, and easily angered. *How* might I keep a record of wrongs? *Why* would anyone delight in evil, and *what* is the *truth* with which I am to rejoice?

The popular King James Version of Scripture uses 1611 English that is unfamiliar to most people today. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" (1 Cor 13:4 KJV). Unchurched learners will choke on the "eth" endings, and words like "suffereth," "vaunteth," and "puffed up." The New King James helps, bringing the beauty of the classic text into the twentieth century. It reads, "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up." Even here, unchurched folks may strain at "suffers" and wonder why the Bible is talking about parades. The Holman Christian Study Bible reads, "Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited." *The Message* paraphrases the verse this way: "Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a

swelled head." While biblical purists wince at the casual feel of *The Message*, there is no argument that it conveys contemporary meaning much better than the old King James.

Still, even when using contemporary versions, we give attention to clear explanations of biblical meanings. Whatever translation of Scripture is used, focus on correctly translating the words on the page so that the Word, the message, comes through clearly. Paul said it this way: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, *correctly teaching the word of truth*" (2 Tim 2:15, emphasis added). This demands rational engagement with the text.

Helping Learners Feel, Respond, and Value

One day, years ago, I was having a cup of coffee with a pastor acquaintance. He told me of a boy who had come forward during the invitation. His parents were getting a divorce, he had no friends at school, his grades were bad—he just didn't know what to do. The pastor reported his response this way: "Son, I really don't care to hear about your problems. Do you know that you are a lost sinner? Do you know that if you die tonight without Jesus, you'll spend eternity in hell?" The boy looked at him with wide eyes, brimming with tears. His mouth fell open, and for a moment time stopped. Then he turned and ran out of the church. I was heartsick. The pastor was proud. "So I guess I put the fear of God in him!"

I never think of that boy without praying that the Lord will send someone to share the love of Jesus with him.

The pastor was doctrinally correct, but he had not one ounce of care, concern, or compassion for the heartfelt needs of this 10-year-old boy.

Hearts are touched when learners inhabit an atmosphere of openness, warmth, and trust. So how do we create such a climate? We will make good progress toward

emotional warmth in the classroom if we focus on sharing ourselves, sharing the experiences of class members, accepting them as they are



(while helping them grow), using humor appropriately, and building trust. Let's look at each of these more closely.

Personal Experiences versus Wooden Stories. A good way to begin a session is to tell a story related to the subject. Curriculum materials provide suggestions for doing this: "Joan is a single mother, working two jobs" and the like. These are good suggestions but not necessarily the best material for any particular class. Fictitious testimonies, contrived case studies, and artificial anecdotes may do little to warm up your class. No matter how good they are, they are wooden, stilted, often forced because they do not relate to the life experiences of you or your class. Far better are stories that come from our own experiences or the experiences of learners. All of us have experiences of success and growth and victory in the Lord. As these experiences are shared, to the glory of God, the class is warmed by His presence and our praise of Him.

The Right versus the Spot. Teachers do not have the right to call on learners to confess their sins in front of the group—to put them on the spot—but some do so anyway. A seminary student of mine began his session this way: "How many of you haven't had a daily devotional this week?" There was a silent pause. "Just lift your hands." A long uncomfortable pause and some frowns. "Well now, I know there's someone in a class this size who hasn't had a regular time of Bible study and prayer this week. Remember, God is watching, and He knows who you are." The only response to the student's whip was several groans. Then, a young man in the back of the room bowed his head and slowly lifted his hand. The student teacher had no right to do this. It humiliated the learner. It angered the class. It certainly killed any sense of openness toward the student teacher. It is not for us to tear down our learners through guilt but to handle God's Word correctly (2 Tim 2:15). The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin (John 16:8), not teachers.

If the student had "earned the right" to ask that question—sharing his own struggles with having a daily quiet time—there would have been no problem. Look at the difference: "This past week I've not spent time in prayer and Bible study as I normally do. Things have gotten so busy and hectic, and I've let them push my devotional time aside. Are any of you struggling with this problem?" I know for a

fact that several students would have nodded in agreement. "Let's see what we can discover that will help us give top priority to the Lord."

Such an approach increases openness. It warns the class because "we have a common struggle" and "we're working together" to find answers from God's Word. When we share ourselves, others are more likely to share as well. Earn the right.

Acceptance versus Judgment. We discussed Jesus' command "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged" earlier in the chapter. Jesus was condemning the carping, nagging, nit-picking, censorious spirit of the Pharisees. We will drift in this same direction, unless we pray through negative attitudes toward learners. "My people never want to pray." Or, "I can't get anyone to answer a question." Or, "Projects? I can't get anyone to do anything in my class!" I can only hope these teachers keep these opinions to themselves.

The disciples failed in many ways, but Jesus forgave them, loved them, and continued to teach them. Accept learners as they are. Love them, teach them, and encourage them to grow in the Lord. Some grow more slowly than others. Commitment level of some may never please us. But when our focus is accepting rather than judging, openness and warmth will blossom and bear fruit in spiritual growth.

Humor versus Solemnity. Humor opens up the emotions of a class. Gravity shuts them down. Paul was a great Christian philosopher. His letters are deep and often hard to understand.⁶ Yet philosophical reasoning and theological expertise were not, for Paul, the evidence of Christ in our lives. It was rather the joy and peace we experience from the indwelling Christ.

- "Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer" (Rom 12:12).
- "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).
- "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13).

⁶ Even Peter had trouble understanding him (2 Pet 3:16)!

- "May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father" (Col 1:11-12).

The Bible is a solemn book with a solemn message. We are wise to approach Scripture study with absolute reverence. But this reverence differs from the stoic, stern, dispassionate logic of the false teachers Paul opposed. Where the Spirit is free to produce fruit, there is joy (Gal 5:22).

The superserious has little warmth. The supersilly has little depth. While biblical joy is much more than good humor, the proper use of humor can both warm up and settle down a class. Humor can enhance the openness of class members, not just to one another but to God's Word as well. People who honestly laugh together can also honestly share together or pray together or weep together (see Rom 12:15). The natural use of humor enhances openness in the classroom.

Be sure the humor is positive and uplifting. Avoid crude or vulgar jokes, stories with double meanings, and even lighthearted pranks or eggs. Humor misfires when it denigrates others or demeans the sacred task at hand. "Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks" (Eph 5:4).

Trust versus Guilt. Guilt is a strong motivator. Perhaps that is why so many immature leaders use it. It produces quick results but undermines trust, the glue that holds human relationships together. B. F. Skinner conducted many experiments in which he taught rats to run mazes. In some cases he used a positive reinforcer, food. In others he used punishment, electric shock. He found that electric shock motivated the rats to learn the maze faster than food. But the shock also taught the rats to fear the maze. Eventually, the rats refused to move, regardless of the degree of shock applied, even to the point of death.

Guilt is like an electric shock to the personality. It produces quick results but leads to fear in a class or congregation. Guilt is toxic to learners.

Where do we find Jesus, the Lord of lords, teaching this way? "For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17).

Where do you find Paul, strong personality that he was, teaching this way? Paul's enemies in Corinth claimed he was strong in his letters but weak in person (2 Cor 10:10). Paul responded by pointing out his weakness: "You put up with it if someone enslaves you, if someone devours you, if someone captures you, if someone dominates you, or if someone hits you in the face. I say this to [our] shame: we have been weak" (2 Cor 11:20–21). Rather, Paul loved the church at Corinth and grieved over their problems: "For out of an extremely troubled and anguished heart I wrote to you with many tears—not that you should be hurt, but that you should know the abundant love I have for you" (2 Cor 2:4). By his clear teaching and firm but loving exhortation, Paul led the church at Corinth away from her problems and into a more focused relationship with Christ. Trust grows among people as they live, work, and pray together, as they share needs together, as they forgive one another. Paul underscored this social element of the Christian faith:

But now you must also put away all the following: anger [fury toward others], wrath [settled hatred toward others], malice [wishing harm on others], slander [denouncing the character of others], and filthy language [abusive talk toward others] from your mouth. Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion [soft-heartedness toward others], kindness [helpful actions toward others], humility [right thinking toward others], gentleness [tenderness toward others], and patience [long-suffering with others], accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive. Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity. (Col 3:8, 12–14)⁷

Paul's words are relational marching orders for pastors and teachers. When we keep in step with them, we find the level of trust among members—and beyond this, openness of heart—dramatically increased.

Helping Learners Do Skillfully

Years ago I taught a Sunday school class for Deaf college students. One day I ran into Keith, a member of the class and a student at Gallaudet College, where he studied and I worked. During our conversation I asked him what he discovered during our study the previous Sunday. He shrugged his shoulders. "That was a long time ago." Yes, I agreed. It had been a few days since class. I asked again what he had learned. "We studied something in the Old Testament, right?" Actually, we studied a passage in Ephesians. "Ephesians! Right! I remember now!" So what did he discover? What did he learn? "I don't remember. That was a long time ago!" I had spent five or six hours preparing to teach. I had given the presentation all I had. Now, on Wednesday, he couldn't remember the first thing about what we'd studied. And since he did not remember the study, it was clear he was not living it out.

A Rational Approach to Doing. Facts cannot be "done." They just are. Further, learners cannot "do" biblical concepts where they live unless they understand them. We discussed this at length under "Helping Learners Think Clearly."

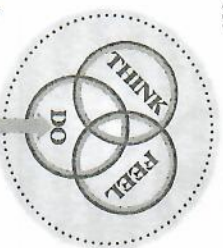
I had failed Keith in my teaching because I filled our time with 45 minutes of facts, with explanation. Asking questions and solving real-life problems during class time anchor Scripture in the minds of learners and build bridges into their lives.

This seminal event, a chance meeting on campus, changed my view of teaching forever.

An Emotional Approach to Doing.

Learners will more likely practice biblical concepts and values *outside the class* when they share personal "life experiences" with others *inside the class*. We discussed this

King



sharing process at length under "Helping Learners Feel, Respond, and Value." Hearing tangible testimonies of day-to-day applications from *some* makes it more likely that *many* will "do" them as well.

These two general approaches to learning—understanding concepts and appreciating values—lay a firm foundation for Christian action.

⁷ All bracketed words and bold-face emphasis were added by the author.

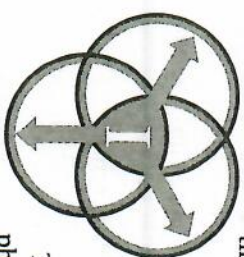
But there is a far more direct way to provoke Christian action outside of class.

An Action Approach to Doing: Assignments. The most direct way to encourage learners to do their lessons during the week is to make specific assignments. Assignments can vary in their intensity and scope: selected verses to read, specific questions to answer, a simple project, making entries in a journal, words to analyze, and the list goes on. Assignments can be done individually, in pairs, or in groups of various kinds. By giving learners things to do during the week, you give them the opportunity to learn from the Lord on their own. For details of how to plan various approaches to making assignments, see the end of chapter 13, "Planning to Teach."

Christ, the Center of the Triad

Teachers who model a thoughtful, passionate, skillful approach to life create the best environment for learning. This environment of thoughtful, passionate, skillful action is a veritable greenhouse for human growth. We have taken a Christian view of thinking-feeling-doing in this chapter, but the triadic balance need not be Christian. In the early days of the Russian revolution, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, set up a state security agency known as the Cheka. The motto of the Cheka was triadic: "The Chekist is a man with a 'warm heart, a cool head, and clean hands.'"⁸ The Cheka later morphed into the more familiar KGB, which carried on the triadic formula, as well as the twin symbols of shield—to defend the Revolution—and sword—to defeat its enemies. The first time I read these lines, a cold chill swept over me. I had been using the Christian Teachers' Triad in conferences for nearly 10 years, and now I read that its essential *head, heart, and hand* reflected the essence of the Soviet Secret Police? I could not form words to pray, so I simply groaned to God: What had I done? Then I saw it differently: the triad did not reflect the Chekist motto; the Chekist motto reflected God's fundamental design of man: *head, heart, hand*.

Notice that the triad forms a small triangle in the center where the three circles overlap. This is the seat of the will, the ego, the "I" of



the personality. Those without Christ determine the course of life for themselves: what I think, what I value, what I choose to do. The nineteenth-century Russian Christian Dostoyevsky once wrote, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted."

This was the beginning point of existential philosophers like Nietzsche and Sartre: "God does not exist, so everything is permitted. Make your choices." By contrast Paul wrote, "But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Cor 2:14).

After we accept Christ as Lord and Savior, He lives in us (Col 1:27). If 'I' continue to reign, determining for myself what 'I' think, what 'I' value, and what 'I' do, there will be little perceptible difference between us and the unredeemed around us. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Deny self. Follow Christ. This makes all the difference, for it engages Christ as Internal Teacher. Spiritual growth is learning how to let Jesus be Teacher and Lord, both learning from Him and obeying Him. Paul knew this: "I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:19b–20). We provoke our learners to grow in the Lord as we teach them to depend on Him. "Christ in you" makes all the difference. Let's see how.



Earlier we looked at psychological elements of thinking-valuing-doing. Now we turn to the spiritual elements, energized by the Christ within. He does not force His way into our life spheres, nor does He dominate them. He gives us freedom to invite Him in or lock Him out. As we invite Him to lead us, to teach us, to mold us into what He desires, He helps us to think, to value, and to do—according to His will. "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice

⁸ A. Christoffer and V. Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the K.G.B.* (New York: Basic, 1999), 23.

and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me" (Rev 3:20).

CHRISTIAN Thinking

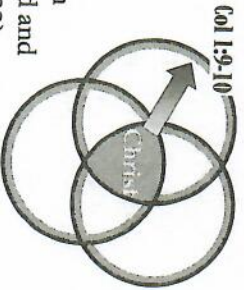
We haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the *knowledge* of His will in all *wisdom* and *spiritual understanding*, so that you may walk *worship* of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9b-10, emphasis added)

The knowledge Paul prays for the Colossians to have is not the head knowledge (*gnosis*), which inflates with pride (1 Cor 8:1), but an intimate knowledge (*epignosis*) that comes through devotion to Christ. What Scripture says is more than words printed on a page because we could read into the text our own definitions. The Spirit illumines the Word so that we correctly know God's message. He does not speak for Himself but illumines what He hears from the Son (John 16:13-14).

But not knowledge only. The Lord leads us into spiritual understanding—that is, what Scripture means. As we walk with the Lord, He explains, just as He did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "Weren't our hearts ablaze within us while He was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

But not understanding only. The Lord leads us beyond understanding into "wisdom." Paul, a philosopher by training, rejects human philosophy and rational thought, emphasizing rather the ability "to judge correctly and follow the best course of action."⁹ This harmonizes well with Jesus' own words: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man" (Matt 7:24 NKJV, emphasis mine).

Doing in the Lord begets broader knowledge of His Word, which begets deeper understanding, which begets more effective doing.



⁹ "Wisdom," *Nelson's Bible Dictionary*, PC Study Bible, Ver. 2 (Seattle: Biblicsoft, July 1995).

The cycle of rational development proceeds *under the direction of the Lord* who lives within and teaches us. The means: knowing what the Bible says, understanding what the Bible means, and putting it into practice—as Jesus leads. The result: learners being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

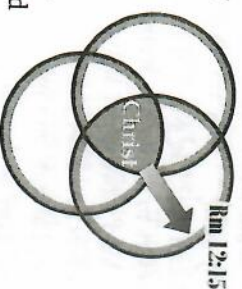
CHRISTIAN Valuing

Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Rom 12:12-16)

Jesus declared kingdom beatitudes and behaviors in the Sermon of the Mount (Matt 5) that are impossible to develop in our own strength. The Lord within helps develop

these kingdom elements into action. Many Christians have emotional problems and defects in values just like unbelievers: hatred, anger, instability, harshness, insecurity, bitterness, selfishness, and the like. Scripture underscores the importance of progression in removing the negative and growing in the positive. Paul emphasized several positive values in the above passage: joy, hope, patience, persistence, benevolence, hospitality, blessing, empathy, agreement, relationships. Each affective quality is developed out of the tangible fabric of everyday situations—conflicts, misunderstandings, disappointments, and loss—and requires a humble heart and a denial of self.

All believers experience affective challenges as they move from pagan to believer to teacher to missionary to leader: Love, not hate. Forgiveness, not anger. Steadfastness, not instability. Gentleness, not harshness. Courage, not insecurity. Sweetness, not bitterness. Generosity, not selfishness. The affective component of spiritual growth revolves around openness, values, priorities, and commitments in classroom and congregation. As we walk with the Lord, He



teaches us within each day's struggle how to put off the negative and put on the positive. Seeking His values produces dramatic positive results not only in our own lives but also in the lives of those around us. His priorities, not ours. His values, not our culture's.

CHRISTIAN Doing

"All of you, *take up My yoke* and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt 11:29-30, emphasis added)

As our understanding of God's Word and commitment to the Lord deepen, our actions change.

Old habits die; new habits grow. How do we refine those habits? How do we learn the skills of spiritual living as Jesus lives within us and teaches us?

Jesus shows us the way. He says, "Take up

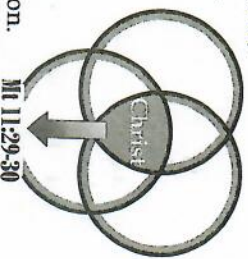
My yoke." "Take up" denotes a voluntary action.

I can take the yoke, or I can leave the yoke. "Yoke"

refers to a wooden beam that ties two oxen together. Two can pull a load more easily than one, and the yoke ties them together. "My" refers to whose yoke it is. Jesus invites us to accept His yoke—not our parents', nor our pastors', nor our friends' yokes. The yoke of the Lord is my ministry—that which the Lord wants me to do. All believers are gifted (Eph 4:7) in order to help edify—strengthen—the church (Eph 4:12). Where should we serve? What should we do? "Take up my yoke," Jesus says.

Why should we give up what we want to do in order to do what the Lord wants? The answer strikes at the heart of natural self-centeredness: The yoke of Jesus is the only place where we find "rest"—"relief and ease and refreshment and recreation and blessed quiet" (*Amplified*).

The invitation of Jesus is not to learn more *about* Him but to "learn *from* Him." My grandfather once trained young horses to pull a plow by hitching one alongside a steady plow horse. After a time of fighting the traces, the colt learned to cooperate in the pull because it meant getting back to the oats with much less effort. In the same



way the Lord invites us to hitch ourselves to Him in order to learn from Him how to minister. This does not diminish the importance of books, conferences, or seminary classes, since the most effective writers, leaders, and professors share what they have experienced in the Lord's yoke—that is, what they have already learned from Him.

His yoke is "easy"—*comfortable*—and his burden is "light"—*easy to be carried*. Rough wooden beams would irritate, chafe, and even cut the shoulders of oxen. The Carpenter had shaped many beams for a custom fit—an "easy" fit—to the shoulders of the animals. The yoke distributed the load across the oxen and so made the burden lighter. Jesus custom-fits our ministry to who we are, making even our sacrificial service comfortable, making our burdens light. In His will, pulling with Him, going His direction, there is restoration and renewal, even in the work. Ministry burnout grows out of work done in our own will, when we pull alone, going our own direction.

The Lord has invited me to take on several yokes over my life. The first was His call into Deaf ministry. The Lord helped my wife and me learn sign language and understand Deaf culture. We had no one in our families who was deaf, but He gave us a heart for Deaf people. Through years of working with Deaf people, Jesus taught me things about teaching and listening and communicating that permeate my efforts. My second call was to education ministry. He gave a 28-year-old seminary graduate the ability to learn—from the pastor and older staff, experienced lay leaders, and from the Lord Himself—how to lead the educational program of a church of 3,500. My third yoke was a call to the faculty of Southwestern Seminary. Every time I step into the classroom, I sense the preparation I received from the Lord through Deaf and education ministries. After 15 years in the seminary classroom, the Lord invited me into yet another yoke—to carry what I had learned over the previous 20 years to the former Soviet Union. For 11 years now I have taught four to six weeks each summer. To teach, equip, shape, challenge, mold, and learn from young ministers from around the world is an indescribable joy. The Lord's yoke leads to fulfillment and joy for us and for those we teach.

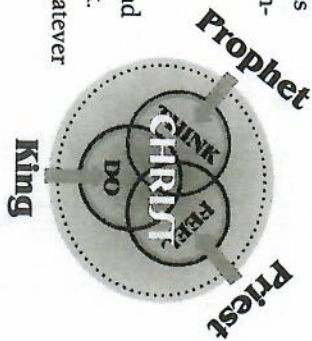
Final Words

The goal of Christian teaching is Christlikeness in our learners. The teacher helps by provoking clear thinking, passionate valuing, skilful doing, and humble submission to the Lord day by day. We, of course, cannot produce Christlikeness in our learners, but we are instruments in the Master's hand. We can cooperate with Him in the process.

In the end, when we honor Jesus as Teacher and Lord, when we teach others as He teaches us, when we love others as He loves us, we will influence them toward Christlikeness.

May God richly bless you as you spend your life pursuing this wondrous task.

"In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained" (Phil 3:16).



Discussion Questions

1. Are you predominately a thinker, a feeler, or a doer? What evidence supports your evaluation? What dangers do you risk in focusing only on this "natural" emphasis?
2. Think of persons you know who fit the areas other than your own. How do you relate to them? What conflicts have you had?
3. Where do you need more emphasis: helping people think, feel, or do? What specifically will you do to strengthen these areas?
4. How are you allowing the Lord to shape your thoughts? Your values? Your actions?
5. What was your greatest discovery in this chapter? Why? What will you do differently as a result?

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