

Theological Equipping Class

The Role of Studying and Thinking in Discipleship

March 20, 2022

Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. (Psalm 111:2)

Reminder: what is discipleship?

Being conformed to Christ

Two illustrations: a summons or an invitation?

The primacy of Scripture

"All other books might be heaped together in one pile and burned with less loss to the world than would be occasioned by the obliteration of a single page of the sacred volume [Scripture]. At their best, all other books are but as gold leaf, requiring acres to find one ounce of the precious metal. But the Bible is solid gold. It contains blocks of gold, mines, and whole caverns of priceless treasure. In the mental wealth of the wisest men there are no jewels like the truths of revelation. The thoughts of men are vanity, low, and groveling at their best. But he who has given us this book has said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Let it be to you and to me a settled matter that the word of the Lord shall be honored in our minds and enshrined in our hearts. Let others speak as they may. We could sooner part with all that is sublime and beautiful, or cheering and profitable, in human literature than lose a single syllable from the mouth of God." (Charles H. Spurgeon)

How Have Christians Historically Thought of Thinking?

The Church has historically led the way in the life of the mind throughout the history of the West

- In the 11th and 12th centuries, the birth of universities
- Even Harvard, Yale and Princeton were all explicitly Christian when founded. Harvard's original motto was "for the glory of Christ."
- Before the middle ages even, education was mainly through cathedrals and monasteries.
- Until the 18th century Enlightenment, most of the most influential thinkers in Western cultural history were Christians.

The fruit of missions: planting churches, hospitals, and schools

"To be sure, hard intellectual labor has not always led to a healthy church. Sometimes, in fact, the pursuit of learning has been a means to escape the claims of the gospel or the requirements of God's law. Yet, generally, the picture over the long-term is different. Where Christian faith is securely rooted, where it penetrates deeply into a culture to change individual lives and redirect institutions, where it continues for more than a generation as a living testimony to the grace of God - in these situations, we almost invariably find Christians ardently cultivating the intellect for the glory of God." (Mark Noll)

"The Protestant Reformers, English Puritans, leaders of the 18th- century evangelical awakenings like John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, and a worthy line of stalwarts in the last century...all believed that diligent, rigorous mental activity was a way to glorify God. None of them believed it was the only way, or even the highest way, but all believed in the life of the mind. And they believed in it because they were evangelical Christians." (Noll)

What about today?

"If I had a million dollars I'd give \$999,999 to the church and \$1 to education." (Billy Sunday)

"My theology! I didn't know I had any. I wish you would tell me what my theology is." (Moody)

Adolf von Harnack "life, not doctrine"

An indictment of the dichotomy between head and heart:

"It has always been a sin not to love the Lord our God with our minds as well as our hearts and souls...We have excused this with a degree of pietism and pretending that this is something other than what it is – that is, sin...Evangelicals need to repent of their refusal to think Christianly and to develop the mind of Christ." (Os Guinness)

Why Should We Study?

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| 1) To be like God | 3) To mortify sin | 5) To love and glorify God |
| 2) To obey God | 4) To cultivate humility | 6) To love others |

To be like God

- discipleship is imitating Christ
- how do we imitate the God who is omniscient? By learning.
- All truth is God's truth

To Obey God

- Commands to think
 - *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* (Colossians 3:2)
 - *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* (Philippians 4:8)
 - *Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.* (2 Timothy 2:7)
 - *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...* (Hosea 4:6)
 - *Apply your heart to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge.* (Proverbs 23:12)
- Making disciples and understanding culture

- *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for " 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, " 'For we are indeed his offspring.' (Acts 17:22-28)*
- *One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." (Titus 1:12)*
- **The danger of false teaching!**
 - *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)*
 - *O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)*
 - *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ... (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)*
- **The noetic effects of the Fall**
 - *But their minds were hardened... (2 Corinthians 3:14)*
 - *and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6:5)*
 - *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)*
 - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the*

truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (Romans 1:18–28)

To Mortify Sin

- Discipline is a means of mortifying the flesh
- *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. (Romans 12:2)*
- One of the ways that we avoid being conformed to this world is by being transformed by the renewal of our minds.
 - *to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds... (Ephesians 4:22–23)*

To cultivate humility

- Studying is a form of community.
 - Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. (GK Chesterton)

To Love and Glorify God

- *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:36–37)*
- We think deeply and study in order to glorify and worship God.
 - "God did not give us minds as ends in themselves. The mind provides the kindling for the fires of the heart. Theology serves doxology. Reflection serves affection. Contemplation serves exultation. Together they glorify Christ to the full." (John Piper)
 - "The main reason God has given us minds is that we might seek out and find all the reasons that exist for treasuring him *in* all things and *above* all things." (Piper)
- Right thinking fuels right feeling and theology fuels doxology.
 - "The Protestant Reformers, English Puritans, leaders of the 18th- century evangelical awakenings like John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, and a worthy line of stalwarts in the last century...all believed that diligent, rigorous mental activity was a way to glorify God. None of them believed it was the only way, or even the highest way, but all believed in the life of the mind. And they believed in it because they were evangelical Christians." (Noll)

- "Indeed, thoughts and affections are *sibi mutuo causae* – the mutual causes of each other: "Whilst I mused, the fire burned" (Psalm 39:3); so that thoughts are the bellows that kindle and inflame affections; and then if they are inflamed, they cause thoughts to boil..." (Thomas Goodwin)

To Love Others

- Studying theology and doctrine is a way of loving your neighbor.
 - Although it is true that an illiterate (or aliterate) believer can live a successful Christian life, it would be a mistake to conclude on that basis that reading is not crucial to Christianity. As long as there are some readers who accurately convey the text to the rest, the church can tolerate a shortage of readers. However, the fewer the people who access the Scriptures directly, the more power those who do will have. This is dangerous — witness the many doctrinal and other abuses perpetrated by the medieval Catholic church. Popular facility [proficiency] with the text prevents a "priesthood of skilled readers." (Timothy Nichols)
- An informed congregation is the best means of keeping a church from drifting.

What Should You Study?

- Study whatever, but in particular study theology and doctrine
- How do you find the right books?
- What does fighting scurvy have to do with studying?
- See Appendix: What Books Do I Recommend?

How Should You Study?

1. Read graciously
 - "Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say, 'I understand.'" (Mortimer Adler)
2. Read widely
3. Read wisely
4. Read consistently
 - "We test students right after they read something mostly to ensure that they have in fact read it. From this, many have drawn the erroneous conclusion that the only good that can be extracted from the reading is that which can be displayed on or measured by such a test. This is wildly inaccurate. Most of the good your reading and education has done for you is not something you can recall at all..." (Doug Wilson)

5. Read worshipfully

- "for every one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ" (M'Cheyne)

6. Read diligently

7. Read communally

8. Read convictionally

- Lifelong learning? What it should and shouldn't mean.
- *For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:6–7)*
- Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid. (GK Chesterton)
- What if I don't like to read?
 - Learn to love it
 - Other ways to study and think without reading:
 - Listen to audio books.
 - Listen to lectures.
 - Listen to good sermons.
 - Attend conferences.

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. (2 Timothy 4:13)

- He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books!
- He had seen the Lord, and yet he wants books!
- He had had a wider experience than most men, and yet he wants books!
- He had been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet he wants books!
- He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants books!
- The apostle says to Timothy and so he says to every preacher, "Give thyself unto reading." The man who never reads will never be read; he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains, proves that he has no brains of his own. Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read. Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritan writers, and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying. You may get much instruction from books which afterwards you may use as a true weapon in your Lord and Master's service. Paul cries, "Bring the books"—join in the cry. (Spurgeon)

Appendix: What are Some Books that You Recommend?

Don't let the size of the following list intimidate you. I'm trying to be comprehensive and include things for those who are just starting AND those who have been studying hard for decades. Happy reading!

Systematic Theology

Reformed Dogmatics (4 vol. or an abridged 1 vol.) by Herman Bavinck
The Wonderful Works of God by Herman Bavinck
Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin
Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem)
Bible Doctrine by Wayne Grudem (a slightly more accessible version of Systematic Theology)

Historical Theology

The Christian Tradition (5 vol.) by Jaroslav Pelikan
Historical Theology by Alister McGrath

Biblical Theology and Storyline of the Bible

The King in His Beauty by Tom Schriener
From Eden to the New Jerusalem by T. Desmond Alexander

Old Testament Theology

Old Testament Theology by Bruce Waltke
Dominion and Dynasty by Stephen Dempster

New Testament Theology

The 3 Volume series: *Jesus and the Victory of God*, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, and *The New Testament and the People of God* by N.T. Wright
A New Testament Biblical Theology by G.K. Beale
New Testament Theology by Leon Morris
A Theology of the New Testament by George Ladd

Church History

The Story of Christianity (2 Vols.) by Justo Gonzalez.
Church History in Plain Language by Bruce Shelley

Bibliology

The Journey from Texts to Translations by Paul Wegner
Light in a Dark Place by John Feinberg
Taking God at His Word by Kevin DeYoung
The Canon of Scripture by FF Bruce

Trinitarianism (and Theology Proper)

All that is in God by James Dolezal
De Trinitate by St. Augustine
The Deep Things of God by Fred Sanders
The Trinity by Scott Swain
Delighting in the Trinity by Michael Reeves

Prolegomena

Remythologizing Theology by Kevin Vanhoozer
The Fabric of Theology by Richard Lints

Hermeneutics

The Hermeneutical Spiral by Grant Osborne
Is there a Meaning in this Text by Kevin Vanhoozer
40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible by Rob Plummer

History of Interpretation

Hermeneutics by Anthony Thistelton
A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible by David Tracy and Robert Grant

The Gospel

Kingdom Through Covenant by Steve Wellum and Peter Gentry
God's Kingdom Through God's Covenants by Wellum and Gentry (a shorter version of the above)
The King Jesus Gospel by Scott McKnight
Simply Good News by N.T. Wright
The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd

Life and Teaching of Jesus

Jesus and the Eyewitnesses by Richard Bauckham
Jesus and the Gospels by Craig Blomberg
Jesus the Messiah by Robert Stein
The Challenge of Jesus by N.T. Wright

Philosophy

Introducing Philosophy by Robert Solomon, 9th edition (secular but helpful)
Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult by Garrett Deweese and JP Moreland
Life's Ultimate Questions by Ronald Nash
Logic for Christians by Zach Lee

Apologetics

Christian Apologetics by Douglas Groothuis
Christian Apologetics by Cornelius Van Til

The Reason for God by Tim Keller

Justification

Iustitia Dei by Alister McGrath

Justification: Five Views by James Beilby and Paul Eddy

Sanctification

We Become what we Worship by G.K. Beale

Overcoming Sin and Temptation (John Owen) edited by Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor

Predestination, Sovereignty, and Election

Chosen for Life by Sam Storms

Still Sovereign by Tom Schreiner and Bruce Ware

Chosen by God by RC Sproul

Providence by John Piper

Eschatology

The Climax of Prophecy by Richard Bauckham

The Theology of the Book of Revelation by Richard Bauckham

Surprised by Hope by NT Wright

Church Planting/Contextualization

Center Church by Tim Keller

The Mission of God by Christopher Wright

Pastoral Ministry

Brothers, We are Not Professionals by John Piper

Lectures to my Students by Charles Spurgeon

The Reformed Pastor by Richard Baxter

The Christian Ministry by Charles Bridges

Preaching

Christ-Centered Preaching by Bryan Chapell

Preaching and Preachers by Martin Lloyd-Jones

Between Two Worlds by John Stott

Marriage

God, Marriage, and Family by Andreas Kostenberger

The Meaning of Marriage by Tim Keller

The Momentary Marriage by John Piper

Catching Foxes by John Henderson (recommended for premarital counseling)

Ecclesiology

Sojourners and Strangers by Gregg Allison

9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Mark Dever

What is the Mission of the Church? by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert

40 Questions about Elders and Deacons by Benjamin Merkle

Spiritual Gifts

Understanding Spiritual Gifts by Sam Storms (continuationist)

Spiritual Gifts by Tom Schreiner (cessationist)

Additional Recommendations:

Study Bibles/Bible Dictionaries – *The ESV Study Bible* by Crossway; The IVP Bible Dictionary Series

Biblical Law – *40 Questions on Christians and Biblical Law* by Tom Schreiner

New Testament Introduction - *The Cradle the Cross and the Crown* by Andreas Kostenberger, Scott Kellum and Charles Quarles

Old Testament Introduction – *A Survey of the Old Testament* by Andrew Hill and John Walton

New Testament Backgrounds – *The New Testament Background* by C.K. Barrett

Biblical Manhood and Womanhood – *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* by John Piper and Wayne Grudem.

Politics – *Introduction to Politics* by Hunter Baker and *Politics according to the Bible* by Wayne Grudem

Spiritual Disciplines – *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney

Current Cultural Philosophies (gender, race, etc.) – *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* by Carl Trueman, *Cynical Theories* by Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay (secular, but helpful), *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* by Thaddeus Williams, *Above all Earthly Pow'rs* by David Wells

Missions – *Let the Nations be Glad* by John Piper

Other Miscellaneous Books that you should read:

Knowing God by JI Packer

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan

The Cross of Christ by John Stott

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Boenhoeffer

The Confessions by Augustine

Desiring God by John Piper

Future Grace by John Piper

Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper

God is the Gospel by John Piper

The Holiness of God by RC Sproul

Counterfeit Gods by Tim Keller

The Prodigal God by Tim Keller

Anything by John Owen, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and CS Lewis