

Growth Oriented Learning

1) **Active Listening:** It's really easy to set our minds on cruise control, but we need to combat this tendency if we want to grow spiritually. Are we constantly trying to learn and grow? The mind is the gateway to the soul. If we're not stimulating our minds and seeking to "grow in the knowledge of God," then our spiritual life *will* stagnate.

2) **Contextualization:** Many people are content to simply learn new information, and there is no zeal for personal growth (discipleship). The first step to overcoming that tendency is to contextualize the information that we take in. For example: Does this information have a relevant application in our lives? Am I familiar with the subject? If so, are there any new emphases? etc. As we take in information, it is then stored in our memory bank. Often, however, the information will only gain prominence if we can place it in a *personal* framework (context). Several things can happen to the information as it sits in our memory bank: it can simply sit there (memorization); it can dissolve (we forget it); it can *naturally* have an impact on our thoughts, attitudes, actions; or it can be *intentionally cultivated* into our lives.

3) **Verbalization:** One of the best ways to ensure that we've understood an idea is to recommunicate the idea—i.e. we share the idea with someone else. If we cannot coherently recommunicate what we've learned, then it's likely we haven't actually learned something. There is a significant difference between *being entertained* and *learning something new*. There is also a significant difference between *memorization* and *understanding*.

4) **Experimentation:** When we learn something new, it may or not change the way we think, feel, and act. It's important to evaluate our applications, and not push too hard. "What makes you faithful or generous is not just a redoubled effort to follow moral rules. Rather, all change comes from deepening your understanding of the salvation of Christ and living out of the changes that understanding creates in your heart. Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding, our identity, and our view of the world. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting" (*The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller, pg. 133). It would be nice if heart-change happened without any additional effort. But the reality is change frequently requires our concentrated effort.

We need to experiment with new practices which are based on our understanding of biblical truth. Our experimentation should be very flexible. However, we do need to muscle through some practices. For example: If money is tight, and we don't *feel* any spiritual blessing coming from the practice of tithing, that doesn't mean we should stop tithing. But there are many practices that we can (and should) freely drop, add, or alter.

5) **Solidification:** When our experimentation yields positive results, then we will *want* to continue the practice instead of feeling *obligated* to continue it—that's one way to avoid legalism (Matthew 23:23). That doesn't mean we will *always* want to practice these applications, but it does mean we've *experientially* learned biblical truth—i.e. we moved beyond memorization into actual learning. For example: If we've developed the habit of Bible reading, and personally experienced spiritual benefits from this practice, we will probably still enter seasons where we neglect God's Word. But now, since our learning has been *solidified* through our experience, we are acutely aware that our neglect is causing harm to ourselves and our relationships—we can actually *sense* the harm.

When learning produces new/greater experience, we can be assured that our learning is truly generating spiritual growth—and we're not just memorizing new information. Some of our experiments will teach us that certain practices just don't work for us personally—and that's a significant part of the learning process. ***Are growing in the knowledge of God and experiencing personal growth?***

Additional Notes from Class

- Ephesians 1—*Reformed Theology* straight from Scripture.
- Divine Foreknowledge (Romans 8:29, 30)—*foreknowledge* means God “set His affections on us” before we were even born!
- Assurance of Faith—if we lack assurance, experiencing spiritual growth can help.
- Philippians 2:12—“...**work out** your salvation with fear and trembling.”
- Articulating Our Experience—Illumination and Renewal; Transformation; Confirmation; Praise; Presence (*Experiencing Faith* resource on church website).
- Practical Applications—Personalizing Scripture; Serving in Love Languages; Responding Securely; Learning to Apply Our Spiritual Temperament (*Growing Closer to Jesus* resource on church website).