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Class Handout

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Aiming for Christlikeness

Week 2: Knowledge and Faith

I. Spiritual Maturity Described: An Overview

A. Knowledge

1. Factual knowledge
2. Experiential knowledge

A spiritually mature person has a wealth of personal experiences in God's world seeing God's power at work; such a person has lived through success and failure, through pleasure and suffering, and has learned the character of God and the truth of the word of God through those rich experiences

B. Faith

1. Total confidence and assurance that invisible spiritual things taught in Scripture are really true; the invisible world of God (Father, Son, and Spirit), of history as recorded in the Bible, of angels, of Satan, of demons, of departed saints, of the coming Judgment Day and the reality of heaven and hell are powerful, vividly, intensely real to such a person
2. Strong and vivid conviction of personal sin, and of how much God hates that indwelling sin; such a person is done with pride concerning indwelling sin, and is ready at any moment to repent as sin rears its ugly head one more time; such a person readily melts at a sermon, or a convicting moment during a quiet time; such a person doesn't put up a fight when a friend or relative confronts him or her about some sin in his or her life
3. A spiritually mature person actively trusts in Jesus Christ constantly as all-sufficient Savior, refuge, provider, shield, and has dispensed with all other trusts and confidences
4. A spiritually mature person has a powerfully strong assurance that the good things God has promised will most certainly come true—both in this age and

the next; such a person is confident that God will keep all His good promises, and ventures forth confidently on those promises

5. A spiritually mature person is consistently guided by Christ through the indwelling Spirit and the word of God

C. Character

Spiritual maturity – Christlikeness – is deeply concerned with the heart... what kind of person you truly are, not merely what you appear to be

- **Affection (What you love/hate)**
- **Desire (What you want)**
- **Will (What you choose)**
- **Thought (What you think)**
- **Emotions (What you feel)**

D. Action [Habitual Obedience]

1. **Presenting the Body to God**
2. **Purity** (freedom from sin in sex, speech, relationships, and lawful pleasures)
3. **Habitual obedience:** obedient to the commands of God as a matter of habit; seven key areas: worship, spiritual disciplines, family, ministry to other believers, mission to unbelievers, stewardship, and work.

II. Knowledge: Factual and Experiential

A. Factual

A spiritually mature person knows the Bible very well... he/she has a wealth of Biblical knowledge, a mind saturated in Scripture; such a person also understands the deep things of our faith, of theological truths that flow from the verses of Scripture

B. The Amazing Brain: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made (Psalm 139:14)

1. The most incredible and complex creation in the physical universe
 - a. Average human brain: 100 billion neurons, as many as there are trees in the Amazon Rain Forest
 - b. Brain the center of being

The brain is the center of memory, mood, instinct, will, emotion, decision, and all bodily functions; it is the seat of individuality and personal history – you

train your brain with every experience you go through in life. Our powers of interpretation and reason are centered in the brain, and here the five senses – sight, sound, touch, smell, taste – bring all their packets of information and deposit them for analysis.

2. Here the battle of salvation is fought

Ephesians 4:17-24 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds;²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

3. Scripture is essential to this battle... as we shall see!!

C. Rome wasn't built in a day: 300 years from being a small Etruscan village on the Tiber to gaining ascendancy over the other tribes in central Italy; then two more centuries to be a world empire; each emperor then built Rome to more and more glory

1. A mature knowledge of the Bible takes a long time

In like manner but for infinitely more glorious and eternal purposes, God desires to build a City of Truth in the heart of all His children. This City of Truth will be erected "brick by brick," that is, line by line of Scripture, precept by precept, truth by truth, over years of time spent in his Word and his world. Theological truths, in all their depth and breadth, take years to develop and take root in the human heart, resulting in an increasingly mature worldview by which the Christian understands everything that happens to him in this world, and by which he lives his life.

2. We are an immensely impatient people! Technology makes us expect things instantly

3. Basic building blocks of spiritual growth: BIBLICAL FACTS

- In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)
- Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

- The sons of Issachar [were] Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron—four in all. (1 Chronicles 7:1)
- Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ... he was buried, ...he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
- Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. (Rev. 1:7)

4. A lifetime journey of knowledge

Altogether, the Bible contains over 31,100 verses, and over 775,000 words in an average English translation. That is an incalculable treasure trove of spiritual truth, given us by the goodness of our loving God. And although not every spiritual fact is equally significant, yet *All Scripture is God-breathed and useful...* (2 Timothy 3:16). We may not perceive how knowing the names of Issachar's four sons could possibly make a difference in our lives, but yet we know God speaks no worthless words. From these facts a limitless abundance of material is mined for the City of Truth.

God calls us on a lifetime journey of discovery in the vast world of the Biblical text. There are sixty-six books to be learned, hundreds of people and place names, overlapping chronologies, unfolding history, deepening themes. Some passages tell us what to do quite directly: *Do everything without complaining or arguing.* (Philippians 2:14) Others, like Isaiah's oracles against the nations in Isaiah 13-23, seem far removed from our daily lives. We are not permitted to discard any passage as irrelevant; all passages are given to lead us to maturity. Fact after fact, truth after truth, all given by an infinitely wise God.

D. Facts Combining and Recombining

1. Individual facts of Scripture combine to build theological truths
2. Analogy from nature: 107 elements of the Periodic Table combine in various ways to make all matter in the universe; so individual facts combine in various ways to assemble all the truths in our Christian faith
3. Clear example: The doctrine of the Trinity... no one text teaches it; the doctrine is assembled from various truths in Scripture

E. A River Rock vs. a Forest Rock

1. Illustration of sanctification: immediate cleansing of gross sins just after conversion... followed by long, slow, gradual transformation into perfect smoothness... both achieved by the river
2. So also we must be constantly "immersed" in the Scriptures

F. Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

G. Christ Opens Our Minds to Understand the Scriptures

Luke 24:45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

H. Scripture the Alpha and Omega of Faith in Christ

1. Indissoluble link between written word and faith in the living Word (Christ)

John 20:8-9 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

2. Scriptures given to establish this faith

2 Timothy 3:15 how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

3. Faith comes by hearing the Word

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

4. Faith is also nurtured by hearing the Word

Colossians 2:6-7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

I. The Vine and the Branches: "Remain in My Word!"

John 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

J. The Need for Constant Reminding

1. Having heard the Word (any passage of Scripture) once, we might think we need never hear it again

2. BUT Scripture establishes the need for constant reminding and repetition!!

K. The Ministry of the Word Produces Spiritual Maturity

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until

we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

III. Experiential Knowledge

A. A Theater and a University

John Calvin called the physical universe the “theater of God’s glory.” As we look in wonder at the uncountable starry host of the Milky Way, the snow-capped grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, the purples and reds of a sunset over the Grand Canyon, or the thunder of crashing waves on the seashore after a severe storm, we have a sense of the greatness and majesty of God. God has put his glory on display in the physical world.

In a similar way, God has unfolded his wisdom and attributes in redemptive history, by his sovereign control of events in daily life all around the world. Thus the physical universe and the unfolding of human events are both vital sources of spiritual information. They are together not just the “theater of God’s glory” but the university for Christian maturity. Spiritually mature people not only have a vast array of biblical facts stored up in their heads but also possess a wide variety of spiritual experiences in God’s world that have shaped their minds and helped them grow. Thus there are two vital sources of the knowledge that leads to godliness: God’s Word and God’s world. There is factual knowledge and there is also experiential knowledge. Now, these are not equally clear forms of communication from God. Scripture interprets all human experience. But apart from daily life experiences, we cannot understand Scripture, and God has ordained that these life experiences are essential to our growth in Christ.

B. Real Life Illuminates Scripture

Real life gives meaning to the words on which Scripture depends, and Scripture in turn interprets real life experiences. Every day we live in this world expands our life experiences and makes us more and more ready to understand the all-sufficient Scripture. It is the Scripture that sanctifies, but it does its work in a context of an ever-growing storehouse of experience.

C. Biblical Examples of Learning by Experience

1. Moses’ Arms Lifted in Prayer: (Exod. 17:8-13)
2. Israel Humbled and Trained in the Desert: (Deut. 8:3)
3. The Disciples and the Feeding of the 5000 and the 4000

Mark 8:17-21 *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. ²⁰ "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." ²¹ He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"*

4. Paul's Lessons on Christian Contentment: (Phil. 4:10-13)

Philippians 4:11-12 *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

D. Daily Lessons in God's Love

The longer we live in God's world, the more evidence we have of his loving providence, his daily sovereign rule for the benefit of his children

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (Matt. 10:29)

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. (Prov.16:33)

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25)

E. Discipline for Sin: Learning by Bitter Experience

Another vital form of knowledge gained by experience is God's loving discipline of his sinning children. Hebrews 12:5-11 teaches this plainly, that God as a loving father disciplines every son he receives, to train us to hate sin and love him. These lessons are only learned by suffering through daily life hardships that God brings on us when we sin. Peter had to live through the painful experience of denying the Lord three times before he was deeply humbled and stopped thinking so highly of his commitment to Christ. He who had boasted that he would stand by Christ even if everyone else fell away ended that night weeping bitterly after denying Christ (Matt. 26:33, 26:75). That humbling lesson had to be lived out, not learned from a book.

F. Suffering: The Graduate School of Spiritual Experience

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-3)

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4)

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Scripture is encouraging us to have a supernatural reaction to suffering. We are to rejoice in it, because we have been instructed by factual knowledge gained in the Scripture that suffering is forever linked to the development of proven character. Only by the testing of our faith will our character be developed and our hearts be transformed, so that who we really are is revealed.

G. Shaped by Powerful Spiritual Experiences

The more faithfully we obey God’s commandments and engage in fruitful ministry, the more we learn his heart and his nature. If we go on mission trips, or spend years caring for orphans (like George Mueller), or immerse ourselves in caring for the poor and needy (like William and Catherine Booth), we will know God better. Learning comes by rich spiritual experiences based on costly obedience to his word.

IV. Faith

- a strong sense of the reality of invisible, spiritual truths-past, present, and future
- a vibrant hope in a bright future based on the promises of God
- a deep and detailed conviction of personal sin
- a firm and consistent reliance on Christ
- a consistent sense of practical guidance by the Holy Spirit

A. Faith is the Eyesight of the Soul

2 Corinthians 5:7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Hebrews 11:27 By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

Ephesians 1:18-19 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

B. Certainty of Invisible Spiritual Realities, Past, Present, Future

1. Faith enables us to be absolutely certain that the things taught in the Bible about invisible spiritual realities is true...
2. Past: all the history related in the Bible is actually true, beginning with Creation itself

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

From that first act of God, a march of Redemptive History began that we can only perceive properly by faith. The events of Redemptive History, including the flood, the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, the establishment of the nation of Israel in the Promised Land under the Old Covenant, the acts of the Kings of the Jews, the words and deeds of the prophets, the exile to Babylon, and the restoration from exile all point toward a consummation of the ages in the coming of Christ. Christ's own birth, sinless life, miracles, teachings, atoning death, and bodily resurrection are matters of the historical record. We cannot see any of them with our eyes, but must simply accept by faith that the Bible's historical record is true.

3. The Present Invisible Spiritual World: God enthroned, Jesus at the right hand of God, the Holy Spirit active in the world; angels and demons; departed saints in heaven; etc.
4. The Future as Promised by Scripture: the Second Coming of Christ, Judgment Day, heaven and hell; the New Heaven and New Earth and New Jerusalem

C. Assurance of Things Hoped For

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for..." (Heb. 11:1, NASB)

The "assurance of things hoped for" is a settled confidence that God will bring about all the good things he has promised to us in Christ. Faith feeds this forward-looking disposition; it causes a Christian to be happy, strong, and confident no matter what earthly circumstances are currently taking place. A Christian going through great suffering is confident that these sufferings are merely preparing us for "*a glory that far outweighs them all*" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Faith looks forward to “things hoped for” in two invisible future realms: 1) future things in this present age; 2) future things in the age to come. The “things hoped for” are based on the promises of God.

D. Conviction of Things Not Seen

“Faith is ... the conviction of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

Faith has both a positive and negative aspect. We just finished describing the positive aspect of faith, “*assurance of things hoped for.*” But Hebrews 11:1 also gives the negative aspect as well, “*conviction of things not seen.*” As we have seen, those things we hope for are attractive to us, appealing, magnetic to our hearts. But faith also warns us of the dire effects of sin. Faith makes the wrath of God real and powerful in our hearts before the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment is revealed (Rom. 2:5). To unbelievers, that day remains hidden, unseen and therefore rejected. But to believers, the day that we will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ giving an account for every careless word we have spoken (Matt. 12:36) is powerfully real. These fearful and negative things become more vivid in the heart of a believer by a growing faith. Faith is thus a “two-sided coin.”

E. Reliance on Christ

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6)

“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8);

“Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident” (Psalm 27:3)

Faith enables the soul to rest securely in God, as if serenely standing on the walls of a mighty fortress and, while looking out over a vast, besieging army, still having no anxiety about the outcome. As John Newton put it in the hymn, “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,”

On the rock of ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation’s walls surrounded,
Thou may’st smile at all thy foes.

God yearns to work that confident smile by the soul that trusts in Jesus; he wants to teach us to smile at any foe that assails our souls. Just as there is no greater threat than damnation on Judgment Day, so there is no greater refuge than Jesus Christ. A spiritually mature man or woman has learned from Scripture and experience to place full confidence in Christ as all-sufficient Savior, Refuge, and Provider no matter what circumstances face us

Especially focused on Christ:

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (Heb. 12:2)

F. Spiritual Guidance

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Commonly, the Lord speaks to us as he did to Elijah in the cave on Horeb, in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12, KJV). These quiet impressions from the Lord may have to do with personal spiritual growth (internal journey) or missionary strategy (external journey), or other vital details of our spiritual health and fruitfulness. Such impressions must be tested by the Word of God, for no private impression can ever take priority over Scripture.