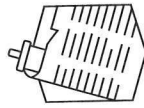


THE BOOKLETS' DESIGN: TEACHING PEOPLE TO THINK BIBLICALLY 3

Record your thoughts:



Study the Scriptures

The following passages are primarily included to help you see the biblical foundation of the practical, wisdom-tradition approach being used in this session.

On learning to think and pursue wisdom
Proverbs 1:1-7; 4:1-8 | Kings 8-10



Consult the Scholars

As we begin to understand the booklet design of *The First Principles Series*, we must begin with a clear understanding of the educational philosophy. We are using what educators call the Socratic method. Some have argued that this is not biblical because the method is identified with Socrates not Christ. Others argue that the Socratic method is not good education because Socrates led people down a predetermined path rather than letting sincere and genuine exploration take place.

As to the first point: Just because an educationally sound method (if it is) is identified in culture with Socrates, does not mean that it is inconsistent with Scripture or with Jesus' own model of educating His disciples. Truth is truth. Just because it is skillfully observed and articulated in the natural world and even identified with a particular person or school

Proverbs are intended to do the following:

1. Provide one with the ability to manage life skillfully. 1:2a
2. Give the ability to think things through clearly to a wise course of action. 1:2b
3. Provide one with the ability to deal wisely with people. 1:3
4. Give the inexperienced (youth) experience beyond their years. 1:4
5. Keep the wise growing ever more skillfully. 1:5
6. Enable one to see below the surface to the real underlying issues. 1:6

In addition, in Proverbs 4:1–8 he tells his son that above all else he should pursue wisdom. And it should be a lifelong pursuit. Therefore, our goal in education, and especially in biblical education, ought not to be just acquiring knowledge, but to process biblical truth in a way that produces wisdom—which centrally involves developing the ability to think biblically.

So what exactly then is the *Socratic method*? It is simply a method of hovering around and constantly questioning a set of ideas or truths that leads to grasping their full significance and implications. From this we develop the ability to think biblically in our contemporary and cultural settings. Sayre puts it well in his summary in *Plato's Literary Garden*, when he attempts to state the achieved goal of the Socratic method properly understood.

"The discipline imparted through many 'conversations' with a teacher and by daily 'living with the matter' itself, that is to say, is necessary not only to make the mind receptive to the 'flame of intelligence,' but also to marshal the resources required to maintain that elevated state once it is achieved."⁵

The process then has four main movements to it. The first two work together to produce the third, and the fourth is sustaining and developmental in nature. The first two are the guts of the method. Two habits have to be practiced simultaneously over a sustained period of time: (1) the many conversations with a teacher and (2) the daily living with a matter (ideas or subject). This process will eventually open up a "flame of intelligence" so that the individual gains insight at a whole new level. This state then creates a wisdom base from which to live life and solve problems.

Once you understand the Socratic method, it unlocks the key to understanding the educational design of *The First Principles Series* booklets. There is a design structure to a whole booklet and a design structure to a unit. The design structure of a whole booklet looks like this:

Design structure of a booklet

- Sustained "living with the matter"—5 weeks of studying the biblical passages and related readings.

of thought, does not mean that we should not use it and benefit from it. In fact, it helps us see the beauty and skill with which Jesus taught, as you will see in the next session.

As to the second point: Those who argue that the method is not good education because it leads down a predetermined path really do not understand the Socratic method. I will draw upon the following books⁴ in our discussion:

- *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (Bollingen Series LXXI—Princeton) edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns
- *Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue* by Kenneth Sayre
- *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato* by Hans-Georg Gadamer

Socrates rooted his method in what is known today as practical wisdom. The Socratic method is clearly found in the wisdom tradition of Western thought, which predates the Enlightenment's scientific tradition of the last four hundred years. I believe the practical wisdom tradition attributed to Plato, who wrote the *Dialogues*, is in the wisdom tradition of the Hebrews and the cultures that surrounded them. Solomon excelled in this tradition as seen in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

This tradition has been resurrected in the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer. He argues that people need to develop a wisdom approach to life, a hermeneutically trained judgment, an ability to think through issues and come to the best approximation of the truth, which in our case is found in the Scriptures. Edward Farley calls for tapping back into the wisdom tradition, which he believes was previously referred to as *habitus*. Farley refers to *habitus* as "an orientation of the soul for the purpose of acquiring wisdom, which all men and women need regardless of their position in life." Historically, this was achieved by the serious, holistic study of the Scriptures, reading great books, and by learning the biblical languages. This wisdom tradition—and along with it our ability to think biblically and, therefore, with wisdom—has been lost in pursuit of scientific and academic methods and categorizations. At the lay level, this has been reduced to a fill-in-the-blank, thought-for-the-day, six-easy-steps approach to growth and spiritual maturity. We must return to the wisdom tradition, to the practice of practical wisdom, to a *habitus* orientation. The Socratic method enables this process.

Let's pause for a moment and examine a piece of the wisdom tradition of Solomon. In his introductory motto to Proverbs, Solomon makes it very clear that every person needs to be in the wisdom tradition and to develop the lifelong habit of pursuing wisdom. Notice the various nuances of the thinking processes of a person who is continuing to pursue wisdom.

- “Many ‘conversations’ with a teacher”—5 weeks of Socratic discussions around the ideas.
- Then comes “the flame of intelligence”—session 6 is where it all comes together and a wisdom base develops.
- Then “maintaining that elevated state”—the lifelong learning section of the book.

Design structure of a session (the process in miniature)

- Sustained “living with the matter”—passages to study and a commentary and extended quotes from other writers to read.
- “Many ‘conversations’ with a teacher”—a Socratic discussion around the ideas.
- Then comes a spark of intelligence—part 4 of each session is applying the principles.

We are trying to take people through a process of learning to think. Therefore, we cycle through the process in miniature in every session. Then, in session six, we take one final sweep back over all the sessions to pull together the ideas into a summary, collect the implications from the Socratic discussion, and then integrate all those insights into life and the cultural issues at hand—“the flame of intelligence.”

Take time to look thoroughly through Book One: *Becoming a Disciple*. Read “Design of the Study Guides,” and then quickly read the entire booklet. Gain a grasp of the design and how it relates to the Socratic method. When you look through the first five sessions and the requirements of the sixth session, don’t visualize a mechanical set of steps, but students who are living with the matter for six weeks and having many conversations with you as the teacher. The book will begin to come alive for you.

It will also be helpful for you to understand what is called in education “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” because it is also part of the booklets’ design. The taxonomy will also help in understanding what is lacking in many of the shallow fill-in-the-blank materials and why it is not enough to merely seek out an individual application, which is all that is often required to complete most discipleship materials. Bloom envisions six levels of educational outcomes; he envisions six stages of learning.⁶

- Level 1: Recall—Recognizing facts, concepts, rules (high percentage of schooling).
- Level 2: Comprehension—Understanding, capacity to express ideas in own words.
- Level 3: Application—Doing something with what is learned, using facts to solve new problems.
- Level 4: Analysis—Breaking down information, understanding how the parts relate to the whole.

Level 5: Synthesis—Putting things together so that they fit, integrating components into a new whole.

Level 6: Evaluation—Validating, evaluating the use of knowledge, judging or comparing ideas, procedures, and products.

We have designed the study process in a booklet to encourage students to work at levels four through six as they go through the process. The following structure analysis will help you better understand the process you are leading people through and how to get the best results in their lives.

Design structure of a session (compared with Bloom’s Taxonomy)

- Study the Scriptures—Levels 1 and 2
- Consult the Scholars—Levels 1 and 2
- Think Through the Issues—Levels 4 to 6
- Apply the Principles—Levels 3 and 6

Design structure of a booklet

- Sessions 1–5—Levels 1 to 6
- Session 6—Level 6

What is it then that we are trying to do? In the “Study the Scriptures” and “Consult the Scholars” sections we are trying to get the student through levels 1 and 2 with an increased knowledge base and an ability to put that knowledge in their own words. In “Think Through the Issues” sections, we are aiming for levels 4–6. If people have not done their reading very well, we may have to start the Socratic discussion (in “Think Through the Issues”) at levels 1 and 2, but a good discussion moves up and down levels 4–6. In “Apply the Principles,” we are trying to get applications, but never just isolated applications. We are shooting for life implications and reshaping as well. And session six pulls all of the work together from the first five sessions to create a grand level 6 experience.

Why go through all this work with people? First, it is how the Holy Spirit works. Second, it is a vastly superior way to get at the truth.

So exactly where is the Holy Spirit in this process? Right at the center! What we have been describing is how the Holy Spirit works. He works in us as we renew our minds with the Word (Romans 12:1–2). He works in us through teachers of the Word (1 Thessalonians 5:12–14). He works in us through discussion of the Word in community together (Acts 15; Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 14). He works in us through reflection, prayer, commitments to obedience, etc.

The Spirit at Work:

Sessions 1–5

- Study the Scriptures—He works in and through the Word.
- Consult the Scholars—He works in and through teachers.
- Think Through the Issues—He works in and through the gathered community.
- Apply the Principles—He works in and through obedience to the Word.

Session 6

- Committing Your Heart—He works in and through reflection, personal journaling, and prayer.
- Committing Your Mind—He works in and through clear convictions and memorization of the Word.
- Committing Your Life—He works in and through serious obedience, decisions, personal projects, and life habits.

What about the “flame of intelligence” that Plato talks about? The Spirit ignites it in the believer (1 Corinthians 2:6–16; Ephesians 1:15–23, 3:17–21). Illumination and the mind of Christ are ultimately works of the Spirit.

We must also realize that our traditions are merely an approximation of the truth. They are not the truth. Dispensational theology is only an approximation. Reformed theology is only an approximation. And they both are from old cultures. As Gadamer says so well, our traditions are only an approximation of the truth, not the truth itself. If any of the traditions were an exact replica of the truth, we could use them as our foundations. But they are not. And those teaching them as “the foundation” to be learned first are usually not aware that there is a big difference between “the teaching” itself and their tradition—between the Bible and their system.

Ultimately which is better: Believers learning to think biblically and a church learning to do theology in community in tandem with gifted and mature leaders? Or learning an existing tradition created by men centuries ago? These systems need to be consulted and learned from but not allowed to serve as the foundation of our faith.

Record your thoughts:



Think Through the Issues

Our educational philosophy is very important. It is directly related to how effective we are in actually seeing believers founded in the faith and on a life course guided by their ability to truly think biblically. Our philosophy must be biblically and educationally sound. Since you have probably not been taught nor been teaching with a completely sound philosophy, it is important to think through the implications of this session.

ISSUE: A biblically and educationally sound philosophy

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. As a believer, were you raised with a sound biblical and educational philosophy? Which dominated more, the wisdom tradition or the traditions of men?
2. How about your own educational and teaching patterns now? Are they sound?
3. Why is it important to teach people to think biblically? What is at stake? Why?
4. What must be changed in your thinking to make the kinds of adjustments required by the approach of this series and the design of the booklets?



Apply the Principles

Write a summary of your current educational philosophy and what specifically needs to change in the way you currently train and educate others. Record your thoughts about the difficulty of making that change.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion: