

FOUNDATIONS

Two Kinds of Knowing



When it comes to learning theory, there are two very different kinds. The first has to do with surviving in an imperfect world. It is anchored to the notion that, with knowledge, we can think our way to improving our lot in life. It is education focused on time and space and the here and now of this life. It gives us a fighting chance. Thank God for creating us with a level of native intelligence that rises above the learning potential of other creatures. Scripture says that God’s reason for giving us this remarkable ability is to provide a special resource to help us “*subdue the earth*” (Genesis 1:28). This kind of learning is very important for people, like us, who have to function in a sinful world. Christian schools do an excellent job of embracing this first kind of knowing.

But Christian education embraces another kind of knowing, as well—one that the developers of the *Foundations* program wanted to highlight for parents, students, and Christian educators. Consider this definition for *knowing*: “Where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears . . . For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). Profound, isn’t it! Did you catch the distinction between the two kinds of knowing? Saint Paul used the words *now* and *then* (twice) to establish a sharp contrast between these two very different kinds of knowing. *Now* is knowing in a secular sense; *then* is knowing in a spiritual sense. *Now* satisfies the need to know about the stuff that will help us get along in this life. Knowledge about *then* trumps it.

Did you notice Paul’s emphasis on the intimacy of this second kind of knowing? This learning model isn’t just knowing *about* God; it is an intimate kind of knowing that involves being “fully known” by God himself. This is what the thief on the cross was seeking. He believed that Jesus was the Son of God. He wanted his dying Savior to remember him—literally, to *know* him, in his heavenly kingdom.

Learning of the first kind causes students to grapple with new concepts. Learning of the second kind causes students to wrestle with God. One of the first Bible narratives children learn in a Christian school describes spiritual learning as a wrestling match. It is a real-life story about an event in the life of Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32).

Wrestling is one of the most intimate of all human activities. (You can almost hear the grunting and smell the sweat.) God comes to us in the flesh to lovingly initiate our wrestling matches with him. It can be painful. But it is his way of making sure we always know he is real. (Children need to know this.) Furthermore, he provides the strength we need to persevere through the night. Saint Paul wrote, “. . . We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4). (Children need to know this.) Our wrestling matches come in many forms: through prayer, or when we meditate on his Word, through a difficult relationship or during hard times, in moments of temptation, or because we are struggling with a guilty conscience. (Children need to know this.) No matter what the causes of our wrestling matches may be, they are always for our good. (Children need to know this.) And, while God always wins, those who wrestle with him cannot lose; he uses such opportunities to bless us. (Children need to know this.)

Foundations helps people understand that our wrestling matches with God are an honor and a privilege. This is how we learn: we wrestle with God for virtually everything we need, trusting that he will bless us in ways we could never have dreamed. No amount of cognitive knowledge can substitute for this very special kind of knowing.