

# Closing the Mind's Potential

By Jeremy Lucas

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During a seventh-grade morning warm up, the following "brain teaser" question was asked in Mr. Hanson's class.

"Central Middle School is hosting a city-wide ping pong tournament. Twenty students signed up for the tournament. Each player plays another; the winner goes on to the next round. Elimination games continue until there is one grand winner. How many games must be played to find the grand winner?"

As the students began pulling out paper to sketch the possibilities, Mr. Hanson asked, "Does anyone want to know the answer?"

By this time in American society, the reply of each child should not be a surprise.

"YES!" They shouted.

"The answer is 19 games."

The children began to put their pencils away and class continued as though there had been no warm-up. In fact, nothing had really happened. A question was asked. An answer was given. And the children learned a behavior that is evident all around us today:

"When something is too tough for me to figure out, someone will give me the answer."

I share this imaginary story with you because of an experience my wife and I had at a Florida science museum yesterday on our anniversary. Since our day of celebration was on a mid-week wednesday, the museum we had decided to visit for the morning was full of children who had been bussed in for a class field trip. As it turned out, this single field trip wasn't the only one over the course of our morning... the children kept coming and coming and coming. Certainly there was an ever-so-slight disappointment in the possibility of a quiet morning of holding hands and playing with creative experiments, but we encountered something that both of us took to heart on the off chance that our home is ever granted children.

In the back part of the museum, one of the main walls in the exhibit was full of something that they enjoyably called "Brain Teasers." Approximately twenty different objects, shapes, boxes, and puzzles that required diligent processing to solve complicated and sometimes very simple concepts that evade basic logic. For instance, one of the puzzles involved 14 nails and a block of solid plastic. The idea of this "teaser" was to place one nail in the plastic and balance the other 13 on top of the head of the single nail.

The nail experiment was a test in basic assumptions about architecture and developing a way for these 13 pieces to somehow lock together. Complicated? Not necessarily. Challenging? Yes. A little tough to figure out? Absolutely.

Among the many other teasers that existed were experiments involving a small rope and a maze of single possibilities. Or dimensionally sound boxes with six blocks that weren't able to protrude from the top. Across the wall were a variety of unique problems with the same objective: To 'tease' the brain and make it work a little creatively.

During the adventure of solving these riddles, many of the children would wander into the area and begin fiddling with the various things that were there. At some point, I watched a group of children circling around the nail experiment that my wife and I had not gotten to yet. Each child was productively suggesting to the other something that might work. It was collaborative reasoning. And in truth, it was refreshing to see. That was, until one of the escorting teachers walked up behind them and asked, "Do you want to know how to do it?"

"Yes." They replied.

And just like that, she made her way into the circle and began to show them how it was done. I turned back to my puzzle in disgust at how quickly the children had just been trained to understand that if a problem of the mind creates tension... tension is bad and it's better to find someone who can just give you the answer.

Why must mental tension be bad?

As we read later, the purpose of these brain teasers was to offer several things:

Structure an approach when you don't have an idea what the answer is

Think laterally and shift perspective

Spot tiny flaws in logic and focus your thoughts on why they don't make sense

Think under pressure

The exercise of the mind is the building of one's potential. When a teacher, instructor, or presenter of material simply GIVES answers to those they are teaching, they are closing the mind's potential for their audience. And alternatively, they are fueling a group who are prepared to hear answers before taking an exerted amount of time trying to figure them out.

What's worse is that those who have found the answers aren't exactly sure why they are so quick to provide them. Do they believe that they'll be perceived as something special? Do they believe that they're helping in some way? What exactly do they believe they're accomplishing by sharing an answer and not pushing a person's mind to think for itself?

In the "grace movement" that we treasure so much, we often find ourselves doing the same thing amidst a world that is impatient for answers and solutions on spiritual matters. We have a tremendous number of solutions for their many questions based on what we see so plainly in the Word of God rightly divided. Yet, when we get into discussions with those who are new, or even those who are just beginning to put the puzzle of Scripture together... we are quick to assert every answer we think that we've figured out up to that point.

Have you ever heard someone do this with dispensational information and then proceed to say, "we are like the Bereans who did not simply accept what was taught, but tested and examined it daily to see if it was accurate." They may indeed have arrived at their information as a Berean, but by spewing out "the answers" to everyone they meet and engage, they are most certainly not preparing others to be the same Bereans.

In the final chapter of Solomon's book of vane wisdom, he wrote the following:

"And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, [and] set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and [that which was] written [was] upright, [even] words of truth. The words of the wise [are] as goads, and as nails fastened [by] the masters of assemblies, [which] are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books [there is] no end; and much study [is] a weariness of the flesh." Ecclesiastes 12:9-12

Study, be it for the Hebrews of old, the Greeks of ancient times, or the Americans of modern civilization is just as our Author defines it... a "weariness of the flesh." Why is that? Can we develop an understanding as to why "study" makes men weary?

In the application of any man's heart and mind to a task... there is a natural progression of exhaustion. Why do we sleep at night? We do we not exert ourselves in all things 24-7, 365 days a year? Because we are human. In order to make it through any day successfully, we have to practice whatever it is that we do most commonly. If your day to day requires you to build and construct great monuments, will your day end with success if your body is not prepared to withstand the heat or the weight of such projects? And that practice will make you tired.

But this begs the question... what's wrong with being tired from mental exertion?

All of us use our minds more often than our hearts or our bodies. When we're lying in bed before getting up to hop in the shower, we're thinking. When we're zoned out on the television at night, we're thinking and processing what's in front of us. Your mind doesn't require you to move or feel anything. It just requires you to process patiently and diligently.

"But in all [things] approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the

word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," 2 Corinthians 6:4-7

"Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every [thing, in] faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and [in] all diligence, and [in] your love to us, [see] that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love." 2 Corinthians 8:6-8

Perhaps there is irony in each series, but upon both moments in which "knowledge" is used, the two words that follow in each verse speak of one who is willing to endure. Those two words are "longsuffering" and "diligence."

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." II Timothy 2:15

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and [in] all judgment; That ye may approve things that [differ]; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;" Philippians 1:9-11

Most of you are geared toward studying in the manner that Paul would have hoped. The things I've shared with you today are not to counter your passion for that study. On the contrary, I share these things with you because of a growing ignorance that we often have for closing the mind's potential in our audience. Whether they be fellow grace believers who don't see something that we see or they be someone who does not see right division... while we study to show ourselves approved, why must we treat those that we're discussing with as the children in the science museum? When a frustrated believer stands there and you have the answers, what will be accomplished by saying, "Here is the answer?"

No doubt you're saying to yourself, "Well, yes, but they'll have the truth!" And praise God for their hearing of such truth, indeed. But where you will have failed is that they will not be any further mentally prepared to become the Bereans that you yourselves represent. When you meet that frustrated believer on this street corner or that place of employment... turn their frustrated questions that don't make sense into questions that do make sense, but will make them think. Give them a reason to go look something up one night and come back to you the next day. Have them dig deeper than the quick one-shot reply that leaves them with answers and no idea what to do with those answers.

Some of the children we met at the science museum gradually became spitting images of the adults who had represented "the answers" earlier in our morning. From time to time, we'd make our way into a new experimental brain teaser and a child who had gotten the answer 10 minutes earlier would walk up beside us and say, "I know how to do it. Do you want to know too?"

The Berean who hears this from someone is likely to do as we thought to express.

"That's great that you know how to solve the problem. We'll find a solution as well, but why don't you stay close to make sure that we're on the right track until we get there."

Man's thirst for knowledge has often outweighed his willingness to ask for patience or rational sense.

"And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which [is] in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree [was] good for food, and that it [was] pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make [one] wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked;" Genesis 3:2-7

Interesting paradox, wasn't it? The tree of the "knowledge" of good and evil was partially just as the serpent had said it would be. There was an implication and direct suggestion that it would offer more knowledge. Eve saw that it was indeed capable of giving knowledge. And upon going after that easy solution... they did find knowledge. But at what expense?

The search for knowledge can always offer a great adventure of the mind, but when we take the easy "apple" or listen to the person standing next to us who has the knowledge... we lose our capacity to think for ourselves. As Bereans you all know that. What I encourage you to consider today is how quickly you give the answers away and how quickly you expect your listeners to accept what they genuinely need to process.

Knowledge is a great gift when the mind is able to develop toward answers. On the other hand, knowledge that is given without any effort is the very thing that strips an individual of their growth and maturity.

Don't give away answers. Show people how to find them and you'll produce the kinds of believers that study to show themselves approved. After all, that's what will keep the "grace movement" alive in generations to come.