

Inquire & Advocate

The easiest place to reawaken relational Trinitarian values that leave little room for competition is to join a *natural learning* community. The natural give-&-take of mutual *inquiry* and *advocacy* begin to redevelop neural connections necessary to learn this way. People grow most rapidly when they feel the challenges are just over their heads—at least, at first—and have a mentor or coach who offers them helping hands for *deliberate practice*.

In any opportunity to influence, two very important traits to develop are to learn to become a *good listener* and to ask *good questions*. These two skills will take you far in any arena of life, whether the family or work, relationships or Bible study.

Inquire by temporarily laying aside your own values and assumption, best you can, so you can truly listen to the other. For now, lay aside what others have taught you about this passage to see it fresh, through the eyes of the Spirit of God, our resident Teacher. For now, please don't use Bible footnotes, commentaries or internet experts. Give the Spirit a chance to open up fresh insights to you. Seek to first understand the mind, heart and passions of the author/Author from their viewpoint without imposing your own. Listen without an agenda.

Advocate by picking up your values and assumptions again after re-examination in light of the passage. Champion your opinions and ideas passionately yet with gentleness and kindness. Defend, explain, and support them. We aim at a “wisdom dialog,” looking to draw closer so we impact our lives with truth. Then, since this is a dialog of mutual openness, be willing to “*agree to disagree without being disagreeable*” if no common ground is discovered, without looking down on each other. Experience the mutuality that this natural learning environment accesses.

We are not battling on the ground of “*right & wrong*.” This is the ground our ancestors embraced with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Rather ask, “*What is the Father doing?*” (John 5:19). The Spirit will not lead us into what is morally wrong, but He will at times lead us into what we erroneously believe is wrong.

Can you hear the distinction?

Tolerance is a word much bandied about today. Yet as it's often used today, the concept is a counterfeit, based on the false belief that there are no absolutes. “*We all have our own opinions, and all are equally right.*”

Authentic tolerance, however, recognizes we must accept others where they are if we ever want to influence them. Their opinions may not be right since there are absolutes. Yet we still value each because we meet them where they are in *equality* as image-bearers designed by God with value.

“We see people and things not as they are, but as we are” (Anthony De Mello).

For instance, I wrote *Big God! Bold Design* in 2005 from the only place from which I could write...where I was at that time. As I finished (and I still believe it's an excellent spiritual primer for personal growth), I began to realize I wrote from my prevailing individualistic, Western Christian viewpoint. It was not wrong, simply incomplete, a part of the picture. I saw spiritual growth “*as I was*,” instead of in *both* an individual *and also* in a community-based way I see now. We need others in community to help us see with a wider lens and to help us take off our blinders.¹

¹ If you are interested, the Fifteen Year Edition incorporates these changes into a Trilogy of three books available on Amazon.com, *Big God! Bold Design*.

Many development programs are packaged as short-term seminars or workshops. Imitating our microwave society will not bring lasting change. By contrast, a weekly learning community provides the ongoing environment of support and structure over time. Recent studies on how our mind works also support this. Our thinking brain can comprehend a fact after a single hearing or reading. By contrast, skills...

“are best learned through motivation, extended practice, and feedback....The limbic brain...is a much slower learner— particularly when the challenge is to relearn deeply ingrained habits. This difference matters immensely when trying to improve leadership skills: At their most basic level, those skills come down to habits learned early in life. If those habits are no longer sufficient, or hold a person back, learning takes longer. Reeducating the emotional brain for leadership learning, therefore requires a different model from what works for the thinking brain: It needs lots of practice and repetition.”

The dual skills of *inquiry* and *advocacy* are essential to dialog in a *natural learning* culture where each adds their full value to stir behavioral growth. These skills necessitate a healthy confidence in how highly God views us or we will not be free to look at life through the lens of the other without indiscriminately swallowing everything. Without this weighty base of a solid identity in Christ, we will get mired down in the swamp of venting our opinions without listening on one side or stuffing our opinions in the other swamp.

Both swamps rob a community of vital resources.