

PITFALLS OF KNOWING TOO MUCH

By: Jim Mathis

Ted DeMoss, the late president of CBMC, would occasionally comment that a person was “educated beyond their intelligence.” This was just his humorous way of describing a person that he felt knew too much but would think too little. In other words, he believed raw knowledge could be a dangerous thing when used carelessly.

I can certainly understand how this whole idea of *knowing* too much and not *thinking* enough seems to be a trait shared by many people. I have seen it in myself. In my early career, I started a photofinishing business. I know absolutely nothing about photofinishing, so I had to think through everything and figure it all out for myself, relying primarily on my heart and intuition. (I know now this was wisdom from God, not any real knowledge that I had.) This intuitive approach led to some very creative solutions that set my business apart from our competition and resulted in a lot of commercial success.

By comparison, years later engaged in another project, I felt very well-prepared and approached our work along the same lines as our competitors. Despite having acquired more knowledge about my craft, however, my business was no more successful than some others in the same field. In retrospect, I am certain this was because we had not been forced to be creative in finding new and better ways for doing things. We relied entirely on our own understanding – and established practices within our industry. Apparently I knew too much for my own good.

This seems counter-intuitive. One would expect that the more you know about something the better – but it does not always work that way. Take, for example, Steve Jobs, the creative force behind Apple Computers. I doubt he would have started Apple if he had come from a background with IBM, which used a very different approach in solving technology problems. Jobs’ lack of computer experience caused him to think in totally new, sometimes unorthodox ways – but ways that proved very productive.

In the spiritual realm we are exhorted to trust God rather than our own knowledge. Proverbs 3: 5-6 says, “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.” This often is hard for veterans of the business and professional world, because we are accustomed to seeking tangible, measurable solutions to problems rather than acting by faith. Yet this is exactly what God asks of His followers.

Prior to the Renaissance period that spanned the 14th through 17 centuries, it was assumed all people were essentially the same, so if someone was capable of producing art, music, or literature, they must have received some special gift from the supernatural. People would say someone *had* a genius – a divinely bestowed ability – not that he or she *was* a genius. During the Renaissance, however, man-centered thinking concluded man was capable of creativity on his own, without any supernatural aid or intervention. I believe this line of thought is incorrect.

As the Bible asserts, God gives and withdraws special gifts and abilities, so we should not give ourselves too much credit for having them – or demean ourselves up too much if we do not have the gifts we want. He has provided each of us with specific gifts and talents, even if they come in ways that do not seem like gifts. If we rely on God and His direction, rather than our complete knowledge and understanding, we will discover ourselves fully using – and enjoying – the abilities He has uniquely given to us.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that it is possible to know too much about something, that knowledge can sometimes prove to be an obstacle in discovering new and better answers to problems? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of a time when, to borrow the adage, you or someone you know “could not see the forest for the trees” – when you were too close to a particular situation to recognize a fairly simple solution that seemed obvious in hindsight? Describe that situation and how it eventually was resolved.
3. How do you think someone can avoid the pitfall of being misguided by too much knowledge or information?
4. What do you think are the greatest challenges – particularly in the business and professional world – to making decisions that are based on faith and spiritual wisdom, rather than on the basis of documentation that can be measured and evaluated?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 16:3,9; Jeremiah 33:3; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Ephesians 3:20