

Starting the Journey of Understanding

Bible passages: Psalm 18:20-24; Romans 7:14-25; Colossians 1:18-23 (The Message)

What do we mean by 'understanding'?

We use the word 'understanding' a lot. Stieg Mellin-Olsen points out that there are two types of understanding – 'instrumental understanding' and 'relational understanding'. What is the difference?

-  Instrumental understanding is 'rules without reasons.'
-  Relational understanding is knowing both what to do and why.

Richard R. Skemp¹ uses a helpful analogy. When he stayed in a certain town for the first time he learnt several particular routes to get to a colleague's office in that town. He learnt a limited number of fixed plans by which he could get to his destination. However, when he had more time he began to explore and in so doing constructed a map in his mind of whole areas of the town. Now he could produce, if needed, an almost infinite number of plans by which he can guide his steps from any starting point to any finishing point. And, if he does take a wrong turn, he will still know where he is and thereby be able to correct his mistake without getting lost; even perhaps to learn from it.



We want to impart 'relational understanding' – giving you the feel of this material. That means you will be able to work many things out for yourself.

Setting the Scene

What we will learn from these notes is not a substitute for Bible study or worship - but it is an application of Biblical principles to everyday life and, in fact, goes to the heart of the message of the Bible.

God's plan

Paul writes, *'...all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe – people and things, animals and atoms – get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death...'* (Colossians 1:20. The Message). The same verse in the NIV simply states, referring to Jesus, *'and through him to reconcile to himself all things'*. God is in the business of putting things back together – through Jesus.

This is a big vision but where does it start? It starts in our hearts.

¹ 'Relational Understanding and Instrumental Understanding' Richard R. Skemp

Shalom



This lovely word is still used by Jews as a greeting. It is derived from a three letter root sh-l-m which means 'to make complete or whole.' It means peace, wholeness, a sense of well-being; in fact, it means salvation in the fullest possible sense of the word. When the Bible writers talk about the kingdom of heaven they mean God's Spirit having free reign in every part of who we are – including all that goes on deep inside us. So the Bible shows us how we can be connected up within, at peace with ourselves. It recognises that if we are going to be peacemakers then we will have to be at peace within ourselves. If we are going to be at peace with

ourselves we will need to understand what is going on inside us.

Where do temperaments fit in?

These notes are not just about temperaments – they are about relationships. Understanding temperaments is one factor amongst others that helps us build relationships. If we never used 'temperament words' we would still be able to build relationships – it is just that understanding the temperaments makes the task quicker and easier. We can see more objectively what is going on.

Why is understanding so important?

We believe that we all need to understand ourselves – but is it really that important? Here are five reasons why it is important to know who we are.

1. Our dilemma

Paul's dilemma

There was something that Paul did not understand about himself and it gave him a problem: '*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do*' (Romans 7:15). Paul knows what is right but doesn't have the strength to do it by himself.

Our dilemma – spiritual schizophrenia

For many Christians, even after Jesus has entered our lives, there is a part of us that still doesn't seem to be able to do what is right. And it is made all the worse because, now we are Christians, we know how we should live. We are told the power to change is available – so why don't we change? We can so quickly become schizophrenic Christians – we know how to say all the right things, we genuinely believe them – but they don't bite deeply enough into our hearts to bring about the profound change in attitudes and behaviour that we know we need. We end up being one thing when we are with other Christians on a Sunday but in our relationships we struggle to live out what we believe. This can result in guilt and frustration and even eventual disillusionment



Paul's solution - Jesus in control

Fortunately for Paul, he had discovered the solution: '*Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!*' (Romans 7:24).

Our solution – Jesus in control

We need to understand the part of us that we haven't allowed Jesus to reach, what is going on inside there and why we keep ourselves under lock and key. Then we can let Jesus into that part of our lives and live as whole people. At the cost of his own life Jesus purchased the whole of who we are - so we owe it to him to use it to the full.

2. Our value

There were some wonderful aircraft that were built and flown during the Second World War. Many of these planes have been lost but there are some enthusiasts out there who are prepared to go to all kinds of trouble to restore these old rust-eaten machines.

A friend took his son to visit an interesting specialist company that restores these vintage military aircraft. When he walked into the workshop he wondered if they were restoring or building new aircraft as everything looked so new. He said, 'I quickly learned that they thoroughly restore, by completely dismantling down to the last nut, bolt or screw, reusing what they can (brackets, castings etc, having x-rayed them to check for any invisible flaws), and replacing what has corroded away over the years.'



The original aircraft built during WW2 have now corroded away, as little was done to protect the metal components from rust because they urgently needed to be flying in combat ASAP. In the process of restoration modern coatings are used which will mean that the restored aircraft will never suffer from corrosion.

There can be no doubting the value and beauty of these old machines but they are nothing compared to the wonder of you! God saw us in whatever state we were in – paid an enormous price for us – so he could restore us to our former glory – and more!

The owners of the aircraft being restored have a great passion for their restoration and then take delight in seeing them fly again. Some of the Hurricanes are worth over £1.5m when completed, and the restoration is an extremely labour intensive and costly process taking over 2 years. If an old aircraft can be so lovingly restored, bolt by bolt, piece by piece, how much more attention should we pay to all the good things that God has put within us – that have made up who we are even while we were being formed in the womb! Some of those aircraft components have rusted and corroded, some changed beyond recognition – but it is worth understanding what each part is, where it fits and what it does. In the same way, we are God's workmanship, he takes great delight in us and he wants to lovingly restore us so we can fly again!

3. Our blueprints

Imagine that you want to build a two-storey house. You contact the architect to draw up the plans. You employ a builder who orders the materials and plans the work. You trust the builder to follow the plans meticulously. Imagine the result if he abandoned your drawings part way through and tried to use the materials to build a bungalow instead!



God has planned exactly how he wants you to be. He is the Master Architect and he ordered the right materials. When you came into this world, in that moment of time, the right materials were being delivered on site. It was our parents' responsibility to consult the plans – in other words, to ask, 'Who is my child?' – and, in terms of character and personality, 'what is he meant to look like?'

Parents are builders who do a better job when they frequently consult the Architect and work to the blueprints! What if they didn't take the time to find out what they were meant to be building? What if they got it into their heads that they would like to see a bungalow – not a two-storey house? Imagine the distortion, the mess, the tension in this building as door and window frames are forced into positions for which they were not designed. What about the unused parts that were simply discarded?

Do you know who you were meant to be? Did your parents know? What has happened to turn you into who you are now? Why are there tensions and pressures within? The process of understanding yourself will help you find answers to these questions as you look at the blueprints, dismantle where necessary and begin to rebuild with God's help.

4. Our 'double act'

Did you know that there are two of you – in one body! Think of it like this:

Those two temperaments live together in one house. They are you. Generally, one is the extrovert and the other is the introvert. I want to get to know you so I knock on your door. Who answers the door? The extrovert! But I really want to get to know you so I am going to persist. I know there is more to you than this extrovert who always presents himself. So I come in and ask to see the introvert.



The chances are that your extrovert will do everything in his power to prevent me from engaging with your introvert – talking, arguing, distracting. But I persist and after a while I am shown into a darkened room at the back of the house and there, curled up in the corner is the introvert. It will take time to build enough confidence for him to come and meet me. He has never been given a voice, never been asked his opinion – in fact, when he offered it years ago he was left in no doubt as to how worthless that opinion was. Now I am listening and as I listen the extrovert becomes

aware that the introvert does have value, does have an important perspective. The introvert grows in confidence and soon eventually they learn to respect one another, listen to each other and work together.

What has happened? They have become connected. Shalom is in operation. You have begun to become comfortable with yourself. There is peace. That is why we seek to understand ourselves.

5. Our 'pieces of the jigsaw'

Most of us have at least two main temperaments. Imagine these as two large floor jigsaws spread before us with the pieces representing the 'ingredients' of each temperament. Understanding these temperaments will enable us to get an overview of who we are – an objective view – and that view will help us take responsibility for each of those ingredients. Yielding to the Spirit of God will lead to self-control that will enable us to take and use all that we are to honour the Lord and live life to the full.



"We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit."

—E. E. Cummings