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# Learning Lifeline

A LETTER ABOUT LEARNING FROM ESTHER WILKISON

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“You forgot? But I’ve told you 1,000 times!”

“You could do this last week. Why are you staring at me as if you’ve never heard this before?”

Our efforts can feel pointless when day after day we give information, only to feel like we are pouring water into a bucket with no bottom. How do we help someone who seems to always forget? Is this person unable? Unwilling? Intentionally trying to drive you crazy?

Extreme harm comes when in frustration we lash out with statements like— “Are you *trying* to act like an idiot?” “This is *NOT* hard! Why are you acting like this is hard?” “Why are you being defiant?” “You will never be able to make it in life if you can’t even \_\_\_\_\_.”

If you have said statements like that, chances are high that you also heard them. We tend to do unto others what was done unto us. But we don’t have to! Sarcasm is not a spiritual gift. Condescension is not the best way to get your point across. Surface-learning methods typically involved speaking many words into the air. That approach is about as effective as writing words on post-it notes, sticking the notes on the outside of a child’s shirt, and sending that child outdoors on a windy day. There is a better way.

What if we based our teaching methods on how God taught? When God created the first humans, He knew we had a lot to learn. God gave Adam the assignment to name all the animals. Even though he completed the task, God cared more for Adam than He did about the completed assignment. God said that Adam working alone was not good. From God’s point of view, working in partnership is a key to accomplishing the good God designed us to do. The partnership between Adam and Eve came in the form of marriage. When the second Adam, Jesus, came to earth— partnership came in the form of men and women who became His friends.

Adam and Eve did not always partner together well, either with God or with each other. In fact, they blew it royally. Yet, God didn’t give up on them or tell them to go work in isolation. God stepped in to find them where they were. He covered their shame. He protected them by moving them out of the garden, yet still partnered with them (and all future generations) in bringing His redemption.

Even though our spiritual, family, social, and corporate lives are full of partnerships, school often focuses on individual learning. Perhaps God designed each of us with our learning strengths and deficits so we could learn the interdependence of healthy relationships while we are young.

I’ve met many teachers who refuse to consider grouping students into partnerships or teams because they have experienced teams where a few do all the work and the others coast. Yet, in the world of sports, we love watching a ball team that works together well because of how they have been taught and coached. In the classroom, homes, and churches—as in sports—teamwork is a learnable skill with significant life-long benefits.

Partnering up with a study buddy does not guarantee a move from surface learning to deep learning. For learning to go deep, it needs to move beyond fact recall. What we do when we learn in groups



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should deepen understanding and develop skills so that what is learned in one context can be applied in a different context.

I saw a striking example of how we learn better together when the combined class I taught was assigned a segment of the year-end program. While I had experience writing and directing plays, I was running on empty by the end of that year, so I asked my 5, 6, and 7-year-old students what they thought we should do for the program. I asked without much hope, but I was in for a surprise.

As they began brainstorming, one student brought up a recent reading lesson on rhymes. Another commented on who would be better at reciting the rhymes and who would be better at acting them out. After more discussion, the students came up with simple costumes that they could make themselves. My contribution? I helped guide the practice and cheered them on.

Of course, that end-of-the-year teamwork came only after a host of challenges we had faced throughout the previous months of learning to work together. Those challenges were worth it—not only for the program, but even more for each student’s future relationships.

Introducing more teamwork might rock the status quo. If that has you concerned, I encourage you to invite God to guide you in this. He has a great deal of experience both in rocking the status quo and in uniting people. If you are already engaged in the challenges of deep learning in teams, bless you for helping to prepare those you influence for better relational connections in every area of their lives.

**I’m curious:** How have you experienced deeper learning in partner or group work? I’d love to hear about it and find out any questions you have. I believe we will learn better as we partner together.