

## **How Smart Do We Need To Be?**

It would be nice to be smarter. It would save me a lot of time if I could figure things out faster, and a lot of steps if I could remember what I was after when I headed down the stairs.

Several drugs on the market now promise to make that happen. One is an old standby, Ritalin, a stimulant that has long been used to lend stability to the conduct of ADHD children. Two are newer drugs, potentially useful to those whose thinking processes are unraveling due to age or disease. The latest trend with such drugs is use by normal healthy people to give them an edge in mental performance.

At what cost? Of course, we do not know the long-term physical effects of the newer drugs. With rare exceptions, long-term drug use carries a significant risk of physical side effects. Scientists are even more concerned with long-term effects on the way we think: possibly cluttering our brains with unnecessary information, or affecting our ability to understand and use what we know.

"There's no free lunch", says geneticist Tim Tully of Cold Springs Harbor labs. Adds Martha Farah of the University of Pennsylvania, "we meddle with these things at our peril."

I frequently hear the advice "work smarter, not harder". Good idea, we might think, when we have too much to do in too little time with too few resources.

But there are things that cannot be hurried. When we cultivate friends, we need to spend time with them. Never mind all of the short-cut advice on how to "read" body language, what your friend's wardrobe tells you about her, or three easy ways to recapture your husband's heart. Don't put all of your trust in "quality time" either. Some things you just can't do without "quantity time".

Suppose you want to get to know God better. If you are a smart person, you may read his book, notice and remember dozens of facts, and draw many interesting comparisons before I have even sorted out the book of Genesis. But if you and I have spent the same amount of time on it, we will probably both be equally improved by the experience.

A friend once said that if you want to learn the Bible, "you have to spend the time there". I thought of him spending days weeks, maybe preparing a Bible class or seminar, and I knew he was right. If you can prepare two talks, lead a Sunday School class, and write an article in the spare time you find in one week, you are no doubt working smart, and providing a benefit to others. Yet your own growth will not take place any faster for the speed at which you work.

"Blessed is the man", David wrote, whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2). David himself did this. "Thy law," he says, "is my meditation all the day (Psalm 119:97), and "I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee

in the night watches" (Psalm 63:6). Could he have improved on this, maybe, and completed all of his meditation tasks before, say, 8 PM? Could he (and can we) meditate faster?

Think of all of the hours that Jesus spent in prayer. Might a little time-management instruction have helped him squeeze it all in, and still get the sleep he needed?

Most of the things that God wants to see in our character are things that you can't acquire any faster by being smarter. Our more intelligent friends will develop them no more quickly than we.

Faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, humility the list goes on. None of these requires exceptional intelligence, but all require time. Intelligence is good, certainly. But more isn't always better.

Whether we have a high or low IQ is not something God seems overly concerned with. What he is concerned with is how we use our intelligence, and how we spend our time. He is concerned with the development and application of wisdom in our lives. Wisdom may indeed be a type of intelligence, but it isn't the kind that can be measured with an IQ test. And it isn't the kind that is likely to be enhanced by ingesting chemicals.

"Wisdom is the principal thing", says Proverbs, "therefore get wisdom. And with all thy getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7). God has given us the right equipment, and he calls us to "reason together" with him (Isaiah 1:18).

If we apply the intelligence we have; if we reason together using God's word; if we spend time with him; we will "get understanding". Like Solomon, we should "search, and seek out wisdom and the reason of things" (Ecclesiastes 7:25). Let's do it. We're smart enough.

Dennis and Vicki Martin