
A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY AND CHURCH GROUPS

INTRODUCTION

1. According to the introduction, what are the key components of “intellectual character”? Would you add anything to the definitions laid out in the introduction? If so, what and why?
2. Why is a love for truth so critical to the development of virtuous intellectual character? Are there times that our society places other aims above the truth? If so, what things are prioritized over truth? Discuss specific examples and the consequences to our culture. Are you ever guilty of placing something else above the truth? If so, what?
3. What benefits might come from having “virtuous intellectual character”? How, for instance, could being a consistently honest, fair-minded, courageous, humble and tenacious thinker positively impact your life? Spend a few minutes brainstorming and making as large a list as you can. As you do, consider also Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:2-7, 15; and Titus 1:1. On the other hand, what negative consequences might come from having bad thinking habits such as being a consistently lazy, biased or careless thinker? Create a list of negative consequences resulting from poor thinking habits.
4. From each of the two lists you have just made, pick a top three. What did you list as the three most important consequences in each category? Why? Discuss.

PART ONE: THE SEVEN INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

CHAPTER 1: INTELLECTUAL COURAGE

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual courage below.

Intellectual courage defined: Those who are intellectually courageous earnestly want to know the truth and so consistently take risks in the pursuit of truth. They are willing to reconsider their own beliefs, even if this scares them. But once they have done so, and come to a belief about what is true, they are willing to stick to their guns, even if the majority mocks or threatens them. (Intellectual cowardice is the corresponding vice.)

1. Can you think of any examples in Scripture of intellectual courage? Why were these acts examples of *intellectual* courage—as opposed to moral courage? What were the varying consequences of these acts of intellectual courage, and what lessons can you draw from these consequences?
2. What is the difference between an act of intellectual courage and intellectually courageous character?
3. Make a list of several instances in which you have acted in an intellectually courageous way. Now make a second list of several instances in which you acted in an intellectually cowardly way. Pick one example from each of these lists. What was it that made you act either with courage or cowardice in that moment?
4. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself regarding intellectually courageous character (one being extremely poor and ten being perfect). Assuming you did not give yourself a ten, where do you think you fall short? Are there any practical steps you can take toward becoming more intellectually courageous? What are they?
5. Read the following passages from the Bible: Daniel 1:10, 2:12, 2:26-28, 3:13-19 and 4:19-27. Summarize the lesson regarding intellectual courage in a sentence and share your summaries with the group. Are there places in your life where you think you will need the intellectual courage of Daniel? What are they? Courage does not mean reck-

lessness. Is there a way that you can act in both a prudent and a courageous way in this situation? How?

CHAPTER 2: INTELLECTUAL CAREFULNESS

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual carefulness below.

Intellectual carefulness defined: Those who are intellectually careful earnestly want to know the truth and so consistently make sure not to rush to hasty conclusions based on limited evidence. They are patient and diligent in their thinking, careful that they do not overlook important details. (Intellectual hastiness is the corresponding vice.)

1. Can you think of any examples from history or current popular culture of intellectual hastiness or carelessness? What are they? What were the consequences of those acts of careless thinking?
2. List some instances in which you have acted in an intellectually careful way. Do the same for instances when you have demonstrated careless thinking. What were the results in each case?
3. Are you consistently careful in your thinking? On a scale of one to ten (one being extremely poor and ten being perfect), what rating would you give yourself regarding your level of intellectual carefulness? Why did you give yourself this rating?
4. Consider asking the group if they see any patterns of intellectual carefulness or carelessness in your life. Can they give you an honest rating from one to ten? And, if so, what specific examples of careless or careful thinking led them to give you the rating they did? If this is not appropriate for the group, consider posing these questions to your spouse, or perhaps a close friend.
5. If you have discovered any habits of careless thinking in any area of your life, can you think of any simple ways that you can begin to transform those thinking patterns into ones that exemplify carefulness? If so, what are they? What will you need to do to ensure that you can actually put your intention to change into practice?
6. Read the following passages from the Bible: Romans 10:2, Philippians

1:9-10, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 Timothy 4:16 and Titus 2:7-8. Summarize in point form the lessons of each passage concerning intellectual carefulness. Discuss your summaries as a group. How can we apply these lessons to our own lives?

CHAPTER 3: INTELLECTUAL TENACITY

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual tenacity below.

Intellectual tenacity defined: Those who are intellectually tenacious earnestly want to know the truth, so they are consistently unwilling to give up when they find an assignment difficult or boring. Instead, they are determined to fight through the difficulty in order to gain a deeper understanding of the material. (Intellectual laziness is the corresponding vice.)

1. What is it about tenacity in general that we find so inspiring? What examples of tenacity (intellectually or otherwise) have been especially encouraging to you? Can you think of a specific example of intellectual tenacity from history, Scripture or your own life? Share why these examples are particularly inspiring to you.
2. Make a list of the sort of challenges you face in your day-to-day life that might require intellectual tenacity. When was the last time that you faced a significant challenge in your thinking? How did you respond? What was the result?
3. Some of the obstacles we face in our thinking are not the intimidating sort of difficulties that inspire fear so much as they are challenges to endure something unpleasant or boring. Why is the challenge to fight through boredom so potentially important? Can you think of a personal example of a time in which you faced that sort of challenge? How did you respond, and what resulted from your response?
4. From one to ten (one being extremely poor and ten being perfect), how would you rate yourself in the area of intellectual tenacity? When and where are you most likely to display a lack of intellectual tenacity? Can you think of practical ways in which you can begin to alter your thinking patterns in an intellectually tenacious direction?

5. Read the following passages from the Bible: Titus 1:9, Hebrews 5:14 and James 1:2-5. Summarize in point form the lessons of each passage concerning intellectual tenacity. Discuss your summaries as a group. How can we apply the lessons in these passages to our lives?

CHAPTER 4: INTELLECTUAL FAIR-MINDEDNESS

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual fair-mindedness below.

Intellectual fair-mindedness defined: Those who are intellectually fair-minded earnestly want to know the truth, so they consistently listen in an even-handed way to differing opinions, even if they already have strong views on the subject. In addition, they attempt to view the issue from the perspective of those they disagree with, believing that they do not always have the most complete or accurate vantage point on a given issue. As a former student of mine correctly observed, the intellectually fair-minded person “seeks to know, not to be right.” (Intellectual bias is the corresponding vice.)

1. The concept of fair-mindedness is based on a belief in an objective truth. Without the concept of objective truth, there is nothing to be either fair-minded or biased about. But the very concept of objective truth is being questioned in Western culture today. What are the arguments in favor of the relativity of truth? Why do you think these arguments are appealing to many? What are the arguments in favor of the existence of objective truth? (For a concise account of the debate and a powerful argument in favor of truth, see Princeton professor Harry Frankfurt’s short but powerful book, *On Truth*.)
2. What are some of the ways in which consistent fair-mindedness can positively affect our lives? And, by way of contrast, what are some of the ways that being consistently biased can negatively affect our lives?
3. Can you think of examples of biased thinking from popular culture? Pick a few of the most important and discuss how these examples affect society.
4. What do you think are the root causes of biased thinking? Based on

your answers, what are some practical ways that we can attack these causes in our own lives in the pursuit of genuine fair-mindedness?

5. Read the following passages from the Bible: Acts 15:1-31 and James 3:17. In point form, summarize the lessons from these passages concerning intellectual fair-mindedness. Discuss your summaries as a group. How can the lessons from these passages be applied to our lives?

CHAPTER 5: INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual curiosity below.

Intellectual curiosity defined: Those who are intellectually curious earnestly want to know the truth, so they are always asking why. They are not satisfied with the easy and simplistic answers, but have a desire to understand what makes it all work—at the foundational level. For them, learning is not simply a necessary evil (the means of getting a job and buying a house) but a lifelong quest full of mystery and joy. (Intellectual indifference is the corresponding vice.)

1. What are the key differences between the positive and negative types of curiosity? Create a list of various examples of curiosity. Then discuss whether each is an example of virtuous intellectual curiosity, the unhealthy sort of curiosity or could be in either category depending on the circumstances.
2. Create a list of people you know who are shining examples of intellectual curiosity. How does their intellectual curiosity spill over into their everyday lives? And what are the positive fruits that they reap as a result of their habit of intellectual curiosity?
3. Create a list of people you know who are examples of an unhealthy form of intellectual curiosity. What are the negative effects of this sort of curiosity in their lives?
4. Are you consistently intellectually curious? From one to ten (one being extremely poor and ten being perfect), how would you rate your intellectual character in the area of curiosity? Why did you give yourself the score you did?

5. Read the following passages from the Bible: Proverbs 2:1-11 and Acts 17:11, 16-34. In point form, summarize the lessons of these passages concerning intellectual curiosity. Discuss your summaries as a group. How can we apply these lessons to our lives?

CHAPTER 6: INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual honesty below.

Intellectual honesty defined: Those who are intellectually honest want to encourage the spread of truth, so they consistently use information in an unbiased way. Realizing that the strength of any argument lies in the integrity of its evidence and logic, the intellectually honest person is careful not to use information taken out of context, to exaggerate, to distort or to otherwise mislead using statistics or any other type of supporting evidence. In addition, the intellectually honest person does not take credit for evidence or ideas that are not their own; they are careful to cite the work of others whenever it is used. (Intellectual dishonesty is the corresponding vice.)

1. Can you think of examples of intellectual dishonesty in Scripture, in popular culture or in your own life experience? In each of these cases, how did the person or persons apply or communicate truth in a deceptive way? If they were successful in the short term, what are the possible long-term consequences of their intellectual dishonesty—for them and for those touched by their dishonesty? Were the long-term consequences of their intellectual dishonesty different from the short-term consequences? If so, how?
2. Can you think of a public figure (either in Scripture or in current political life) who has maintained a reputation for intellectual honesty and integrity? How has this person earned this reputation?
3. Sadly, we can all point to examples in our own lives of intellectual dishonesty. Make a list of personal examples of intellectual dishonesty. Then go down the list and ask yourself why you chose to be intellectually dishonest in that situation. If you are comfortable sharing, choose one example from your list and share it with the group.

4. In what area of your life are you most tempted to consistently manipulate or fudge the truth? Why do you think the temptation to be dishonest is particularly strong in this area of your life? What are some consequences that are likely to result from your dishonesty? And what are some practical things you can do to begin to develop intellectual honesty in this area?
5. Read the following passages from the Bible: 2 Samuel 12:1-14 and James 5:19-20. In point form, summarize the lessons of these passages concerning intellectual honesty. Discuss your summaries as a group. How can these lessons be applied to our lives?

CHAPTER 7: INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Begin by reviewing the definition of intellectual humility below.

Intellectual humility defined: Those who are intellectually humble earnestly want to know the truth, so they consistently recognize that they, like all people, are sinful and capable of error. They are humble because they are aware that truth is not of their making but is God-breathed. They are also honest enough to admit the limitations of their own knowledge base and actually rejoice when they are proved wrong because it means they have grown in their understanding of God's truth. However, intellectually humble people are also aware that all people are sinful and limited in knowledge; thus, they are not willing to passively accept the opinions of others. They remain courageous in their passionate pursuit of truth even as they admit their own limitations. (Intellectual arrogance is the corresponding vice.)

1. C. S. Lewis says that "if you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed" (*Mere Christianity*). Do you think he is right? Why or why not?
2. Do you know anyone who you believe has genuinely humble intellectual character? Who is it? What impresses you most about his or her life? What does this person do regularly that demonstrates intellectual humility?

3. How can our understanding of human nature (basically good, evil or a mix of the two) influence our quest toward intellectual humility? What do you believe about human nature? Do you apply the same standard to yourself that you apply to others?
4. On a scale of one to ten (one being extremely poor and ten being perfect), how intellectually humble do you think you are? With regard to intellectual humility, what patterns of thought or actions can you point to as examples of good or bad intellectual character?
5. Read Philippians 2:1-11. In a sentence, summarize the point of this passage. Discuss how the lesson of the passage can apply to our thinking.

PART TWO: THE FRUITS OF INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER

CHAPTER 8: THE BENEFITS OF KNOWING MORE ABOUT MORE

1. This chapter claims that ignorance is not usually blissful and that knowledge of the truth almost always produces positive outcomes in our lives. List and discuss some examples from your own life in which ignorance was harmful and knowledge helpful.
2. While knowing the truth is almost always beneficial, are there ever times when knowing the truth is more of a burden than a benefit? What might be some examples in which this seems to be the case? When knowing the truth is painful, does that mean it is ultimately harmful? Discuss.
3. Create a list of five books or people whose insights or knowledge have changed your life for the better. Why did you include the books or people that you did? Share your list with the group and explain how the knowledge you gained from one of the books or one of the people changed your life for the better.
4. In what area of your life do you think you are in the most urgent need of an increase in quality knowledge? Why? What are some practical—and realistic—ways you might go about gaining the knowledge that you feel you need?

CHAPTER 9: THE BENEFITS OF BETTER THINKING

1. Have you ever cut corners in your pursuit of knowledge? When? Why did you do it? What was the result in the short term? How might that choice have affected your intellectual character?
2. Think of an example of when you did not cut corners—when you pushed through and did the hard work necessary to really understand something. What made you work hard in this case but cut corners in the earlier example? What was the result of your hard work in the short term? How might that effort have paid off in the long run?
3. In education circles, the skills of critical thinking and problem solving have gained almost legendary status. They are often viewed as the magic bullets that will turn potential school dropouts into sharp students and model citizens. This book implies that the focus on thinking skills *alone*, while important, is shallow and is unlikely to produce virtuous change in people's lives. Why? Do you agree or disagree?

CHAPTER 10: LOVING GOD

1. Begin by reading the parable of the bags of gold (Matthew 25:14-30) and the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:12-27). In each of the parables, who was rewarded? Why? Who was punished or condemned? What sort of language was used to describe them? Why do you think they were judged this way?

Now read Mark 12:30-31. How might this passage be related to the two parables above? If using our God-given talents to the best of our abilities is an act of worship, does that mean that failing to do so is sinful? Why or why not?

2. Read Psalm 136. What kinds of knowledge are critical in worshiping God according to this psalm? Can you think of other psalms, or other passages of the Bible, in which additional types of knowledge are also important to worship? How might attempts to worship without knowledge be dangerous? Emotion is an important part of worship. How might knowledge of the truth aid in our emotional response to God?

3. Read Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:20. What do these passages say about the relationship between our knowledge of the world and our ability to worship God? Some people know a tremendous amount about the world and yet fail to honor the Creator of that world. What might explain this, and what are some passages that would support your explanation?

For the Christian, however, it seems clear that a growing understanding of creation will bring with it an increased ability to honor the Creator. What are some examples in your own life where an increase in knowledge has led to deepening worship?

CHAPTER II: LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

1. Think back on the examples of the reckless decisions by the businessman and the reporter at the beginning of this chapter. Create a list of harmful effects that their reckless decision making could have had on others. Can you think of examples where hasty, ignorant or otherwise poor decision making by others has resulted in harm to you? Can you think of examples when your own lack of virtuous decision making has caused pain to others?
2. Consider knowledge and trust in the context of intellectual character. Car mechanics generally have a poor reputation. In fact, their reputation is often just slightly better than that of used-car salesmen. Assuming that mechanics are not inherently more deceptive than anyone else, why do you think that we have such a tough time trusting them? Compare how you feel and act around people whom you trust, on the one hand, with how you feel and act around those who have broken your trust, on the other. What good things result from the experience of a trusting relationship or community? What harmful or painful things come out of relationships or communities where trust has broken down?

According to this chapter, and your own thinking, what is the relationship between intellectual character and trust? And, what is the relationship between trust and being able to love your neighbor? Can

you think of practical examples from your own life where trust has improved your ability to love others? Can you think of practical examples from your own life where broken trust has hurt your ability to love others?

3. This chapter argued that the acts of intellectual character by Mutava Musyimi and Václav Havel were also acts of love. How so? Can you think of examples from history, Scripture or your own experience where an act of intellectual character has been loving in a similar way?

PART THREE: BECOMING PEOPLE OF INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER

CHAPTER 12: DEVELOPING VIRTUOUS INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER

1. We have already seen that all of us, at some point, put other things above our loyalty to truth (whether it is our pursuit of wealth, power or popularity, or simply our desire to be loved or accepted). Unfortunately, to the extent that we continue to do this, we are undermining our efforts to develop virtuous intellectual character. Unless we attack the root, we can hack at the leaves forever without seeing any meaningful results. So what can we do to develop a deep love of truth? Using this chapter and your own ideas, create a list of ways that you can effectively grow in your love for truth. For Christians, also consider what role the study of the Bible and the Holy Spirit play in this transformation.
2. We will never seek to become people of increasing intellectual character if we believe we are already intellectually virtuous. Take a minute to recall how you and your friends assessed your intellectual character in each of the different virtues. In what areas do you see the greatest need for growth? Are there thinking habits that are encouraged by your work, your current leisure habits or the people you spend your time with that are harmful to intellectual character? What are they? What steps can you take to replace those habits with new

and positive ones? From your list of bad habits, try picking one habit that you believe can be overcome and create a reasonable plan of attack. Discuss this plan with at least one other person in the group, specifically looking for ways to make it more realistic to implement.

CHAPTER 13: SEVEN SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

1. By this time, you have likely begun to understand the power of intellectual character to shape the outcome of our lives. You have also seen that our intellectual character must be rooted in a love for truth. And finally you have seen that each of us has areas where our intellectual character is in desperate need of improvement. Now what? What are some practical steps we can take in our quest to help students, children and colleagues become people of virtuous intellectual character? Spend a few minutes considering the suggestions in this chapter, as well as adding suggestions from the group.
2. Take a minute and come up with a list of people who are inspiring examples of how to pass on virtuous intellectual character to others. They can be friends or role models from history or Scripture. Are there ways that you can keep their example before you as you go about your day—and particularly during those periods when you are targeting a specific habit for change?
3. Even when we are consciously working to change a habit, it can take several weeks before we start seeing real change, and months before our new habits have really taken hold. Once that happens the hard work is over, but until then it can be very hard work and may require more strength than we have on our own. Do you have people who are willing to walk with you on this journey? Who are they? How can they keep you accountable in your pursuit of intellectual character?