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Book review: The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences

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Book Review: The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences Paperback – April 21, 2020, Muriel I. Elmer and Duane H. Elmer

Dr. Kevin M. Jones Sr.

Without the slightest hesitation, I recommend *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences*. Every day Christian educators grapple with making sense of theology and pedagogy and how these ideals work together. In addition, there are discussions as to what we should do *after* learning. Whether K-12 public, private, charter, or homeschool, in the post-secondary setting, or church, the believers desire is to make Christ known. We are called to love the LORD faithfully while faithfully loving those around us. This requires implementing the Bible and strategies to enhance the spiritual and cognitive learning of students. This book is for people who desire to see God glorified and take action after learning.

Elmer and Elmer start with stating a problem in Christianity. In short, many teachers do not practice what they teach. The authors examine Matthew 23 and draw some helpful conclusions from the work and words of Christ. They challenge the reader to do some reflection early in the book related to teaching by asking, “In what ways am I (and are you) a hypocrite? Name it; confess it; let God remove it with truth in word and deed.” The problem of our day is not new. There is nothing new under the sun, and the sins prophets, priests, and early church fathers dealt with are still looming and will loom until the return of Christ. We know the word, but don’t practice the word. Therefore, educators have a vital role in connecting theory to practice in how and what we teach. *The Learning Cycle* presses this point.

Graphic organizers are a very helpful tool to enhance cognitive development. Elmer and Elmer use a helpful model to assist with what they describe as “barriers to change.” In the center of their graphic design is “Christlikeness.” Their model consists of five very helpful ways for the teacher and learner to think about transmitting and teaching information. You will have to read the book to get all five, but here are two of them: 1) *Recall*: I remember the information, 2) *Recall with appreciation*: I value the information. They do dig deeper than recall, and challenge the reader at several points to respond in writing to prompts. I found this very helpful in reading and implementing some of the suggested strategies with other educators.

I remind you: “Christlikeness” is at the center. Christ was guided by and filled with the power of the Spirit. If we try to do these things without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are going to fall short. In this book, the scripture is the foundation and final authority in everything stated.

In summary, the first two chapters employ us to think about Christ and the difficulty of change. In chapters three and four, they encourage us to build a robust understanding of the Bible.

Chapter five is about falling in love with the truth they urge us to understand from chapter four. In chapter six and seven the urging is to live out what we learn and teach.

It seems when reading the Pauline epistles that Paul (by the power of the Spirit) would often anticipate the opposition or questions of his readers. Elmer and Elmer likewise prepare the teacher for barriers in chapters eight and nine. In chapters ten through twelve, the aim is obedience and continual practice. Upon concluding *The Learning Cycle*, I was excited about teaching and learning.

The book succeeds at many things. The call is to love and practice truth.

Many of us became teachers because we love teaching. Even so, teaching has always been a difficult task. It has proven to be more difficult in our contemporary settings as we deal with racial tension and COVID 19. I love this book because it has strengthened my heart and has been a gentle reminder that my work has eternal significance. I hope you will read this book, and I assure you it will generate healthy discussion in any learning environment.