

Analysis Document

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Concept Lesson: Divine Omniscience

The following is an analysis document for a concept lesson on divine attributes focusing on the concept of omniscience, which will be taught in the context of a local church youth discipleship program with learners that are in high school between the ages of 14 and 19.

Learner Analysis

General Characteristics

The projected learners for this concept lesson are young adults, ages 14 to 19, who are still in high school. Because the lesson is in the context of a church youth discipleship group, each participant should have previously made a personal commitment to Christ. The group will be composed of individuals who voluntarily choose to join the group in order to grow more in their spiritual understandings of central doctrines of the church.

The voluntary and spiritual nature of the group may add to the positive outlook of individuals toward the content of the lesson (i.e., their roles as new disciples may increase their eagerness to learn) (Molenda, Pershing, and Reigeluth 1996, 273). However, the ages of those represented in the group may have an adverse affect on their motivation toward learning the material in its abstract form (G. M. Wadholm, personal communication, September 12, 2007). Thus, the complexity of the material should not be allowed to overshadow the practicality of the concepts involved. Relevance is especially important with young people (L. Bledsoe, personal communication, September 12, 2007). Also, teaching methods should be used which incorporate interactivity, including the use of movie or television clips, music, group discussions, and role playing (Lawrence, Fields, Mayo, and McLuen 2005, 72, 80). While I had originally envisioned using student workbooks of some kind, an interview with the Youth Pastor, Grace Wadholm, who has taught youth Sunday School for four years, advised against using such a “cold” teaching method in the instruction of teenagers.

Specific Entry Competencies

First, participants in the group should have a personal relationship with Jesus. This entry competency relates to the purpose of the group, which is discipleship. In order to follow Jesus, a person must first know Jesus, and knowing about Jesus is no substitute for a personal relationship with the all-knowing Jesus.

Second, participants should have a basic knowledge of the concepts of God and infinity, and should be somewhat familiar with the methods of logic (for instance, with inductive and deductive reasoning) though they will not need to be adept logicians or know the logic lingo.

Third, participants should be somewhat aware of the importance of using the Bible in discovering theological principles and with the idea of divine omnipotence. These topics will be addressed in earlier lessons in the series.

Fourth, participants should be able to read at a junior high to high school level.

Special Needs

Grace Wadholm, the Youth Pastor at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship (hereafter referred to as CCF) in Bloomington, Indiana, identified two special needs of the group (personal communication, September 12, 2007). First, the youth have a lower level of maturity and understanding than might be the case for older groups receiving the same instruction. Short attention spans, boredom, and a lack of experience with the concepts related to the lesson might all present problems for the instructor and the instructional designer. These issues might best be dealt with by using a non-school-like learning environment through the use of informal interactive teaching methods, interesting anecdotal asides meant to illustrate main concepts, and a fresh and lively approach to the topic by the instructor. Second, because of the non-Christian backgrounds of the participants, the teenagers may experience large amounts of cognitive dissonance when confronted with the new concepts. Also, non-Christian parents, fellow schoolmates, friends, and relatives that are influential with the participants may discourage them from being actively involved in the group, or may even completely disagree with what is being taught in the lesson. Negative outside influences may lower the motivation of the students and increase their cognitive dissonance. These outside pressures may be counteracted by positive inside influences (friends and adult role models from within the church) and by active discussion and question and answer times during class to address pertinent questions and challenges of the participants.

Process Used to Complete Learner Analysis

Seven youth from CCF were contacted and interviewed. Five boys and two girls were asked questions that centered on ideas related to divine omniscience to appraise entry competencies and to assess interest in the proposed content. After being presented with a generalization of the content of the lesson, the youth were asked:

- Does the lesson sound interesting?
- Do you think you need to know more about God?
- Does God know everything?
- Does God know everything that has been or will be?
- If yes, how does God know everything?

- Does God know what might have been in the past, or might be in the future (possibilities)?
- Did Jesus know everything, even while he was here on earth?
- Can we ever know as much as God?
- How can we know whether or not God knows everything?
- What concepts in this lesson might be the most difficult for new Christians to understand?

This informal survey revealed that the four children that had been Christians for two or more years and had grown up in church could give rudimentary answers that corresponded closely with traditional evangelical Christian beliefs. However, the three newer Christians (one girl and two boys) were very unsure about their answers, or answered in ways that showed that they did not understand the concepts involved, particularly the concepts of infinity and the relationship of omniscience to time. However, the newer Christians were more interested in the lesson plan than the youth who have been Christians for two or more years.

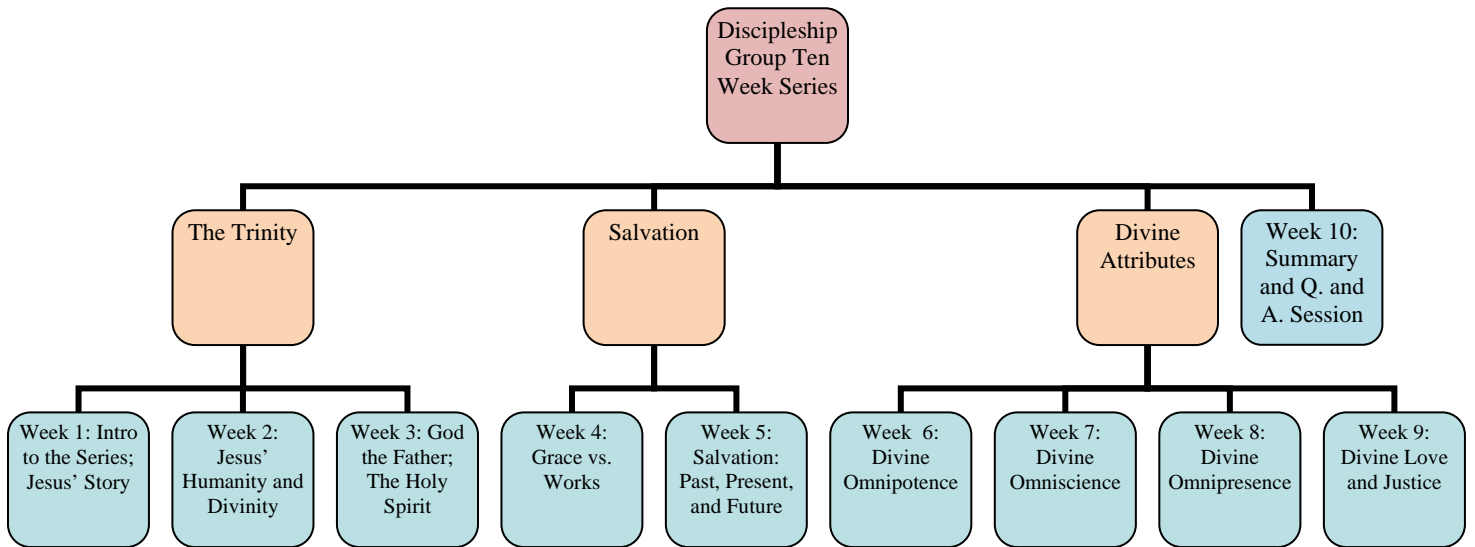
The results from a 2005 national survey of 15,000 Christian teenagers in churches across denominational spectrums were used to ascertain the general learning styles of teenagers in church discipleship groups (the published results were from a sample of 1,008 responses with a margin of error at +/-3.1%) (Lawrence, et al. 2006, 80). More than 25 denominations were represented, and half of the respondents were female. 58% of respondents indicated that they liked film or TV clips, music, experiences, group discussions, and other “active” methods of teaching God’s truth, while only 28% indicated that they enjoyed traditional talks or lectures (82).

A Youth Pastor, Grace Wadholm, and a Youth/Children’s Ministry Director, Lana Bledsoe, at CCF were consulted regarding the appropriateness of the content, the existing knowledge and attitudes of youth in discipleship groups in a church environment, any special needs that might exist in the group, and the motivational strategies that might work best in the instruction. Their answers were incorporated into the learner, task, and context analyses.

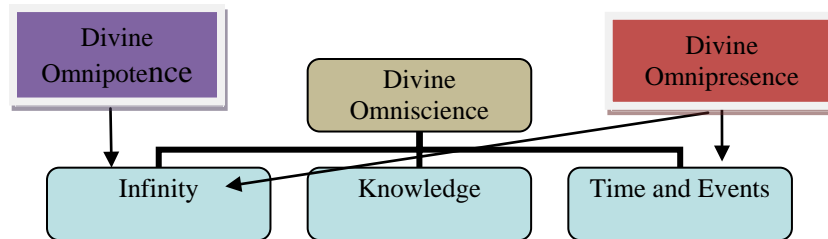
Task Analysis

Concept Classification

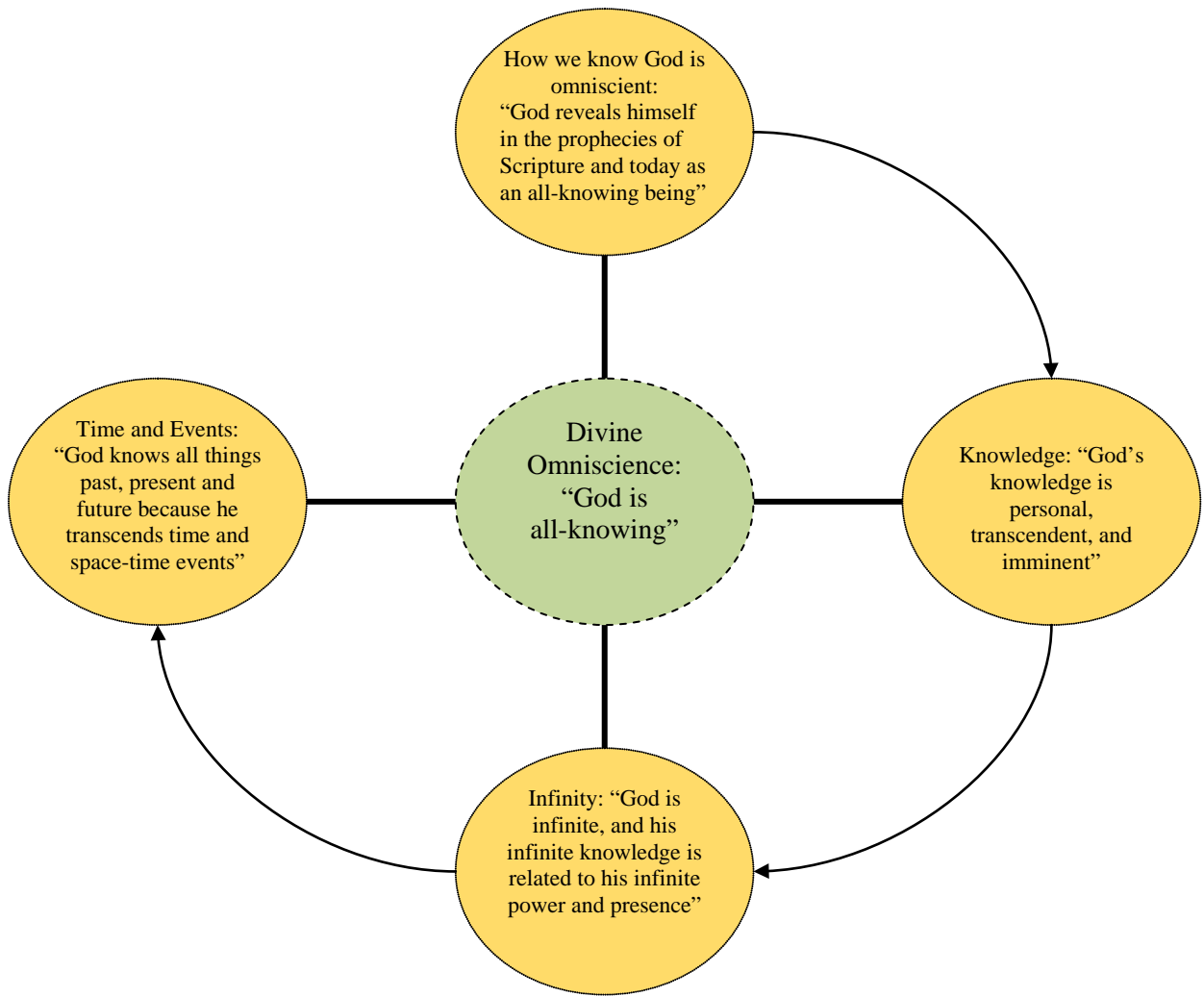
The problem identified in the context and learner analyses is that of new teenage Christians not understanding basic Christian doctrines. The content of the ten week discipleship group is meant to address this deficiency through interactive instruction. The following chart illustrates in a hierarchical form the concepts that will be learned in the discipleship group throughout the ten week series, and the weeks in which they will be taught.



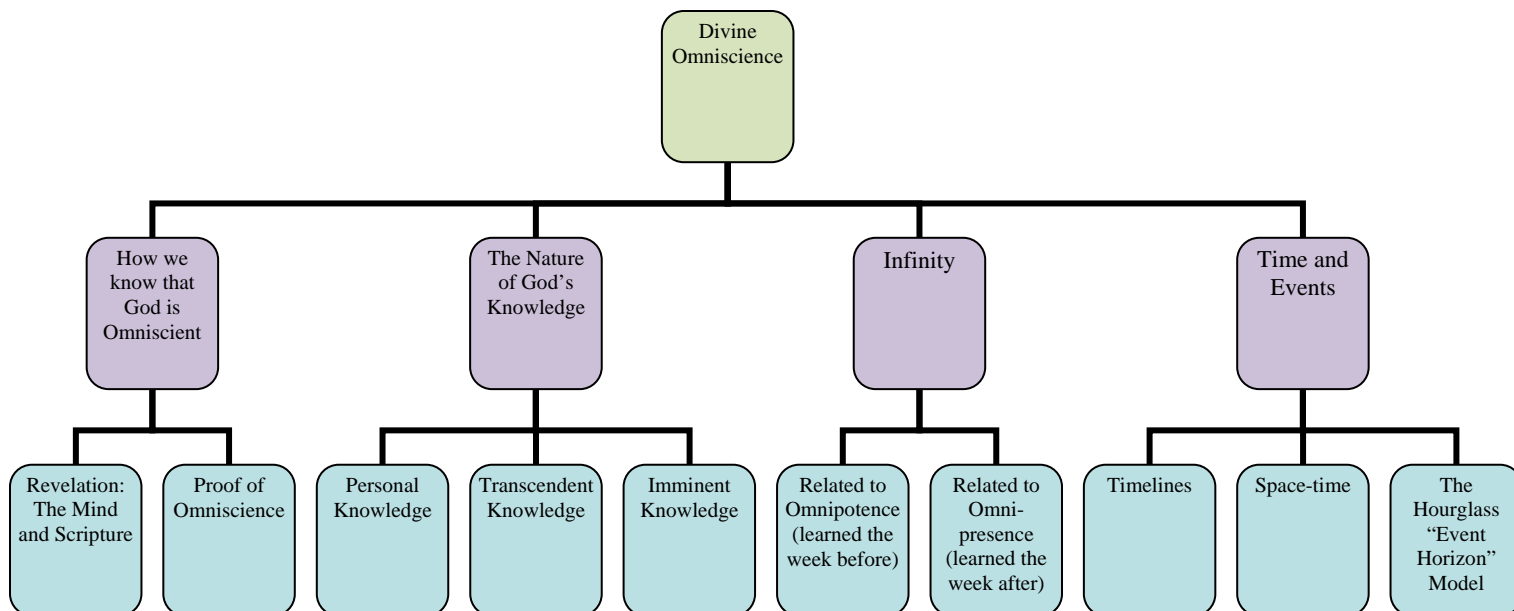
The present analysis document focuses on the lesson presented in the seventh week of the ten week series (omniscience). The following chart illustrates in a hierarchical form the concept and subordinate concepts to be learned in the seventh week of instruction and their relationships with two other concepts in the series.



The concept classification that should be mastered upon conclusion of the lesson on omniscience is illustrated in the following radial diagram, which shows the relationships of the subordinate concepts in the lesson to the core concept of divine omniscience. The arrows that tie together the subordinate concepts show the order in which the subordinate concepts will be learned in the process of learning the core concept.



The following chart illustrates in hierarchical form the concepts and subordinate concepts to be learned in the lesson on omniscience and the order in which they will be learned.



Due to the abstract nature of the content, only six new concepts will be dealt with in this lesson to avoid undue complexity (Reigeluth 1997). The new concepts that are presented in the lesson are omniscience, personal knowledge, transcendent knowledge, imminent knowledge, space-time, and event horizons. The number of new concepts to be included in the lesson have been purposely kept to a minimum to increase the probability of learner retention (too many new concepts can lead to confusion or lack of retention). Also, the subordinate concepts have been clumped together into “chunks” of two to four in order to optimize retention of the material, and these chunks are ordered from simple to complex, following Reigeluth’s Simplifying Conditions Method (Molenda, Pershing, and Reigeluth 1996, 276; Reigeluth 1997, 167).

Identification of Experts

Accepted denominational doctrines set forth in *The Sixteen Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God* were consulted in order to identify any discrepancies between the content to be taught and the formal doctrines of the denomination (General Council of the Assemblies of God 2007).

The Apostle’s Creed, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the decisions of the early church councils (from the first to the fifth century AD) were consulted in order to identify the major and most generally accepted doctrines of the Christian church, and the language used to describe the concepts (Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, n.d.).

Erickson’s *Christian Theology* (1999), a widely used textbook on modern evangelical theology, was useful for its examples and nonexamples and its topical layout of the subject. The written works of other important theologians and philosophers were consulted in order to flesh out the concepts and subordinate concepts (Grenz and Olson 1992; Locke 1975; Pascal 1962).

In addition to the use of outside sources, I have used my own theological work as a resource for the construction of the content of this lesson. I am a Bible scholar, with a B.A. and M.A. in Biblical Studies. I am a member of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, and am currently finishing my second book on theology (both not yet published). The “Event Horizon” model of space-time causality and its relation to omniscience was first elucidated in *I Found You: A Theodyssey* (Wadholm, 2007). This model of space-time causality will not be named in the actual instruction of the content in the lesson, but several ideas will be drawn from this model.

From the point of view of evangelical Christians, the Bible is the final and supreme authority for the formulation of doctrine (Grenz and Olson 1992, 286-288). Therefore, the content of the lesson will depend in large part on Biblical data that will be addressed at the beginning of each major section of each lesson.

How Accuracy of Content was Confirmed

The Youth Pastor of CCF was shown the concept maps for the lesson in order to ensure that the content was theologically correct and appropriate for the learning levels of the youth. A further step that might be taken in the future might be to have the completed concept lesson (and the other lessons in the series) reviewed by several theologians from different backgrounds (e.g. pastors, seminary professors, and independent scholars).

Process Used to Complete Task Analysis

Several books on theology were consulted in the development of the task analysis. John Locke’s ideas concerning the existence of God were used to develop the concept of God’s imminent knowledge (1975, 314-315). Blaise Pascal’s comments on the proofs for the existence of God were used to develop the idea of God’s personal knowledge, and his argument for the “hiddenness” of God provides a foundation for the concept of God’s transcendent knowledge (1962). Millard J. Erickson’s elucidations of the concepts of infinite knowledge and God’s relation to time were helpful in providing clarity to those issues in the lesson (1999, 300-302). Also, Erickson’s descriptions of how divine omniscience relates to divine omnipotence and omnipresence were helpful in bringing lucidity to my own conceptualization of these relationships (298-304). Erickson’s arguments concerning revelatory and logical proof for God’s eternal attributes form the basis of the concepts of revelation and proof in this lesson (299-302). Erickson was heavily influenced in this regard by the works of Carl Henry, Bernard Ramm, and Karl Barth (Grenz and Olson 1992, 286-309).

The Youth Pastor and the Youth/Children’s Ministry Director of CCF were consulted regarding the content of the lesson. Originally, I had scheduled the Divine Attributes section of the series to occur first. However, the Youth Pastor informed me that the Trinity should be discussed first, with a synopsis of Jesus’ life as the beginning of the series to lay ground for later ideas within a narrative setting (G. Wadholm, personal communication, September 13, 2007). She argued that this would increase the perceived relevance of the material and would be a better structure for learning and retention of the concepts.

The Apostle's Creed, the decisions of the early church councils, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, and *The Sixteen Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God* were accessed online. These doctrinal formulations helped to provide a standard for doctrinal language and for concept relationships. This also helped to ensure that heresy would not be taught.

Context Analysis

Needs Analysis

First, a normative need was addressed. In evangelical Christianity it is a generally accepted theological concept that Christians need to know what they believe, why they believe it, and how to act on those beliefs (Erickson 1999). Unfortunately, formal doctrinal formulations are nearly nonexistent in scripture. However, several extrabiblical normative standards exist that help to establish the baseline of doctrine that is the foundation of orthodox (as opposed to heterodox, not as opposed to Roman Catholic) Christianity. *The Apostle's Creed* and the decisions of the early church councils are by far the most commonly accepted standards for Christian belief outside of the Bible itself. These canons of doctrine may serve as a normative standard of belief in Christianity, and the content of these canons may be said to “set the bar” for the doctrinal development of new Christians. This idea of a “community of faith” setting the “rules of faith” for the community of believers is a concept developed first by the early church fathers Irenaeus and Tertullian in the second century AD (Froehlich 1984, 13-15, 44-47), and was later seminal to the theological formulations of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Modern evangelicals continue to apply this concept of authoritative extrabiblical canonicity to their interpretation of Scripture (Dockery 1992). These canons also form the basis of the denominational doctrines of the Assemblies of God, and are seen as containing normative beliefs for Christians in the international denomination and in each local church affiliated with the denomination. Thus, it makes sense to test the present beliefs of the youth in the church against the consensus of these commonly held canons before the class actually begins. In the process of interviewing seven teenagers at CCF, each individual's knowledge level of the content before the instruction was compared with the normative standards. Needs that were found were in the general areas that are listed below.

- One youth misunderstood God's omniscience to mean that God merely had a larger mind than humans (a misconception of the concept of infinity).
- Several youth thought that no person (including God) could know everything (a misconception of both transcendental knowledge and the nature of divinity).
- Two of the youth believed that Jesus, while he is God, could not possibly know everything, though God the Father could (a misconception of Jesus' divinity and unity with the Father and also a misconception of the relationship between the concept of omniscience and the Christian concept of divinity).

- Four of the youth had trouble expressing what exactly they believed because they were not sure what they believed (the concepts of omniscience and proof of omniscience were completely missing or were not clearly delineated).

Second, the felt needs of the group were ascertained in interviews. Several youth said that new Christians might be interested in the lesson, and all of the youth expressed a need to understand more about the concept of omniscience. One of the new Christians expressed an interest in the lesson.

Third, the expressed needs of the group would be made apparent through youth signing up for the group. Teenagers that volunteer to be a part of the discipleship group are expressing their need for growth in the knowledge of basic Christian concepts. The Youth Pastor expressed a need for lessons on basic Christian beliefs geared toward new Christians.

Instructional Context

A local Pentecostal church, CCF, is the setting for the instruction. The church is affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Average attendance on Sundays is 150-200. The youth group average attendance is around twelve. The youth room downstairs will be used for the group meetings. The youth room is equipped with a supply of Bibles (New International Version), a marker board, several CD and a DVD player, and a large television that is connected to a laptop for instructional purposes (mostly for PowerPoint presentations). The room is furnished with fold-up chairs, five large bean bags, and a couch. Use of the marker board, videos, PowerPoint presentations, and short clips of songs will probably be part of the presentation of the material, and the room is large enough to accommodate role-playing and games with small groups to increase interactivity in the instruction. The color printer at the church will be used for printing teacher lesson plans and other instructional materials. The instruction will take place during regularly scheduled Sunday School at 9:30-10:30am on Sunday mornings, and the group will meet for ten consecutive weeks (excluding holidays). The group will discuss a different doctrinal concept each week that has to do with divine attributes, the Trinity, or salvation.

Transfer Context

The new knowledge that will be gained will be intrinsically valuable to the participants, but will also have practical use at home and school. Each lesson will incorporate practical applications of the content, and each student will be asked to do something related to the lesson for each week. This homework will be given verbally and will be included in the teacher manuals. The practical application for the lesson on divine omniscience will be as follows:

- The student will be asked “Do you know anyone that doesn’t believe that God knows everything? If a close friend were to question you about the nature of God, how would you respond to them?”

- The student will be encouraged to find someone outside of class during the week with which to discuss the concepts they learned in class. In-class role-playing dialogue on the concept will artificially simulate discussions that the students might have during the week with their friends, family, or fellow students at school.
- The student will write in their weekly journal that week, and will identify some event, concept, or procedure which seems impossible for even God to know, and then describe how God overcomes these impossibilities and what that means to them.
- At the end of class the student will be asked “Why does it matter that God knows everything?” This question will bring the students back to the beginning of the lesson where relevance was discussed.

The new knowledge will be used to discuss faith issues mainly in homes and schools. The income level of the households represented are mainly middle class to upper lower class. All of the youth live in houses. About half of the parents are unbelievers. The schools that are attended by the youth are Bloomington North High School and Bloomington South High School. Both schools are described by the youth as being places where the concept of divine omniscience would be little understood and probably opposed.

Process Used to Complete Context Analysis

The needs analysis was developed from the data obtained in seven interviews with teens at CCF and in two interviews with youth leaders at CCF, and from comparing the results of the interviews with normative doctrinal needs found in the decisions of the early church councils, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, and *The Sixteen Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God*. The information regarding the instructional context was gained by asking the Youth Pastor about what instructional resources would be available and by visiting the youth room at CCF. The information about the transfer context came from discussing the issue of relevance with the Youth Pastor and through personal contact with the teens. I asked the teens which schools they attended, and I have met all but one of their parents and have visited all of their houses. This hands-on method of data acquisition regarding the context of instruction is called for by Molenda, Pershing, and Reigeluth, and allows me to have a better idea of the types of materials the teacher will have available and what kind of needs (felt, expressed, etc.) are to be found in the context (1996, 274). Of course, in the end I cannot know everything about the context—I am not God after all.

Appendix A: Supporting citations from professional literature

- Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics. (n.d.). *Historic Church Documents*. Retrieved September 13, 2007, from <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>
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