

Living our Faith Faithfully

About a year ago I became interested in making wooden gears in my workshop. I was hoping to design and build a wooden clock, and while I haven't begun, it is still on the backburner. Wooden clocks have multiple gears, and there are two ways to make gears out of wood. The first way is to print out a sheet of paper with a gear on it, paste that paper to a piece of wood and cut it out with a scroll saw. Depending on the size of the gear and the number of teeth, it can be a tedious task, and it takes a great deal of accuracy, for if you accidentally make the tooth of the gear too small or too large, it won't mesh with another gear. The second way is to develop a jig that enables one to cut the teeth of a gear using a table or band saw. It's quicker and more accurate. I came across a YouTube video with someone doing that, but no explanation was given. I knew that if I were going to develop such a jig, I would have to understand how gears are designed.

I initially thought the concept couldn't be too hard, but the more I studied the geometry of a gear, the more I became aware that there was a lot to know. The shape of the tooth determines how well the gear will mesh with another, and I was introduced to the concept of the *involute of a circle*. The literature said that the gear which followed the involute of a circle was the best shape of a gear. I almost stopped reading because I had no idea what they were talking about. But I persisted, and I found some further definitions and I realized that I needed to understand a whole lot of other terms: *pitch*, *root*, *reference*, *addendum*, *dedendum*, and something called the *module*. These terms were confusing me, and I found I had to do more and more reading. Thankfully I have access to the Internet (how did we survive without it?), and I gradually I gained a basic understanding of how an involute gear is designed. I also became convinced that the guy who posted the YouTube video of himself cutting an involute gear on the table saw was an absolute genius. I still haven't figured out how to build the jig to cut gears on my table saw, but sometime I may be able to do so.

If the above paragraphs confused you, you are probably not alone. I am sure that if I talked to some qualified people in a machine shop, they would not be confused because they use this kind of language all the time. But for me, a beginning, my head was spinning. I do know, however, if I would immerse myself in the field of involute gears, I would soon become able to converse with the pros.

When in seminary, our professors warned us that we need to watch the language we use from the pulpit. They were not talking about bad language, but, rather, something they called Christian-speak. While in seminary we threw around words like *justification*, *sanctification*, *predestination*, and the like, always knowing what they meant. For those who have been in the church for years, perhaps these words are quite familiar, and they can define them quite readily. However, the seminary professors warned us, a lot of people are not entirely familiar with these words, and if we were going to use them from the pulpit, we need to define them clearly and often or else people will get confused. Our professors went on to say that we not only had to be careful about the language we used, but when we referred to biblical stories, we had to assume that not everyone in the congregation would know what we were talking about, and we would have to give a bit of background. So, if we happened to mention Abraham or David or Paul or James

(we could assume that people would have a pretty good idea of who Jesus is), we should tell a little bit about them as we referred to them.

I can imagine that someone who did not grow up in the church or to whom one's parents did not read the familiar Bible stories when they were young, would have the same level of confusion as I did when I was first introduced to the idea of involute gears. I do try to be careful to explain theological terms and introduce people from the Bible as I refer to them so that I do not cause undo confusion among those who may not have had access to these words and persons. After all, a sermon should be clear to all, not just to those who have years of experience in the faith.

Of course, as we spend time reading our Bibles and learning the concepts from the Bible (theology), we will grow more familiar with names and terms, and we will become confused less quickly. That being said, there is something else that is equally important and that is putting what we know into practice. I might know exactly how an involute gear works, but if I don't ever figure out how to design and create one, that knowledge is virtually useless. In the same way, if we know the Bible forward and backward, and if we can correctly define all the biblical terms but never incorporate them into our lives, what is the point?

I said at the beginning that there are two ways to make gears for a wooden clock. The second was to understand how a gear works and then develop a way of making that gear. The other way is to find a pattern, paste it to a block of wood and then cut it out. This method also results in a gear, and most people who build wooden clocks use this method. In other words, they may not have the faintest idea as to what all those terms mean but they take what they do know, and they put it to good use. I'm not saying that we should use this as an excuse not to learn the stories of the Bible or not seek to be able to define biblical words. Knowing these things deepens our appreciation for God and his work. However, we do not need to wait until we know everything to be a faithful Christian, for we can be faithful even if we know a little.

Jesus spoke highly of the faith of a child. Pasting a picture of a gear on a piece of wood and cutting it out is what a child would do. They simply trust that the one who designed the gear knew what they were doing, and they follow the lines with the saw. Perhaps what Jesus wanted to impress upon us when he talked about the faith of a child was that while we should learn and grow in knowledge, we should also be like children and simply put into practice what we do know. Living faithfully doesn't mean that we have to know everything. It simply means that we put into practice everything we know. While some of us might have a better understanding than others, all of us can put into practice what we believe, often with the exact same results.

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