

9 Sept 10

This version has an up-dated chapters 1-4 as of Nov 2008.

Nobody cares how much you know -  
until they know how much you care.

- John Cassis

#### THIS & THAT:

A Sunday school teacher was telling the youngsters about Daniel and the Lions Den. She had a picture of Daniel standing, brave and confident, with a group of lions around him. One little girl started to cry.

The teacher said, "Don't cry. The lions are not going to eat Daniel."

The girl said, "That's not what I'm crying about. That little lion, over in the corner, isn't going to get any food."

~~~~~ A Sunday school teacher said to her children, "We have been learning how powerful kings and queens were in Bible times. But, there is a higher power. Can anybody tell me what it is?" One child blurted out, "Aces!"

~~~~~ A visiting minister waxed eloquent during the offertory prayer. "Dear Lord," he began with arms extended and a rapturous look on his upturned face, "without you we are but dust..."

He would have continued but at that moment my very obedient daughter (who was listening carefully for a change!) leaned over to me and asked quite audibly in her shrill little girl voice, "Mom, what is butt dust?"

March 11, 2002

Dear friend,

You have received this free copy of this book manuscript intended to help lay teachers do a better job of teaching the Bible. I make one request. Please **FIRST** read the chapter assigned to you based upon the first letter of your last name. As you read note any problems, errors, or confusing sentences. You can print off a hard copy and mark them, or keep it electronic and mark errors or suggestions by adding your comments inside [[[ ]]]. Feel free to suggest changes to stories, arrangement, content, and suggest other stories (with citations). Note any confusing sentences or ideas. Then simply email or snail-mail these notes to me. [pbishop@bama.ua.edu](mailto:pbishop@bama.ua.edu). PO Box 870312, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0312 USA.

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Feel free to comment on multiple chapters, just be sure and do your assigned chapter first!!!

For example, My name is Bishop, so I read chapter 2 and mark it first.

A or Z = Chapter 1  
B or Y or X = Chapter 2  
C or W = Chapter 3  
D or V = Chapter 4  
E or U = Chapter 5  
F or T = Chapter 6  
G or S = Chapter 7  
H or R = Chapter 8  
I or P or Q = Chapter 9  
J or O = Chapter 10  
K or N = Chapter 11  
L or M = Chapter 12

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## Teaching the Heart of the Matter A layman's guide to effective teaching.

November 17, 2001

“School teachers are required to have certificates indicating preparation and previous experience; Sunday School teachers are chosen from the ranks of busy men and women, few of whom have had professional training for their task.” Gaines Dobbins p. 73

We have a tremendous challenge as teachers. In our teaching, one of our primary goals must be to glorify God. Among our other goals, we hope to change attitudes and behaviors as an outward manifestation of a changed heart.

The purpose of this short text is to prod your own thinking about teaching. This is not a cookbook. You must adapt it to yourself, your class, and your situation. No one can tell you the best way to prepare, or teach, or assess your teaching. You and your situation and your students are UNIQUE. Only you along with the Holy Spirit can figure out best to minister through teaching. My purpose is merely to try to make it a bit easier to accomplish each of these vital tasks.

It is your role to clear the major obstacles to learning from your students' path. These obstacles can include their personal background, lack of guidance, discouragement, sin, and failure (Dobbins p. 109). Likewise, all I am trying to do in this book is remove a few obstacles for us teachers.

### **What's Ahead for Teachers?**

One of the basic principles of public speaking is to tell the listeners what to expect. In fact, the rule is, tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, tell 'em, tell 'em what you told 'em. In that spirit I give you a brief introduction to the following chapters. It isn't vital that you read these in any particular order, simply use what you need, although I do particularly recommend chapter 3.

Chapter 1, Teaching, a Blessing or a Curse?, introduces the challenges and responsibilities of teaching and the potential for lasting influence.

Chapter 2, “Myths, Marvels, and Misconceptions”, talks about some common misunderstandings with regard to teaching and helps clarify some useful terms. Discussed here is the difference between telling, which is good communication, and teaching, which is having an impact on students' lives.

Chapter 3, “It really is Who You Know, Not What You Know”, covers the importance of knowing your students. If we don't know our students, we are often relegated to telling rather than truly teaching.

Chapter 4, “Jesus as the Master Teacher”, gives a brief overview of Jesus' examples in teaching. The objective is to enable us to emulate Christ in our teaching.

Chapter 5, “Learning, Lessons, and Learners”, introduces student learning styles and personality factors. Knowledge of these fundamentals is critical in planning effective teaching.

Chapter 6, “Preparation, Priorities, and Planning”, gives some general principles along with two specific planning systems. It includes information to help you plan a teaching term as well as a single lesson.

Chapter 7, “Teaching Tips and Techniques”, will provide a variety of approaches to delivering content. It includes some experiments teachers can conduct in their classes to discover which methods will work best considering the teacher's style and the students' needs.

Chapter 8, “I Like Your Style”, discusses identifying your own personal style and integrating your strengths into your teaching.

Chapter 9, “Questions, Questioners and Questioning”, covers the important role of questions in teaching and how to effectively use them. It also covers some pitfalls of questioning students.

Chapter 10, “Practice, Practice, Practice”, describes how we can improve our teaching through evaluation. Evaluation is underutilized in Bible teaching, and this chapter gives some ideas for determining how we are teaching and what we are accomplishing.

Chapter 11, “Some of Teaching's Greatest Bloopers”, recounts some great teaching mistakes. As always, the goal is to help us teachers avoid the mistakes of others and learn from our own.

Chapter 12, “The Blessing”, is a short summary of the key points and encouragement to continue to improve. Hopefully you'll finish the book greatly encouraged, and not over-

burdened.

May God bless your endeavors in educating His people.

Throughout the book I have tried to provide examples and quotes. Please use these as you choose. Nothing pleases a teacher more than seeing his work used by others. You will notice that all the quotes are in the King James Version. There is a pedagogical purpose here, in that many people find it easier to memorize the KJV simply because it does use atypical wording. These unusual words and phrases make them stand out in our contemporary minds.

May God bless you in your teaching. As the little boy prayed, “Dear Lord, take care of mommy and daddy, and brother and sister”, and finished his prayer, “and Lord take care of yourself; without You we’re all in big trouble.”

In a world that is constantly changing, there is no one subject or set of subjects that will serve you for the foreseeable future, let alone for the rest of your life. The most important skill to acquire now is learning how to learn.

John Naisbitt

**1/11/2008 8:02:27 AM**

### **Chapter 1. Teaching, a Blessing or a Curse?**

“You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization -- these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit ...”

C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”

“Better than a thousand days of diligent study, is one day with a great teacher.”

Japanese proverb

#### **Who You Are Makes A Difference...**

How could a teacher save the life of a stranger, someone she will never meet, speak to, or even see? Well, teachers influence people all the time, people they never see or even hear about. Here's a story about one teacher who literally saved a life.

The story was published in Chicken Soup for the Soul and goes like this: There was a teacher in New York who comes up with a great idea for a social experiment.

One day as the school year is ending, she calls each of her students forward, one at a time, and says something like this. "You, Sandy, have really made a difference in my classroom this year. Your sense of humor has helped me to take myself less seriously. In this way I have learned things from you that have made me a better teacher, and I am confident that you are going to make a difference in the world. Please take this blue ribbon, because I want you to know that 'Who You Are Makes a Difference.' Please take these three additional ribbons and honor someone who has made a difference in your life."

Sandy takes a few days to think about who to honor with a blue ribbon. Eventually he settles on a young executive who has taken a lunch hour here and there to counsel him on his college plans. He tells her how much he appreciates the time she has taken to help him, then proceeds to explain the project.

We're doing a class project on recognition, and we'd like you to go out, find somebody to honor, give them a blue ribbon, then give them the second blue ribbon so they can acknowledge a third person to keep this chain going.

The young executive doesn't have to think very hard about who to honor. While her boss is very demanding, the young executive realizes that it his creativity that is a driving force in the success of the company. She takes the time to visit her boss's office, where she gives him two blue ribbons. “Sir, every day you inspire me to do my very best work. I hope that you will accept this ribbon, because 'Who You Are Makes a Difference.' Please accept an additional ribbon and honor someone else who is important in your life.”

The boss is obviously taken aback, but he graciously accepts the ribbon and starts considering all of the people who make a difference in his life. While there are many he could honor in this way, he begins to realize that, while their relationship has become strained in many ways, his teenage son deserves this very special distinction.

The father sits down with his son that very evening, and tells him the story of what happened at the office that day:

*“As I drove home, I started thinking about whom to honor and I thought about you. I want to honor you. My days are hectic and when I come home I don't always pay much attention to you. Sometimes I scream at you for not getting good enough grades in school and for your bedroom being a mess. Tonight though, I just wanted to sit here and, well, tell you that you do make a difference to me. Besides your mother, you are the most important person in my life. You're a great kid and I love you!”*

The son responds with an unanticipated display of emotion. He weeps, and we discover that this fourteen year old

boy was planning to commit suicide because he didn't believe that his father loved him.<sup>1</sup>

As teachers we are in an excellent position to make a difference in our student's lives, as did the school teacher at the beginning of this story. At the same time, as teachers we have the potential to touch people who we will never know and in ways that we will never imagine, albeit indirectly. Anyone in our class, or who will ever be in our class, has a heart, has needs, and wants to be accepted and loved. We can meet some of these needs, and like the teacher in the story, we can act in such a way that will help our students see the need to love and care for others around them.

### Challenge of Teaching

Teachers, what a task we have! Teachers take risks. Teachers don't always see the results of their work. We are not often recipients of applause or overwhelmed with student gratitude. As well we face a variety of challenges. At times our students are so familiar with Scripture that its study is boring to them. At others they are so ignorant of Scripture that every point must be explained in painstaking detail. Some students are dedicated to disinterest; others are so filled with opinions that truth can't even elbow its way into the conversation.

Each of us has accepted the supreme challenge of attempting to change another human being's ways of thinking and behaving. Teachers must be good communicators, but it is not enough to simply be a good communicator. Our competition is formidable. The media world is filled with excellent professional communicators to whom teachers will be compared. To teach means to move beyond excellent communication to touch students at their deepest levels. To teach successfully, we must cause a lifelong change in thinking, or vision, or attitude, or behavior.

Teaching is a challenge that many who are wise might actively avoid. James 3:1 gives this caution, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." The context of this verse implicitly warns that teachers subject themselves to criticism from every front. Pastors are often criticized the most regarding their teaching. Consider these reproaches directed at pastors, who also teach:

*If he is young, he lacks experience; if his hair is gray, he's too old for the young people. If he has several children, he has too many; if he has no children, he's setting a bad example.*

*If he teaches from his notes, he has canned sermons and is too dry; if he doesn't use notes, he has not studied and is not deep.*

*If he suggests changes for improvement of the church, he is a dictator; if he makes no suggestions, he is a figurehead.*

*If he uses too many illustrations, he neglects the Bible; if he doesn't use enough illustrations, he isn't clear.*

*If he condemns wrong, he is cranky; if he doesn't condemn sin, he's a compromiser.*

*If he teaches about money, he's a money grabber; if he doesn't teach tithing, he is failing to develop the people.*

*If he lectures all the time, the class gets tired of listening to one man; if he invites guest speakers, he is shirking his responsibility.*

Author Unknown<sup>2</sup>

Why would anybody in her right mind want to teach? Perhaps because for some people, not teaching simply isn't an

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from [http://www.chickensoup.com/stories/soup\\_1/MakesADifference.html](http://www.chickensoup.com/stories/soup_1/MakesADifference.html)

<sup>2</sup> The Speaker's Quote Book: Over 4,500 Illustrations and Quotations for All Occasions  
By Roy B. Zuck (Editor) Kregel, 1997, 438 pp, ISBN-10: 082544098X

option.

### Personal Inventory

- If you have taught before, why do you teach?
- If you have not taught, why are you thinking of teaching?
- What are some good motivations? What are some bad motivations?

### Unavoidable Teaching?

Sooner or later everybody does it. Most of us teach all the time whether or not we see ourselves as teachers. Those of us who work outside the home will likely become involved in teaching new employees how to do a task. Those who have children cannot avoid teaching, nor would they ever desire to do so. Why change diapers or bottle feed any longer than necessary?

Regardless of our primary vocation, we're all teachers. Consider a mother's legacy, realizing that this applies to fathers as well. Notice how often the word "teach" comes up:

### Reflections of a Mother

*I gave you life, but cannot live it for you.  
 I can teach you things, but I cannot make you learn.  
 I can give you directions, but I cannot be there to lead you.  
 I can allow you freedom, but I cannot account for it.*

*I can take you to church, but I cannot make you believe.  
 I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot always decide for you.  
 I can buy you beautiful clothes, but I cannot make you beautiful inside.*

*I can offer you advice, but I cannot accept it for you.  
 I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.  
 I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.*

*I can teach you respect, but I cannot force you to show honor.  
 I can advise you about friends, but I cannot choose them for you.  
 I can advise you about sex, but I cannot keep you pure.*

*I can tell you the facts of life, but I can't build your reputation.  
 I can tell you about drink, but I can't say "no" for you.  
 I can warn you about drugs, but I can't prevent you from using them.  
 I can tell you about lofty goals, but I can't achieve them for you.  
 I can teach you about kindness, but I can't force you to be gracious.  
 I can warn you about sins, but I cannot make you moral.  
 I can love you as a child, but I cannot place you in God's family.  
 I can pray for you, but I cannot make you walk with God.  
 I can teach you about Jesus, but I cannot make Jesus your Lord.  
 I can tell you how to live, but I cannot give you eternal life.*

Author Unknown<sup>3</sup>

So many of the items in this list are beyond the speaker's control, yet still she strives to teach her children thereby

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<sup>3</sup> J. John, Mark W. G. Stibbe A Bundle of Laughs, Kregel, 2005, 224 pps ISBN 0825460794.

equipping them to love.

Many aspects of life, too many to count, also involve teaching. You teach if you are a Girl Scout troop leader. You teach when you participate in home Bible studies. If you are bold enough, you might take on the awesome task of teaching an entire Sunday School class.

Do not be dismayed because all is not lost. Teaching isn't always a burdensome, thankless task. There are great blessings that come from teaching, whether we teach willingly or not.

Consider that God has, for the most part, chosen the vehicle of human teaching to convey His truth. Jesus spent much of his time teaching. God is actively giving us the privilege of participating in something He wants to do. He doesn't **need** our teaching. He could speak wisdom into existence. He could pour wisdom and knowledge into us or into our students without effort, yet God has chosen, and continues to choose, to use us to assist the Holy Spirit in bringing men and women conform to the image of God.

Let us look at an example of the strange way God sometimes does His teaching. I, Phil Bishop, have taken seven university courses in Spanish, and have traveled to half a dozen Spanish-speaking countries. Despite extensive time and effort, I barely scrape by in Spanish. On a recent trip to Nicaragua, I chatted with a Spanish-English translator. I asked him, as I often ask the translators that I meet, how he came to know English. The translator looked at me, smiled, and said, "I prayed to God to teach me English, and He did. What's more, I know of an English-speaker who prayed to God to know Spanish, and God answered her prayer too."

In other words, God doesn't need us to teach. Instead God gives us the opportunity to participate as HE divinely teaches anything that is worthwhile. This should take the pressure off all of us a bit. Here is an example of how I believe God actually uses us in His work:

When my children were very young, they often volunteered to help me paint the walls, trim, or whatever it was I was painting at the time. Because they were too young to understand how to paint effectively, their work on the job created maximal mess and minimal progress. Yet because I wanted my children to learn a good work ethic, and because they wanted to help, I endured the mess for the greater gain. I think that God does the same with all of our teaching. He endures our shabby attempts with a smile. God uses our teaching despite us, not only to shape others but also to shape us. And remember, God has no need to wait until we're good at it. He can make our work effective at any time.

Mark Galli introduces a book on teaching with these words:

Teaching is more than simple communication, it's helping people discover the truth of the gospel. One example of the impact of teaching is the incident on the road to Emmaus.

Galli reminds us that in Luke 24: 32 two of Jesus followers, who have just been left by him on the road to Emmaus ask, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Galli, Mark in preface to Hestenes, Roberta, Howard Hendricks, Earl Palmer. *Mastering Teaching*. Multnomah 1991. 0-88070-440-3.

What a blessing it is to be involved in helping people realize the truth of the Gospel. This involves not only the word of salvation, but also the word of sanctification, by which we become more Christ-like, and ultimately the word of glorification, which is the promise of what is yet to come. As teachers must ultimately realize, to truly teach is to affect not only the future, but eternity as well.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Write out your own definition of teaching.
- How is teaching different from communication?
- How does teaching impact eternity?
- Give some examples where teaching has impacted your life for eternity.
- Do you think your teachers in the past have been aware of the times they have impacted your life? Why?
- What can be done to help teachers see their impact in the lives of their students?

### **The Advantage of Teaching Small Groups**

I assume if you are reading this book that you are most likely a lay person. Generally speaking, you already have several advantages over pastors and other clergy who typically are required to teach much larger groups in more formal settings. As a lay person you have the opportunity to teach in a small group setting, and it is only in this setting that it is practical for you as the teacher to get to know well the students in your class. Also only in a small group teaching situation is it easily practical to deal with individual questions and objections as they arise.

In addition, you get the opportunity to use resources in the small group setting that the clergy seldom have. In a Sunday School class or home Bible study you may choose to use clips from videos and movies, as well as skits, and small group activities. You may even broach topics that are controversial, topics that require several sessions to explore and involve much discussion. These are the kinds of things your students will continue to think about on their own time.

### **Small Group Bible Study or Major Church Service?**

Here's a very real, very practical, question. If you had acquaintances with the following characteristics would you prefer to send them to a small group or a major church service? Remember that small groups encourage discussion, while church services are often locked into a traditional assembly format:

- 1) Your relative who is totally pagan but interested in Christianity?
- 2) Your friend at church with some knowledge of Christianity but who is still lost and/or badly confused on some points?
- 3) Your colleague at work who has a good knowledge of the Bible, but is anti-Christian and argumentative?
- 4) Your neighbor who is interested in God but highly critical of the church and "TV preachers"?

When Phil posed this question to a thoughtful Christian colleague, Bryan Boyce, he gave the following analysis:

The pagan (example #1) would probably be put off by church and the whole routine that would be foreign to him. A small group study, on the other hand, is like a more intimate meeting. The "churched" friend of #2 needs the focus of a smaller class where questions can be asked and answered. The colleague from work (#3) needs the forum of discussion to air his views and hear responses. And the neighbor (#4), needs to understand church from someone in a smaller, less formal setting before he will fully appreciate it and get over his

problems.<sup>5</sup>

I am biased, but I agree with Brian. In our North American culture, I believe most people have a better chance of being exposed to the Gospel in an effective way in the small-group setting. The lay teacher, who is addressing a group of 4-12 students, is able to know each person intimately. She or he can discern what needs to be said and when, and what can wait for later. The small group teacher can handle questions as they arise and in depth, and she can pace the information to the learner. The small group teacher, if she has the skill and desire, can destroy the barriers, recognize the points of need, and touch the hearts of the lost, the discouraged, and the disenchanted.

It seems that the most strongly evangelical churches in America have traditionally viewed the “worship” service as an evangelical outreach tool. Non-evangelicals, in contrast, practice worship to greater or lesser extents, but do not necessarily emphasize evangelism in their preaching. The flexibility of the small-group teacher, however, allows her to change the focus of a lesson at any moment to suit the need, whether this involves a lost soul in need of the basics, or knowledgeable Christians who need, alternatively, a pat on the back or a kick in the pants.

I promote the advantages of small groups here because this is where most of us will teach. We ought to recognize and embrace the advantages we have over most pastors who only have the worship service as their chief forum for teaching.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- From your experience in large and small classes, what are some other advantages of small groups?
- What are some disadvantages?

### **Teaching as Service**

Anyone who has ever taught realizes that teaching is an act of service. To commit to prepare, to be present, and to take responsibility requires dedication and commitment.

Scriptures tell us, in John 15:13, that, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Romans 5: 7-8 explains this in greater detail, “For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Typically when we think about laying down our life, we think of jumping in front of a speeding bus to save a school child.

That's not all. We also have the opportunity to lay down our life over and over again. We can sacrifice our time, our energy, our effort for the sake of our students. We have opportunity and privilege to participate in what God is doing.

Good spiritual teaching also requires a good portion of prayer, which becomes another opportunity to lay down one's life. In our U.S. Christian culture, prayer is neglected to the detriment of the kingdom of God.

### **The Gift of Teaching**

A few of you have the gift of teaching. You are the ones who really cannot escape. Though you may not want this particular gift, because of the work and time involved, scripture insists that at least some of us have the blessing of this gift.

In Ephesians 4: 11-13, The Holy Spirit speaks through Paul saying, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

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<sup>5</sup> Used with permission.

This same message occurs also in Romans 12, and in 1 Corinthians 12. Perhaps you have suspected you have the gift, perhaps you have denied it despite the evidence. But how do you recognize the gift of teaching?

Those who have the gift of teaching like to teach even though some may want the job only if they can carry it out informally. They like to teach only if they don't HAVE to teach. Those who have this gift are anxious to show people how a thing works, whether machine or idea. Gifted teachers generally learn quickly and are able to analyze things and break them down into simple parts. They often see problems as learning opportunities.

In fact, one of the great weaknesses of teachers is that they view everything as a lesson. If a young child falls and skins a knee, after a brief show of affection a person with the teaching gift will say, "Now what did we learn from that? When we run across broken glass carrying scissors, and not watching where we are going in the dark, we can get hurt."

So teachers view everything as a lesson. What's wrong with that? Look back at Ephesians chapter 4; there are other gifts besides teaching. Teachers cannot meet every need.

### Evaluation and Application

- Who do you know who seems to have the gift of teaching?
- Why do you think so?

### Risks of Teaching

With the blessing, teaching also carries considerable risk. This risk is not limited to the probability that we will be reproached. Our students always seem to be listening most when we are inadvertently telling them wrong. There is an unexplained law of teaching stating that the 50 things we say correctly, no one seems to notice. The moment we make a single, tiny error, everyone notices. Teachers continually run the risk of influencing their students to a wrong thought or conclusion.

It is a very real danger all teachers face. Matthew 18:3-6 warns, "...Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

The last part of that passage ought to make all of us teachers snap wide awake. Although the context clearly implies that these actual verses apply to children, we don't think that teachers of adults are off the hook either. The general principle clearly applies to new babes in Christ regardless of their birth year. If we thought about this long, we might be paralyzed by fear of failure. But, we always have to remember to rely on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit must do the hard work for us, otherwise all is lost. The only essential ingredient in the teaching process is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### Value of Teaching

*In January 1999 a tornado practically leveled Clarksville, Tennessee. A Faculty Commons staff member (Faculty Commons is the university Faculty and Staff ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ) who works at Austin Peay State University wrote that the town looked bombed out, "like Beirut in the 1980's" with much damage on campus, but no one was hurt. The people have survived but the buildings haven't.*

*In teaching at any level, this is an important thing to remember. Teachers are attempting to influence what will last long after they are done teaching. Education is not the buildings or books or institutes; all these will perish, but people's lives are eternal.*

Patrick Rist, *Faculty Commons*, part of Campus Crusade<sup>6</sup>

Teaching allows the Holy Spirit to use us to motivate Christians to listen to God and be obedient to His desires. It allows us to take the Gospel to people who are unreachable by other means: the skeptics, the anti-Christians, and those from Non-Christian religions.

The now deceased physician, Paul Brand, shared the story of a time when he watched one of his young East Indian medical students examine a patient. As he analyzed the young man's technique Dr. Brand recognized that the student's style was the exact image of Brand's old professor. He was so surprised at this realization that he cried out. When Dr. Brand explained what had struck him, his students were the ones surprised. They pointed out to him, that these were Brand's own personal characteristics<sup>7</sup>.

The teacher models and influences his student. If you as a teacher are effective, you will be modeled, for good or for ill, for years to come.

### Evaluation and Application

- Describe how being an effective teacher can be helpful to our students.
- Describe how an ineffective teacher could be harmful.

### Requirements for Teachers

As we will cover in Chapter 2, the real requirements for being a good teacher aren't quite what many people think they are. What does it take? Dr. Howard Hendricks, a tremendous teacher by most standards, suggests that passion is the most important quality a teacher can have<sup>8</sup>. In order to do all they need to do with enthusiasm, teachers have to develop a passion for something. That "something" might be people, it might be teaching itself, it might be sacrificial service, but without passion we will neither attain our potential, nor will we finish the race that Paul talks about in Hebrews 12:1.

Others have suggested that good teachers will benefit from knowing a bit of the theory and skills associated with teaching,<sup>9</sup> which is actually one of the objectives of this book. Teachers certainly benefit from knowing content, in our case the Scriptures. They also need to know their goals. These are likely to vary from class to class and from time to time. As we will discuss in Chapter 3, teachers need to know students, and as in all aspects of Christianity, there is great benefit from knowing oneself.

It is also needful that teachers of spiritual matters constantly strive to be obedient to God and to Scripture as the Holy Spirit leads<sup>10</sup>. The teacher must model the Spiritual pilgrimage herself and in so doing must hold students accountable and thereby must be willing to also be accountable to others. Finally the teacher must engage in the student's life, or communication will substitute for true teaching. As Israel Galindo reminds us,

Teachers must fulfill numerous roles. Teachers need to serve as catalysts to motivate Christians to actively pursue God. They can serve as guides, and clarifiers of God's will and Word. Teachers have the great privilege of affirming God's love and God's interest.

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<sup>6</sup> Used by permission of Patrick Rist.

<sup>7</sup> Yancy, Philip, [and Paul Brand](#). *In His Image* Zondervan, 304pps, 1987. ISBN: 031035501X

<sup>8</sup> Hestenes, Roberta, Howard Hendricks, Earl Palmer. *Mastering Teaching*. Multnomah 1991. ISBN: 0-88070-440-3.

<sup>9</sup> Galindo, Israel. *The Craft of Christian Teaching*. Judson Press. Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851, ISBN 0-8170-1280-X.

<sup>10</sup> Galindo, *ibid*.

Finally, I am convinced that the teacher must herself be a life-long learner, not someone with all the answers, but someone following Christ and attempting to bring others along. We never graduate!

### Evaluation and Application

- Who are some teachers you have seen who demonstrated outstanding qualities in their teaching?
- As you think of these, try to focus on more than just effective speaking/communicating. Rather identify teachers who have motivated a change of behavior in your life.

### The Teacher's Commission

If Matthew 18:3-6 is the challenge for teachers, then Deuteronomy 6:6-12 and Ephesians 6:4 are the commission for teachers as well as for parents.

Fathers . . . bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you shall eat and be satisfied, then watch yourself, lest you forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deuteronomy 6: 6-12).

Clearly the passage is addressed to parents, the first-line teachers of the world. Anyone who wants to be maximally effective in teaching has to be ready to teach when the opportunity presents and must always be on the lookout for the next illustration as well as the next “teachable moment”. **But be warned, those of us with a penchant for teaching must listen to God to distinguish between when we ought to teach, and when we ought to keep silent.**

There once was a country boy who was intrigued by a large cucumber. It was no different from any other cucumber, but it was in the strangest place. His uncle kept it in a bottle on a shelf. The cucumber was many times too large to go through the neck of the bottle, and the boy wondered how it ever got there.

The boy had great awe of an uncle who could perform such a feat, and so the uncle joked about it but never explained how it had been done. After much contemplation and conjecture on his part, the boy's mother finally gave him the answer. When the cucumber was very tiny, she explained, it had been passed through the narrow neck and allowed to grow while still attached to the vine.

Wise mothers and fathers practice a similar principle with their children. From their earliest memory they surrounded their children with prayer and instruction and the gospel so that many will be brought to Christ.

What a lesson for parents who have “little cucumbers” at home. Don't let anything interfere with your first duty toward them. The person who said “Give me a child till he is 7 and I care not who gets him after that” knew the value of early training. As teachers we can participate in the early training of many children.

**Those of us teaching adults have a more challenging task. Unlike the pliability of the young, we deal with students who have already formed opinions about most things. Experienced teachers will recognize that it is often more difficult to “unlearn” than to learn something for the first time. that's one reason teaching is such a challenge.**

### Evaluation and Application

- Not all children grow up in wholesome Christian environments.

- What are some ways teachers can play vital roles in training young people in the ways of God?
- What are some challenges for teaching adults? What are some examples of things you have had to “unlearn” before you could accept new ideas or ways of thinking?

## Why Teach?

You may be asking yourself right now what are the objectives of teaching? Why teach? One of our key goals has to be to bring people into a deeper relationship with God Himself. But there are other objectives as well: To enrich life quality, to prepare others (including children) to teach others in accordance with 2 Tim 2:2 (“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”), and to instill a longing to know God better.

Another of our teaching objectives ought to be to reduce misunderstandings and mis-applications. The following statements demonstrate the depths of our, and our student's, confusion at times.

The following were purportedly written by actual students and are “genuine, authentic, and unedited.”

In the first book of the Bible, **Guinnessis**, God got tired of creating the world, so He took the Sabbath off. Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. Noah's wife was called **Joan of Ark**. Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night.

Samson was a strongman who let himself be led astray by a Jezebel like Delilah. Samson slayed the Philistines with the **axe** A-X-E of the apostles.

Moses led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients. The Egyptians were all drowned in the **dessert**. Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount **Cyanide** to get the Ten **Amendments**. The First Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple. The Fifth Commandment is to **humor** thy father and mother. The seventh Commandment is thou shalt not **admit** adultery.

Moses died before he ever reached **Canada**. Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of **Geritol**. The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son S-O-N to stand still and he obeyed him.

David fought with the **Finklesteins**, a race of people who lived in Biblical times. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 **porcupines**.

Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule, which says to do **one** to others before they do **one** to you. He also explained, “Man doth not live by **sweat** alone.”

The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 **decibels**. The **epistles** were the wives of the apostles. One of the **opossums** was St. Matthew who was, by profession, a **taximan**.

St. Paul **cavorted** to Christianity. He preached holy **acrimony**, which is another name for marriage. A Christian should have only one wife. This is called **monotony**.<sup>11</sup>

As adults we have all recognized similar misunderstanding in ourselves and our friends. We are usually cleverer than children in hiding our own ignorance.

Who are we teaching for: self, students, church, GOD? Whose teaching is it, ours or God's?

## The Work of Teaching

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_kid.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_kid.htm) and <http://www.swsbs.edu/pages/writings/Garner/misrepresentations.html>

*A king once placed a heavy stone in the middle of a roadway. Then he waited to see what would happen. Some who passed that way loudly criticized the government for not clearing the roadway. Regardless, no one took responsibility for removing the obstacle. Then one day, a poor peasant stopped and after much work rolled the stone aside. He was greatly surprised to find a bag full of gold where the stone had stood. It was the king's reward for the industrious.<sup>12</sup>*

So too our Lord sometimes hides a blessing under a trial. The obstacles we encounter in teaching and other ministries serve a purpose. By these God develops our strength, He allows us to test our willingness to trust Him, our ability to turn our thoughts to heaven, and by trials HE gives us opportunities for a blessing.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Give some examples of trials that you have faced that, in the end, were blessings.

### **YOUR potential Impact as a Teacher**

John Powell, a professor at Loyola University in Chicago tells the story of a student in his Theology of Faith class named Tommy<sup>13</sup>:

*Some twelve years ago, I stood watching my university students file into the classroom for our first session in the Theology of Faith. That was the day I first saw Tommy. My eyes and my mind both blinked. He was combing his long flaxen hair, which hung six inches below his shoulders. It was the first time I had ever seen a boy with hair that long. I guess it was just coming into fashion then. I know in my mind that it isn't what's on your head but what's in it that counts; but on that day I was unprepared and my emotions flipped. I immediately filed Tommy under "S" for strange. . .very strange.*

*Tommy turned out to be the "atheist in residence" in my Theology of Faith course. He constantly objected to, smirked at, or whined about the possibility of an unconditionally loving Father/God. We lived with each other in relative peace for one semester, although I admit he was for me at times a serious pain in the back pew. When he came up at the end of the course to turn in his final exam, he asked in a slightly cynical tone, "Do you think I'll ever find God?"*

*I decided instantly on a little shock therapy. "No!" I said very emphatically.*

*"Oh," he responded, "I thought that was the product you were pushing."*

*I let him get five steps from the classroom door and then called out, "Tommy! I don't think you'll ever find Him, but I am absolutely certain that He will find you!"*

*He shrugged a little and left my class and my life. I felt slightly disappointed at the thought that he had missed my clever line --- He will find you! At least I thought it was clever. Later I heard that Tommy had graduated and I was duly grateful. Then a sad report came. I heard that Tommy had terminal cancer. Before I could search him out, he came to see me. When he walked into my office, his body was very badly wasted and the long hair had all fallen out as a result of chemotherapy. But his eyes were bright and his voice was firm, for the first time, I believe.*

*"Tommy, I've thought about you so often. I hear you are sick," I blurted out.*

*"Oh, yes, very sick. I have cancer in both lungs. It's a matter of weeks."*

*"Can you talk about it, Tom?" I asked.*

*"Sure, what would you like to know?" he replied.*

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from <http://www.speedyadverts.com/SAPromotions/html/jan28.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.inlighttimes.com/archives/2005/10/atheist.htm>

*“What's it like to be only twenty-four and dying?”*

*“Well, it could be worse.”*

*“Like what?”*

*“Well, like being fifty and having no values or ideals, like being fifty and thinking that booze, seducing women, and making money are the real 'biggies' in life.”*

*I began to look through my mental file cabinet under 'S' where I had filed Tommy as strange. It seems as though everybody I try to reject by classification, God sends back into my life to educate me.*

*“But what I really came to see you about,” Tom said, “is something you said to me on the last day of class.” He continued, “I asked you if you thought I would ever find God and you said, 'No!' which surprised me. Then you said, 'But He will find you.' I thought about that a lot, even though my search for God was hardly intense at that time. “But when the doctors removed a lump from my groin and told me that it was malignant, that's when I got serious about locating God. And when the malignancy spread into my vital organs, I really began banging bloody fists against the bronze doors of heaven. But God did not come out. In fact, nothing happened. Did you ever try anything for a long time with great effort and with no success? You get psychologically glutted, fed up with trying. And then you quit. Well, one day I woke up, and instead of throwing a few more futile appeals over that high brick wall to a God who may be or may not be there, I just quit. I decided that I didn't really care about God, about an after life, or anything like that. I decided to spend what time I had left doing something more profitable. I thought about you and your class and I remembered something else you had said:*

*'The essential sadness is to go through life without loving. But it would be almost equally sad to go through life and leave this world without ever telling those you loved that you had loved them.'“*

*“So, I began with the hardest one, my Dad. He was reading the newspaper when I approached him.”*

*“Dad.”*

*“Yes, what?” he asked without lowering the newspaper.*

*“Dad, I would like to talk with you.”*

*“Well, talk.”*

*“I mean . . . It's really important.”*

*The newspaper came down three slow inches. “What is it?”*

*“Dad, I love you. I just wanted you to know that.” Tom smiled at me and said it with obvious satisfaction, as though he felt a warm and secret joy flowing inside of him.*

*“The newspaper fluttered to the floor. Then my father did two things I could never remember him ever doing before. He cried and he hugged me. We talked all night, even though he had to go to work the next morning. It felt so good to be close to my father, to see his tears, to feel his hug, to hear him say that he loved me. “*

*“It was easier with my mother and little brother. They cried with me, too, and we hugged each other, and started saying real nice things to each other. We shared the things we had been keeping secret for so many years. I was only sorry about one thing --- that I had waited so long. Here I was, just beginning to open up to all the people I had actually been close to.”*

*“Then, one day I turned around and God was there. He didn't come to me when I pleaded with Him. I guess I was like an animal trainer holding out a hoop, 'C'mon, jump through. C'mon, I'll give You three days, three*

*weeks.' Apparently God does things in His own way and at His own hour. But the important thing is that He was there. He found me. You were right. He found me even after I stopped looking for Him."*

*"Tommy," I practically gasped, "I think you are saying something very important and much more universal than you realize. To me, at least, you are saying that the surest way to find God is not to make Him a private possession, a problem solver, or an instant consolation in time of need, but rather by opening to love. You know, the Apostle John said that. He said: 'God is love, and anyone who lives in love is living with God and God is living in him.' Tom, could I ask you a favor? You know, when I had you in class you were a real pain. But (laughingly) you can make it all up to me now. Would you come into my present Theology of Faith course and tell them what you have just told me? If I told them the same thing it wouldn't be half as effective as if you were to tell them."*

*"Ooh ..... I was ready for you, but I don't know if I'm ready for your class."*

*"Tom, think about it. If and when you are ready, give me a call."*

*In a few days Tom called, said he was ready for the class, that he wanted to do that for God and for me. So we scheduled a date. However, he never made it. He had another appointment, far more important than the one with me and my class. Of course, his life was not really ended by his death, only changed. He made the great step from faith into vision. He found a life far more beautiful than the eye of man has ever seen or the ear of man has ever heard or the mind of man has ever imagined. Before he died, we talked one last time.*

*"I'm not going to make it to your class," he said.*

*"I know, Tom."*

*"Will you tell them for me? Will you . . . tell the whole world for me?"*

*"I will, Tom. I'll tell them. I'll do my best." So, to all of you who have been kind enough to hear this simple statement about love, thank you for listening. And to you, Tommy, somewhere in the sunlit, verdant hills of heaven -- I told them, Tommy, as best I could.*

## **Summary**

Teaching can be a blessing that helps students or it can do them harm. We are unavoidably teachers, so making it a blessing ought to be our goal. Whether or not we have been given the spiritual gift of teaching, we can teach effectively. As teachers we can have an eternal impact. What a responsibility that is, and what a blessing!

*"Please do not pray -- I plead with you -- for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle."*

Thomas S. Monson

## Chapter 2. Myths, Marvels, and Misconceptions

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Matthew 11: 25

When Fred Schuckert was a young seminary student, he taught a Sunday School Class. Like most seminarians he took his job very seriously and attempted to dazzle his class each week with his knowledge. One particular week Fred taught from Luke, chapter 3. After sharing his well-educated insights for 45 minutes or so the class ended. Immediately Fred was approached by a slightly bedraggled looking older guy who didn't seem particularly well-educated. The wizened guy opened his Bible to Luke 3:1-2, where he read these words, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness."

"Imagine this", the guy explained patiently to the future pastor. "With all these well educated governors and priests, the word of God comes to John, a nobody."

The message of the passage wasn't lost on Fred. He realized that this humble layman had captured a central truth of the chapter, a truth that had eluded the trained seminarian.

Study and education are important, but what we really need to teach God's Word is a word from God.

### Common Myths About Teaching

All of us labor daily under a large number of misconceptions. Many of these are relatively harmless, while others paralyze us. Unfortunately, Bible teaching is particularly fraught with this latter, paralyzing type of misconception. For example, many of us believe:

Teachers ought to be all knowing, have answers to every questions, and are the final word on all Truth.

This myth, like most, has some basis in our experience. When you look back at your own teacher you realize that many of them were extremely knowledgeable about their subjects.

In contrast to this widely held belief, I suggest that there may be more truth in the opposite opinion. The best teachers of Spiritual truth are probably those who readily and often acknowledge their own ignorance and insufficiency. Graham Greene in *Monsieur Quixote* suggests, that doubt is what unites us in faith. It is those areas in which we are convinced we know the answers (i.e. they are no longer issues of faith) that people find themselves in conflict.<sup>14</sup> What is truly frightening is that us teachers who over-estimate our spiritual knowledge can easily teach without the benefit of the Holy Spirit indwelling and informing our efforts. We teachers, hence, may easily go astray.

In contrast to the myth of the wholly competent teacher, I would offer certain facts about the teaching of Biblical Truth:

<sup>14</sup> Greene, Graham, *Monsieur Quixote*, London: Bodley Head, c. 1982.

- 1) Neither you, us, nor anyone else, will attain all truth this side of heaven.
- 2) To be effective as a teacher we must know our own limitations and we have to be dependent upon God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 3) The best teachers are students themselves who acknowledge their ignorance and their own need to continue learning.

In dealing with the other myths of teaching we'll discuss further some of the elements that refute this over-arching myth of the totally competent teacher.

A few years ago I traveled on a mission trip to some Latin American universities. After a talk about science that concluded with a brief testimony regarding God's existence, a bright young student posed an interesting question.

"In the old days," he began, "man attributed everything he didn't understand to God. Because he didn't understand rain or lightening or the growth of crops, man attributed all these things to God. As we have increased our scientific knowledge we understand the natural causes behind these things. Consequently the more we know scientifically, the less there is for God to do."

I surprised myself by beginning to speak without knowing exactly what I was going to say. As I listened to myself speaking I heard these words.

"That is an excellent point. However, I think you misunderstand the real scientific process. You see, I will often have one research question that I will try to answer in my laboratory. In the process of answering that one question, I typically uncover three more questions that need answering. Each one of those questions can possibly generate three or more new questions. So instead of having the answer to a larger percentage of the questions, in fact I am growing ignorant at an exponential rate."

Although the idea of admitting to exponential ignorance may not appeal to you, most research scientists would agree that the research process generates questions more rapidly than it does answers. So whether the topic is science or spiritual matters, those who know the issue best realize that no one knows it all, and the more we learn, the more we recognize how little we truly know. Recognizing the depth of our own ignorance, therefore, may be more of an asset than a liability to us as a teachers. One of my friends points out that an ever-expanding ignorance fosters infinitely more openness regarding the messages God may be attempting to deliver to us. We run great risk of missing these if we are convinced from the beginning that we already fully understand the key issues of doctrine.

#### **Evaluation and Application**

- What are some advantages in recognizing that all of us are inadequate to teach God's divine truths?

### **Myths About Teachers [Is this section really different from the one above?]**

A myth that is closely related to this “all-knowing” myth, is the idea that the teacher must be a complete Bible expert. Probably the most common hindrance to Bible teaching, both spoken and unspoken, is this feeling of inadequacy. If you feel inadequate, I'd say you actually have one of the key requirements for success.

Each one of us is inadequate to dispense God's word. No matter how many seminary degrees you may have, no matter how much experience, no matter how clever you are, or how well prepared, apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are all dismally inadequate. Apart from the Holy Spirit, our attempts at teaching God's word are shabby.

But when we are in touch with God, God gives us words to say. In fact, we ought to pray that God would protect our students from what we have to say. It has become my own practice to begin every Sunday School lesson this way. Jesus himself is our example in this. He clearly expresses his intention to speak God's words, not his own. In John 12:50b he proclaims to those who are ashamed of the gospel, “... therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me. ” In another context Jesus takes this even further. He assures us, “...and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Mat 10:18-20).”

When God speaks through us, then our students, and everyone else will be truly blessed.

The Holy Spirit is the one who knows all. As teachers, we rely upon ourselves far too much for our own good. John 16:12-14 promises, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.” One of the necessary ingredients to teach well is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only able to guide us as to what to say, but just as importantly to keep us from saying what we ought not say.

Remember, most of the great men and women of the Bible were NOT seminary graduates. Jesus' own disciples were not scholars, yet they turned the world upside down with their teaching. When you read the specific teaching to the Jewish leaders by Peter (Acts 4), by Philip when he spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), and by Stephen at his stoning (Acts 7), you are reading simple testimonies and historical recitations, not great theological scholarship. Yet, these men were touched by God, and the result of their teaching reverberates across the ages.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Why is reliance on the Holy Spirit essential for effective spiritual teaching?
- Are there examples in your own life of times you relied Holy Spirit's leading in relating to someone?

### **Appropriate Confession- Good for the Teaching**

If the idea that total competency is necessary to be qualified to teach is a myth, then the opposite-incompetence disqualifies,- must be true. Personally, I have found that almost nothing gives me more

credibility than admitting to a class my ignorance or shortcomings. I have been caught in an embarrassing morass of ignorance more times than I am comfortable in admitting.

I am often surprised at my ignorance when a question is raised, the answer to which I haven't a clue. My immediate response is to defer to the class members for their answer. This buys me time, and more than occasionally elicits a good answer. When that fails, I typically open my mouth and out pops a credible answer, which surprises me more than anyone. [You mentioned this earlier in the story about science's developing questions. Do you want to remind the reader of this example?] I am the person most surprised, because unlike the rest of the class, I know the answer wasn't present when I initially opened my mouth. Some psychologist might speculate that the act of answering aloud triggered some sub-conscious information of which I was unaware. I personally attribute it to the Holy Spirit, while still admitting that, at times, the Holy Spirit probably would not want to be associated with my answer.

Regardless, if a student stumps you, don't be surprised or embarrassed. A good response is, "That's an excellent question..." then you have at least two options. If you wish, you can volunteer to find an answer, or you can challenge class members to find an answer. Which direction you take depends on who you and your students are.

But keep in mind we can confess to the wrong thing at the wrong time (see Chapter 11). Whereas I recommend total honesty at all times, still I recommend against drawing undue attention to ones inadequacies. [Please reconcile this with what you say above about admitting shortcomings. The same problem occurs in the last paragraph of this section.]

My very first time as the professor of an academic class at the University of Alabama, I honestly pointed out to the students that I had never taught in the public schools. I had several years of teaching experience, just not in that particular setting. My admission greatly harmed my credibility and was brought up on numerous occasions in numerous ways by my students. The next term I taught the class, I honestly forgot to mention my lack of public school experience. The students never noticed and never asked, and never used it as a basis to complain or dispute.

My advice is this: don't bring attention to yourself or your lack of qualifications. If the Holy Spirit speaks through our teaching, if we put forth reasonable effort, and if we are always alert for ways to improve, we will do well. If we depend exclusively upon our selves and our abilities, all is lost anyway. If we are weak or unqualified in an area, we don't worry about it. We won't have to advertise the fact; our students will discover it quickly enough.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Give some examples of good confessions a teacher can make. Why? Give some examples of some bad confession a teacher shouldn't make. Why?

### **Good precedent for not answering at all**

A particularly scary myth is that all questions must be answered. If you think all questions must be answered, consider Jesus' response to questions. For example, in Matthew 21:23-27: When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

How would you have responded to the question? Under other circumstances Jesus answered readily. In John 10:30, He clearly states, "I and the Father are one." Why wouldn't Jesus WANT to answer this question? As I gain more experience as a teacher I am beginning to believe that some unanswered questions are better than the answers. Leaving people to wonder, leaving them to speculate, leaving them to muse may accomplish more than giving them an easy answer. Perhaps this is why Jesus deliberately avoided explaining so many of the parables.

#### **Evaluation and Application**

- What good and bad things can happen for students when questions remain unanswered.

#### **Know-it-all Teachers**

A corollary to the myth that you have to answer every question, is the myth that the teacher knows everything. [So when you introduced this idea near the beginning of the chapter were you simply preparing for this moment in the text?] The sooner the teacher demolishes this myth in her own mind, and in the mind of the students, the better.

The answer to the myth of self-sufficiency shows up in a story of the desert fathers.

One day some men came to see Abba Anthony. In the midst of them was Abba Joseph. Wanting to test them, the old man suggested a text from the Scriptures, and, beginning with the youngest, he asked them what it meant. Each gave his opinion as he was able. But to each one the old man said, "You have not understood it."

Last of all he said to Abba Joseph, "How would you explain this saying?" and he replied, "I do not know." Then Abba Anthony said, "Indeed, Abba Joseph has found the way, for he has said: 'I do not know.'"

Benedicta Ward<sup>15</sup>

#### **Evaluation and Application**

<sup>15</sup> Ward, Benedicta. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975.

- Why do you think some teachers feel obligated to have answers to every question? Is there anything you consider wrong with such thinking?

### **Authoritarian Teaching**

A myth, especially common among those teaching children, is that the teacher is the authority. This takes care and reliance off of the Holy Spirit. A teacher ought to be in control, but never controlling. A teacher should be authoritative, but not authoritarian. When we are controlling and authoritarian, we abandon Christ's example, both as a teacher and as a leader.

The authoritarian myth leads to another especially pernicious myth, that the teacher is somehow above the students. Consider this bit of advice from the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

... A teacher ought to be a stranger to the desire for domination, vain-glory, and pride; one should not be able to fool him by flattery, nor blind him by gifts, nor conquer him by the stomach, nor dominate him by anger; but he should be patient, gentle and humble as far as possible; he must be tested and without partisanship, full of concern, and a lover of souls.

Theodora (500-547)

How do you and I rate on Theodora's scale? In Mark 10:45 we see that, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. "

Probably the most common mistake I see in my fellow professional faculty at the University is this fault of forgetting that teachers are gifted, paid, and called to serve students, not to be served by students. Our students are not a necessary hindrance to our work, they are our work. Hopefully in the Bible study setting the concept of service is not lost for long. I pray we never lose sight of the nature of our call as to be a servant-teacher.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Why would teachers come to feel they are "above" their students? What can be done to prevent this attitude?

### **Doing it Right...**

A common myth of teaching is that there's a right way to teach. Adherents to this myth often prescribe a rigid program, sometimes with a fixed curriculum. Often it involves much talking by the teacher and much listening by the students. In this myth, every question is answered according to some set of specific position statements. Discomfort and controversy are to be avoided, and every lesson comes with a contemporary application. Every story's punch line must be given and highlighted to such an extent it cannot be missed.

Although this particular myth has lots of appeal, particularly for the insecure, it has very little Biblical precedent. As we will see in the chapter on Jesus' teaching style, Jesus never approached his disciples this way. On occasion He lectured the masses, but generally He taught by questioning, by calling attention to things in a new way, by requiring his students to figure things out and by requiring them to tolerate a bit of ambiguity.

There are occasions when teachers need to talk a lot, but there are more occasions where a good teacher gets the topic going among her class members and then only serves as the moderator to keep the class on track and to block potential heresy.

Teachers with a low tolerance for disharmony will feel compelled to avoid controversy and controversial issues. In fact many of the most interesting issues in Christianity today are controversial. Unless you are supremely confident you have God's absolute and final word on an issue, you should be very open to

differing viewpoints, and to exposing your class members to competing arguments. I feel no such confidence. [Change that last sentence somehow. I think it is hard to understand as removed as it is from the beginning of the preceding statement.]

But don't we run the danger of having some class member espouse a view that is patently wrong? Of course we do. But a good teacher would rather KNOW that a class member is struggling in a particular area so it can be addressed, rather than going along in contented ignorance allowing members to silently hold to grossly erroneous positions.

Donald Griggs<sup>16</sup> describes effective teachers very well. He says that a teacher isn't necessarily a Bible expert, but more of a helpful guide. She isn't the source of a theological and apologetic knowledge, but rather a learner among learners. An effective teacher isn't tied to a rigid program, but is free to be flexible and creative in order to affect the very lives of her students. A great teacher isn't teaching a curriculum, but changing the lives of the people in the class. A thinking teacher isn't always talking, but takes time to listen to the views, problems, and struggles of the students. A wise teacher isn't alone, but part of a process and a team that includes the Holy Spirit and other members of the class as well as other teachers.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Think back to effective Bible lessons you have seen. How were they similar and how were they different?
- How did Jesus' teaching style differ from time to time and why?

### **The Myth of the Easy Answer**

Sometimes teachers feel compelled to offer easy solutions to difficult problems<sup>17</sup>. This is probably a myth that teachers created for themselves. The great temptation for teachers is to offer easy answers that make the teacher look good. Most of us have discovered that tough questions typically have tough answers, and that easy answers are only good for easy situations. Perhaps in our effort to evangelize we sometimes try to reduce the Christian life to simple formulas with predictable outcomes. From my Bible reading I cannot discern where God gave simple formulas to complex issues or how we deduced it. In fact I think Jesus avoided easy answers and emphasized that some answers are indeed difficult. Remember at one point the disciples ask Jesus out of frustration, "then who can be saved?" and Jesus replies, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19: 25-26)."

Faith is essential for us all, and that is the way God intended for us to live. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb 11:6)." Much of who and what God is must be accepted on faith, which means without tangible evidence. God's entire system is set up on faith, which means that God is not concerned that we don't have clear cut answers. He prefers we trust Him. We won't always have answers, easy or hard ones.

In John 6:60 the disciples respond to some of Jesus' teaching by saying, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" Jesus hears the question but doesn't offer an easy solution. So teachers, our job isn't to make the Gospel more appealing, it is to rightly divide the Word of Truth. Although it will likely seem hard at the time, you will do your students a great favor by admitting that some issues are hard and difficult for us to accept, but true none-the-less.

### **Evaluation and Application**

<sup>16</sup> Griggs, Donald L. *Teaching Teachers to Teach*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1980. 0-687-41120-3, (p. 92).

<sup>17</sup> Edge, Findley B. *Teaching for Results*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

- What are some problems with “easy” answers?

### **The temptation to please people**

The “easy answers” myth brings us to another difficult idea to accept. It is not possible to please everybody all the time. Remember on more than one occasion Jesus sends his audience away unhappy. Our goal as teachers is NOT to make everyone happy. In fact a myth of Christianity in general is that happiness is God’s highest desire for us. [Should anything more be said on this happiness myth?] Sometimes we transform people with words of encouragement and comfort, and other times we transform people by bringing them to the point of recognizing that they are in great need of God’s mercy, God’s power, and God’s grace. Obviously the former is quite pleasant, but rarely as effective as the latter.

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, he was pretty abrupt. When he was delivering the woes to Pharisees, he was straightforward and clear.

During a recent teaching opportunity in a large group setting, I gave a very disquieting lesson about the radical nature of Jesus. For some unaccountable reason I have grown accustomed to at least a few accolades following any major presentation. After this talk I got none. I was not surprised, however, and only slightly disappointed because I knew from the start that this was a hard issue that would not create “warm and fuzzy” feelings in my students.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Whose approval should we be seeking?
- Why are many of us so oriented to pleasing our fellow man?

### **Keeping Whose Agenda?**

It is the widely held myth that you have to finish the planned lesson. Clearly Jesus himself operated according to a different plan. In John 16:12-14 Jesus says, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”

If you want a rule to follow, it is this: we are interested in transforming lives not in checking off boxes. If the lesson never gets past the first thought because of a need to minister to a class member, then God be praised. Plus, you have to realize you have a room full of students who may emulate how you deal with (or ignore) this person’s needs. Forgetting the lesson for the sake of reaching a class member will do more for transforming lives than the best prepared teaching in the world. If you don’t believe this, try it yourself. [Try what for yourself? I only ask because this isn't an experiment with an obvious result. Can this be rephrased?]

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Because we spend a lot of time and energy preparing material we want to get to it all. What is the danger of being committed to “cover all the material”?
- What potential sacrifice do we make if we always try to “finish” the lesson?
- What message do we send when we are strongly committed to “the lesson”.

## Myths of Learners and Learning

There are also several myths of learners that need to be considered. One of the most daunting myths is that when learners fail, the teacher has failed. Fortunately this myth doesn't come up too often because of our misunderstanding of learning. In most Biblical/spiritual instructional situations, the concept of failure is pretty far removed, because we seldom link education with behavior. We have confused communication with education. On the other hand, when a failed learner is identified, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that the teacher failed. My observation after many years of teaching is that many students learn in spite of poor teaching, and conversely many students fail to learn despite wonderful teaching. Did Jesus fail Judas?

Clearly the teacher can create great learning opportunities, but ultimately it is the students' responsibility to learn, all the teacher can do is facilitate the process. Proverbs are typically understood to state general wisdom, not absolute guarantees. Trying to imitate God's teaching practices and principles can make us more effective, but they carry no guarantees. Apart from the Holy Spirit, all of us, teachers and students alike are lost.

Likewise the teacher who believes that all learners will be inspired all the time is setting herself up for some great disappointment. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, "You can teach most of the people some of the time, and some of the people most of the time, but nobody can teach all the people all the time." Even Jesus acknowledged the variability among his listeners when he repeatedly said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

I am shocked sometimes when a lesson I believe totally flopped ends up making a great impact on one of my students. More often, I am totally surprised to find that a lesson that was well planned, well executed, and well received, appears to have no noticeable impact at all. Of course we must understand that we are not always able to recognize successful and unsuccessful lessons. We'll talk more about that in Chapter 10, where we discuss evaluating our students and ourselves.

Much in education depends upon the learner. Clearly it is a mistake to believe all learners are ready to learn. A wise teacher helps students prepare but cannot do it for them. We can help students get ready by praying for them through the week. We can take the time to pray corporately at the start of the lesson. We can give homework that lets them prepare themselves. We can build towards a key moment in the lesson where it all comes together, but we can't force them to do it.

Here are several myths that I would classify as myths of learning. These myths are:

- Listening = Learning
- Reciting = Learning
- Memorization = Learning
- Contentment = Learning<sup>18</sup>

These myths point toward an underlying fundamental myth, that good communication is the equivalent of good teaching. Certainly good communication is necessary for good teaching, but many teachers as well as students stop right there. I have the great pleasure of personally meeting a lot of college students. When the opportunity arises I always try to ask them to list for me their top teachers. For some, unfortunately, this is a bit of a challenge, but typically they will name one or two individuals. I will ask what made them so good. Often they will reply, "She (he) really cared about students." When I probe a bit deeper, most often I hear tributes to their communications skills such as, "she made it interesting", "he told interesting stories", and, "she was enthusiastic". Then I get to the key question, what did you learn in the class? The responses

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<sup>18</sup> Edge, Ibid.

I get are very interesting. Typically the student cannot recall any really significant issues learned. I prod the student to recall changed attitudes, or new outlooks, or continued interest in a subject. Often these favorite teachers are NOT in their major field of study. I am in the process of concluding that the students I ask about this are unclear on the goal of education and confuse appealing-communication with good teaching. In fact many of these students haven't necessarily learned anything of importance from their favorite teachers.

It seems we often confuse memorization with learning. And this is not confined to novice teachers. One of the recognized top teachers in Christianity equates memorization with learning. We sometimes become so excited about memorization that we may devote the majority of our effort to transmitting facts and figures. I have sat through hours of "Bible teaching" that essentially required students to memorize vast numbers of facts. It didn't help much that these facts were accompanied by mnemonics or clever motions. These elements are quickly forgotten and seldom have substantial practical value. Becoming experts in "Bible trivia" is not a worthy goal of spiritual education. People can't learn valuable lessons about life if they are only asked to spout facts and figures <sup>19</sup>.

One expert has written<sup>20</sup>, "Education is mutual sharing between teacher and a learner of ideas and experiences leading to the growth of ideas, and the enrichment of experience." Education by this definition is about the process of sharing ideas and experiences. I have a slightly different view. I believe education ought to change thinking, attitudes and behaviors as an outward manifestation of a changed heart. True education starts a process that students will continue on their own. Jesus clearly taught for permanent impact, <sup>21</sup> and Jesus let the students decide ("He who has ears to hear, let him hear"). Are we interested in communication, education, or indoctrination?

Do people watch videos and do they read books completely on their own and learn? Yes, this happens on occasion, but typically only for people who are already in the process of changing and just need of a bit of good communication to give them a foot-hold. In other words, nothing can prevent a highly motivated person from learning and growing.

Jesus provides an example [of what specifically? Connect or transition between this paragraph and the paragraph above]. Jesus spoke to the multitude and doubtlessly many were PREPARED for change and a few actually made the change. In contrast, Jesus was up-close and personal with a relatively small number. And SEVERAL of his pupils (not necessarily all) were really TRANSFORMED to the extent that they turned the world upside down.

When communication is one-way as with a book or video, it is limited to conveying information rather than encouraging transformation. The Holy Spirit may transform anyway, even with mere communication, but the teacher contributes considerably less to the process. When we teach, rather than simply communicating we are attempting to help people make real change. We are attempting to change attitudes and behaviors as an outward manifestation of a changed heart. We want to see the "light come on", and that only happens occasionally, despite our best efforts.

So then what purpose does communication serve? It provides a basis, a foundation for change. It doesn't provide the actual transformation. That is, communication is necessary but not sufficient. Garrison Keilor, author and reader for National Public radio's popular "Prairie Home Companion" illustrates some of differences between communication versus education.

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<sup>19</sup> Halverson, Delia. How to train volunteer Teachers. Abandon Press, Nashville, 1991. ISBN 0-687-17975-0. (p. 138).

<sup>20</sup> Dobbins, Gaines. The improvement of teaching in Sunday School. Conventions Press, Nashville, 1973, (p. 20, 21).

<sup>21</sup> Warden, *ibid*, (p. 40).

If I told you there was going to be a quiz on the next edition of Prairie Home Companion, you could listen carefully and would likely score well on the exam. But Keilor isn't trying to transform, he is simply providing highbrow entertainment by communicating in an appealing manner. Many other folks we mistakenly say are good "teachers" when we really mean that they are good communicators. Some pastors communicate well, but see minimal transformation.

So what does this tell us? Since Biblical or spiritual teaching is almost always voluntary on the part of students, we MUST be good communicators or our students may not choose to come back. At the same time, I believe communicating in an appealing way does not mean we have taught well. If we are educating our students we are assisting the Holy Spirit in producing changed lives. We are being used of God to motivate people, to commit them to His service, to help them fall ever deeper in love with God who died for their benefit. If we are simply entertaining them, we are doing a great disservice.

Findley Edge has pointed out <sup>22</sup> that too often, "The notes of the teacher get to the notebooks of the students without ever having to pass through the minds of either." Action must produce reaction. Jesus appears to teach with the express purpose of producing changed lives, not filled notebooks.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Name some good communicators. What have you learned from them?
- Name some good communicators who were also good educators.
- What have you seen as different between good communicators and good educators?
- Which is the smaller group, good communicators or good educators?

### **Summary**

There are many myths and misconceptions regarding this business of education. Some of these have been highlighted, but the job is hardly complete. Even now you and I harbor mistaken notions that we haven't even discovered yet. How can we protect ourselves from our own misconceptions?

Here is a three-pronged strategy to help. First ask God in prayer to see yourself as you ought. Second, reflect on what you are thinking and doing in your teaching. Is it scriptural? Does it make sense? Third, find a discerning person who can gently bring your myths and mistakes to light.

Disposing of these myths is important, but remember that teaching is an active process. We have to move beyond what not to do, and what paralyzes us, to those things which are true and do work. The next chapter will start us down the proactive path of better teaching. We'll start by meeting our students.

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<sup>22</sup> Edge, *Ibid*, (p. 46).

### **Chapter 3. Students Don't Care What you Know Until They Know That You Care**

"Nobody cares how much you know - until they know how much you care." John Cassis

"It really is Who you know, not what you know." Anonymous

#### **The Teacher Who Knew**

Unfortunately, I do not recall the name of the teacher who was one of my all-time favorites. A greater tribute to him is that I clearly remember the lesson and how he so effectively taught it.

I was a midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy. My classmates at USNA were generally highly conservative and patriotic. Though some of our cohort viewed themselves as radical liberals on the political continuum, they were conservative. You had to be pretty extreme to qualify as radical in the highly charged cultural environment of the U.S. in the late 1960's - early 70's.

The Naval Academy course was U.S. Government. Now here was a class with great potential to be exceedingly boring. It was hard to grab the attention of a group of young men imagining visits to plenty of exotic ports, and imagining all of the young women waiting to be impressed. This presented a challenge that our professor met in fine fashion.

Through genius or experience, he had devised an effective ploy for overcoming our disinterest. Every day in class he spent the better part of an hour attacking the fundamental principles of our government. Every night, for at least an hour, many of my classmates and I would analyze his statements. Each time we envisioned ourselves skillfully and completely refuting his attacks the following day. After all, even as radicals, we midshipmen had sworn to defend our country against all threats, foreign or domestic. And so it continued for the entire semester. He skillfully attacked by day, and we cleverly plotted defenses by night. Our frustration rose steadily over the semester as our arguments were either never acknowledged, or were decisively overcome by the enemy professor.

But the last couple of days, everything changed completely. Suddenly our enemy prof (I had convinced myself that he must be a communist or at least a socialist) was telling us very patriotic tales from his early years. He spoke of his meals around the supper table of a boarding house populated mostly by foreign students. He related the strange hush that befell the foreigners the day after a presidential election. He told how his inquiry on their solemnity had been answered by the poor stranger's worries. There would be riots and killings by either the winning or the losing party or maybe both, they thought. The prof went on to explain to us that our U.S. government indeed suffered from many weaknesses and woes as he had previously highlighted so gleefully. But, our faulty government was far superior to all those known to his alien friends. In fact, he concluded, our system, though lacking much, was better than all the alternatives.

It took me many months to realize that, in truth, over the years our prof had probably fooled class after clever class. His device for making a U.S. Government class interesting enough to fully engage a bunch of self-satisfied closet-patriots was to attack the government we were sworn to defend.

It has taken me much longer to recognize how he could successfully pull off such a trick. This professor succeeded where most profs would fail, only because he knew his students very well, even before we showed up in his class.

#### **It really is "Who You Know, Not What You Know"**

Here's an idea, let's just replace all our teachers with video tape players. We could videotape the world's foremost experts on whatever subject we wish to address, and then we simply play the tape every Sunday

morning. We'll give our students the world's best teachers in each teacher's area of greatest skill. This is so clever, why hasn't anyone thought of this before?

## Qualities of Good Teachers

While you are reflecting on that suggestion, let's talk about teacher qualifications. Many good teachers fail to teach because they claim, "I'm not qualified to teach." There are only two fundamental requirements for teaching the Bible, and the first is knowing God.

We often seem to confuse knowing about God with knowing God. I may, for example, know a lot about Dr. Howard Hendricks. I may know his background of growing up in a broken home. I may know he is a seminary professor in Dallas Texas. I may know of many of his famous students. I may know something about his wife and children. I may listen to tapes of his sermons and talks. I may study his teaching techniques and read his books. I may be able to list pages of facts about Howard Hendricks, yet that's an altogether different thing from really knowing Howard Hendricks. Eventually I may get to know almost everything about Howard Hendricks. But, knowing about Howard Hendricks is not nearly the same as KNOWING Howard Hendricks. To spend time with him, to see him in action, to discuss issues with him, to be transparent and honest in sharing with him my weakness and seeing his response, that is the start of KNOWING him. Strangely, even with this finite being, I will never exhaust the possibilities to know him better. Biographers will confirm this.

If I were planning to teach a class on Howard Hendricks, I would be infinitely more well-prepared if I KNEW him vs. just having read about him. From a student's perspective, suppose you were about to enroll in a course to learn more about one of the recent US presidents. Two sections were offered. One was to be taught by a journalist who had written stories about the president. The other was to be taught by the person who was the president's roommate for four years at college and had served in his cabinet for X years. Which class would you select? [In the above example I get stuck on the roommate part of the example, and almost miss the part about being on the president's cabinet. My first thought was, what can a guys roommate tell me about his professional life? That would make the reporter more appealing. But if the former roommate has actually served with him professionally, that makes a difference. It all has to do with what you wish to know.]

## Evaluation and Application

- Give some examples of the difference between knowing ABOUT God and knowing God personally.
- What is the difference between being a teacher who knows ABOUT God and a teacher who knows God personally. How would this show up in the teaching?

I know this because I have lived with my wife Brenda for over 35 years. We are still getting to know each other better. I am still learning to understand my wife, to relate to her in new ways. I'm guessing that all of us will be able to live an eternity with God and never really know Him fully. Knowing about God is necessary, but not sufficient. Don't ever settle for less than knowing God himself, and deepening that relationship every day.

Unless we Bible teachers know God, we run the very grave risk of having a millstone tied around our necks and being flung into the sea. That's God's very serious warning in Mark 9:42: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea." If we are not in the process of truly knowing God, we may cause another of God's little ones to stumble, and we don't want that to happen.

It's one thing to create confusion while teaching Math or English, but it can be quite serious to err in teaching about the Very God of the Universe. How can we eliminate the risk? By knowing God himself! Knowing God is a day-by-day process. As we know Him better, as we speak to Him and hear from Him, we can share God's Word in the power of God the Holy Spirit, and count on Him to change our students as

only He can.

There is another warning directed straight to teachers in James 3:1. “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” This verse reminds us that teachers expose themselves to criticism from all sides. Every student is a potential critic. Knowing God and communicating with Him regularly gives us the confidence to proceed.

In fact the process of knowing God is one of the key issues in preparing to teach, which is covered in Chapter 6. We can’t teach what we don’t know. Only when we have a deepening relationship with God are we able to teach others how to have such a relationship. We are most effective in teaching when we are modeling what we teach day by day. As you will soon see, we must count on hearing from God, or else we have nothing to share.

In addition to the absolute necessity of knowing God through a personal relationship with God through Christ, the Bible teacher needs a second quality. Willingness, enthusiasm, passion are all good qualities, highly desirable, and very likely enhance potential for success. However, they are not required. What is required to teach effectively is a growing knowledge of your students.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Give some examples that distinguish between “knowing about” and “knowing”.
- Why is it essential to know God in order to teach about him?
- What are the dangers if we attempt to teach “about God” without continuing to know Him better?

### **Knowing our students**

Knowing our students is the essence of teaching, and building a relationship with our students is the essence of knowing them. Mike Warden points out that commercial marketers and public relations experts both understand the value of knowing their clients thoroughly<sup>23</sup>. Should we do less with our students?

Knowing our students tells us:

How to provoke them to reflection,  
How to evoke emotion,  
How to prick their interest,  
What to avoid,  
What is most relevant in their lives and experiences.

### **Steps to Knowing Students**

How do you get to know your students? Everyone has their own way of relating to others. The first step is to learn everyone’s name.

There’s something magic about being called by name. If you care about me, then you will learn my name. Dale Carnegie in his book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” points out emphatically that knowing someone’s name and calling them by it establishes a connection – very desirable in a classroom setting.

I am convinced that knowing another person’s name carries deep psychological meaning. There is plenty of Biblical support for this. As early as Chapter three of Exodus, Moses asks God for his name. God quickly tells him, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’(Exodus 3:14).” In the New Testament, John the Baptist’s name is delivered to his father by means of angels (Luke 1:13). Likewise, Jesus’ name is decreed by God himself.”.....you shall call His name Jesus (Matthew 1:21).” In John 10:3

<sup>23</sup> Warden, *ibid*, (p. 104).

we learn that Jesus calls his sheep by name. God changed Abram's name, Sarai's name, and Jacob's name. I don't understand why names are so important, I just know that they are. When someone doesn't bother to remember your name, what message does that send to you?

### **Evaluation and Application**

- What are some tactics for learning other people's names?
- Ask a trained salesperson this question. What works for you?
- If you have a hard time remembering names, what are the biggest obstacles?

### **A Big Mistake**

Even if you can't know your students intimately, you need to know as much as possible in general about them before you begin. Certainly their age, educational level, and their general theological inclination, are vital to effective teaching.

The value of knowing your student's background and circumstances was illustrated to me in 1998 when I was a visiting professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. One of my friends, a professor emeritus with over a quarter century of teaching experience agreed to come to speak to the Christian faculty and staff members there. This guy is not only a tremendous teacher, but has a deep relationship with God and contagious enthusiasm. He speaks literally all over the world on the topic of engaging Christian faculty and staff in Christian ministry at their colleges and universities.

Unfortunately, he has never had much exposure to the U.S. military academies. I warned him several times that this audience was different from that of a civilian university. He failed to realize that most of the U.S. Military Academy faculty members are military officers who teach for three years, then return to their army jobs of leading soldiers and firing weapons. My friend was accustomed to addressing faculty and staff who are professional teachers dedicated to a life in academics.

Although his talk was very graciously received, there were numerous times when I realized that what he was teaching was either irrelevant, or inapplicable to this group's situation. For example, my friend mentioned tenure and promotion which was irrelevant to most of these career soldiers. He was irrelevant only because he failed to appreciate the particulars of this group of students. Fortunately, some good was done, but this very experienced teacher wasn't able to obtain maximal benefit from the opportunity because he neglected to learn about his students.

Neither knowledge, nor technique, nor passion can substitute for a basic knowledge of our students' characteristics. In order to maximize our teaching effectiveness we have to speak to the particulars of the audience. If we will stop and envision trying to teach a lesson designed for graduate students to a first grade Sunday School class, that should drive this point home.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- If you are already a teacher, list some of the major characteristics of your students.
- If you are just learning to teach, list some of the major characteristics of the other students in a class or group with which you are closely associated.
- How would some of these characteristics influence what and how you teach?
- What are some differences between teaching teenagers and pensioners?
- How would illustrations be different between these two groups?

### **Gathering Information**

One way to get a lot of information quickly, perhaps even before the first class begins is to do a student survey. You might include questions about the following:

Name, telephone number,  
 email, address,  
 occupation,  
 avocations,  
 background,  
 education,  
 special interests and abilities,  
 special training.

You might also ask their view points on certain theological, religious issues such as baptism, music, worship, evangelism, etc.<sup>24</sup>.

You don't want to make the survey too extensive, but several short informational items can be complemented with one or two questions that involve more effort and more revelation from the students. Over time you will develop questions of your own. We have found that often people are more willing to write things out than talk about them face to face. Other folks are very willing to talk but reluctant to write. Experience will help you decide which approach is best for you and which works best with which students.

A friend uses a writing technique to get high school boys to open up about themselves. He requires them to fill up two sheets of paper with writing. They can choose any topic and ramble as much as they want, they simply have to fill two pages. Often they complain about having to do an exercise so seemingly pointless, but with enough cajoling they comply. He says they often begin by writing about some mundane topic, but often gradually shift to talking about matters of great importance to them. Try it sometime.

A second approach that I have found to be very useful is simply to take the time to have students introduce themselves to others in the group. This serves the dual purpose of giving you information, and also helps students in the class become more comfortable with each other as well. These introductions give shy students the opportunity to hear themselves speak out in class on a topic they know very well. It can take a lot of class time to let everyone speak, but it is extremely valuable and sets the tone for future class meetings, and incidentally is quite enjoyable.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Some questions we ask will make people uncomfortable.
- List three non-threatening questions you could ask students to answer in front of the class.
- Now list two more that are more personal and probing.
- When could you use those questions or how could they be presented to be less threatening?

### **Going Further**

The next step in learning our students is to look for natural opportunities to spend extended periods of time with them in very small groups or individually. Meals with time set aside afterwards for conversation are a culturally acceptable and effective way of getting into someone's world. Probably the fastest way to get to know someone deeply is to go on a retreat with a small group. This gives us an extended time to relax, get comfortable, and share our lives. Getting people away from the daily grind seems to put many folks in the mood to share from their heart. For some mysterious reason, sometime after midnight conversations seem to get to deeper and deeper levels among friends. A friend of mine recently attended a weekend marriage retreat with his Sunday School class. One of the individuals who rotated through the regular teaching duties was in charge of one of four one hour organized meetings the group scheduled. The normal Sunday class under this individual's leadership had always been almost entirely one-sided as he was well-prepared, had a lot say and intended to "get it all in". However, there was a different atmosphere at the retreat. The one hour session quickly turned into 90 minutes during which the leader likely spoke less than 10 minutes total. There's something about committing to be in that setting with a group that almost initiates an unwritten permission to share when it would otherwise not happen on a regular Sunday.

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<sup>24</sup> Dge, Ibid, (pp 81-85)

### Evaluation and Application

- What is an inexpensive retreat possibility that you could schedule for your class or group?
- How feasible would it be for most of the members to participate?

### Levels of Knowing

Psychologists tell us that people have varying levels of relationship. Most of us know people to whom we merely say hello. With others we converse about non-threatening issues like sports and weather. Some of us are fortunate enough to have a true soul mate or two, with whom we can share our most private doubts, regrets, sorrows, and confessions.

It is unreasonable to expect to get to this deepest level of relationship quickly or with very many members of any class. However we ought to be seeking opportunities and means to get to the deepest level of relationship we can achieve. We also must be aware that most people are only willing to reveal to us what we are willing to reveal to them. The more transparent we are willing to make ourselves, the more vulnerable we are, and the more the other person is likely to share with us. Remember, we said earlier that we have to be careful to share and confess appropriately with consideration for all involved. [Did that happen in this chapter?]

### Danger! Danger!

A word of caution here, everyone is susceptible to sexual sin. Achieving high levels of emotional intimacy with the opposite sex is extremely dangerous. In mixed-gender classes of all ages I highly recommend that there be two teachers, preferably husband and wife, with each teacher ministering most closely to their own gender. Even those with the best of intentions can fall into sin. Major Christian ministries close each year because of sexual sin. It isn't worth the risk, so don't take the risk.

### Evaluation and Application

- Identify a person (of the same gender) from your class who you would like to get to know better.
- Schedule a lunch or other meeting with the stated purpose of learning more about them.
- Practice revealing yourself appropriately and learning about them.
- Remember, you don't have to be a brilliant conversationalist.

### My Big Mistake?

One teaching device for getting to know people and for helping them get to know each other is to have everyone share some small innocuous fact about themselves with the rest of the class. It warms everyone up a bit, and starts the sharing process. Occasionally I'll ask people to give their name and favorite dessert, or some odd fact that no one else knows.

Once and only once, I asked people to share their middle name, thinking this would be very simple and totally risk-free. Was I wrong!

Everything was going fine until we got to one young married lady who burst into tears over the thought of sharing her middle name (which was, by the way, quite a common name that meant nothing to anyone else in the group). That particular Bible study never recovered from the trauma of the middle name, and I have never posed that particular question in any group since. The episode did, on the other hand, show all of us that this person had some deep emotional needs and made the whole group more sensitive to her, and to others in need. If you perceive that a question may cause the least trauma such as

the middle-name did, one option would be to present two separate questions indicating each person can choose to answer either. This approach would decrease the probability of creating a disaster like the one described above.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Recall an embarrassing mistake similar to the one above.
- What was the issue, and how did the episode end?
- What teaching lesson can you learn from this experience?

### **Learning Styles**

One of the things good teachers should begin to appreciate is the personality differences that God has given us. Some people are extroverts who look for the big picture, value logic and reason, and are task-oriented. Others are introverts who are concerned with details, value feelings, and are people-oriented. And of course there are all possible combinations of these characteristics and more.

There are a number of good books available on personality types. We'll discuss this in more depth in Chapter 5, **Learning, Lessons, and Learners**. The major point the teacher must recognize is that people are different, and most of our students are different from us. Different people communicate in different ways and appreciate different approaches and styles of instruction. Not everyone, and perhaps not anyone, thinks just like we do. The teaching style most appealing to us likely will not appeal to all of our class.

Learners have different personalities, so it follows that they also have differing learning styles. Although there are doubtlessly many ways of learning, learners are often broadly classified as kinesthetic learners (who prefer doing things), visual learners (who prefer pictures and symbols), read-write learners (who do well in our education system), or auditory learners (who prefer to hear). We'll also deal with the issues of learning styles more extensively in Chapter 5.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- What's your preferred learning style?
- Try to identify the preferred learning styles of some of your friends.
- If you find this difficult now, we'll get to this in detail in chapter 5.

### **Applying Your Knowledge - Practical Steps to Knowing Your Group**

As we established earlier, the very first thing we need to learn about our group is everyone's name. At our earliest opportunity, we should write down the names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of everyone in our class on a piece of paper. We stick the paper someplace where we will run across it often. Our Bible might be a good place. Remember, if we can't be bothered with learning someone's name, we must not be very interested in them.

Once we know a student's name, we need to take every opportunity to chat with them. We need to ask questions and provide appropriate information about ourselves.

It is valuable to find out the religious experience of our students when they were children and youth. Often this is a key to understanding them. For instance if someone has grown up in Sunday School, we can be prepared for them to give "Sunday School responses" in class. These are "right" answers which may not reflect the person's true thinking. On the other hand, folks who are new to Christianity will be easily

confused by religious terminology. They may become embarrassed if called upon to read some of the difficult names of people and places in Scripture. The student's denominational experience will also tell you something about their views, but it is easy to erroneously stereotype people, so don't take this information too far.

### **Showing your heart to see theirs**

Once the informational stage of relationship is established, look for opportunities to gently share more personal issues. Openness on our part is crucial. Most people are very guarded in sharing personal issues, so we need to be gentle, patient, and prepared. When someone does share, be careful to listen only. Don't try to "fix" them or solve their problem. If our students' theology is a bit awry on an important issue, we need to be patient. Ideally we have lots of time to gently guide them to discovery on their own. Most importantly, we need to keep confidential information confidential. Nothing will destroy a relationship more quickly than sharing information that was intended to be confidential. Building trust is much like building a skyscraper. It took a long time to build the World Trade Center towers, yet they were destroyed in a fraction of that time. Trust takes a while to build but can be destroyed very quickly.

We have to take our time. We may never reach a deep level of relationship with most of those in our group, so don't make that your goal. Seek to listen to people and share with them. Pray that God would permit you to minister to them. In fact, allowing others to minister to you is a great step in this process. You will get to know some folks faster than others; you just want to keep making progress.

We build these relationships, not by lecturing and displaying our great knowledge, but rather by being willing to learn together. If we aren't willing to change our position on anything, why should our students be interested in changing theirs? We model learning, whether we want to do so, or not.

Jesus was very clear on this. He never intended to talk about the path—Jesus WAS the path. "I am the way (John 14:6)<sup>25</sup>.

We will reveal our concern for relationship by the manner in which we run the class. Remember we are attempting to reach people, not dispense a particular amount of information. We can not sacrifice the people and their needs for the sake of information, even if it is good information. Meeting people's needs honors God more than covering an assigned text. Responding respectfully to student's questions and concerns builds confidence. Being interested in what each person has to contribute makes everyone feel more at ease. There's more on this in Chapter 7, Teaching Tips and Techniques.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- What makes some people approachable, and others not approachable?
- Reflect on your own manner. Are you approachable?
- What can you do to become more approachable?

### **Jesus Knew His Students**

Relating to people is absolutely essential to make an impact with them. Jesus gave us many good examples; here is one of our favorites.

Jesus once ran into a rich young ruler who asked him to teach him how to have eternal life. Most of us evangelicals would have jumped at the chance to share an evangelical

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<sup>25</sup> Warden *ibid* (p. 158).

presentation such as the Bridge Illustration or the Four Spiritual Laws. The Master Teacher didn't do either of these. Instead he gave a very odd lesson.

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

"You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich (Luke 18:18-23). Now we have to ask ourselves, why would the Lamb of God, the Sacrifice for the World, the Master Teacher, send a young man away sad? The only answer I can derive is, Jesus knew what this particular student really needed and He wasn't about to teach the wrong lesson at the wrong time.

Can we learn to do the same? We'll look more closely at Jesus as the Teacher in the next chapter.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Think of Jesus' other encounters with different people. How did he relate to each of them?
- How was Jesus able to relate differently to different people?
- Why is this important?

### **It's the Process, Not the Speed**

Don't be overwhelmed by the need to schedule a class retreat this weekend. You don't have to become intimate friends with every person in our class this week, this month, or even this year. You must take a little time. Circumstances and convenience play a part in how fast we relate to students. God ordains these. Godspeed, but we must go at God's speed and not our own.

The process of building relationships is what will communicate our care and what will make us better teachers. If we have the goal in mind of deepening our relationship with God and with our students, it is not so difficult to map out a means to get ourselves to that point.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- What can you do this week to begin the process of learning more about your class?
- What can you do next month?

### **The Payoff**

Stephen Covey in his excellent book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People<sup>26</sup>," gives us this

<sup>26</sup> Covey, S. 7 habits of Highly Effective People. Fireside, Simon & Schuster, NY, 1989. ISBN 0671-

perspective:

*Unless you're influenced by my uniqueness, I'm not going to be influenced by your advice. So if you want to be really effective in the habit of interpersonal communication, you cannot do it with techniques alone. You have to build the skills of empathic listening on a base of character that inspires openness and trust. And you have to build the Emotional Bank Accounts that create a commerce between hearts.*

Covey is saying that we have to invest in people to really influence them in substantial ways. We have to slowly build an “Emotional Bank Account” to earn the right for influence. We make deposits in a person’s emotional bank account by keeping confidences, by sharing our own lives, and by developing a genuine interest in what our students value.

When the time comes that we must challenge their beliefs, when we must gently point out that their actions are wrong, if we have established a relationship, they will heed our words. We always influence others based on a foundation of trust.

#### **Evaluation and Application**

- What are some ways other people have earned your trust?
- How can you build a foundation of trust in your students?

#### **Personal Integrity**

All of us are in this together. We are all pilgrims on a journey and none of us have arrived. Unless we are walking with God, we will struggle to convince any one else of their importance. We can’t sell what we won’t buy.

Being a teacher means recognizing our failures and admitting to them. It means a continuous struggle to become like Christ. It is wrong to expect perfection, but we can only build relationships based on honesty and on striving to “practice what we preach.”

#### **Evaluation and Application**

- What are some ways students respond to a teacher who models high integrity and devotion to being a disciple of Christ? How does this show up in our daily lives?
- What happens when the teacher’s actions don’t match her message?

#### **For the Doubters**

The analytical thinkers are probably saying to themselves right now, “I know lots of great teachers who don’t know their students very well. Just last year we had a visiting preacher who was great...”. This is a fair argument, but there are three reasons it’s not a convincing argument.

First, many good teachers find out as much in general about their audience as they can. They might know only one or two individuals, but they do know generalities about the theology, socio-economic status, education level, philosophical leanings, etc. of the audience. If we are attempting to teach very large groups, this will likely be the best we can do. This is one reason why it is so difficult to be an effective teacher with very large class sizes.

Second, we often confuse good communication with good teaching as we discussed in Chapter 2. A good communicator still must know her audience, but doesn’t need the same level of personal knowledge because her goal is to convey information clearly, something easier than real teaching. Remember Garrison Keilor mentioned in Chapter 2? He is a superb communicator whose goal is entertainment rather than education. Yet, few people would say their life was altered by Keilor’s stories.

Third, one might doubt the necessity of knowing students if the learners are highly motivated. If a learner is motivated to learn, no amount of bad teaching will sufficiently deter him. Many students indeed learn a lot from bad teachers, despite the poor teaching. And motivated learners can learn well from good communication. How much more would they benefit from good teaching? Certainly the less motivated students need as much help as they can get. So knowing our students can do nothing but help our teaching.

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Describe the general characteristics of your home congregation.
- How would these characteristics affect your approach to communication and education with them?

### **Back to the beginning**

Let’s go back to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. Why not just get some seminary professor on videotape? Profs get paid to study the text we are trying to teach. They know Hebrew and Greek. They are acknowledged experts on teaching and have years of teaching experience. What these experts do not have, and can never have, is our knowledge of our class members. The experts have no notion which of our students is struggling with what issues. They cannot know what theological grid our students use. They don’t even know what portion of the text needs emphasis for our particular group.

Videotapes, DVDs, books and other forms of distance education are good means of conveying information, but not of teaching. Good communication will hold students’ attention, but videotape cannot identify the hurting student who needs help today. Videotape can’t slow down for the struggling, or respond to the questions of the seekers. Videotape cannot tailor itself to the interests, desires, and needs of your students. Only you can sense these needs, and only if you know your students and use that information effectively.

The conclusion is this, if we don’t get to know our students, and if we aren’t responsive to their needs, they might be better served if we just played a videotape.

### **A Teacher’s Story<sup>27</sup>**

Bruce Wilkinson tells the story of a teacher whose life was changed in a wholly unexpected way because of one of her students. Teddy Stallard was obviously going to be a problem student:

Disinterested in school. Musty, wrinkled clothes. Hair never combed. One of those kids with a deadpan face, expressionless—sort of a glassy, unfocused stare. When Miss Thompson spoke to Teddy he always answered in monosyllables. Unattractive, unmotivated, and distant, he was just

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<sup>27</sup> Wilkinson, Bruce, *The Seven Laws of the Learner* (Wilkinson references Tony Campollo)

plain hard to like. Even though his teacher said she loved all in her class the same, she knew she wasn't being completely truthful.

Whenever she marked Teddy's papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure from putting Xs next to the wrong answers, and when she put Fs at the top of the papers, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better; she had Teddy's records and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit. The records read:

1<sup>st</sup> grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation.

2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home.

3<sup>rd</sup> grade: Teddy is a good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.

4<sup>th</sup> grade: Teddy is very slow, but well behaved. His father shows no interest.

Christmas came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class brought her Christmas presents. They piled her presents on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them. Among the presents there was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift. Teddy's gift was wrapped in brown paper and held together with Scotch tape. On the paper were written the simple words, "For Miss Thompson from Teddy." When she opened Teddy's present, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The other boys and girls began to giggle and smirk over Teddy's gifts, but Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by immediately putting on the bracelet and putting some of the perfume on her wrist. Holding her wrist up for the other children to smell, she said, "Doesn't it smell lovely?" And the children, taking their cue from the teacher, readily agreed.

At the end of the day, when school was over and the other children had left, Teddy lingered behind. He slowly came over to her desk and said softly, "Miss Thompson . . . Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother . . . and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents." When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Miss Thompson had become a different person. She was no longer just a teacher; she had become an agent of God. She was now a person committed to loving her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. She helped all the children, but especially the slow ones, and especially Teddy Stallard.

By the end of that school year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement. He had caught up with most of the students and was even ahead of some.

She didn't hear from Teddy for a long time. Then one day, she received a note that read:

Dear Miss Thompson:

I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class.

Love,

Teddy Stallard

Four years later, another note came:

Dear Miss Thompson:

They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I like it.

Love,

Teddy Stallard

And four years later:

Dear Miss Thompson:

As of today I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27<sup>th</sup> to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year.

Love,  
Teddy Stallard

Miss Thompson went to that wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there—she had done something for Teddy he could never forget.

What an impact! May God permit us all to make that kind of a difference.

Jesus set a great example in knowing His students. In the next chapter we'll explore some of the elements of Jesus' teaching that are contrary to modern practice. We'll see some of the things that characterize His teaching and earn Him the title, "The Greatest Teacher Ever Known."

### **Evaluation and Application**

- Find out if any of your friends have stories of a teacher who made a major impact in student's lives.
- What made the difference in this student-teacher relationship?

### **Summary**

We must know our students to minister to them. We must know their hearts to change them. The level of intimacy we hope to have and the magnitude of the impact we hope to make is dependent upon our willingness to take the time to really know these students. Each has particular gifts, particular perspectives, particular contributions, and particular needs. May God give us His insight into our students.

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## Chapter 4. Jesus as the Master Teacher

Everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40 (KJV)

For he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees...Matthew 7: 28-29 (KJV)

We tell students to "be like Jesus" but we don't teach that way. Warden p. 9

### Three Parables

Once there was a guy named Jerry. He was in his mid-thirties and had his own business, actually two businesses. He was also wisely invested in several things. He had a diverse portfolio.

Jerry was very good at making money; very, very, good. And what's more, he was a very committed Christian. He lived modestly and gave away large portions of his money.

One day his wise old pastor, Edwin, called Jerry in. Edwin said, I feel very uncomfortable saying this, but I fear you have let your money-making enterprises become an idol.

Jerry gasped.

I fear that all the time and effort and thinking you are putting into making and managing your money is causing you unconsciously to sin in other areas.

Here let me read you a story. And Edwin read to Jerry the story of the rich young ruler Luke 18:18-23 (also in Mk 10:17-22).

Impossible! Jerry thought. That doesn't apply to me!

"This is quite serious." said Pastor Edwin, and then he quoted Matt 6:21, "Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also."

But Jerry was no longer listening. Instead his mind was racing ahead to defend himself against such a ridiculous idea.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

Once there was a lady, about 59 years old named Martha. She was a terrific lady with a very pleasant but rare quality, she had a servant's heart. She was very good at serving others; very, very good. She was a very committed Christian. She lived modestly and served people all over the community in many creative ways. She never asked for recognition, she never expected anything in return.

One day the wise old pastor, Edwin, called Martha in. He said, I feel very uncomfortable saying this, but I fear that all the time and effort you are putting into serving others is causing you unconsciously to sin in other areas that you may be unaware of.

Martha gasped.

Here, said Edwin, let me read you a story. So he read to her the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42.

Impossible! Martha thought. That doesn't apply to me!

"This is quite serious." said Pastor Edwin, and then he quoted Matt 6:21, Where a man's treasure is, there

will his heart be also.

But she was no longer listening. Instead her mind was racing ahead to defend herself against such a ridiculous idea.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

There once was a young couple named Brenda and Phillip who had 5 children.

They loved those children, they spent time with those children, they raised them in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

One day the wise old pastor, Edwin, called them in. He said, I feel very uncomfortable saying this, but I fear you have made your children an idol.

They gasped.

I fear that all the time and effort you are putting into your children is causing you unconsciously to sin in other areas.

Let me read you a passage, and Edwin read them Psalm 127:1-3.  
Impossible!, they thought. That doesn't apply to us!

"This is quite serious." said Pastor Edwin, and then he quoted Matt 6:21, Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also.

But they were no longer listening. Instead their minds were racing ahead to defend themselves against such a ridiculous idea.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.



### **Jesus Never Stopped Teaching**

We modern Christians in our culture tend to compartmentalize our thinking, which is quite a contrast to Paul and the apostles. We tend to think that teaching occurs during designated times and in designated parts of the worship service. In contrast, Jesus never seemed to stop teaching. In fact Jesus appears not just to be on the lookout for "teachable moments" but was also able to create them. Wherever he went he used illustrations from life to teach valuable lessons. Whenever someone was interested, Jesus took the time to teach. Consider John 3:2 (KJV) "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. "Jesus' response is interesting. He introduces the concept of "being born again" which seems to confuse the well-educated Pharisee, Nicodemus. Then follows an exchange of questions, and the story ends, at least at that point (verse 21), without a clear conversion of Nicodemus. In fact I get the impression that Nicodemus may have walked away scratching his head and wondering about the strange conversation he just had.

Now hopefully you find this story disturbing. In our knowledge of teaching we tend to think that clear communication is essential. We feel compelled to answer questions,

clearly and completely. We don't want our students leaving the class with questions. But again, maybe Jesus knew something we don't.

### **Jesus' Teaching Certificate**

H.H. Horne, in his book, Jesus the Master Teacher, lists these qualifications of a world-class teacher:

- 1) Vision for world
  - 2) Knowledge of heart of man-- each of us has to be a student of our students
  - 3) Mastery of the subject taught- Student of God's word
  - 4) Aptness in teaching- student of the craft
- 1) Life that embodies teaching

Michael Warden in his book, Extraordinary Results for Ordinary Teachers, writes the same ideas about Jesus' teaching objectives:

- 1) Build relationships
- 2) Learn to Love
- 3) Faith and Obedience
- 4) Boldness (Warden p. 53)
- 5) Encourage Faith
- 6) Challenge thinking (p. 59)

Jesus set the example. His vision was so clear that He died for a world that rejected Him. His knowledge of man was profound. He was clearly a master of his subject, after all He confounded theological experts at age 12 (Luke 2:42-49) and as an adult (John 7:15-17). If we can judge the ability of a teacher by his impact, clearly Jesus' three and one-half years of teaching had a greater impact on the world than that of any person before or after. And, as we pointed out a bit earlier, Jesus not only instructed, his very life was a lesson for all.

One of my students, Paul Trinh, pointed out that Jesus' primary purpose was not to teach but to offer the Perfect Sacrifice for our sin. That Jesus did that is undeniably true. But we also know that Jesus was in perfect communion with God (John 5:19-20), and that what Jesus taught to a ragtag band of largely uneducated followers has changed the world. Even if Jesus wasn't interested in teaching, his relationship and results make him worthy of emulation.

### **Jesus' Example - Outside the Classroom**

How was Jesus so very effective? There were many factors, but one was that Jesus was congruent, that is, his actions matched his words. Whatever Jesus taught, He exemplified. Jesus taught, have faith in God, then He walked on the water, He calmed the raging storm. Jesus taught, "...take no thought for what ye shall eat...", then multiplied the loaves and fishes. Jesus taught, "...love those who spitefully use you...", then he willingly died on behalf of his slayers.

Many of us have not been gifted with miraculous abilities, yet we can challenge ourselves

to live consistently with what we teach. We can ask God to teach us to pray, to help our unbelief, to give us wisdom. And we can ask in faith. I John 5: 14-15 (KJV) tells us, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." We can, unlike the self-righteous publican, ask God to protect us, as teachers, from our own hypocrisy (Luke 18:11-14).

Clearly, attempting to live by the things we teach out of Scripture has its own reward as Jesus assures us in Matthew 7:24-27 (KJV) "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

### **Jesus was Reality-Oriented and NOT Boring**

Jesus was real, and what He taught was relevant. As Howard Hendricks says, Jesus never said, "Men write this down, you'll need it later." Jesus was teaching people how to live, and He did it in a practical way.

The most frequent complaint I hear from college students is, "This stuff we are taught is so irrelevant." Few people in our culture have the time and energy for theoretical musings unless this contemplation leads them somewhere useful. I believe that the Scriptures are totally relevant for life and work. I believe we need to teach with the purpose of pointing out just how relevant God is. God is not bound by time, He is easily capable of giving us advice, even from an old, old story. We need to reinforce that principle in every lesson.

### **Jesus was Relational**

As was presented in Chapter 3, students are important. Jesus illustrated his interest, and care for people throughout his ministry. In John 4, we see Jesus relating to a student in an interesting situation. This is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus is talking to the wrong person (i.e. a Samaritan and a woman no less), at the wrong place (i.e. at a well without a bucket in the heat of the day), about the wrong thing (not some lofty theology, but about living water, clearly a topic that was confusing at that point in the conversation), and followed up with the wrong question, (an embarrassment for a woman living in sin after a series of failed relationships). We would never make such a mistake in one of our classes! Yet, Jesus in just a few moments touches the depth of this woman's soul. His brief contact profoundly changes her. She, and many of her village, were never the same.

Can we have supernatural knowledge of our students? Perhaps, "... yet ye have not, because ye ask not." James 4:2 (KJV). But it seems presumptuous to ask for supernatural knowledge of our students when we haven't made any effort to gain natural knowledge. (You may want to look back at Chapter 3 for further discussions on this important issue.)

This episode also illustrates that Jesus' teaching was developmental. Jesus took folks from where THEY were, not where He was. When many professors write text books, they are mistaken in their understanding of where undergraduate students are developmentally. The text writer is in love with her subject. She has devoted her life to this particular topic and is fascinated by even the smallest details. Consequently often the first chapter of a textbook is devoted to the history of that particular field. Most undergraduates don't necessarily even like the topic. They are often taking it only because it is part of the mandatory curriculum. Developmentally they have neither interest nor much need for knowledge of the founding and flourishing of an academic specialty.

To teach with a text we need to try to see our subject matter from the viewpoint of our students. Jesus with the Samaritan woman captured her interest and held it for the whole conversation and beyond. He knew where she was spiritually and personally, and took her forward from there.

### **How Shepherds Teach**

The episode with the Samaritan woman illustrates one further point about Jesus' teaching. He built bridges not barriers. Jesus saw people from a different perspective. This woman of a disdained race and disdained lifestyle was worth the time and energy of the God of the Universe. Even though her own people might have given up on her, Jesus saw her potential. She would be used of God to help many in her village make personal contact with the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus lead gently, he didn't routinely exert his authority. The only time he ever used force was in the temple cleansing, and it is a powerful lesson because of the contrast with his normal style. In Matthew 9:13, Jesus tells us that his mission was not to the righteous, but to sinners. Jesus never attempted to teach the unwilling. He never demanded attention or that his students take copious notes. He oft repeated, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Are there lessons here for us?

### **Jesus' Reason for Teaching**

There are many motives for teaching. We may be motivated by the desire to be in charge, or to be the center of attention. We may be motivated by a particular agenda we want to engender. What was Jesus' motive? He appears to have the pure motive of love, a love sincere enough He would die because of it. He seems motivated by an attitude of acceptance not rejection. In Mark 2:16, 17 (KJV) "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus also seemed to be motivated to affirm his students. If Barnabus was the Son of Encouragement, then perhaps Jesus was the Father of Encouragement. In John 14:12-14

(KJV) he says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

### **Jesus Trusted God**

Jesus wasn't driven by a compulsion to "finish the lesson" at all costs. In fact, Jesus seems confident that he would NOT cover everything on the syllabus. In John 16:12-13 (KJV) He explains "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.\*\*\* add verses about many more things\*\*\*"

### **Jesus Prayed**

Jesus prayed for His students. One example is John 17, the High Priestly Prayer. In verses 12-13 (KJV), Jesus prays, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

Jesus taught his students to pray. Perhaps surprisingly, He didn't do this by teaching classes on prayer, or by inviting people to prayer meetings. He simply showed them by praying himself. Indeed, it seems every time the disciples looked around, Jesus was drawing apart to pray. Finally, perhaps in desperation the disciples make their only direct request for instruction, "Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1 (KJV).

### **Jesus Was Creative**

Most of us, myself included, try to find a satisfactory teaching method or style, then we stick with "what works". Jesus, however, seemed always ready to use whatever was at hand. Jesus took advantage of an attack on his personal authority to provoke deep reflection. Consider Matt. 21:27-31 (KJV) "And he (Jesus) said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

And in Luke 10, Jesus is challenged by a good question regarding to whom we should be kind. In response he teaches with the story of the good Samaritan. Jesus looked at the lilies of the field, at the birds of the air, at the question posed by attackers, and used all of them skillfully to teach. He never seemed willing to constrain his teaching to a blackboard, a classroom, a Bible study. Jesus didn't stick to one method or style, and if we desire to follow his example, neither can we.

Jesus at various times used these teaching devices (these are choices of Dr. H. Horne)

Overstatement: Mark 5:29-30- Woman with issue of blood.

Proverb- Mark 6:4 A prophet is not without honor...”.

Paradox Mark 12:41-44 “And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:..”.

Parable - Mark 4:2; Mk.4:10-12; Matthew 11:25-27; Mark 4:34; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 15:1-2.

Irony- Matthew 16:2-3 (KJV) “And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?”

Hyperbole Matthew 23:23-24 (KJV) “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.” Matthew 11:12, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Simile- Luke 13:34 (KJV) “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”

Pun Matthew 16:18 (KJV) “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Allusion John 2:19 (KJV) Jesus answered and said unto them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Metaphor Matthew 12:40 (KJV) “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Luke 13:32 “And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.”

### **No Easy Answers**

When someone poses a good question, I am very tempted to demonstrate my wisdom with a clever, erudite response. Typically my answer is designed to be so comprehensive and wise as to end the discussion. However, Jesus' responses provoked reflection, rather

than resolution.

How would you respond to this question? “And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” Mark 12:13 (KJV)

Jesus not only answered the question, He raised some questions of his own. He asks in verse 16, “Whose *is* this image and superscription?” But in asking the question isn’t He raising the bigger question, Whose image and superscription do we bear?” (see Genesis 1:26,27 and 2 Cor 3:3)

Jesus’ answer wasn’t just the solution to a tricky puzzle, but the broad answer to a number of very important un-asked questions. Jesus’ teaching was engaging. Instead of answering the lawyer's questions, he questioned the lawyer’s answers (Luke 10:25-37).

### **Jesus Was Discomfiting**

Jesus on almost every occasion comforted the afflicted, and afflicted the comfortable. Before I taught one day, I remarked to my pastor, Fred Schuckert, I was attempting to afflict the comfortable. Fred pointed out the danger of afflicting the afflicted. As I mused on his warning, it dawned on me that is probably even more dangerous to comfort the comfortable. Jesus was not afraid of making people uncomfortable (Warden P. 19). If we are going to emulate Jesus, doesn’t that bring us to the frightening conclusion: our teaching should be offensive at least part of the time. What a radical idea, and how contrary to our culture!

Jesus was a comfort to those in distress, and a distress to the religious, to politicians, and to us at times. Jesus never seemed to hesitate in addressing sin and injustice among God’s chosen people. He exposed hypocrisy and unbelief not just in opponents, but in His own disciples as well (Warden p. 65). And typically he was so crystal clear in his message that some might consider him almost rude. Consider Christ’s words in John 8:19, “Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” In Matthew 23:12-28, Jesus highlights in painful detail, a legion of criticisms of the Pharisees. In the temple cleansings, Jesus backs up his words with uncomfortable action (Matthew 21:12; Luke 19:45; John 2:14).

Yet, Jesus was extremely gentle with the poor, the ill, the widows, the children, and the gentiles. He never seemed surprised or offended by the sins of prostitutes or tax collectors. He never rebuked the common folk in the same way he did the Pharisees.

Why are we not aggressive like Christ? Why are we generally unwilling to confront ourselves and other believers? Seldom does our striving to be Christ-like include these aspects of Christ. Perhaps we are constrained by our knowledge of our own sinfulness, which may be legitimate. Perhaps we are constrained by a fear of being rejected, or of seeing attendance fall if we get too confrontational. Perhaps we don’t trust our own

judgement in these matters.

I wish I could offer you something other than speculation. Maybe one day God will convince me, convict me, or transform me, so that I will be more Christ-like in telling the truth in love without hypocrisy, and without fear. Christ certainly set a high standard for us.

### **Jesus' Teaching Through Parables**

Probably the most recognized aspect of Christ's teaching style is that He taught in parables (e.g. Mark 4:2; Mark 4:10-12; Matthew 11:25-27; Mark 4:34; Mark 12:1-11; Luke. 15:1-2). Today, modern teachers don't emulate this much. Why? I think there is a good reason, and that is because we don't trust the Holy Spirit to communicate truth.

Here are some characteristics of parables:

- 1) They often dealt with emotional issue. As an example see the parable of the rented vineyard (Matthew 21:33-41), where great injustice is perpetrated and emotions are deliberately evoked. In fact, engaging the emotions may be the key to creating teachable moments (Halverson p. 121).
- 2) In parables, often the story is unexplained and no punch line is clearly offered. This can be most perplexing. And there is considerable risk that some of the listeners, and maybe most, will not get the point (Warden p. 76). In the parable of the rented vineyard, or the parable of the 10 virgins, or the parable of the sower (the latter two are in Matthew 25), we may think we have them figured out, but a closer examination will likely raise a number of difficult questions. For example in the rented vineyard, why would the owner send his son into an obviously dangerous situation? Does this parable apply to us? How?
- 3) Parables are often set up such that the listener is convinced using another illustration before getting to the real issue. The story of the rented vineyard was told chiefly to a hostile crowd, who were easily convinced of the unjustness of the renters, but were not easily convinced of their own unjust rejection of God's son, Jesus Christ.
- 4) Too, the parables were almost universally third-person stories. Jesus never said the Jewish leaders were the vineyard renters. But, the real trick is, can you convince your students that THEY also sometimes act unjustly towards God's borrowed equipment (e.g. their family, possessions, and church). Moving your students from third person to first person is vital, but Jesus left it up to His hearers to decide.

Now, go back and look at each of these four points with application to the task of teaching. Can we use emotion to communicate on a deep level to transform thinking and living? Are we willing to trust that the Holy Spirit will use conundrums, unanswered questions, and puzzles to educate our students long after the door is locked? Can we use structure, and timing and Scripture to convince ourselves and our students of unpleasant realities about our own thinking and our own sin? Are there times when third-person stories can be used to perceive our own shortcomings? It's not easy to teach like Jesus, but no one said it would be.

**A Parable for Today**

Everybody knows that Jesus taught with parables. Few folks take the opportunity to examine Jesus' parables and apply them. One device that Jesus often employed, was deliberate omission of the explanation of the full meaning. Parables, unlike most of our modern stories, are often left unfinished. But maybe Jesus knew something that it takes us a long time to figure out.

One Sunday morning, a friend of mine filled in for the pastor. In his sermon he told a story, planning from the outset to imitate the parables and avoid drawing a clear conclusion. That is, he quite deliberately withheld the "punch line".

The next week he got three phone calls. All three had the same point, and two of the callers specifically mentioned that they were unhappy at "being forced to work" to figure out the application for the story. My friend was thrilled. Most people hear good teaching but it never really grabs them. My friend had succeeded in grabbing them, even though they weren't particularly happy at being grabbed.

Remember, Jesus, the Master teacher frequently enjoined, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear".

**Jesus' Results**

What would you think of a Bible teacher who after more than three years of work had only 11 students? We want to measure the three B's: bodies, budgets, and buildings. But Jesus started with 12 students and ended up with 11 and had neither budget nor any place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20).

Yet, the outcome of Jesus' teaching was not immediate numbers (though remember that his number of followers DID exceed the number of disciples), but rather radically changed lives. And that should be our goal, to help every Christian conform to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29).

Someone has complained of modern church teaching that, "we give students cut flowers when we should be helping them learn to grow their own plants." Our goal needs to be to teach them to innovate rather than simply sharing our own innovation. As a teacher, can I emulate Christ in giving my students such a hunger they will pursue God in the seven days between class meetings?

### Summary

Jesus' teaching style offers us a great challenge. His teaching was unique, "The officers (of the Pharisees) answered, Never man spake like this man." John 7:46 (KJV). Jesus knew man better than we ever can (John 2:24-25). Jesus taxed people's capacity beyond what we dare (Matt. 4:33). Jesus trusted the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Jesus illustrated his points with hard-hitting parables which forced people to think. Jesus was the master of the teachable moment (Matthew 18:2; Mark 12:15; Luke 5:4).

In my research for this book I found more texts on Jesus as teacher than any other topic. I encourage you to continue to study Christ, how He related to people and how He taught. As you study Jesus' teaching style, consider how much it cost Jesus to teach as He did, it cost him everything (Warden p. 35). Here was a teacher who was committed to his task, not to communicate, but to transform the very world.

Will any of us be able to emulate fully Jesus as Teacher? We probably won't. But Jesus, His motive and His methods certainly deserve serious consideration. Our goal is to be able to say, with a pure conviction, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1 KJV). To be effective followers of Christ we must seek to immerse ourselves in Christ, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20 KJV). This is so high a mountain it has to be a lifelong pursuit.

God make it so!

A Question for you:

How does Scripture quotation (from memory) impact a class?- answer with regard to different class compositions, maturity levels, purposes.

One of our key observations about Christ is that he knew his students (e.g. "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because **he knew** all *men*..." (John 2:24 KJV). If we are to emulate Jesus, we have to learn our students also. In the next chapter we'll discuss some aspects of knowing students and some techniques to make enable us to know them quicker and better.

## Chapter 5. Learning and Learners

“And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one...” John 8:8-9

### My favorite Teacher

Dr. Jesse Liles was my professor for the only instructional methods course I have ever taken. Of all my college professors, he stands out the most. I liked him so much I convinced him to mentor me in an independent study. He was a very relaxed individual. He was one of only a couple of good professors who taught me while sitting down. He taught a course on higher education teaching methods and he was clearly passionate about what many consider a boring subject.

I can't recall exactly why I liked him so much, but he is the most memorable teacher in my entire Master's degree program. Perhaps what appealed most was the excitement he had about learning. I felt a kinship to him because he somehow communicated that we were learning together. He was the teacher, but he was willing to learn. My final project for him was a paper on logical thinking. He asked me to write in such a way that he could use it with his own students. What a motivation that was. I really gave that paper some intense effort because I knew it was going to be actually used, and not just filed away.

I still have a lot of questions about Dr. Liles. Was he as good as I think he was? Was he working at being good or was he just naturally gifted? Did the other students feel he was good? Maybe he was so good, he made it look effortless. One day maybe someone will wonder about you and me, too.



### Teaching to Change Paradigms

To try to change outward attitudes and behaviors does very little good in the long run if we fail to examine the basic paradigms from which those attitudes and behaviors flow.

Stephen Covey

Our goal in teaching is to change the heart and the mind of our students in order to strengthen their relationship with God. This is no less than a paradigm shift for most of our students. There is an old saying I heard several times growing up, “he’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good.” In fact, my experience is just the opposite. Most of us are so earthly minded we are no heavenly good. As Covey points out above, getting students to act correctly isn’t the goal, it’s a change of heart and mind that leads to a change in relationship that counts.

### When the Paradigm Whistles

One Sunday during the minister's prayer, there was a loud whistle from one of the back pews. Gary's mother was horrified.

She pinched him into silence, and after church, asked:

“Gary, whatever made you do such a thing?”

Gary answered soberly: “I asked God to teach me to whistle... And He just then did!”

In all my years of teaching, I have to say the greatest reward is hearing the whistle. What I mean is, you sometimes teach and teach and teach and nothing seems to be happening.

Then all of a sudden from some place in the room you hear the whistle. No one hears it but you and the person whistling, but you know that student just heard from God, and now something makes sense, which never has made sense before. They are being changed, transformed, and real learning just took place.

I trust that transformation is slowly taking place even when I don't know it. But the Lord knows, I love to hear (or see) that whistle.

Are you listening for the whistle?

### **Learners' Attitudes**

Wes Fondren was a seminary student who was a long time member of our church. One of his courses required that he teach a class on some subject. Wes decided to brush up on his knowledge of Greek by teaching a 12-week summer class on Biblical Greek.

Wes put out a sign-up sheet made a couple of announcements and had about 12 people sign up, which was encouraging since we have less 100 adult members.

On the first morning of class, which was at 6:30 AM on a Monday, the following people showed up: A high school senior, a second-grade teacher about age 27, her husband who is an engineer of about the same age, a high school history teacher, a fourth year medical student in his late 20's, a Christian book store manager, two homemakers, ages 27 and about 35, an unmarried health care professional in her mid 30's, a 49 year old college professor, a recently retired 51 year old industrial worker, and a local Realtor in her mid 50's.

Here's the puzzler for you, which five people (besides the teacher) made it all the way through the class, and why? The answer is at the end of the chapter.

### **Learning about Learners**

As teachers, we have to be students of our class members. We have to study them in general and in particular. Each student is different. We need to know them because there is little doubt that a learner's attitude influences their learning. Their attitude towards themselves will determine their approach, their confidence, and their success. Their attitude towards the group will affect their participation and their willingness to help in other ways. Their attitude towards the teacher will determine their dedication and cooperation. And their attitude towards the learning situation will impact all their other attitudes.

Student attitudes arise from their culture, their interests, their experiences (Hendricks HHP-p. 52). And we have to understand them on those levels. This in part goes back to Chapter 3 where we discussed the importance of knowing our students. Ultimately our objective is to create independent learners who will continue to learn beyond the class. This is no simple task. To be successful, every illustration must be developed with the learner in mind. Every class exercise or project, and even every question tendered depends on who your learners are, where they are spiritually, and where your learner

needs to go next.

### **Learners' Perceptions of Themselves**

There are numerous accounts describing the importance of students' perceptions of themselves. One of my favorites is told in a powerful story, "The Rich Family in Our Church" by Eddie Ogan (GET PERMISSION\*\*\*\*).

I'll never forget Easter, 1946. I was 14, my little sister Ocy 12, and my older sister Darlene 16. We lived at home with our mother, and the four of us knew what it was to do without many things. My dad had died five years before, leaving Mom with seven school kids to raise and no money. By 1946 my older sisters were married, and my brothers had left home.

A month before Easter, the pastor of our church announced that a special Easter offering would be taken to help a poor family. He asked everyone to save and give sacrificially. When we got home, we talked about what we could do. We decided to buy 50 pounds of potatoes and live on them for a month. This would allow us to save \$20 of our grocery money for the offering.

When we thought that if we kept our electric lights turned out as much as possible and didn't listen to the radio, we'd save money on that month's electric bill. Darlene got as many house and yard cleaning jobs as possible, and both of us babysat for everyone we could. For 15 cents, we could buy enough cotton loops to make three potholders to sell for \$1. We made \$20 on potholders. That month was one of the best of our lives. Every day we counted the money to see how much we had saved. At night we'd sit in the dark and talk about how the poor family was going to enjoy having the money the church would give them. We had about 80 people in church, so we figured that whatever amount of money we had to give, the offering would surely be 20 times that much. After all, every Sunday the pastor had reminded everyone to save for the sacrificial offering.

The day before Easter, Ocy and I walked to the grocery store and got the manager to give us three crisp \$20 bills and one \$10 bill for all our change. We ran all the way home to show Mom and Darlene. We had never had so much money before. That night we were so excited we could hardly sleep. We didn't care that we wouldn't have new clothes for Easter; we had \$70 for the sacrificial offering. We could hardly wait to get to church!

On Sunday morning, rain was pouring. We didn't own an umbrella, and the church was over a mile from our home, but it didn't seem to matter how wet we got. Darlene had cardboard in her shoes to fill the holes. The cardboard came apart, and her feet got wet. But we sat in church proudly.

When the sacrificial offering was taken, we were sitting on the second row from the front. Mom put in the \$10 bill, and each of us girls put in a \$20. As we walked home after church, we sang all the way. At lunch Mom had a surprise for us. She

had bought a dozen eggs, and we had boiled Easter eggs with our fried potatoes!

Late that afternoon the minister drove up in his car. Mom went to the door, talked with him for a moment, and then came back with an envelope in her hand. We asked what it was, but she didn't say a word. She opened the envelope and out fell a bunch of money. There were three crisp \$20 bills, one \$10 bill, seventeen \$1 bills and some loose change. Mom put the money back in the envelope. We didn't talk, just sat and stared at the floor. We had gone from feeling like millionaires to feeling like poor white trash.

We kids had had such a happy life that we felt sorry for anyone who didn't have our mom and dad for parents and a house full of brothers and sisters and other kids visiting constantly. We thought it was fun to share silverware and see whether we got the fork or the spoon that night. We had two knives which we passed around to whoever needed them.

I knew we didn't have a lot of things that other people had, but I'd never thought we were poor. That Easter Day I found out we were. The minister had brought us the money for the poor family, so we must be poor. I didn't like being poor. I looked at my dress and worn-out shoes and felt so ashamed that I didn't want to go back to church. Everyone there probably already knew we were poor! I thought about school. I was in the ninth grade and at the top of my class of over 100 students. I wondered if the kids at school knew we were poor. I decided I could quit school since I had finished the eighth grade. That was all the law required at that time.

We sat in silence for a long time. Then it got dark, and we went to bed. All that week, we girls went to school and came home, and no one talked much. Finally on Saturday, Mom asked us what we wanted to do with the money. What did poor people do with money? We didn't know. We'd never known we were poor.

We didn't want to go to church on Sunday, but Mom said we had to. Although it was a sunny day, we didn't talk on the way. Mom started to sing, but no one joined in and she only sang one verse. At church we had a missionary speaker. He talked about how churches in Africa made buildings out of sun-dried bricks, but they need money to buy roofs. He said \$100 would put a roof on a church. The minister said, "Can't we all sacrifice to help these poor people?"

We looked at each other and smiled for the first time in a week. Mom reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She passed it to Darlene. Darlene gave it to me, and I handed it to Ocy. Ocy put it in the offering. When the offering was counted, the minister announced that it was a little over \$100. The missionary was excited. He hadn't expected such a large offering from our small church. He said, "You must have some rich people in this church."

Suddenly it struck us! We had given \$87 of that "little over \$100." We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary said so? From that day on I've

never been poor again. I've always remembered how rich I am because I have Jesus.

I can hardly read this story without tears welling up. It's a great story but its importance in our context is as an illustration of the crucial role of self-perception. And as this story illustrates, people's self perception is strongly influenced by how other treat them. As a teacher you will play a major role in the self-perception of many of your students. You communicate to them through your teaching, planning, techniques, and style. You communicate to them how they should view themselves as students. Will they be active, involved, engaged? Some of that is out of your control, but some of that arises from their own self-perception and you do contribute to that. Students need to perceive themselves as valued, experienced, and capable contributors. They must believe that they are able to change their behavior and conform to the image of Christ, not by their own power, but by the enabling of God the Holy Spirit. What perception do your students have in your class?

### **Types of Students**

I have found that my classes are made up of some common "types".

The most rewarding students are the sincere learners. They make every teacher look good because they will learn the material, either because of you, or in spite of you. They want to learn, they have the ability, and they will do whatever it takes. When you get one of these, enjoy them and thank them for helping make teaching a pleasure.

The greatest challenge to me is the obviously bored student. These students either appear determined not to learn, or already are so knowledgeable that it is doubtful that anyone can teach them anything they don't already know.

A useful type is the eager answerer, particularly if they are a good student. If you give them a chance, they will make your job easier by doing some of the talking. And they can help encourage others. The only hazard of this type is that they can drive everyone crazy, particularly if they aren't very knowledgeable. Often if you will give them a little attention and encouragement outside of class they can be persuaded to quiet down sufficiently to be much more of an asset than liability.

The reluctant quiet student type often has great potential, and offers a good opportunity to the teacher. The challenge with these students is to gently encourage them to contribute, but be careful to avoid embarrassing or discouraging them. Typically these students are introverts who need time to process their thoughts. You will help them a great deal by allowing time for cognitive processing. They also sometimes benefit from homework and from giving out questions in advance. Small group work and individual reflective work often are very useful means for engaging them in class discussions. You will find them coming up after class with very good observations. Note these down and start the next class by recognizing their good work, and everyone will benefit. This group will require consideration and patience, but they are definitely worth the effort.

The humorist type is always a welcome addition to my classes. A little laughter makes everything go better, even funerals. The only real caution here is that it is easy to waste a lot of time and easy to get sidetracked if you don't pay close attention to what's going on in class. Clearly humor can be inappropriate, but most good humorists are clever enough to stay within the established bounds and still practice their craft.

Howard Hendricks (HHP-p. 50) points out that every sizable class has someone looking for God and someone about to give up on God. Most students are really interested; so don't let a few bores affect your attitude.

Often only God knows people's real needs.

### **Learning Preferences**

People have definite learning preferences. I had been a student for over 22 years before I finally realized that I was a visual learner. I was taking an undergraduate Spanish course at my university. My Spanish teacher would introduce a new word to the class. I was lost until I could see it written down. Then I suddenly recognized my own preference for illustrations on the board and for pictures in texts. I realized that my desire as a teacher to write things on the board was probably derived from my learning preference as a student.

Visual learners learn from seeing. They need visual images, either supplied by the teacher or of their own creation. They will often speak in terms of vision, as "I see what you are saying".

Auditory learners learn best by hearing. They would prefer to hear a lecture or a discussion rather than read or look at diagrams. They will often speak in terms of hearing, as, "I hear what you are saying".

Kinesthetic learners can learn in other ways, but they prefer to learn experientially. They learn best by getting their hands dirty, but actually doing things. They will often speak in terms of action, as "I am getting a feel for what you mean".

The fourth learning preference is the read-write learner. These people do very well in academics because they learn best in the read-write mode so common in school. They retain much of what they read and since most tests are written they excel in exams. Ironically, the way we do Christian education in America often puts them at a disadvantage. We seldom assign reading in advance and we almost never involve writing in the learning process.

Our teaching culture in this country is such that auditory (at church) and read-write (at school) learners are usually the most satisfied. If the teacher happens to be an auditory person, he/she will tend only to talk. These teachers must plan, and discipline themselves to use visual aids and to incorporate experiential learning. Visually oriented teachers will tend to write a lot on the board or use overheads and other aids. Since some form of lecture predominates most teaching, visual teachers typically talk a good bit, but will

have to focus on providing kinesthetic learning experiences. The kinesthetically oriented teachers, who seem to be a minority, will have a lot of “doing” activities, which will be great for the kinesthetic learners but may lose the visual and auditory people.

The teacher has his/her own style and will tend to teach towards that group of learners. This is a great benefit to that part of the class that shares that particular learning style, but makes it hard on those who don't. As a first step, teachers need to begin to observe their own learning preference. Students in your classes can probably tell you if they know the characteristics of each style. Once you know your own style, you have to make a deliberate effort to incorporate the other senses into your instruction.

One great advantage of small group Bible teaching over sermons is that the small group situation can cater to the visual and kinesthetic learners. Sermons, by custom, generally tend to be low on visual and kinesthetic opportunities.

Which brings us to the obvious point that small group Bible teaching has many advantages over large group sermons, so we would be foolish to give sermons in these situations. The advantages of small group teaching opportunities are covered in Chapter 1.

### **Adult Learners**

Adult learners are a trickier group that you might think.

Richards and Bredfelt (p. 231-240) give these observations about the desires of adult learners, they:

- Desire an embarrassment-free, safe environment
- Desire emotional encouragement
- Desire to meet challenge
- Desire reflective opportunity
- Desire to be stretched
- Desire to be surprised
- Desire a learning community.

In teaching we must consider each of these desires, even if they can't always be met. We need to protect them from embarrassment in class. This may mean not calling on certain people for certain tasks, or tactful handling of wrong answers. By reflecting on your class and getting good feedback from time to time (see Chapter 10) we can meet the desires of our class, whether adults or children.

Hestenes (HHPp. 86) recommends that we be careful to treat adults as adults and that we carefully diagnose their needs and that we involve them in planning the class. As adults we need to make them responsible for their own learning and we need to help them realize that they need to be life-long learners.

### **Motivating Learners**

How do we motivate learners to learn? Learning is hard work; it takes energy and time, both of which can be in short supply. We first motivate learners with our relationship. If

we are enthusiastic about our topic, we can infect them with some of our enthusiasm. This of course means we have to overflow with enthusiasm. As Howard Hendricks says, “A flame in the pulpit is a glow in the pew”. We must demonstrate extra enthusiasm to infect our students with even a little bit. Guide the group dynamic so that it will motivate all our students positively. I see this illustrated in a laboratory class I teach at the University. I follow the same basic teaching plan each year, because it is very effective. The students are about the same every year, but the one changing factor is the group dynamic. The students are sub-divided into smaller groups of 3-5 students, which seems to amplify the group dynamics. I had a class in 1989 that developed a negative perspective. The class decided that the labs were silly, the class was irrelevant, and the whole thing was a waste of time. I caught a lot of grief. When I analyzed it, the only thing I could figure was that the dynamic went bad, the groups cross-pollinated and pretty soon the whole class thought this was the most useless course of their graduate career. Other times the class feels just the opposite, that this course is terrific, it is highly relevant, very effective, and maybe even fun. Whatever the explanation, I have come to believe that the group dynamic is very important factor.

Sequenced learning is motivating. If the class feels they are going somewhere definite, that they are accomplishing something worthwhile, they are much more willing to put forth the time and effort. To motivate, we need some clear attainable goals and students have to believe those goals are worth attaining (Edge p 43). Ask yourself, What do I want them to know? What do I want them to feel? What do I want them to do? (Hestenes HHP-p. 30)

Encouraging your students is motivating. There is very much discouragement in the world, and very few cheerleaders. We need to get excited about what excites our students. Sure they may not be quite as far along in their thinking as the teacher, but when they sense a break-through, get excited about their discovery. Take a minute to express appreciation and encouragement when you can. Encourage them when they participate, when they contribute, even when they raise tough questions.

Motivation requires stimulation. Nothing kills motivation quicker than a boring class. Life is not boring, so why should class be boring if it is connected to life? To motivate, connect with life’s most stimulating issues. We ought not avoid the issues of life: relationships, finances, emotion, sin; we ought to embrace them (Richards and Bredfelt.p. 231-240).

### **Achieving Change**

A few years ago as I was driving home from work one day, I was contemplating the state of the USA. I was thinking about the need for a nation-wide revival of Christian practice. I quickly gave up on the idea of changing our nation, at least as a starting point. I next thought of changing my home state of Alabama, then I thought well, it’d be more practical to start with my home county of Tuscaloosa. After another couple of minutes I realized that my own church, Grace Church, would be the more realistic place to start. I realized actually my own family, my wife Brenda, and our five children was really my first priority. Finally as I turned left at the last stoplight, I realized that actually I needed

to start with myself. I need revival; I need the Holy Spirit to fill me up first of all. So it is with the teacher, if we want to achieve change in our students we must be prepared and willing to change ourselves (Galindo p.41). Teachers seldom fail for lack of knowledge, but rather from the low spiritual quality of their lives. Ask yourself, has my lesson touched my own heart? Am I right with God? (Dobbins, p. 70).

Let's see how this plays out in terms of obedience. If we are going to teach obedience, we as teachers, must be in obedience, and willing to be confronted when we are disobedient. We must communicate that obedience is an objective. We must be willing to hold our students accountable and be held accountable. To do this we must engage in student's life. We must be able to perceive what we need and what our students need to help them increase in obedience (Galindo, p.41).

Our students need to be recognized as individuals, each at a different stage of obedience. They need to be received by listening, soliciting, accepting (on the short term) even when in error. Our student need our respect, and they need to be understood (Pazmino, p 85).

### **Myers-Briggs Personality Factors**

Two psychologists, Myers and Briggs have developed an eight-part description of the human personality, which is potentially very useful to teachers. They see people as having one of two types of orientation, Introvert- Extravert. Likewise people have two general means of perceiving the world, Intuition and Sensing. They believe that people execute two types of judgment, Thinking and Feeling. And they see people as displaying two types of attitudes, Judging and Perceiving. They use these words a bit differently from the way we use them in general conversation, so don't jump to conclusions until you understand their usage. These may not be the definitive descriptors of human personality, but these are useful ways of looking at students. They also help us understand how different personality types are likely to receive our instruction and react to our particular style.

#### *Two types of orientations*

Extraverts are those whose attention seems to be directed towards objects and people in the environment. They desire to act on the outside world. They tend to find communication easy, and tend to be social, action-oriented, and somewhat impulsive.

Introverts draw energy from the environment and consolidate it within themselves. They are most interested in the inner world of ideas and concepts. These students will be interested in clarity of ideas, and be thoughtful, contemplative, detached. They enjoy solitude and privacy.

#### *Two types of judgment*

Thinking types link ideas together with logic. Thinkers are interested in cause and effect and may tend to be impersonal. Thinkers are generally analytic, objective, concerned with justice, critical, and oriented to linked events.

Feeling students will make decisions by weighing relative merits and values of issues.

Feelers are more subjective because they seem to rely upon understanding personal and group values. They are more likely than the thinkers to be in tune with values and feelings of others. Feelers tend to understand people, to be concerned with the human aspect of issues and problems, desire harmony, and need to belong.

We might think of thinkers as being more “tough-minded” and feelers and being more “tender-minded” when it comes to decisions.

### *Two types of perception*

Sensing types rely upon perceptions gathered by the senses. They have a strong sense of awareness of the present moment. People with this perception would generally enjoy the present, appreciate realism, have acute observation powers, have memory for details, and be practical.

Intuitive types have a perception of possibilities, meanings, and relationships by way of insight. Intuitive types will have hunches, sudden realizations and discoveries. Intuitives perceive things beyond the human senses, including future outcomes. They perceive the “big picture” rather than the details. Intuitives may neglect the here-and-now in the pursuit of future possibilities. Intuitive types are likely to be imaginative, creative, theoretical, abstract, and future oriented.

In contrasting the two, sensing people would describe an apple in terms such as “sweet”, “juicy”, “red”, “hard”. Intuitives might describe the apple in terms such as, “keeping the doctor away”, “nutritious”, “a source of vitamins and carbohydrates”, or, “good for your teeth”.

### *Two types of attitudes*

Finally there are two attitudes, Judging and Perceptive. Judging types are concerned with making decisions, planning, organizing, and completing. Thinking-judging types will use judgement to make plans based on logical analysis and feeling types will base judgment on human issues. In contrast to Perceptives, Judging types are closure driven. They tend to be organized, purposeful and decisive.

Judging types tend to collect enough information to make a decision, then get on with it. Perceiving types will want to continue to gather information and reexamine the issues for much longer periods.

Students with the perceptive attitude are concerned with incoming information. For Sensing-Perceiving types, this may be immediate realities, whereas for Intuitive-Perceiving types this will be new possibilities. Perceptive’s have attitudes that are open, curious, and interested. They tend to be process driven. Persons with this attitude are spontaneous, curious, adaptive types who want to take everything in.

These four possible characteristic pairs, Extravert-Introvert, Thinking-Feeling, Sensing-Intuitive, Judging-Perceiving can be used to create 16 (4 times 4) possible personality factors (Myers and McCaulley, pp. 12-14). For example I am characterized as an ENTJ,

with a very strong T characteristics. In contrast my wife is almost an exact opposite as an ISFJ.

The purpose of discussing this isn't to allow us to pigeonhole each student. The point is to help you realize that each student that comes to you has about a 15 out of 16 chance of being of a different personality composition than you. (The 16 personality types are about evenly distributed). Which is to say, your students will doubtlessly see the world differently than you. The more you can learn to identify difference in viewpoint, the more effective you will be at communicating with people of vastly different personalities. This ability must be learned, and I believe is one of the biggest hurdles to success as a teacher.

Just to illustrate how this information can be used, let me relate a story from my friend Wes. Wes has a high degree of understanding of Myers-Briggs typing. Consequently when he took his auto to be repaired he decided to test the validity of personality typing. Here is his story in his own words:

It is pretty obvious that Billy, my favorite repairman is an extravert. Even when he's under a car he is talking to somebody. The fact that he's a feeler is just as apparent. The last time I counted, Billy had 103 cars at his shop. He won't tell anybody, "No," and he undercharges because he can't stand for someone to think he's ripping them off. Knowing that Billy is a feeler and an extravert, means that relationships and talking are important to him. Normally, it takes one to two weeks to get your car back from Billy because he's so overloaded. While driving out to Billy's one day, I decided to perform a little experiment. If my personality-typing of Billy was accurate, then all I had to do to get my car fixed better and faster was to work on my relationship with Billy via listening. I stood around for over an hour after I dropped off my car. I asked him about his kids, his wife, vacation, fishing, work, and mutual friends. I just stood around and listened while he extroverted (and that was all he was doing). I had about two hours of work that I needed done on my car. In "Billy hours" that means at least four to seven business days before it's ready. Also, you have to call Billy several times to remind him about your car before it gets fixed. The morning after I dropped my car off and stood around listening to Billy I received a phone call at about 9:00 AM. It was Billy, just calling to let me know my car was ready.

This made such an impression on Wes, that he felt guilty about having used his knowledge for his own gain. He resolved not to abuse his knowledge of personality typing for his own benefit. But, if you wanted to use this information for a positive purpose...

Myers and McCaulley (p. 131, 133) claim that judging types prefer to learn from workbooks, lectures and demonstrations and want the material presented in an orderly way, because they desire structure and clear guidance. In contrast, perceptive types are not as concerned with order and structure and in fact are often frustrated by the constraints of too much structure. Intuitives prefer self-paced work and prefer to study

on their own. They also like challenges to their imagination. Feeling types need appreciation and support, and like group projects and may be more prone to wander off the task in pursuit of socializing with other class members. Sensing types prefer involvement and demonstrations and have high affinity for memorization and they prefer step-by-step instruction and hands-on. They prefer to plan and organize their approach to learning. Thinking personality types need clarity of communication. Extraverts are very attuned to surroundings and so are more affected by room arrangement decorations and visual aids. Introverts will be quiet and desire a greater depth of understanding than extraverts.

So how does the teacher deal with typical classes that may contain some of each personality type? You can't teach to all the people all the time. Consequently, you must try to provide enough variety that each student gets something directed at her every lesson, or at least on a regular occasion.

How the teacher views herself and the teaching enterprise is influenced by the teacher's own personality type. Myers and McCaulley suggest the following teacher characteristics: (p. 135).

According to Sensing-Thinking types, ideas for teaching come from texts, guidebooks, and experience; whereas for Sensing-Feeling types, ideas come from texts guide books, workshops, other teachers, and experience. For Intuitive-Feeling types, ideas come from concepts of subject, courses, reading, knowledge of student, and "everywhere"; whereas Intuitive Thinking types will say ideas originate from concepts of subject, courses, reading, knowledge of student, and synthesis from diverse sources.

Since you are a personality you have a definite type. If you consider the vast mix of possible personality types among your students you can see why a lesson that goes over well with some students may flop with others. Ultimately you are left with doing the best you can and listening to God for His leadership. Perhaps too, this helps us put an emphasis on prayer for our classes.

How the student views the role of teacher varies among the personality types also. Sensing-Thinking types perceive the role of the teacher to be to set the example and share personal knowledge and experience. Whereas Sensing-Feeling types see the role of teacher as being to instruct, encourage, support, model, and serve. Intuitive-Feeling types want teachers to encourage, inspire, provide variety and creativity, and motivate; and Intuitive-Thinking types want teachers to encourage, inspire, and help students develop.

### **Hierarchy of Learning**

One of the most useful concepts in teaching, in my opinion is Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain. Benjamin Bloom is a noted educator who created an ordered list describing the thought processes. Here is list from the simplest to the most complex.

Knowledge of Fact - dates, dimensions, names, events, etc.

Comprehension - definitions, descriptions, explanations

Application - problem solving, performing, doing, etc.

Analysis - taking apart, determining constituents, etc.

Synthesis - Creating, developing, designing, etc.

Evaluation - judging, critiquing, etc.

The list is hierarchical in that we must first have Knowledge of Facts, then from there we can proceed to Comprehension, then to Application and so on to the highest level of thinking which is Evaluation.

This taxonomy is a very useful guide to lesson planning, to instruction and to evaluation. For example, we'll refer back to Bloom's taxonomy in Chapter 9 dealing with questions and in Chapter 10 involving evaluation of teaching.

It is my hypothesis that whatever is learned strictly as Knowledge of Fact will be quickly forgotten (shortly after the final exam if there is one). If Knowledge of Fact is combined with application, or some other higher level of thinking it will be retained much better. Acquired second languages are often quickly forgotten when it is not frequently heard and spoken immediately following acquisition. That is because when language is not used frequently, there are no higher levels of application to make it permanent.

On the other hand, if we strive to help our students reach the highest levels of cognition, synthesis and evaluation, they will leave the class with something very useful and they are more likely to retain the material and be changed by it.

Our default teaching is to focus on the Facts. Facts are controllable, they are inarguable, and sometimes boring. Most of us know all sorts of facts from the Bible. But many fewer are able to apply those facts, to synthesize disparate Scripture references in to one unifying whole. For an example of effective synthesis, take a look at Luke 24, the Emmaus road experience. Jesus synthesized the entire Bible (Old Testament at that time) showing Himself through the Scriptures. And, their hearts "burned within them".

Unfortunately so many of us have been taught Knowledge of Fact and Comprehension levels so long it takes real concentration to break away from this approach to learning. If you think back to your college examinations, the majority of questions only required Knowledge of Fact or perhaps some Comprehension. Bloom suggest, however, that real learning doesn't occur until we reach the Application level and beyond.

So strive to move your students quickly up to higher-order thinking. It's worth the effort.

### **Summary**

To be effective we must consider who our students are and how they learn. Learning preferences include those who prefer aural, kinesthetic, visual, and read-write learning. Personality types have been classified by Myers-Briggs typing. Likewise, our own teaching style will be influenced by our personality type. Our ultimate goal is to change the hearts and minds of our students and this is a big task. Are you listening for the whistle?

It is essential that we learn as much as we can about our audience, but ultimately we have to have something to say. Without a message, there is nothing to share. We cannot give away what we do ourselves possess. How do we obtain the bread of life? In the next chapter on preparation we'll look at the issue.

**Answer to the puzzler:**

The medical student, the schoolteacher, the engineer, the elementary school teacher, the high school student and the professor all finished the course. What did these people have in common? They were accustomed to studying, they were either in school or not long out of school, and they were not easily intimidated.

Language classes are particularly daunting. To maximize the success rate, this class would have had to be carefully planned in such a way to make all students comfortable, to keep expectations low at first, and to give students early success. To Wes' credit, he had prepared himself for a large drop out rate because he had seen the same thing in his own seminary. He did not become discouraged and in the process learned a great deal about learners and learning.

## Chapter 6. Preparing to Teach

As teachers we ought to say, "I can speak nothing except what I hear from the Father". John 8:28

"I have more insight than all my teachers, for thy (God's) testimonies are my meditation." Psalm 119:99

A little boy's prayer: "Dear God, please take care of my daddy and my mommy and my brother and my doggy and me. Oh, please take care of Yourself, God. If anything happens to You, we're gonna be in a big mess."

"Most speeches fail because they were written for the page (a clean outline, symmetric paragraphs, etc.) and not for speaking. We need to speak to the ear, not the eye."-Anonymous

### Don't Forget the Captain

A young junior officer had nearly completed his first tour of sea duty when he was given an opportunity to display his ability at getting the ship under way. With a stream of crisp commands, he had the decks buzzing with men and soon the ship had left port and was steaming out of the channel.

The officer's efficiency had been remarkable. In fact, the deck was abuzz with talk that he had set a new record for getting under way. The young man glowed at his accomplishment and was not all that surprised when another seaman approached him with a message from the captain. He was, however, a bit surprised to find that it was a radio message, and he was even more surprised when he read, "My personal congratulations upon completing your underway preparation exercise according to the book and with amazing speed. In your haste, however, you have overlooked one of the unwritten rules --- make sure the captain is aboard before getting under way."

God's Manual for Life, the Bible, is our "set of instructions" for getting our lives under way. But we must never become so bound to the book that we forget the Author of it and the relationship He desires to have with us on the voyage.

(God's Little Devotional Book, Honor Books, P.O. Box 55388, Tulsa, OK 74155)

In preparing to teach, the foremost thing we must keep in mind is that we must never forget our captain. We aren't teaching information in the way a Math or a music instructor teaches, we are teaching the very Mind of Christ. God has blessed us with a sacred trust, and we must be careful to ensure that we are teaching what we hear from God himself.



### Why Prepare?

Depending upon our individual personalities we look at teaching preparation in different ways. Some of us enjoy the teaching but not the preparation. We trust in our natural giftedness and try to "wing-it" with minimal preparation. Others may spend so much time preparing, that their teaching suffers from fatigue and boredom with a passage.

I believe our preparation provides the best time for us to personally hear from God. Dr.

Howard Hendricks, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, tells the story from his student days of one of his own professors. Dr. Hendricks said that the path to his daily job took him by his prof's house. This particular professor of Patristics (the study of the Church Fathers) could be seen, through a window in his home, studying. Hendricks marveled at this since he knew that the teacher was among the best, if not the best, in his specialty area. One day Hendricks curiosity got the better of him and he asked his prof why morning and night he continued to study a field he already knew better than perhaps anyone. The old prof had a ready reply, "I'd rather my students drink from a flowing stream than a stagnant pool."

From which will your students' drink?

### **Preparing Ourselves**

In our teaching, one of our primary goals must be to glorify God. Our other goal is to change attitudes and behaviors as an outward manifestation of a changed heart. To accomplish such lofty goals, we need to begin with changing our own heart. This sort of change is not a one-time decision, at least not for me. I need to be constantly changing, and changing some more. My wife describes herself as a statue being modeled by God as the sculptor, and He is constantly chipping away, a bit here and a bit there, never quite perfected, but ever in the process.

As teachers we need to develop our thinking in terms of people. Jesus, despite having an extremely important mission, had a person-minded ministry (for examples see Matthew 19:21, the rich young ruler, and John 8: 11, the woman caught in adultery). One of my colleagues in Christian Leadership Ministries, Mike Sorgius, suggests that we learn to think "relationally" rather than "terminally". As teachers it is easy to get off-track here.

Mike says it this way.

"Terminal" thinking is the process whereby activity and knowledge are objectives and ends within themselves. It is thinking that does not relate daily activities to a larger, overall objective. It tends to be thinking that is short-range, static, that seeks to please others around you, and is controlled by programs. Terminal thinking is how most of us have been trained to think. Not that all terminal thinking is "bad" thinking, it's just incomplete thinking.

"Relational" thinking, in contrast, relates activities and knowledge to specific objectives. It tends to be thinking that is long-range, creative, seeking to please God, and sees programs merely as a means to accomplish a larger or more comprehensive objective.

Here are some typical activities in which you may find yourself involved as a teacher. After each activity is a typical "terminal" (T) and "relational" (R) answer to the question. Test yourself before you read the text answers, answer the question for yourself. How would you score?

"Why do you go to church? (T) - Because I always have and it is a good thing to

do. (R) - To worship with the Body of Christ and become better equipped to serve Him.

“Why do you teach a Sunday School class?” (T) - I enjoy teaching and they needed somebody to do it. (R) - To touch others and prepare my students for an effective life and ministry.

“Why do you invite people to your class and to your church? (T) – The more the merrier. (R) - To bring someone closer to Christ, and to continue my relationship with them so that they can become a discipler of others.

“Why do you do anything that you do? (T) - Well, I... uhhhhhh. (R) - To bring glory to God.

Jesus was a consistent relational thinker. As we imitate Him, it can shift our perspective, making our teaching preparation and other everyday activities exciting, adventurous and life changing. I Corinthians 10:31 (KJV) says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

(Michael Sorgius, Christian Leadership ministries adapted from the book, “Guidebook to Discipleship,” by Doug Hartman and Doug Southerland.)

### **What to Teach**

“We don't teach subjects because they need to be taught. We teach subjects because they need to be learned.”

Anonymous

Preparation for teaching a lesson must, of necessity, start with a particular topic. Sometimes a curriculum, a committee, or a Christian Education Director determines this. Other times there is limited guidance. When teaching adults I prefer to give them some latitude in picking what they feel is most important to study at this time in their lives and at this point in history.

My approach is to give my students several choices within what I feel qualified to teach. Among the potential choices may be a Book of the Bible or even a contemporary or classical spiritual book. My experience is this is the easiest topic for preparation. It is easiest because deciding what to teach often consumes lots of time and energy. In the case of a Book, the topics and order are already established. Generally speaking we know we are going to start out with a general introduction of the book, it's themes, approach, etc. From there we will start with chapter one and proceed through the book at a speed designed to help us reach the end at the same time the teaching term expires, whether it be a quarter, a semester, or a year.

Books are easiest to teach, but don't always meet your students' needs. Sometimes you and your students need a topical study. In this case, a topic is selected because of its interest or relevance. Sometimes a good book dealing with the choice is available as a Book of the Bible, or a classic or contemporary work. If no good text is available, the

teacher will be left to pick appropriate Scripture and other sources to flesh out the course. One good way to approach this is to open up the first class meeting as a brain storming session to decide what issues/texts are appropriate. If twelve to fourteen weeks will be available, pick more than enough sources and ideas to fill the schedule. Extra ideas will be needed to give you some leeway to emphasize some more than others without making any student feel their idea was ignored.

Once the quarter's topics are set, the teacher then simply arranges the choices in a logical order and begins seeking appropriate Scripture and other supporting material.

### **Getting Prepared to Prepare**

We must keep in mind that we are always preparing to teach. We need to keep our ears open for every story, every sermon, and every illustration that might help us in class. It is very important to develop a note-taking system, because we will quickly forget what was said or where we saw that terrific illustration if we rely upon our memories. We also need a good filing system so we can find those items we need.

We do much better if we schedule preparation time. Put it on your weekly calendar and don't let anything else crowd out that time. You need to approach preparation with a problem-solving attitude. How will I make my point? How will I match the lesson to these aims? How is the class likely to respond? If you foresee yawns, you need to think some more.

At some point you will need to reduce everything you've read, and thought to notes. You'll need to decide on which personal illustrations would be effective and finally as always, you need to pray earnestly for guidance (Dobbins p. 69-70).

I think one of the keys to "painless preparation" is working ahead. When we are preparing to teach a week or more ahead, we are able to look for material everywhere, if we know what's coming. Here's an example. I was getting ready to teach a class on teaching and I was talking about how we American Christians are sometimes much less spiritual than we appear. I ran across this list:

### **Great Hymns, the Way We'd Sing Them if We Were Honest:**

I Surrender Some  
 There Shall Be Sprinkles of Blessings  
 Oh, How I Like Jesus  
 He's Quite a Bit to Me  
 I Love to Talk About Telling the Story  
 Take My Life and Let Me Be  
 Where He Leads Me, I Will Consider Following  
 Just As I Pretend to Be  
 When the Saints Go Sneaking In  
 Sit Up, Sit Up for Jesus  
 A Comfy Mattress Is Our God  
 Praise God from whom All Affirmations Flow

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Much  
 Pillow of Ages, Fluffed for Me  
 All Hail the Influence of Jesus' Name!  
 When Peace, Like a Trickle  
 I'm Fairly Certain that My Redeemer Lives  
 What an Acquaintance We Have in Jesus  
 My Faith Looks Around for Thee  
 Joyful, Joyful We Think Thee Pretty Good  
 Blessed Hunch  
 Above Average Is Thy Faithfulness  
 Spirit of the Living God, Fall Somewhere Near Me  
 Blest Be the Tie that Doesn't Cramp My Style

I asked one of the class members to read the list and it not only made the point, but added a bit of levity to what could have been a depressing issue.

### **Study**

Preparation involves study. After all we can't teach what we don't know. Unfortunately many of us never have learned to study effectively. Here are a few basic principles of effective study.

How to study:

- 1) Regularly- Can't cram
- 2) At every opportunity
- 3) With a pencil- you have a forgetter as well as a memory- don't lose the jewels. The act of writing helps you learn.
- 4) In short tolerable bites
- 5) Well in advance- you are on the look-out for material
- 6) By asking questions
- 7) By taking advantage of opportunities
- 8) By praying for insight
- 9) By listening to God
- 10) By having a FEW good reference materials: Parson's Quick Verse (a handy Bible program for your personal computer), a laymen's bible encyclopedia, a good cross-referenced Bible, and a good concordance.

### **Why Study?**

It's been said that we forget more than 80 percent of what we learn. The obvious question is, "Why, then, should we go to the trouble of learning at all?" James Dobson answers that questions this way:

When you consider the personal and financial costs of getting an education, it seems appropriate that we justify putting all that effort going into examinations, textbooks, homework, and countless hours spent in boring classrooms. Is education really worth what we invest in it?

In fact, it is. There are many valid reasons for learning, even if forgetting will take its usual toll. First, maybe the most important function of the learning process is the self-discipline and self-control that it fosters. Good students learn to follow directions, carry out assignments, and channel their mental faculties. Second, even if the facts and concepts can't be recalled, the individual knows they exist and where to find them. He or she can retrieve the information if needed.

Third, old learning makes new learning easier. Each mental exercise gives us more associative cues with which to link future ideas and concepts, and we are changed for having been through the process of learning. Fourth, we don't really forget everything that is beyond the reach of our memories. The information is stored in the brain and will return to consciousness when properly stimulated. And fifth, we are shaped by the influence of intelligent and charismatic people who teach us.

I wish there were an easier, more efficient process for shaping human minds than the slow and painful experience of education. But until a "learning pill" is developed, the old-fashioned approach will have to do.

James Dobson ("Home with a Heart")

### **Planning for Teaching Instead of Just Communicating**

Overheard in a classroom:

Teacher: "Johnny, it's time to go home. But your picture isn't pasted, your table is very messy, your puzzle is half-finished, and you haven't learned your memory verse. Why?"

Johnny: "well you made me sit down and be still and you kept telling me to be quiet and listen. Then you taught and taught and taught and taught and taught. I guess I just didn't have time to learn."

We need to plan on teaching people not material. Covering the lesson carries too much weight. Even though we have spent much time in preparation, we need to remember we are preparing ourselves to be used by God. If God chooses to use this particular class to help mend a broken heart or a broken relationship, we need to be sensitive to Him. After all, sooner or later we'll have an opportunity to teach that lesson we've prepared.

### **Managing Your Time**

Deadlines? Demands? Calls? Emails? Schedules? Time needed exceeds the time available? Have you found yourself being pulled in different directions? Have you found yourself weighed down by responsibilities? All of us have allowed our duties, responsibilities, and personal demands to commandeer our lives.

Though we may follow the path God has laid before us, we may start the trek with our attention focused on the burden on our shoulders. We can trip and fall, weighed down mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Yet Jesus has promised us that His burden is easy and His Yoke is light (Matthew 11:30). When we lose sight of the goal, we let the obstacles of life crush us to the ground.

"If we undertake work for God and get out of touch with HIM, the sense of responsibility will be overwhelmingly crushing; but if we roll back on God that which HE puts on us, He takes away the sense of responsibility by bringing us the realization of Himself."

## Oswald Chambers

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14 KJV)

Capable people have a curse. Everyone quickly recognizes they are capable and gives them all sorts of jobs to do. As a teacher, you’ve got all that, plus the requirement to prepare to teach.

Time is the great equalizer. Everyone, rich or poor, smart or dense, has the same 24 hours per day, seven days per week, fifty-two weeks per year. The difference is in how we CHOOSE to use our time. One day we will give an account for how we spent our hours.

None of us seems to have time to do all we would like. All the time management experts agree we simply have to determine our priorities, and then do our important tasks first, leaving the less important things undone until extra time becomes available. As a teacher, preparing to teach must remain high on the priority list.

Here’s an illustration of how this works.

## The Big Rocks in Your Life

One day an expert on the subject of time management was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, “Okay, time for a quiz”. Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on a table. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them into the jar. When the jar was filled and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?” Everyone in the class said, “Yes. Then he said, “Really?” He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel, dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing the gravel to sift down into the spaces between the big rocks.

Then he asked the group once more, is the jar full? By this time the class was on to him. Not one of them answered. “Good!” He replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand and started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, “Is this jar full?” “No!” the class shouted. Once again he said, Good! Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, “What is the point of this illustration?” One eager beaver raised his hand and said, “The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!” “No”, the speaker replied, “that’s not the point.”

Take a few moments to see if you can figure out his principle point. The answer is at the end of this chapter.

### **The Paralysis of Over-Planning**

There is a very fine line between proper, sufficient preparation and over preparation. No matter how dedicated and ambitious we might be, we must always remember that our success is in God's hands. Even the best planning can fail, apart from God's divine intervention.

I have it on good authority that following account is true.

The S. C. Johnson & Son Building in Racine, Wisconsin, has been called "the greatest piece of 20th-century architecture in America." It has a half-acre "Great Workroom" with a 3-story skylighted ceiling.

Despite its beauty, the Johnson Building suffers a multitude of faults. Those huge glass tubes that produce stunning light effects also inadvertently function as unintended mousetraps. The unfortunate acoustics of the Great Workroom cause workers to hear conversations 100 feet away. The expansive roof leaks with every rain, and humidity drips from the glass tubes.

Does this magnificent structure suffer from lack of planning? No, there was plenty of planning by very bright people, but as Robert Burns once almost said, "The best laid plans o' mice and men, often wind up with stinky, dead, mice and leaks." We must prepare to work as workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, but we cannot count on our own preparation. Bear in mind this wisdom, "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It *is* vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep." (Psa 127:1-2 KJV)

### **General Tips for Preparation**

As an undergraduate student at the Naval Academy I learned there are some basic principles that make studying much easier. Studying to teach is very similar. As a midshipman I learned there is an advantage to having a definite time and place to prepare. By the same token you need to have all needed materials available. Having your materials available saves time and reduces distractions. Having a set time and place makes it easier to get into the "mode" of study.

And as we have discussed previously, in preparation, you have to start by preparing yourself (Edge p. 157-158). Preparing yourself may involve confession and may require taking some specific action to undo the consequences of some particular sin. Hopefully this will be relatively rare. On every occasion, preparation will require prayer as you seek God's direction and as you pray for each member of your class. It may be helpful to place a list of your students next to your prep area (Dobbins, p. 71).

In preparing for teaching any lesson, it is necessary to ask and answer some key questions. Good preparation is simply organized thinking (Dobbins, p. 74).

Here are some key questions that you can ask yourself to help you organize:

Can I set the atmosphere by arranging the room or by simple decorations? (Dobbins p. 78-79).

Do I have an introduction that supports the lesson objective?

Do I have natural transitions to go from the introduction (familiarization) to the main body of the lesson (processing) to the final conclusion (assimilation)?

How will I arouse interest based upon group's interest?

What arousing questions can I ask?

Are there any current newspaper, magazine, email, or other clips that will help establish relevance? (Edge, p. 118-120).

How will I stimulate and guide participation, and how will I sustain attention and interest? (Dobbins, p. 78-79).

What are the objective(s)?

Can I state the main idea clearly? (Edge p. 50).

How do I engage my students' thinking?

What do I want my students to change?

How can I get that change to occur? (Dobbins, p. 84).

How do I personalize the material? (Edge p. 160-162). Think of each member of your class. Your preparation needs to be always governed by the folks you are going to try to reach (Dobbins, p. 72).

What will be the flow of lesson?

What will be the relevance to my students and what can I do to make it more relevant to where they are right now?

How can I best communicate relevance?

What is the main point I want to be sure to make? (Galindo p. 104).

How am I going to conduct the actual class?

How do I get carry-over to life and to coming lessons? How do I create interest for the succeeding classes? (Edge p. 160-162).

How can I display a realistic perspective with enthusiasm?

Can I create favorable class attitudes?

How to I help the whole class reach a fruitful and unhurried conclusion? (Dobbins, p. 78-79).

What do I want the students learn?

What teaching activities can I use to better reach the kinesthetic learners?

What visual aids can I use?

What other resources might be available?

What will be my strategy for motivation?

How will I arrange the room to facilitate teaching and learning?

What questions need to be asked?

What answers am I likely to get and how will I deal with those?

What choices will students make?

What directions will I give and what will be left unsaid?

What will be the student response, and how will I respond to them?

How can I provoke students to really think about what is going on? (Griggs, p. 4).

Start preparing early, identify the flow of lesson, play it out in your mind, figure out relevance to learners, communicate relevance, aim to teach one thing at a time. One of the most important questions, and one that does not always get sufficient attention is, how will I conclude the lesson (Edge, p. 76)? It is well known that listeners will best recall whatever they hear last, so the last part of the lesson is more important than the first which in turn is generally more important than the middle. This means you need to plan a take-home message. Of what will you convince them, and to what will they commit themselves (Edge, p. 144)?

In general, lessons need to be made personal (Edge, p. 136). We always tend to talk about THOSE Pharisees. If you look carefully at the New Testament, I think you'll see that American Christians are more like the Pharisees of Jesus' day than like any other New Testament group. By the same token, it seems better to me to use real life illustrations, and personal ones, rather than hypothetical ones that may seem very distant from your group. At times it is best to use third person to help students be more objective (Edge, p. 136), but I think it is better not to leave it in third person; always end by making it personal.

R.W. Pazmino (p. 61) points out the danger of ignoring the Holy Spirit and instead relying upon reason alone in discovering God's message. We need to always be aware of our own rationalization ability. We can twist Scripture to suit our own desires, but we wind up with twisted Scripture. Remember the admonition and punishment for causing "one of these little ones to stumble" (Mark 9:42). No one said it was easy.

### **Specific Tips for Preparation**

Just as general questions can guide general preparation, specific preparation for each individual lesson can be expressed as a series of questions.

What was author's intent for this message?

What is the theme and genre? That is, is it a love poem, an allegory, a letter to a specific group, or a historical account?

What is the structure and organization (Edge, p. 158)?

Is it prescriptive or descriptive? Findley Edge (p. 136) points out, and I strongly agree, that this latter point is crucial, as it is very important to distinguish between what the Bible is talking about and what it is recommending. Errors here can potentially lead to some serious errors of Christian interpretation and practice.

To whom was the text originally written?

What is the time context; what happened before the text and what happens after (Edge, p. 158)?

Which details are most important?

Are there repeated words, ideas, and phrases?

Are there figurative expressions or metaphors (Edge p. 158)?

Are there key contrasts and comparisons?

Are the connectives, the "ands, buts, ors, therefore" significant (Edge, p. 158)?

What is the context? (Edge, p. 134).

What does the text say and most importantly what does the text mean?

Sometimes, but not always, it is important to determine the personal application. A few years ago I would have presumed it is always important to determine the application and state it clearly and repeatedly in the lesson. Now, I am not so sure.

Mark Warden in his book, Extraordinary Results From Ordinary Teachers, shows clearly that Jesus himself often seemed to deliberately avoid sharing the application in His teaching. Why? Although Jesus never says, I think the Jesus wanted those “with ears to hear, to hear”. That is, Jesus wanted his listeners to exert some effort for themselves. Likewise I believe a given passage of Scripture may have different applications at different times even for the same person, and certainly for different people.

### **One Approach to Lesson Preparation**

One of the best teachers I know is a friend of mine, Corley Odom. I asked him to share with me how he prepares and this is what he said.

The first thing I do is get all the materials needed to teach the subject. Your pastor, elders, Christian Education Director or others may be good resources to ask what authors and books are the most useful. I then order what I need from Christian Book Distributors, or even from the Internet, which has some really outstanding prices. In the course of a long study, I do all the reading I can from as many reputable sources as possible.

For a regular lesson, I usually try to devote two weeks. That is often hard to do, and sometimes I am working on more than one lesson at a time, but I think that it helps me get a better handle on the topic.

I start with simply reading the text we are to cover, usually in New American Standard Bible, sometimes in New King James (NKJ) or the Amplified Bible, and only rarely in a more modern translation. I usually read it from a Bible without study aids, just the text; perhaps to more easily focus and depend on the Holy Spirit to make His impressions on me without man's commentary. I then will get a study bible to read, usually MacArthur's latest one in NKJ, and study from that.

I then try to see what God is trying to teach me from the text. I need God to teach ME before I can teach others, because I think that a teacher is much more effective, more credible, when he has been moved by the Scripture that is being taught. I have a luxury here that many don't enjoy, several hours a week in commuting. What a great time to pray, reflect, and think out loud. I really find that a valuable time, and try to make good use of it.

As the days progress, I find myself almost consumed some weeks trying to put everything together. In the shower, reading the paper, listening to baseball, it seems that I find applications everywhere. At times, I will wake up in the night with a thought, and try to jot it down then, because as sure as the sun is going to rise, that

thought would have been forgotten by the morning.

I use my computer a great deal, and enjoy a program called QuickVerse, by Parsons. In this program, I have New American Standard Bible, King James Version, New KJV, Scofield's Notes, the Believer's Study Bible notes, Nave's Topical Index, Strong's Concordance, and Hebrew and Greek synchronized dictionaries. This really allows me to dig deep when I need to, and do word/phrase/topical studies very quickly.

By Friday, I try to have most of the “research” done, and attempt to discover the applications that God would have me make, the most crucial points that I want to get across. Sometimes it comes easily, and at others it seems like I barely hear from Him at all before the class actually begins. However, I know without a shadow of a doubt, that God SPEAKS, first and foremost, through His word. I have that assurance each time I teach, and it gives such liberty, such freedom to know that it isn't up to me to “sell” His truth, but His Spirit will do His sovereign will as He sees fit.

As far as time involved, I always spend at least 10 hrs (I find the more I teach, the easier and more quickly I can get ready) preparing for a lesson.

### **Another Approach to Lesson Preparation**

A few years ago I was feeling overwhelmed by commitments. Like you, I was fully committed to God's service, and also fully scheduled. I had volunteered, or been volunteered, for numerous jobs and wanted to give each one my best. I also had been convinced of the importance of a personal devotional life.

How could I have a daily quiet time, spend time in prayer, complete effective Bible study preparation, and be more effective as a Bible teacher?

I had no choice but to look for ways to conserve my limited resources while still serving God and my family. The most obvious approach was to combine at least a couple of my tasks. What I found was that by combining my daily quiet time with my Bible study preparation, I improved both. Let me share with you what worked for me. After you've tried it, you can remodel it to suit your situation and your tastes. The basic program is set up in seven steps to correspond to weekly Bible study, but the principles can be applied to any time frame.

The first step in any Bible study is selecting the material to be studied. Fortunately in most cases, some study materials are available which will detail the topic from lesson to lesson. If your study material is not broken into lesson-size pieces, it will be your job to establish the scope of material to be covered. One of my first graduate school professors surprised me by saying that survey courses tend to be boring because they cover too much material. At first I doubted him, but I have since found that to be true. As you experiment with this method of Bible study preparation, I think you will find that you will be limiting yourself to one or at most two Bible chapters, or only a few pages of a book. Remember though, 30 to 45 minutes of Bible study can seldom effectively cover

more than about three key principles. At any rate, if your study material is determined in advance by some sort of study guide, the hard part of topic selection is behind you. If you're responsible for picking the topic for several weeks, my advice is to pick a book of the Bible or other large chunk of material so that one choice takes care of several weeks. For many of us, picking the topic is one of the hardest parts of preparation, and the sooner it's completed, the sooner you can get to the preparation part.

Actually, the first step in preparation begins while the previous Bible study lesson is going on. As teacher, or future teacher, you need to be constantly observing how the class is responding to different approaches.

On the day immediately after the Bible study, you need to begin preparation for the next lesson. If you already have a daily quiet time, spend part of your quiet time praying, and part of the time using the Bible study material as your Scripture passage. If you don't have a daily quiet time, this is the time to start. Pick a particular time of day where you can set aside at least 15 to 20 minutes undisturbed. Most people either pick first thing in the morning, or right before bedtime. If you are a definite "morning" person, then early is best. Next pick a definite place. Pick a location where you will be undisturbed. Finally, place everything you will need: Bible, paper, pencil, study book either at your quiet time spot or someplace close so you won't have to waste time hunting these items. When your time arrives to begin your quiet time, don't debate the issue, like the Nike shoe commercial, "just do it". Finally, if you miss a quiet time, God has given us the grace to start over again. Some people find consistent devotions to be easy, and some people find it difficult, but it can be done, and it will provide many benefits, as you will see.

Step two, on the second day, during your quiet time pray for God's leadership as you continue preparing for the Bible study. As you pray and read, jot down questions that arise, key verses, etc. Try to get the central thrust of the lesson in mind so that as you hear sermons, read the newspaper, etc., you can note items that pertain to the topic. Items like current comic strips that pertain to the study material help emphasize the timelessness of Scripture and the contemporary relevance. By being thoroughly familiar with the topic several days in advance, you can look for these items as you go about your daily routine. If study group members are aware of the topic, and you set a good example, some of them may start to look for these sorts of pertinent items also. Don't forget to pray for the requests of your group members and their spiritual lives in general.

Steps three through five are taken on the corresponding days and are basically similar to day two. You are studying the material over and over and listening for God's direction so that you will recognize the central Bible truth that will speak to your group. Continue to make notes and write down questions. Bruce Hose, a Sunday School teaching expert for the Southern Baptists, suggests that you not consult with any study guides too early in the preparation. Hose points out that we are teaching people, not material. Also, as a teacher know the learning styles of your group, you know their problems and concerns. You are in the unique position of discerning how a particular passage might speak to your group. Those who prepare study materials can help with the basic understanding of the text, but they haven't a clue as to what your class needs. You do know their needs

because you listen to them, observe them in class, and pray for discernment. It's fine to consult Bible dictionaries, commentaries and the like, but it's also fine to have your own unanswered questions and seek the group's corporate wisdom. I am no longer surprised when I bring up questions that I think is a very difficult and complex and that I have been unable to resolve, and one of my class members quickly and simply provides a profound answer. Without a doubt, that is one way that the body of believers should work.

By steps five or six on day five or six, the lesson should be gaining a life of it's own. You have now read and reread the passage. You should have an abundance of notes, and a few news clips, etc. Your final task is to tie it all together. Write down on a clean sheet of paper the title you have picked for the lesson, and the key Scripture verses that should be read. Try to determine if the group would benefit from listing things, brainstorming, or other active sorts of learning activities. Write down some points you want to make, and some questions you will ask the group. By asking questions, and guiding the direction of the responses, you will allow the group to discover the truth that God has revealed. You can do that only when you have spent a few minutes each day making the Bible truth your own. Bruce Hose points out that we "can't give away what we don't have". After a full week of study, you may feel you have only scratched the surface of that passage, but that just illustrates the depth of God's Word.

Step seven, sometime before this week's class, preview the succeeding lesson at least once so you can prick the interest of the class for the following week. Before class starts, write down the day's lesson title and the Scripture verse to be read in a place where the whole class can see. You may want to write down a key question that will provoke the group to think about their own situations. Don't get carried away in writing down too much, or some class members may become distracted by racing ahead mentally. Don't worry about covering every verse at all costs. Remember you're teaching people and if the whole study is spent on a single verse, it's better to meet a need with one verse than accomplish little with a whole passage. If good questions are raised and there's not a good answer, or there's not enough time to answer, you have an ideal opportunity to create interest for the next lesson. Remember, there's no need to be intimidated by hard questions, only Christ knew all the answers.

Don't miss the freedom this approach allows. Each daily quiet time should be focused on discovering God's truth through prayer and Bible study. Each meeting with God should be enjoyable. And the outcome should be the best teaching you can produce. Don't wait until tomorrow; the time to begin is today.

### **An Actual Preparation**

A few weeks ago, I was tasked with teaching a major lesson, but the exact topic was not specified. I had several weeks to prepare. Before dawn one morning I was running to avoid the heat of the day. As I was praying, it suddenly struck me that I should teach on the idolatry possible with parenthood. Our congregation is made up of many young families. This group is extremely aware of the value of good parenting and the repercussions of bad parenting. Immediately I was concerned for people who might hear the lesson but not relate to it because they weren't parents. As I prayed and meditated, I began to realize that all of us were susceptible to idolatry of the most dangerous kind,

idolatry that we can't perceive. Immediately I had an idea of delivering this message by means of original contemporary parables. By this time my run was over.

The next morning my teenage son, Daniel, was running with me and I posed some questions to him regarding what to talk about and what might be appropriate Scripture references. The next morning I began to work out the parables and got three of them very easily, however I felt that I needed a fourth parable. I felt I needed three parables to set the stage, then a focus on Scripture, and then a final parable to drive the point home. I began to look at Scripture and decide what to include and what to omit. By this point I had an idea for the fourth parable (actually it would be the third one in order).

Over the next few quiet times I looked at various Scriptures and about a week or a little more before the target Sunday I roughed out an outline on the computer. I used this outline to study Scripture. I looked at some of the key Scriptural principles at several different places in the Bible. As I reflected on the message and the Scripture, it impacted me strongly. Several questions were raised in my own mind. Why had God ordered the Ten Commandments as He did? Why did He place the first two at the beginning? Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler to keep the commandments, then list only 5 of the 10? I thought over these issues. I was able to rehearse how I would deliver the lesson on my morning runs. The whole thing was finalized about five or six days before the due date.

On the day of the lesson, I went through the first three parables as planned. Then I focused on the central Scripture. I asked my question, "Which Commandments did my students find most difficult to keep?" I expected they would not list the first two, which would raise the question, Why had God placed the first two Commandments of the Ten where He did? I expected that topping the list would be coveting or lying. Instead, a member of the congregation quickly volunteered that the first commandment was the hardest to keep. I had not really anticipated this response, but the point was still made. Indeed we do put other gods before Jehovah.

After a short discussion, the stage was set for the last parable. The response to the lesson was very positive. But, regardless of the student responses, I knew I would feel very good about the lesson because I was very confident that two weeks earlier I had clearly heard from God. And as is typical, I am sure I learned more than did anyone who heard the lesson.

### **Using your Personal Computer**

I don't think anything has been a bigger boon to teacher organization than the personal computer. If you have a personal computer (PC), I highly recommend that you make use of it in lesson preparation. Start by writing down all your thoughts. If you have a Bible on computer use it to copy verses and paste them into your file. One great advantage of word processing is that you can easily copy, paste, cut, and move around material with very little typing. If you gave homework or posed questions last week include those in your notes along with any inspirations you had during your times of meditation. If you start early you will have a lot of material to organize. From here it's a matter of taste. Write out as much detail as you need. I include the scriptures in my notes, just for convenience so I don't have to shuffle papers so much during class. After class you can

jot down notes, questions, and problems and transfer these to your computer. One of the great advantages is that the PC gives you an almost permanent storage for every lesson you teach. If you can think of a key word, you can quickly search hundreds of pages of notes and lessons. Try this tool and see how it works for you.

### **Summary**

Preparation is our greatest opportunity to hear from God. The earlier preparation starts the easier it is. Find a set time and place to do your preparation, have your tools handy. Make prayer a key part of your process. Remember, no matter how good our technique, no matter how great our knowledge of Scripture, no matter how well-prepared, without God we are all “gonna be in a big mess”.

Preparation is not an end in itself. There is a saying in the sport of track that, “you don’t want to run your best race in practice, run your fastest in the competition”. The same is true for teaching. We don’t want to get so involved in our preparation, to spend so much time and energy, that there is little left for the actual class instruction. In the next chapter we’ll discuss ways in which to translate our preparation into effective transformational instruction.

### **Moral to the “Big Rocks” story**

The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all. What are the big rocks in your life? Is time with your loved ones a priority? Is developing in your faith, or your education important to you? Is teaching or mentoring or preparing to teach a priority for you?

Remember to put these big rocks in first or you'll never get them in at all. So, tonight or in the morning when you are reflecting on this short story, ask yourself this question: What are the big rocks in my life? Then, put those in your jar first.

## **Chapter 7. Teaching Tips and Techniques**

The Mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.  
William Arthur Ward

‘Successful teaching not only opens the mind but also stirs the emotions, fires the imagination, and galvanizes the will.’  
Hendricks (HHP-p. 71)

“Teaching, the art of talking in some else’s sleep”

Wisdom has two parts: 1) Having a lot to say. 2) Not saying it.

### **Howard Hendricks, The Prof**

I have personally heard Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary only one weekend. In 1986 Dr. Hendricks spoke to a group of college faculty and Campus Crusade for Christ Staff at the Harvey Hotel in Dallas, Texas. Dr. Hendricks established

himself early on as “one of us.” He spent maybe six or eight hours regaling us with stories from his own experience. He laced these tales tightly together with his observations and conclusions regarding what it took to be a great teacher and witness for Christ on the secular campus. I got the tapes from those talks. I have listened to those tapes so many times, I have literally worn them out.

Why was his teaching so good? I'm not sure, but I know he did four things:

- 1) He related to us as teachers
- 2) He illustrated his points with stories
- 3) He had something to say
- 4) He was passionate about what he taught.

What will your students say about you 14 years later?



### **The competition**

Many teachers and speakers fail to realize that we have stiff competition. Our audience watches television, and television provides highly skilled entertainers who have the advantage of huge budgets and the enormous benefit of post-production editing. We have neither of those, yet we will be compared with these beautiful, talented, edited, entertainers.

I learned in sports, never compete head-to-head with people much more gifted than myself, so I avoid these competitions. I do it by making teaching very interactive—something TV cannot do. I do my best to engage my audience, the students in the class, by using questions, comments, small group activities, and humor, anything that will involve them in the process. Given such tough competition, I have to continually ask myself, what technique can I use to attain my goals in teaching?

### **Techniques and Learning**

The learning process occurs in definite phases. The first step in the process is familiarization (also called First Exposure Phase). If it is new material, the student reads the text and acquires knowledge of fact and comprehension, and begins some application on her own. This phase ideally occurs at the time and place of the student's choosing, but outside of the class meeting. The second phase of learning is the Processing phase. Here students begin to really appreciate the material. How do I use this? What's its utility? Why did they say this, require this, ask this? This is the phase in which application is solidified, where analysis and synthesis takes place. This occurs best in the classroom where the teacher and other students can help resolve confusion and complexities and work out the most difficult problems. The final phase is the Assimilation phase (also called the Product phase). In this phase the student ponders the material, evaluates its role in her life and hopefully assimilates it into her heart and changes her attitudes and behavior. Ideally all of these phases blend together without clear lines of separation, but this is generally the way it works.

Regrettably it is often difficult to get students to do phase one on their own. We have

built up a culture in much of our spiritual education wherein students do expect anyone to hold them accountable for doing phase one before class. Attendance is often inconsistent, so students may not even know what to read next. I don't have much hope that we will reverse this trend soon, so most teaching involves planning for phase one familiarization in the early part of the class, hitting phase two processing in the rest of the class and praying that phase three assimilation occurs sometime after the class.

### **Some key general ideas...**

Some key points to remember in teaching God's Word are:

- 1) The Holy Spirit is the teacher, I am only the vessel. Be faithful to the text:
- 2) If you can't put it in your own words without adding to or changing a meaning, you don't understand it yourself. Be sure that you are prepared.
- 3) Be honest about what you don't know or understand.
- 4) The Bible is its own best commentary. Cross references are key. Use several good translations, but not paraphrases because we are trying to create our OWN paraphrase in point 2.
- 2) Encourage scripture memory; the Holy Spirit speaks through His Word to us. Jesus told His disciples that the H.S. would remind them of what He said. (John 14:26) He can't re-remind them of what they have never put into their minds.
- 3) Give assignments so they will have to do some study on their own. That is when the H.S. can best teach them. Hold them accountable for their assignments.
- 4) Never let the class discussion degenerate into what various students think or feel about the text. Shared ignorance is a waste of everyone's time. Questions should revolve around what the scriptures say, other passages that shed light on the text, how we can respond in obedience, etc.
- 8) Stress application of truth, but don't let the class become a counseling session. If needed that can be done privately.
- 9) Don't assume where they are in their understanding and spiritual growth. Start with the basics.

Millie Shropulos, (Dallas Tx, personal communication)

### **Teaching Techniques**

There are 8 to 10 common techniques for reaching your students. You can lecture, you can discuss, you can break up into sub-groups, you can give individual assignments, you can make learning contracts, you can do special activities, you can use drama, you can do case studies, problem solving, field trips, and peer teaching to name the more prominent ones (Galindo, p. 117). Sadly, most of us find one technique and never try anything new. Each technique has some advantages and disadvantages. Lets look at a few of the more common proven approaches.

Lecture is the most common teaching technique and one of the least effective. According to some research, the learner retains:

10% of heard

20% of read  
50% of seen  
90% of done (Galindo, p 113).

If this is true, then we are only about 10% effective when we lecture. Not long ago I attended a conference on improving teaching. The material presented was good, but I was surprised and disappointed that it was entirely in lecture form, and to make matters worse, questions and comments from the audience were gently discouraged. How can we use bad technique to teach people how to teach better?

I believe lecture is so popular for two reasons. Number one, we have seen lecture modeled in teaching more than any other technique. Virtually all of our acclaimed preachers use lecture exclusively. Lecturing is so pervasive it has become a synonym for teaching. Secondly, lecturing is less risky than any other teaching technique. If I am lecturing I am in control. I know exactly what will be said when. I know only good (by my own definition) information will be shared and I know all of it will be covered.

In fact this is one of the key advantages to lecture, it is the fastest way to transmit information (and remember this is NOT the definition of teaching). It is easy to plan, takes minimal creativity, and is low risk. Unfortunately it is mostly passive for everyone but the speaker. It does not permit students to share from their own knowledge and experience and does not allow for much feedback except for body language and facial expression. Many students find lectures often boring and some (such as I) can be frustrated by lecture. If you want me to listen to you lecture for an hour, you better have some good things to say, and you better say them well.

Guided discovery is a semi-lecture semi-discussion approach. Typically the teacher will assign some outside reading, the students will come to class with at least a minimal notion of what will be covered. The teacher may introduce the topic, have class members read key sections, then the teacher begins a discussion by asking some hopefully provoking questions.

Each question will be followed by a discussion whose depth and length is partially governed by student interest and the guidance of the teacher. If a question touches a key point in the students' lives, that question may dominate the rest of the lesson. This is a good format for teachers who want to maintain some level of control, yet want to encourage more activity in the learners.

Discussion as a teaching technique serves many good purposes (Lefever p. 203-204). It stimulates interest and skills, allows for clarification and review. It allows students to solve problems corporately, and it permits them to hear opinions more and less mature than their own. Discussions often stimulate creativity and applications, strengthens beliefs and helps students develop the ability to better verbalize. It helps them learn to be ready to give a defense of the hope that is within them (I Peter 3:15). For teens and young adults it is some valuable practice, because many issues are resolved this way in the work place, in the home, and in the church.

Murray (pp. 94-95) cautions however, that some group discussion utilizes little Scriptural information and consumes a lot of time as people simply voice personal opinions. Discussion can also become very manipulative if some participants try to strongly persuade divergent points of view to agree with their position. Some types of personality Extravert-Thinker types (See Chapter 4) flourish on discussion, other quieter types do not. The advantages are that discussion is more likely to be relevant than a lecture because the students can help define what is important to them. It tends to be more engaging than lecture and if students really become involved you have a really good opportunity to touch their hearts. Many teachers enjoy this because it also engages them in the learning process and they often leave the lesson having discovered much themselves.

The obvious disadvantage is that it takes some practice to use this technique. The teacher must learn to accept less control over the class. If all goes well, the class will find an area of particular interest and only some portion of the planned lesson will actually be covered. Those students who prefer a very orderly presentation may become a bit frustrated because different students may pursue different angles almost simultaneously. The teacher must pay close attention and decide, with little advanced notice, which directions to take and which to avoid. If things get too wild, the whole class occasionally winds up someplace they didn't really want to go. I personally prefer this technique, but you have to be flexible, confident, and willing to sacrifice a lot of the lesson plan on many occasions.

The pure discussion is a good technique with many of the advantages of guided discovery and fewer disadvantages but it places a major requirement on the students. If you have a very dedicated, stable group with steady consistent attendance, and they are willing to prepare, this is a great approach. In this technique everyone comes to class having studied ahead and ready to both raise and answer questions. The teacher's role is simply to be well prepared, act as the toastmaster, make sure no one dominates the discussion, and try to help summarize the conclusions periodically. The students are likely to learn a great deal in their own preparation and also as they share and listen to others in the class. Of course the need for everyone to prepare is what tends to make this technique less effective.

### **Story Telling**

Everyone loves a story and it is a very effective way to teach. Christ frequently used the story, typically in the form of a parable, to convey many truths. There are some fundamental issues that can make your story telling more effective. The first point is, never read. Study the story long enough to get a good grasp of it, then simply retell it. You need an interesting start that relates the story to the class. The next step in any story is to build suspense. And most of the time you will have a conclusion, although for teaching purposes that may be a good part to withhold until the students have had a chance to concoct their own conclusions. In general you need to keep stories short and tie them clearly to the lesson (Dobbins, p. 92).

### **Small Group Work**

If you are ever faced with teaching groups of more than about 15 people I highly recommend spending at least part of most classes in small groups. Experts generally agree that when any group grows to more than about 12 people (e.g. Jesus' disciples), the dynamic changes greatly. In these larger groups people feel less comfortable, less vital to the class, less committed, and less involved. Ideally, when a class numbers more than 12 regular attendees it should be divided into two classes, but the common lack of space and teachers prevent adhering to this guideline. The practical solution is to divide your class into sub-groups of about four to six students.

Small group work offers several advantages. It gets students engaged; they are more active when the burden of analysis and synthesis is placed on them. Introverts have time in small groups to internalize ideas, formulate their thoughts and develop ways of expressing their thinking. Shy people are more at ease in smaller groups and are better able to contribute.

If you are using small groups, frequently you can experiment with group composition and also with creating semi-permanent groups. This may be especially helpful if your students are not accustomed to participation.

Once the groups are formed, give them some clear simple directions. State goals clearly, outline processes and general steps, list resources, and set a time limit (Galindo p.140). Make sure everyone knows the group objective. Sometimes the groups will have the same assignment and sometimes each group can tackle a different issue. This latter strategy is particularly valuable if there is a lot of material to cover. Each of the groups can work on a different aspect of the material and then come together in the end to pool their findings. In American culture, a bit of well-controlled competition can make the group work more enjoyable and engaging.

When using small groups the teacher needs to circulate among the groups to provide clarification and make sure everyone is on task. Monitoring groups will help you decide how to compose the groups to maximize everyone's involvement. Likewise it gives you an opportunity to deal with any problems that might arise. Once the task is nearly complete, and some groups will have difficulty in ever getting full closure, the teacher should call on each group to share with the class. Many educational experts strongly recommend that the teacher summarize what has been found to insure that everyone understands what was accomplished.

This small group approach can be used for an entire class, or can be used in conjunction with any of the other teaching techniques.

### **Experiment!**

So you've read this chapter and it was very nice, but you think you'll just stick with what has always worked before. There's an old saying in engineering, "if it works, don't fix it". But my question is, how well is it really working and will just a little tinkering make it work a lot better? What do you have to lose? The worst thing that can happen is that you'll get fired as a Bible study leader and you could probably use the break anyway.

Experiment a little. Try a new technique. Use it twice. If you don't like it, don't use it again (until next year). You'll give your class a bit of variety and you may find they like a change from time to time. Keep in mind how God has taught you in the past. God can be profoundly risky in how HE teaches us (Warden p. 15). We don't always recognize the lesson or the teacher, yet God persists.

Pray for your class and for guidance on how to present your material. You'll be glad you did.

### **Some General Principles of Teaching**

Regardless of technique there are some general objectives you ought to set for yourself. First you have to know your students (see Chapter 3). Based on that knowledge, you have to start where learner is now. Begin with concepts based upon learners' experiences (Griggs p. 7). Use terms they can understand, and decide what is the top priority for your group. Be selective in what you teach, introducing one concept at a time, which is reinforced by comparison and repetition (Griggs p. 7). It is better for a class to really master a few topics than be vaguely familiar with a breadth of information.

Second, always strive to make lessons personal. It's easy to see what's wrong with the scribes and Pharisees, it's much harder to see what's wrong with ourselves. I encourage you to become aware of how you and your students see Scripture. The children of Israel were not any denser or faithless than are we. Here is where overuse of commentaries can actually hurt you. Our goal is to hear from God and transform our students. Jesus himself said, "My teaching is not my own is from Him who sent me." John 7:15-18 (Warden p. 28) Jesus wasn't teaching from someone's commentaries, he wasn't even teaching what he knew, he was teaching what he heard from God. God wants to transform us more than we want to be transformed. Only God can touch our hearts and those of our students.

Third, communicate clearly. Use unfamiliar terms carefully. Our students will never expand their ability to communicate spiritual/theological information without an adequate vocabulary, but don't assume they understand esoteric terms without some definitions. Do not be afraid to be redundant. Most people don't get everything the first time through (keep in mind there are three phases in the learning process). Redundancy also helps to give people re-entry points. Students need re-entry points, because all students on occasion "leave" the class mentally. This may be a good leaving because a point intrigues them or because the Holy Spirit is speaking to them. They may also "leave" because they are planning lunch. But regardless of the reasons for being away from the class for a few moments, you need to give them good opportunities to re-enter by recapping a bit. It also helps to try to think visually- kinesthetically, since many of your learners prefer that style of learning (Edge p. 47).

Fourth, in my opinion, one of the key issues in technique is seeking ways to engage the students. Bowman claims (p. 35) that even Junior-High students are already turned off by one-way communication. People may be entertained for a while listening to someone, but they won't really start learning until they are engaged. YOU have to get students

involved, hopefully mentally, but as much emotionally and physically as possible.

Fifth, do not tell students what they are capable of finding for themselves (Dobbins p. 111). If you make things too easy, it requires no effort on the part of the listener. Learners in our American culture very much desire strict guidelines and formulas for action. They want spiritual leaders to just TELL them what to do. That is a great temptation for teachers, to give students what they want. Jesus refused to yield to that temptation as much as any other. Jesus seemed to be very careful in avoiding giving us formulas and rules to follow. He never said, “here is the way...” Instead Jesus said, “I am the way.”

Sixth, the reality of Scripture can be enhanced by using illustrations taken from contemporary life. It becomes more personal when you use examples to which your students can relate. Challenge your self and your students to apply Biblical principle of lesson in today's society

Most students realize that the view of life provided on television isn't very realistic. Most of life's problems cannot be worked out in 30 minutes with a happy ending. Not every problem and not every question has an easy answer. In many cases, life and our understanding of Scripture, can be pretty ambiguous. Don't shy away from giving alternative solutions. Don't shy away from problems that you won't be able to resolve in a single class or maybe even in a semester of classes.

Seventh, it is often useful to begin talking in third person to help students initially be more objective. This was one of Jesus' approaches and shows up also in Nathan's confrontation of David. Pointing out personal issues puts people on the defensive. When Nathan approached David about his sin he started off with a third person story. Once David was convinced of the wrong actions in the third person, Nathan shifted to first person. Herein lies another important teaching technique; never leave it in third person. Once the point is made, always end by making it personal. There is seldom much we can do about “their” problem, but there is almost always something we can do about our OWN problem.

### **How Will You Teach It?**

Whichever technique you choose, there are some general teaching principles that will help facilitate learning and make the process more enjoyable for everyone.

I think everyone is best served if the teacher is NOT the center of attention. You can accomplish this by emphasizing the process not your own personality. Allow students to discover for themselves, even when you know exactly what they are going to discover. Do everything you can to talk as little as possible. Don't read the Scripture, call on the students to read. Never say anything you can get someone else to say, even if they can't say it quite as well as you can. Get students engaged in doing (Galindo, p. 114). I have heard it said, that maximal learning occurs when there is maximal engagement. Don't allow students to passively sit and watch you do all the work. Engage!

Seek ways to Affirm your student and express confidence in them. Do this publicly as often as possible being careful not to unduly (a little is okay for most folks) embarrass them. Encourage them to set their own goals. Work to make them independent learners who will commit themselves to not only studying about God, but relating to Him personally and fully. Get excited about the students' discoveries, and look for potential in them and ways to highlight it (Hendricks, HHP-p. 72-74).

### **Importance of Clarity**

Regardless of the technique you use, clarity of the message is important. Most students find it frustrating (which I contend is not always a bad thing) when they have difficulty figuring out what you were trying to say. Often it takes repetition to get across some points. Jesus himself used repetition with his students. Repetition takes time, but I feel it is better to get one point over to the heart of your students than present several points, none of which really make any connections.

Here's an example of what we get with muddled communications:

A daddy was listening to his child say his prayer "Dear Howard". At this, dad interrupted and said, "Wait a minute, "How come you called God, "Howard"? The little boy looked up and said, "That's what they call Him in church. You know the prayer we say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Howard be Thy name."

And this particular four-year-old prayed: "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

### **An Illustration**

It's nice to talk about theory, but how does this work out in real classes? Let's walk through a lesson and explore some of the possibilities.

Let's say we are teaching the story of the rich young ruler as it appears in each of the Gospels (See Mark 10:17-22). We would read this story over several times, then ask ourselves, what is unusual about this story? If the young man had asked you the same initial question he asked Jesus what would you have said? What is unusual about the end of the story? Why do you think Jesus gave a two-part response to the young man's question? What do you learn new from reading the story this time? How would you rate Jesus' evangelism style by today's standards? Which of the Ten Commandments did Jesus list and which did he omit (See Exodus 20 3-17)? Why? Why do you think the Holy Spirit had this story recorded? What application would you make today? How will I provoke my students to consider this passage? How does it apply to them? What is God saying to me through this Scripture? Which teaching technique would be most effective with my students for this session? Can I use small groups in any useful way? What questions should I pose to the class? What are one or two key points I want to be sure comes out in the lesson? How comfortable would I be with a guided discovery approach? Where will we be likely to get off track? Are there any creative approaches to this lesson? Would a skit work? How about role-play, will that take too long? Is there anyone in my class who struggles with the same things as the rich young ruler? Is there anyone who doesn't?

Now I wouldn't purpose to answer any of these questions for you. God may speak to us, probably will speak to each of us, in different ways. What will work in my class may totally fail in yours. What I am comfortable doing may make you uncomfortable, but it might be in your best interest to endure some discomfort, and experiment anyway. What does God tell you? Have you really sought His leadership?

Well, hopefully, you get the idea.

### **Creativity**

Creative teaching is probably the most under-utilized of all techniques. Most of us don't see ourselves as very creative, yet we could be. One of the simplest ways to use creativity in teaching is simply to enlist the help of your creative, free-spirited, uninhibited Christian friends. Better yet maybe some of your students could help. You should know what will be in the lesson, at least approximately, for almost a full quarter in advance. Ask them for ideas of how to use drama, or role-play or activities to increase involvement with learning.

I have done this with pretty good results on numerous occasions. One of my favorite memories is the card trick illustration. It dawned on me (that's the way the Holy Spirit sounds sometimes) one day as I prepared a lesson on faith, that we deal with a lot of illusions in our life. I only know one card trick, but I thought that it might serve as a good illustration. I took my deck of cards into the classroom. I gave a brief introduction and then did my card trick. After it was finished, I ask them whether or not that was real magic. I said that by all appearances it was magic, but they knew by faith that it was merely a trick. What we see and what we know to really be true are different things. What we say we believe and how we live are typically two different things as well. I certainly can't remember all that was covered that day or even which Scripture was studied, but I do remember the look on their faces as they contemplated the differences between what they saw to be true and what they knew to be true.

On other occasions I have called upon friends to give a monologue on Death's failure to defeat Jesus. Another especially effective approach was to have our class write our own parables. One of those was shared in Chapter 4. Another time we separated into male and female groups and played a lesson-linked game of "family Feud" that seemed to be somewhat effective but especially fun way to share spiritual concepts.

Another approach we have used which was given to us by our friends, Walter and Ann Bradley of Christian leadership ministries, is secular movies. This is especially effective if you are trying to reach folks who are unfamiliar with Christianity or even hostile. With this approach you can pick out almost any movie, First Contact by Carl Sagan, Crimes and Misdemeanors by Woody Allen, The Truman Show, or Les Miserables. You simply invite your class over to a central and roomy location, you watch the film together and have a few snacks. Then you simply discuss the philosophical implications of the movies. It's helpful to preview the film and come up with a few questions, but once the group gets started the discussion often gains a lot of momentum. Obviously you will want to avoid

films with objectionable content, but there are so many films available that this isn't the obstacle it might initially appear. All of the movies listed above say something about life and morals and decisions and what is true and what is illusory. One of the key objectives in viewing secular movies for spiritual purposes is to teach your students that these movies do have important messages. The messages may not be overtly Christian, in fact they rarely are because they are secular movies. However the philosophical messages of these films can often be used as a stepping stone to more serious discussions of the weightier questions of life and here is where only Christianity can give satisfying and complete answers.

Clearly the chief disadvantage of this creative technique is that viewing a full film and discussing it can easily take 3 to 4 hours. If you have a strong interest you probably could use several short film clips to accomplish the same thing. It depends on you and your class.

There are several potential hindrances to creativity. The biggest hindrance is excessive concern about being correct. As a teacher we are responsible before God, but probably a lot of what we are teaching is wrong anyway. If we rely upon the Holy Spirit, we are on safe ground. Another hindrance is too much dependence upon the teacher. Excess dependence upon the teacher makes students spiritual cripples. Unrealistic expectations cramp creativity, as does the attitude that mistakes are unacceptable. If we give little room for self-expression or opinion there is minimal soil for creativity to grow (Griggs p. 69).

To encourage Creativity we need an open, interesting, inviting, environment. We need to focus on problem-solving rather than answer-giving, which may be a paradigm shift for many of us. We need to give our students opportunities to choose and time to experiment. Our students need for acceptance and respect is not based on what they have done, but is based upon the fact that they are sons and daughters of the Living God (I John 1:12).

Marlene Lefever has published a book (see listing at the end of this book) devoted to creative teaching. She has many practical suggestions including simple things such as having students draw a picture of the text (p. 28). I recommend her book for enhancing your creativity. I recommend that all teachers be continually on the lookout for techniques and variations on techniques that might be effective with your students.

### **Homework**

Unfortunately homework is a lost concept in much of our spiritual teaching and seems to be losing footing even in secular teaching. As we said earlier, the familiarization phase of learning occurs nicely in privacy. Students who can read can easily familiarize themselves with the material, and those that can write can make considerable progress on their own before class.

But in order to be able to do homework, students have to be assigned homework, and that is the teacher's responsibility. I suggest that part of the last part of each lesson be

devoted to getting students ready for the next lesson. That involves telling them what's coming and assigning the reading or other activities for next time. Good homework is pertinent, clear, and not excessively time-consuming. Good homework has to accomplish something, which means that in the succeeding lesson the homework is utilized somehow. That is, the students are required to use what they have prepared.

If your students' attendance is inconsistent, then it may be necessary to give your students a "syllabus" periodically that will list the homework assignment several weeks in advance.

What happens if your students don't do the homework? Well, less learning will probably take place. You can't force them to do it. Whatever you do, don't embarrass them because they haven't done it. Just gently encourage them each week, and with enough persistence I think you will get some good cooperation. If you achieve 100% success, please contact me to tell me your secret.

### **A Parable for Teachers**

The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five.

Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please!"

Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face.

"A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$2.00 If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma."

As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbor and asked Mrs. McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents.

On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace. Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere--Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?"

"Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you."

“Then give me your pearls.”

“Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess--the white horse from my collection. The one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite.”

“That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night.” And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, “Do you love me?”

“Daddy, you know I love you.”

“Then give me your pearls.”

“Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper.”

“That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you.” And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek.

“What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?”

Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, “Here, Daddy. It's for you.”

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure.

So like our heavenly Father.

To what are you clinging?

And that's a god question for us. What are we hanging on to that God would like to replace? Are we neglecting to teach so we can do something else? Are we holding on to an approach or a technique or a style that God wants to change? What am I hanging on to?

### **Teachable Moments**

Most parents are cognizant of the concept of the teachable moment. The story told above illustrates a teachable moment. There are situations that are prime for teaching. There are rare moments when the illustration is presented and the mood is right and everyone's attitude is just right for significant lessons to be taught. When the moment comes a skilled teacher does two things, she recognizes the moment and she capitalizes on it by teaching.

Often the moment is one of emotion (Halverson p. 121). In many cases the emotion is a painful one. In fact it may be that one of the signals of a teachable moment is the sense of discomfort in the class (Halverson p. 123).

I am convinced these aren't created, they are simply gifts from God. I can't tell you how to predict them, I can't even give a precise description, all I can say is that as teachers we need to always be on the lookout. Very often these moments occur when something unusual has just taken place. Suddenly everyone's attention is captured. No one is wondering what time it is or what's for lunch. What you are supposed to teach is seldom what's in the lesson plan. But when such a moment comes, don't miss it because here is a moment when real learning, the kind that changes hearts can occur. What I can say is, watch and pray.

### **Summary**

There are a variety of techniques we can use. I encourage you to vary your methods. Try combining the various types. Experiment! Each method has advantages and which is most effective with your class will depend upon you and your students. Just remember, "Learning is assured when participation is secured." (Dobbins, p. 105).

## **Chapter 8. Your Teaching Style**

"Teaching is a stained glass window illuminated by God's truth, colored (and hopefully not distorted) by the teacher."  
(Edge p. 224) (parenthetical statement mine)

The Word became flesh—then Theologians put it back into words again.

"It is a great day , "When the teacher ceases to imitate and finds his own vein and follows it."  
Dobbins (p. 26)

### **My worst teachers**

Unfortunately I have had several "worst" teachers. In my recollection, they were teaching professionals who also were outstanding scholars in their fields. They knew their material. In fact this seemed to be part of the problem. They knew the material so well, that they had no interest in the material or imparting it to us.

They directly, or mostly indirectly, communicated to us that they would really rather be elsewhere. (I have also done this myself, to my regret). Once or twice they failed to show up for class without bothering to let the students know in advance.

They were unavailable. They didn't spend much time on campus, and the required office hours they had scheduled were clearly for their convenience not the students'.

They weren't particularly interested in student questions. They did little to encourage us to do anything extra. As a matter of fact they didn't do anything to encourage us at all. These weren't necessarily bad people. At times they were very good teachers, but the message was clear, students and learning weren't high on their priority list.

How would your students rate you?



### **Formulating Goals and Objectives,**

To some extent, the style you develop in your teaching will reflect the vision you have for education. If your vision is simply to impart facts, then your vision is for communication rather than education. If you feel a seminary education is vital for understanding Scripture, then you will teach in such a way to keep your students feeling dependent upon a clergy member. If your feeling is that everyone can hear directly from God, then your teaching style will try to discern God's word not just from Scripture but from every member of the class. So I believe that in all teaching, secular or sacred, the style of instruction flows from objectives, which flow from goals, which flow from your underlying philosophy of who God is, how he operates, and how people relate to Him.

Ideally your approach to teaching will depend on the issues at hand. What is God saying and what do students need (Edge, p. 42)? Where are my students now and where do I want them to be at the end of the course? What are my students' problems, their needs, their interests? What's their maturity? What do I want to do, and what does God want me to do with this group? What can we do to maximize student engagement with the learning process?

The answers to these questions will arise from the context. Who are you, who are your students, where are they socio-economically, what is their spiritual maturity, what is their experience inside and outside the church? Clearly your style of teaching inside a federal penitentiary (as one of my divinity school externs did last term), will be different than it would be for a group of wealthy older adults who have spent their lives involved in Sunday School.

Even the room set-up communicates your style. A typical classroom set-up involves a lectern of some type in front for the teacher (who may be standing) and orderly rows of metal folding chairs with tables optional. The style the students expect in this arrangement is mostly lecture. And, some teachers are so knowledgeable they can effectively lecture, and that maybe you, but my guess is that this is the exception not the rule.

If we take this same set-up and group the chairs in little circles, anyone entering the class will expect that they will be operating in small groups. Some students will be thrilled by the prospect and some not so thrilled. If there is no lectern or other “position of authority”, the students will expect that the style will not be very directive and authoritarian.

My preferred classroom arrangement reflects my preferred style with college students and singles. I feel that a conventional classroom may not be the best environment for my group. The more we can make it look less like a school room and more like someone's living room the better I like it. Why? Because my college students spend hours every week sitting in rows of desks, often passively listening to material they view as irrelevant to “real life”. I do NOT want them to lapse into that sort of thinking for Sunday School. I want them to feel as if they were sitting in the college student union dining area discussing life's issues with friends. I want them to be able to transfer our discussions in a safe friendly atmosphere of mostly mature Christians, to the setting of a dorm room, or someone's apartment. And I definitely want them to see the relevance to “real life” of what we are discussing. This fits my style, but maybe not yours.

### **Your Style**

I learned a valuable lesson on style several years ago. A friend and mentor of mine, Rae Mellichamp, and I attended a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting in which we were encouraged to do a pre-evangelistic talk on our campus regarding making better grades while still having fun. The potential appeal to students is obvious. The person encouraging us to do this was Steve Douglass, the successor to Bill Bright as the President of Campus Crusade. Steve had written a book titled, How to Get Better Grades and Have More Fun. Rae asked me one day whether I was prepared to give the grades talk on campus. I told him that I didn't know when I was going to get time to go through the book and develop a talk.

“What are you talking about?” Asked Rae incredulously. “Don't use Steve's stuff, do your own.”

This was incredibly good advice, because with about an hour of work, I had my own personal “Grades talk” which I have used many times in different forms over the last 12 years.

I needed to translate Steve's basic idea into my own style, using ideas of my own in a way that suited me. I assure you that my style is very different from Steve's. But I am not Steve and by using my own style I am more comfortable and hopefully more effective than I would be using his style.

My temptation is to convert you to my style of teaching. Every other teacher's temptation is to convert you to THEIR style of teaching. Flee temptation! God has uniquely gifted you. Trying to adopt some else's style is like David trying to wear Saul's armor (I Samuel 17:38-40), it will be much more of a hindrance than a help. Take your time and develop your own style. Bear in mind anyway, that your style will have to

change to fit the teaching situation. You'll need multiple styles if you teach in multiple situations.

### **Essentials of style**

Fortunately everyone is free to develop their own style within the bounds of your church's propriety.

Regardless of our individual preferences we all need to:

1) Hear from God. We need to always be very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The key to effective spiritual teaching is hearing from God. Remember even Christ himself said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." (John 5:19, KJV) and, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. (John 8:28, KJV)

This was Jesus who said these things—how much more ought we to say it.

2) Regardless of style we have to be committed to prayer. I am convinced we prepare too much and pray too little. I heard Dr. Ken Elzinga, a distinguished Professor of Economics at the University of Virginia, share his thoughts on teaching as a Christian. Dr. Elzinga said it took him many years to realize the great value of praying for his students. I agree. Make praying a priority and pray for your students as part of every lesson preparation.

3) Analyze your own giftedness. Your teaching style will flow from who you are, and what is natural for you. To be a successful teacher is less an issue of style and more an issue of attitude. Every teacher, regardless of style, must continually be a student of God. Every student must also be a student of God's Word. God's Word enables us to know God. Knowledge of His Word is necessary, but it is insufficient to really know Him personally. We discussed this in Chapter 1.

### **Other's Styles**

We all need to be a student of others' styles. Still we want to develop our own unique style, but we can improve ourselves by studying others. Our style may be perfect for the situation we are in presently, but God may change our circumstances one day soon.

We can learn much from observing closely as others teach. Even if they teach badly we can learn what not to do. As we observe we can find ways to adapt their techniques without losing our own styles. Likewise we can learn as we observe our own students. Their feedback, their comments, their own styles as they participate, can teach us much about our own teaching and its effectiveness.

We ought also to practice, and experiment. Maybe we have a wider range of style than

we realize. We might become more comfortable with other styles if we tried. But, we never know if we aren't willing to experiment.

You may be surprised at what works for your class. Lots of times God will use what I think will never work. Other times, my carefully planned lesson flops totally. My point is, since there are no sure deals in teaching, you have little to risk by taking a chance on something wild.

Keep in mind, Jesus used some pretty wild stuff, like making wine, walking on water and healing demoniacs to make his major teaching points. To be Christ-like in our teaching we have to be somewhat willing to "walk on the wild side."

After all, if it fails, then you never have to try to that again. Don't be too hasty, what flops for one group of students, may wildly succeed for another. As always, the better you know the class, the better you can determine the most effective teaching approach.

One of our problems is that many of us have never been exposed enough to creativity in the Sunday School class, the Bible study, or the pulpit. We pretty much have only seen a couple of different styles of teaching. We have to be more like Christopher Columbus and willing to expand our horizons. A famous Russian biochemist once said it this way, our goal is, "... to see what everyone else has seen and to think what no one else has thought."

No doubt developing your own style can be scary. Doing things in unaccustomed ways takes a bit more effort. Try it, you might just like it and nobody says you can't change again next week. How wild you can get depends on your students, and knowing where they are coming from and where they want to go, and your context.

Don't forget, Jesus was radical in His message, in His style and in His impact. In trying to be like Jesus don't you think we can get just a little bit radical?

### **The less-is-more style**

"When I pontificate, they cannot contemplate." (Palmer, HHP, p. 94).

Palmer (HHP-p. 140) speaks of the Hebrew approach to teaching. In Hebrew thinking teaching was simply pointing the way. The Hebrew teacher walked part of the way with the student and said, "you can go alone from here".

One of my friends, Wes Fondren, tried this in a sermon. He told a story, and deliberately withheld the punch line. He got three phone calls of complaint that week, with two of the callers openly complaining about having been forced to work to figure out the point of the story. Good teaching is not without its tribulations. Christ himself often chose to teach without giving the interpretations and applications of his points.

Dr. Raleigh Johnson, a terrific Bible teacher in Houston says he eschews gimmicks and techniques because he doesn't want to detract from God's Word itself. For him that is where God has led him. Other Bible teachers take the position that they will do anything

(moral, ethical and legal), no matter how outlandish, to get God's word into their student's hearts. What's your perspective? It's worth some thought.

An approach I find very appealing, is to try to bring people to Scripture and let them discover its attractiveness for themselves (Palmer HHP-p. 99). This involves seeking ways to teach not just the facts of Scripture but the fascination of Scripture. The goal here is to help students see that God's Word is crystal clear, yet mysterious. It is so simple that an uneducated person can grasp it, yet so complex that lifelong scholars never totally comprehend it. It speaks to people across cultures and across the ages. It is the best commentary on human psychology and behavior ever written. It was composed over several centuries by authors who largely had little contact with each other. It was written in two vastly different languages, yet it is amazingly consistent in its message and thrust. The amazing consistency is more startling if you view the story of the Old Testament as simply the New Testament in a more primitive, less-developed form.

I believe most teachers do too much for their students. In doing so we create educational cripples, who assume they must be hand-fed everything they learn. Follow Christ's example and let students make the application for themselves (Palmer HHP-p. 100). Perhaps we ought to teach less and listen more (Palmer HHP-p. 68). As teachers we have a tremendous opportunity to learn from our students.

Personally I am happy to encourage disagreement among class members. As Christians we need to learn to disagree in a loving manner. Not everyone thinks like us, and believes like us. That doesn't make them wrong. Where better can students learn to disagree than in a Bible study?

### **The Directive Style**

If the teacher is less confident or the students are immature, a more directive style may be more appropriate. A directive style can involve options such as readings, projects, interviews and surveys, questions, problem solving, written assignments, and group work (Richards and Bredfelt p. 243-244), but the teacher will be much more involved in guiding the comments and discussion. With this style, the teacher will need much more planning to give a solid structure to the class and there will be less opportunity for spontaneity. In the midst of all this the teacher must still be even more sensitive to the Holy Spirit than in other styles because there is a much greater danger of missing an opportunity to see God intercede directly in yourself and in your students and in the course of the instruction.

In this style the teacher will be making more decisions, but still it is wise to allow the class to make as many of the choices as possible. It also should be as participative as possible. Directive doesn't mean passive, it just means the teacher will be a little quicker to intercede, and will pay a little closer attention to what is happening among the students.

Even with a directive style, one of the goals ought to be to make the class atmosphere to be a group of peers learning together rather than the students listening while the teacher

spouts knowledge.

### **The Parable of the Professional Wrestlers**

The following parable, written by my friend Andy Paxton, illustrates the value of stating God's Truth in modern terms. It reflects an atypical style of teaching and approaching Scripture. It also says something about the issue mentioned earlier concerning how we Christians need to learn to disagree without doing injury.

And it came to pass that Jesus and His disciples were traveling through The Kingdom of Wal-Mart, near the Valley of House wares and Electronics. On the journey they passeth a wide screen TV blaring loudly. And lo, on the screen strutteth two men, half-naked, adorned in hoods, tight shorts, shouting blasphemies, brazen with muscles of stone.

And the disciples were appalled at the sight and spake loudly saying, "Lord, surely these men are an abomination to the faith and should be chastised mightily." But Jesus turneth and spake, "Verily, I say unto you, unless ye learn that when ye fight with thy brother and thy sister, ye must fight as these men fight, ye shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. "

Dismayed, the disciples replieth, "Lord, these men preacheth a gospel of destruction one toward the other, and they disheth out blows and falleth to the mat with groanings and sounds of thunder. Oh Master, surely you pulleth our legs in jest".

But Jesus, being filled with compassion sayeth, "Oh ye of little faith! My Father in Heaven hath revealed all things to the Son. Heareth now the secret of the parable of the professional wrestlers. These warriors you behold seeketh not to kill the other, neither do they desireth to maim. Yea, I say unto thee, these men seeketh to preserve one another. Each man considereth the other as more important than himself. For what profiteth a man if he stand amidst the screaming multitudes and flingeth himself to the mat? He needeth his brother to flingeth him down and picketh him up repeatedly not only in this city, but in sleazy arenas throughout Judea and Samaria and unto the ends of the earth. In so doing each man collecteth handsome paychecks and profiteth mightily".

"Likewise, when ye fighteth among yourselves, be imitators of these men. Seeketh not to destroy your brother, but to preserve him, and great shall be thy reward in Heaven. He who hath ears, let him hear! "

So the disciples were refreshed in the faith and rejoiced, and after a season they departeth from House wares and Electronics and setteth course for the Sea of Sporting Goods in quest for hoods and tight shorts.

Think how especially effective this parable would communicate truth of Scripture to a group of high school guys. Think what impact this approach could have in the right setting.

### **The Creative Style**

In the Teaching Techniques, Chapter 7, we discussed the techniques of creative teaching. We don't see much of this modeled. Marlene Lefever in her book devotes a chapter to Drama, a chapter to role-playing, and a chapter to mime. Of these, the use of role-playing may be the most practical for most of us. This can be done with some prior preparation on the player's part or in some contexts it may be more fun and more instructive to have students assume roles without any prior thought.

Creative teachers must be able to tolerate ambiguity (Lefever p. 28), and this is often our greatest deterrent. Maximal learning occurs when there is maximal involvement. Conversely as Marlene Lefever so aptly puts it, "when the teacher is totally in control of the class's activities, his or her ego may be the only growing thing in the classroom" (LeFever p. 9). So try loosening the reins a bit and see what God might do.

### **Animal Story**

Chuck Swindoll writes that the Springfield, Oregon, Public Schools newsletter published an article that caught his eye some time ago. As he read it, he realized that he was reading a parable applicable to the Christian church and home today. The following is that story.

Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming, and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor, but he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his webbed feet to be badly worn, so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that --- except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed charley horses from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a nonconformist. In climbing classes he beat all others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there....

The obvious moral of the story is a simple one: Each creature has its own set of capabilities in which it will naturally excel --- unless it is expected or forced to fill a

mold that doesn't fit. What is true of creatures in the forest is true of Christians in the family. God has not made us all the same. It's OK to be you... so relax. Enjoy your own capabilities, cultivate your own style. Appreciate the members of your family or your fellowship for who they are, even though their outlook or style may be miles different from yours. Rabbits don't fly. Eagles don't swim. Ducks look funny trying to climb. Squirrels don't have feathers.

Stop comparing!

Chuck Swindoll (“Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life”)

### Summary

There are several general styles of teaching. In most cases we will adopt the style that we have seen modeled the most. However, that style doesn't always fit us, and that style may not be effective with our personality and teaching techniques. We need to be aware of our style, and how it fits into our context. Does our style lend to our effectiveness or detract from it? Whatever our style some of our students will model us. Part of several teaching styles is asking questions. This is definitely a learned skill. In the next chapter we will examine several aspects of questions in the classroom. Pray that we would all be conformed to the image of Christ.

## Chapter 9. Questions about Questions

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

(Matthew 7:7-8 KJV)

“The only stupid question is the one that is never asked, except maybe, “Don't you think it is about time you audited my return?” or “Isn't it morally wrong to give me a warning when, in fact, I was speeding?” Quote from a 15 year old.

“The mind is a fire to be kindled not a vessel to be filled.” Plutarch.

“It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.” Albert Einstein

Ask a question and you're a fool for three minutes; do not ask a question and you're a fool for the rest of your life.  
Anonymous

You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.  
Naquib Mahfouz

“To question well is to teach well.” Charles De Garmo *Interest and Education*. MacMillan, 1911, p 179 quoted in Roy B. Zuck *Teaching as Jesus taught*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1995.

Giving students answers to questions is like giving folks the answer to puzzles. Sometimes this might be OK, but it's a sure way to prevent thinking.  
Michael Warden

### The Art (Linkletter) of Good Questions

For those of you old enough to remember, there once was a television show that consisted entirely of a middle-aged man asking questions to a bunch of kids.

The show was tremendously funny and the whole show was done without reference to sex, private body parts, or bathroom functions, and profanity was never remotely part of the show. The main stars of the show were unrehearsed apart from frantic pre-show

coaching by the children's anxious mothers. The only prearranged script was simply a list of questions. I wouldn't dare to guess the cost of producing the show, but it couldn't have been much, and it has to be one of the most popular shows of all time.

The show was called, "Kids say the Darndest Things", and it was revived a few years ago with Bill Cosby as the host.

I think that show captured well the value of questions. They can make a dull lesson interesting. Good questions can teach the teacher as well as being an invaluable tool in teaching the class.



### **The Value of Questions**

Questions perform a number of useful services. Questions from the teacher force students to think and to take an active part in their own learning. Questions give the teacher and the student feedback about which concepts have been mastered, and which have been misunderstood. Questions create interest. The teacher who asks penetrating questions arouses interest in many students. The student who asks penetrating questions channels the discussion towards her interests and typically makes the class more interesting for everyone. Questions can be used to establish how much the students know. Questions can be used to keep students alert. Questions solicit student feedback on what they thought about what they read, or what they think about the lesson. Questions identify when clarification is needed. Questions can set the stage for the lesson. Questions can be used for review and to reinforce learning. Questions can test application skills. Judicious questions create an atmosphere of free exchange. They can take attention off the teacher and distribute it among the whole class. They can create discussion where previously there was only lecture. Questions can move the lesson from the realm of the theoretical and thrust it into reality. From my perspective, questions are the "lingua franca" of true education.

Chapter 4 discussed Jesus' use of questions. Jesus was constantly posing questions, and hard ones at times. Jesus seemed to give particular attention to the answers and often used these as a means to transition to important topics and parables. As we seek to be more like Jesus, our teaching will doubtlessly involve more and better questions.

### **Dangerous Questions**

There are times when teachers do not welcome questions. Questions are unwelcome when the teacher is not well prepared and doesn't want anyone to realize that fact. Also questions are unwelcome when teachers feel as if they must have ALL the answers. It's hard for the teacher to say, "look at all this wonderful knowledge I am dispensing", when they can't even answer a simple student question (Lefever p. 51). These teachers who believe they must know everything also are often insecure. To invite a question raises the possibility that they will have to respond with, "I don't know", which would destroy the illusion in the mind of their students and worse yet, in their own mind.

I give such a negative perspective in order to encourage teachers to always be open to

questions. In fact, I suggest you go beyond openness to encouraging questions. The sooner both you and your class discover that you don't have all the answers, the better off everyone will be.

### **The Art of Questions**

The ability to ask good questions is developed through practice. I use every opportunity to practice and have been long trying to instill in my own children the value of asking questions. Whenever we are visiting some historic site or witnessing some demonstration I go to lengths to ask some questions. On many occasions it pays rich dividends. In 1998 my family toured the Corning Glass Museum in Corning, NY. Part of the tour was a demonstration of glass blowing in which the workers produce a beautiful goblet. The demonstration was very well done and took about a half-hour. Afterwards the crowd filed out immediately--- except for my family. In his concluding remarks, the leader of the demonstration had invited questions and stood dutifully by the front rail. For the next half-hour my family and I plied him with questions about what they had done, what tools they had used, and why they had used them. I really think the guy enjoyed being able to talk informally with a group that was really interested, about some details he could never have covered in the formal presentation. That scene has been repeated all over the country, and after all these years, some of my children are beginning to catch-on.

There are some basic principles that make questions more useful. First of all, the chief objective most of the time, is to ask individuals questions they can answer rather than ones they cannot answer. People are very uncomfortable performing in front of their peers, so make it as painless as possible. Never call a person's name before you ask the question. Why? Because once you call their name the spotlight is suddenly focused exclusively on them. And that's obviously uncomfortable for many. So always pose, pause, and then pounce. Pose the question, pause to see if there is any signal of recognition, give them time to think about an answer, then if no one volunteers, pick the person most likely to know the answer.

Whatever answer anyone gives, avoid indicating "that's wrong", at all costs. If someone gives an answer close to correct; simply clarify their answer, making it correct as you do so. If they give a totally unintelligible answer or one clearly wrong, call on someone else.

After I have developed a rapport with my class, I can use a third alternative. When the students are comfortable with me and with each other, I can use a deliberate and obvious misquote. Whenever someone volunteers a wrong answer, in a loud, clear voice I simply, directly, and deliberately, misquote them giving a correct answer often not remotely related to what they said. The first time I do this, I get a few strange looks. When I smile and nod, everyone catches on quickly and the message is communicated that I will do whatever it takes to keep them from looking bad and often it generates laughter in the process.

Of course most of the time you will elicit correct answers. If a multitude of answers are given simultaneously, then simply pick the right one and identify it by writing the answer

on the board, or calling on someone to say it again. If a student gives a clear, correct answer, then thank them and go on. If they give a correct answer that is a bit convoluted or muffled, simply call on them to repeat their answer again. Your affirmation generally gives them more confidence, allows them to raise their voice and generally results in a clearer answer. Don't overdo it however. If you develop the habit of repeating every answer, it may communicate that no answer is correct unless it has your "seal of approval", which disenfranchises the students.

### **Recognizing Good Questions**

Hestenes (HHP-p. 35) lists some qualities of good questions:

- 1) Questions that can be answered by class- although this is a good rule to follow for the majority of questions, there is nothing wrong with asking students to think about questions which will challenge their thinking, questions that they can chew on for weeks to come.
- 2) Ask questions that challenge students to think. The best questions don't seek pure fact but rather stimulate thinking. (Dobbins p. 93). Only about 5 % of Jesus' questions were designed to elicit facts (Halverson p. 139).
- 3) Questions that are interesting to all- one of the dangers of questions by both teachers and students is that it is easy to get sidetracked on a question that only a few find interesting.
- 4) Those that are clear and simple- very complex, convoluted questions will confuse the students and any answer is likely to be just as confusing.
- 5) Seek questions that require thoughtful response- A few basic questions that require little thought are okay to get the class warmed up, but a series of questions with obvious answers communicates that the questions aren't "real" questions but merely a device the teacher is using.
- 6) Always protect people's dignity- No one wants to be embarrassed. Revealing a person's ignorance with clever questions will cast a chill over the whole class. Likewise asking people to reveal things they aren't prepared to share will discourage future attendance.

And here are some more suggestions from Griggs (p. 52-53):

- 7) Ask open-ended questions- These are questions that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" and "no" response. Most of the time, we want to know the underlying reasons for an answer as much as the answer itself.
- 8) Ask only one at a time- having more than one question on the floor generally results in total confusion. The way to handle additional questions posed in the midst of another question is to write it down quickly (preferably where everyone can see it), and then deal with the questions in order.
- 9) Ask the whole class- as we said earlier, use the "Pose, Pause, Pounce" technique so that the question comes first, those who know can respond, and the students are teaching each other.
- 10) Provide feedback- This must be done with care. Typically students need to end an answer with some knowledge of what the "correct" answer was, which may require some summary or recap by another student (preferably) or by the instructor. I would suggest however, that leaving students with some

unanswered questions can be a very useful technique (see point # 1 above, and also see Chapter 4 on Jesus' teaching techniques which often left unanswered questions).

- 11) Follow up with probing questions- This is very important when students give "Sunday School" answers. These are answers that the student knows to be correct, although may not reflect the actual heart beliefs of the student. We'll say more about this in a minute.
- 12) Ask then wait; don't rush it- Most of us are very intolerant of silence. Keep in mind that the introverts in the class need processing time. They can't participate if high-speed answers are required.
- 13) Inquire, don't interrogate. This is mostly a issue of tone and pace. Rather than firing off question after question, order your questions so that the questions are separated with somewhat lengthy answers. It seems better to intersperse questions with commentary than grouping all the questions into one segment of the class. In fact, in teaching it seems that nothing kills curiosity faster than asking, "are there any questions?"
- 14) Encourage the class to raise questions of their own. Welcome questions and affirm questions- even risky ones. It seems the best questions in class are the ones students raise themselves. When a student asks a sincere question, that is one time when you know you have their attention.
- 15) Avoid echoing the student's response- but having them repeat themselves may be useful for all. You don't want to be in the position of having to approve everything that is said in class. You want clarity, you want to avoid wrong conclusions, but you want your students to "own" the class.
- 16) Treat student responses as gifts. Most people have something worthwhile to contribute. Eliciting contributions is a difficult task that takes practice. Do everything possible to make sure students understand that their questions and their answers are welcome. Also realize that making these contributions is more difficult for some students than for others.
- 17) Use questions to emphasize major points. Asking a series of questions about a central theme is a good way to draw attention to your main point. Most students are clever enough to recognize this sort of emphasis. This too is a good place to strategically place an unanswered question to try to provoke further reflection.

### **Where Good Questions are Born**

There are at least two sources of questions, the student and the teacher. Since we only have control over one of those sources, let's take a look first at teacher-generated questions. Griggs (p 49) classifies them as personal, analytical, and informational. Here are some examples:

Personal: What would you...? How do you feel about...? What do you believe about...? What are you learning about...? Where are you struggling? (HHP-p. 27 Hestenes) How would you have reacted to...? (Pazimino, p. 69).

Analytical: What do you think about...? Why would the Holy Spirit...? What are some possible reasons that...? What is missing in...? What is going on? (HHP-p. 27 Hestenes) What was the message and how did it relate to Scriptures? (Pazimino, p. 69).

Informational: Who...? What...? When...? Why...? How...? What did you see, observe, note? (Pazmino, p. 69).

How a question is classified isn't important; however, these classifications are useful in helping you form questions and recognize the cognitive demands of each question (see Chapter 5 where Bloom's taxonomy of cognition is explained: Knowledge of fact, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation).

Learning to ask good questions takes a bit of practice. You can practice by simply taking any statement and turn it into a question (Bowman, p. 64) or a series of questions. Here's an example:

Statement: The Pharisees missed the essence of Christ.

Questions: What was it about the Pharisees that caused them to miss Christ? What were the Pharisees like? How are we similar to the Pharisees? Is it possible that we are missing Christ at times in the same way they did? How could this happen to us? What can we learn from the Pharisees that might prevent us repeating their mistakes today?

Here are some questions you may find useful in text studies:

1. What does the text say? Have the students to summarize in their own words what is said without changing the meaning, adding something that is not there, or leaving out something important. A good rule of thumb is that their summary should average 6-8 words per verse. They can rearrange the text, but not alter the meaning.

2. What does it say that I do not understand? Ask them to write out their specific questions.

3. Where else in Scripture does it say this. (What are some relevant cross references?)

4. What does it say to me? Personal application of God's word to our lives is the means of transformed character. You may chose not to require students to share their applications.

Millie Shropulos (Dallas Tx, personal communication)

Remember the major objective isn't to find answer, the objective is to find GOD. (Warden , p148).

### **When You Don't Know**

Some teachers avoid questions because they know that sooner or later a question will be posed which they cannot answer. This is an understandable fear based on the myth that teachers know everything. One of the best answers to a hard question is, "I don't know". In fact this is a better answer than some obfuscation designed to make it look like you know more than you actually do. By admitting your sincere ignorance, you communicate humility, reality, and willingness to learn. No one else knows everything, so why should you?

We saw the story of a wise man's evaluation of self-acknowledged ignorance in Chapter 2, but because it's important it's worth repeating, so here it is again.

One day some old men came to see Abba Anthony. In the midst of them was Abba Joseph. Wanting to test them, the old man suggested a text from the Scriptures, and, beginning with the youngest, he asked them what it meant. Each gave his opinion as he was able. But to each one the old man said, 'You have not understood it.' Last of all he said to Abba Joseph, 'How would you explain this saying?' and he replied, 'I do not know.' Then Abba Anthony said, 'Indeed, Abba Joseph has found the way, for he has said: "I do not know."'

Benedicta Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*  
(Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975) 4.

Another way to deal with the hard question, in fact a good way to deal even with an easy question, is to refer it to the class. Often times someone has a good answer. Other times, doing so buys you some time to decide whether you have an answer or not. It also communicates that the class isn't about you and what you know. It allows others to communicate, to contribute, and it acknowledges that God can speak to whomever He wishes.

Again, I maintain that the unanswered question may be the best teaching tool of all. Cheap, easy answers to difficult questions may be worse than worthless; they may effectively kill any further thought and opportunity for God to speak to your students and you.

The more difficult type of hard question is the good question that elicits the easy "Sunday School answer" I referred to earlier. The story is told of a Sunday School class of young boys. The teacher posed the simple question, "What is gray, lives in trees and eats nuts?" There was no response. He asked again, "What is gray, lives in trees and eats nuts?" Met with only silence he asked a third time, "What is gray, lives in trees and eats nuts?" Finally young Juan responded, "I guess the answer must be Jesus but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me."

Too often, in spiritual settings the answer must be "Jesus", or "God", or "The Bible". The problem is that these answers may not reflect the respondent's heart at all. These are the designated "right answers" and sadly most students are afraid of sharing their own true feelings. When a good question reaps only a "Sunday School answer", it may be a good time for the teacher to volunteer her own answer. You can communicate that it is all right to admit that you are less than perfect. You can confess that even Bible teachers struggle with sin. Do whatever it takes to establish clear, open, honest, communication, if you ever hope to be able to touch the heart of your students.

### **Others Issues with Questions**

A couple of other issues may arise in the area of questions. On some occasions, one or two class members may dominate by supplying all the answers. Often they will get the hint when you call on others by name. If they are especially persistent, a sensitive word in private, expressing appreciation, and soliciting cooperation should solve the problem.

Seeking multiple answers from different folks makes this problem less irritating.

Some class members are very reluctant to answer. For the most part I tend to respect their shyness, but I still try to call on everyone at least occasionally.

Questions are also a useful means to gain the attention of class members. If your habit is to ply the group with questions, no one but the offending member will notice why you called on that particular person. In my college teaching I have found this to be very effective.

### **Summary**

Questions ought to be a valuable part of your teaching. Questions help determine what your class knows already and they invite students to participate and contribute.

Questions can point to problems that need to be resolved, and can identify issues of importance to your class. They take some of the attention off you and distribute some attention to others in the class. Asking good questions is a skill you can develop with practice. In the next chapter we'll look at some aspects of practice in questions and teaching in general.

Now, finally here's a question for you.

What was the most important factor in your spiritual growth?

How will you apply the answer in your own teaching?

## Chapter 10. Practice, Practice, Practice

“Evaluation is the most neglected education task of the church.” Richards and Bredfelt p. 251

“A wise man will hear and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel.”  
Proverbs 1:5

“And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”  
Galatians 6:9

“A man is not finished when he is defeated. He is finished when he quits.” Anonymous

“If you fast regularly, do not be inflated with pride, but if you think highly of yourself because of it, then you had better eat meat. It is better for a man to eat meat than to be inflated with pride and to glorify himself.” --Isidore (c. 450)

“He who seeks a friend without fault remains without.”  
Old Turkish Proverb

### My Evaluation Day

One of my own most valuable teaching situations was one of the most painful. I was in my second year as a full-fledged college professor and I was working hard and really making progress. I had worked hard and was really proud of my knowledge of the subject matter, and my ability to communicate it to the students.

Right after the term ended, one of my students came by my office on some administrative errand. This was a special student, probably the brightest in my class. He was a year or two older than I, and I felt we had a good rapport. I saw an opportunity to elicit a compliment from him, so I asked him how he thought our class had gone that term.

I really wasn't prepared for the answer he gave. Somewhat reluctantly, he proceeded for the next half hour (and it seemed much, much, longer) to point out major errors I had made. I had made a classroom full of mistakes, from the way I had treated one student (publicly embarrassing her), to an unwise use of illustrations (I apparently dwelt almost exclusively on one theme). By God's grace alone I was able to endure the ego beating I took. Yet, from the standpoint of teaching it was the best thing that has ever happened to me.

It is unlikely that you will ever have to endure what I did, since chances are slim that you could ever make such a host of mistakes. I have come to believe that good, honest, thoughtful criticism is both a scarce and valuable commodity. I pray God will give you someone who loves you enough to help you see past your own blind spots.



### Learning From our Students

The vast majority of effort in educating teachers is directed toward telling teachers how best to convey information to the student. However, for teachers, the other half of communication, listening and receiving information, is as important as transmitting it.

Dr. George Graham is a nationally known expert on physical education for children. As a graduate student I once traveled with George and two other guys to a relay running race

in South Carolina. On our way back from the race, one of the guys was asking each of us about our occupations. After George explained what he did and that he had two young children, the fellow remarked, “You must use a lot of your knowledge to teach your own kids.”

George gave this very insightful response, “No, not really, I actually learn more from them than I teach them.”

As teachers we can take a lesson from George. It is we who have the opportunity to learn from our students. The lessons are there, it is up to us not to miss them.

### **Focus on Feedback**

A leading educational authority, Benjamin Bloom states, “... (feedback) can reveal errors... shortly after they occur... a self correcting system so that errors made at one time can be corrected before they are compounded with later errors.” (Milton, p. 126). This statement applies to feedback in both directions.

Feedback is a vital ingredient in setting course objectives. Feedback in both directions is essential to the communication process (Myers, p. 11). Objectives are generally most efficient and acceptable when the students are encouraged to feedback their ideas about what they are interested in, and how they feel their goals can best be reached. (Milton, p. 31). Students are a valuable resource that should not be neglected.

Student teacher feedback has a unique value because students have exclusive knowledge of certain valuable information. Students are the sole resource of evaluative information on teacher characteristics like:

“Presents ideas in a manner understandable to the student.”

“Stimulates student thinking.”

“Establishes rapport with students easily.”

Student observations may not always be highly accurate, (Milton, p. 363) but they tend to be very consistent (Milton, p. 365) and student’s position as “consumers” give them a logic right to express their opinions.

Utilizing student-teacher feedback is not an involved mysterious, demanding problem. After all, everyone already employs feedback in the course of conversation. As a teacher you solicit questions, you observe facial expressions. Hopefully, you observe attitudes, participation, and responses to assess your teaching and your students.

Ideally, every teacher should want to become the most efficient and effective teacher he or she can become. Only conscientious collection and evaluation of some form of feedback makes this improvement possible. It is hoped that these ideas will help you to make maximum use of student-teacher feedback to become a better teacher tomorrow than you were yesterday.

### **Where to Listen (And Look) For Feedback**

“Those of us who keep our eyes open can read volumes into what we see going on around us.” Edward Hall (Knapp, p. 1)

Listening to what students tell us is a vital part of the communications process and is certainly one of the simplest means of obtaining vital feedback. Most of us probably do not come close to maximizing use of this source of information.

Effective utilization of oral feedback is largely dependent upon properly establishing the correct atmosphere in the classroom. Thus preparing the way for feedback messages has been aptly dubbed “feed forward” (Myer, p. 132). The way in which you handle questions helps enhance this feed forward. Using confirming responses is vital to feed forward. Always acknowledging questions, answering in an agreeing manner when possible, supporting the questioner, and expressing positive feelings toward the questioner (Myer, p. 199) are useful techniques. In contrast, you can show a lack of concern, or a superior attitude and discourage questions. If you appear dogmatic and interrupt the questioner or give impervious or irrelevant responses (Myer, p. 200) you’ll send a message that questions aren’t welcome. If you even suggest that all questions be held until the end, you will permanently curtail comments and questions, and thereby lose a large percentage of the feedback available.

By showing students that you see yourself as fallible, that you are willing to change your method, approach or procedure, by showing that you still consider yourself a learner as well as a teacher, you will encourage oral communication of the most valuable kind. Paying lip service to these characteristics won’t work; your actions will invariably show your true attitude.

It is essential that you ensure that you utilize good listening skills (as shown in Myer p. 241) to maximize both the volume and accuracy of oral feedback. If we desire to gain the fullest benefit from what students can tell us, we must be prepared to look as well as listen. Virtually everything in our environment communicates something if we are prepared to read the message (Hall p. 38). An expert in non-verbal behavior contends that verbal communication accounts for only 35% of the social meaning in a situation while non-verbal messages supply the remaining 65% (Knapp, p. 12). Another expert contends that 38% of any spoken communications comes from the voice inflection, tone, and emphasis; 55% from appearance, gestures, movement, visual aids; and only 7% from the words themselves (B Boylan P. 80 quoted in Warden p. 98). Clearly, how words are spoken and the facial expressions, are some of the most valid sources of non-verbal feedback (Eckman, p. 74; Knapp, p. 173). Likewise, some communications specialists contend that we incur considerable information error if we consider words in isolation from the body language that accompanies them (Fast, p. 108; Knapp, p. 84) which explains why email communications are so easily misinterpreted.

Responding to non-verbal cues is not a novel process for anyone. We are already well acquainted with such communicating actions as frantic hand waving to signify knowledge, avoiding eye contact to signify lack of knowledge. We gather information from seating patterns, facial expressions, general appearance, and tone of voice (Knapp, p. 14). With just a little more effort, the average teacher should be able to glean additional feedback from non-verbal cues. This particular communication source must be

approached with some caution, because non-verbal judgments are merely judgments and not facts (Knapp, p. 185). Body language, like verbal language, can only be correctly interpreted in context (Hall, p. 40). Again, like spoken language, non-verbal signals are basic to culture and sex, and are influenced by environment, prejudices etc. (Eckman, p. 73) (Hall, p. 38). Accurately interpreting the major portion of non-verbal cues is a fairly long-term undertaking. You must be willing to observe the people you are dealing with over some period of time to establish normal behavior. Major variations from their normal behavior usually reveal significant meaning (Eckman, p. 72).

What type of feedback can we derive from non-verbal observations? The most valid and valuable non-verbal cues are those that contradict what is communicated verbally. For example, an instructor may describe a subject as quite important yet may non-verbally contradict herself with facial expressions, lack of physical intensity, a cavalier approach, and numerous other contradictory motions and gestures. The contradictory non-verbal messages in these situations are usually the most reliable (Knapp, p. 9, 173). Students learn to rely upon these non-verbal cues quite early. Non-verbal actions can also help repeat, complement, and accent other communications. For example, students may say they are frustrated and consciously or unconsciously repeat and accent this feeling by a wrinkled brow, fidgeting, crumpling paper, or punching the teacher (just kidding). Likewise, students often communicate the fact that they are listening and comprehending by smiles, nods, and industrious note taking (Hall, p. 40). Students routinely show they are through listening by closing books, putting away notes, putting on coats, and turning off the room lights (not kidding this time). This information supplied by the students, and recognition of the cues supplied during teaching, can obviously be of great value to teachers and students under certain circumstances.

A piece of information often verbally pursued by instructors is whether or not the students agree or disagree and how much of a consensus of opinion exists. A sudden shift in body position is a tip-off that a student disagrees with what's happening or being said (Fast, p. 116). Similarly agreement within a group may often be discerned by observation of body postures. Very similar body postures suggest group unity (Fast, p. 122).

Many of the examples that have been given are not particularly impressive. But, there is a wealth of information in non-verbal behavior available to the teacher who keeps her eyes open. What you can read from non-verbal behavior is dependent upon your willingness to observe carefully and store your observations for later use. In attempting to interpret observations it is helpful to know as much as possible about those you are observing, as much about the setting as possible, the frequency and duration of the behavior in question, and other factors such as fatigue, personal biases etc. (Knapp, p. 184)

### **Obtaining Directed Feedback**

A second way to elicit student feedback is through the use of written critiques or evaluations. Written evaluations should seek to solicit student comments on how best to

aid them in their learning. Considerable study has been conducted on various aspects of the use of written student evaluations.

Some information about evaluations has been fairly well established. Student feedback by written course evaluations tends to be largely independent of sex and class size (Zakrajsek, p. 64). Feedback is more specific, concrete and accurate if it is solicited immediately after the activity evaluated (Zakrajsek, p. 133). That is, get formal or informal feedback often, if you want to maximize its potential.

Few people take criticism well and what you're basically asking for in an evaluation is some degree of criticism. For this reason, the best student critique is one that you create and specifically tailor to yourself and your class. For those who desire to develop their own course critique, several suggestions might be helpful. The information you want the student to provide should be useful and it should provide you with some alternatives to try (Myer, p. 134; Friedlander, p. 140). It should show to what degree the objectives are being met and include information on personnel, facilities, teaching aids, and course content (Tracey, p. 240). Characteristics, which have been found to be important from the student's point of view, include teachers' knowledge of subject, clarity of explanations, teachers' enthusiasm, organization and preparation, and teacher-student rapport and interaction (Zakrajsek, p. 64). Include in your evaluation some of these items along with any other particular characteristics important to you.

We should consider how we are going to react to the information these evaluations will provide. Feedback will be more easily accepted if we word our evaluations to direct criticism toward our behaviors rather than our persons (Myer, p. 133). Your students should be influenced to give descriptions of criticized areas rather than judgments (Myer, p. 134). Student's comments will be more helpful if they use quantifying, specific descriptions (Myer, p. 123; and Tracey, p. 241). Try to focus feedback items on observations rather than inferences and provide answer options are stated in degrees rather than "either-or" (Myer, p. 133-134). A sample evaluation has been included near the end of this chapter.

Creating the evaluation sheet is only half the problem. Getting students to respond seriously may be more difficult. Students will likely cooperate more in this endeavor if written feedback requests are regular, anonymous, and show results (Milton, p. 76). If feedback opportunities are provided at midterm or earlier, the students will be much more motivated toward cooperation than if a half-hearted effort is made at the end of the course when students know that it will not benefit them.

### **What to do with Feedback**

All the feedback in the world is a wasted effort (almost) if it affects no change. I see teaching right now as an experiment for every teacher. We hypothesize about a topic or test or method of presentation, then we try it and hopefully gather feedback to evaluate our efforts. Stopping here means failure. We must be sensitive to feedback to see if our goal is met, but we must take the next step to modify what we tried to do to match what

we intended to do (Myer, p. 11). The key value in feedback lies in what it tells us to do in our class (Milton, p. 75).

As you work to improve all channels of student-teacher feedback you will be reducing barriers to communication that should have many positive effects including providing even more and better feedback. Exactly how much feedback you get from your students and what you do with it is only limited by your imagination and motivation. Go to it.

### **A Few Specific Feedback Techniques**

If I can convince you of the importance of feedback, then the next thing you will need to know is, how do I get good feedback? Here's an effective approach that doesn't take much time or planning.

With 10 minutes left in your next class, close the class as you normally would, then announce that you will be spending the next 10 minutes asking for feedback from the students that you can use to help you assess how the course is going thus far. Give each student a pencil and a blank piece of paper. Tell them NOT to write their names, that anonymous responses are preferred. Announce that you would like their thoughtful responses to three questions:

- 1) "What helps you learn in this class?"
- 2) "What hinders your learning in this class?"
- 3) "What changes would improve your learning in this course?"

After each question, allow 2-3 minutes for student responses.

Thank the students for their effort, and collect the responses.

Before the next class, read through the responses and make some notes of consistent themes or ideas. Take five minutes or so at the beginning of the next class to summarize for your students the feedback that you received from them and what changes you plan to make. Also, this may give you an opportunity to explain why you have made the choices you have about teaching strategies.

### **Evaluating Teaching by Being a Student**

I have taken seven undergraduate classes on the Spanish language. What makes this a bit unusual is that I took these classes for grade at the university where I hold a full professorship, the highest academic rank.

Moving to the other side of the podium has been very instructive. As a student I have been able to see things more from the student perspective. I am more aware of how boring us teachers can be. I am more aware of how we can appear unapproachable and inaccessible. I am more aware of the lack of consideration many teachers show students. And I am also more aware of what makes students comfortable and interested.

### **Observation of Other's Teaching**

I have a friend, Jose Cano, who teaches Spanish here at this University. He is a lawyer by training, but he is married to an American art professor, so he immigrated here. He teaches two courses in Spanish. He is by all accounts a fabulous instructor. I agree. Beyond the obvious clues he provides, I can't figure exactly why. I have asked him why he is so effective, and he can't say either.

He's a friend to students. He's available. He's humble. He knows his subject. He seems to realize that Spanish is not the most important topic in the world, at least not to our students. He has some interesting expressions. He likes students and spends time with them. He is not rushed or harried.

I like Jose, I watch him closely. I hope one day I'll be more like him.

I like Jesus too. He's a great teacher. I watch Him closely. I hope one day I'll be more like him. As much as I want to teach like Jose, I want to teach like Jesus more.

There are teachers all around us. As we mentioned in chapter 8, we have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and from their successes. Whenever we observe good teachers we need to be watching for some specific things:

- What is her style of teaching?
- What are her teaching techniques?
- In what ways is she effective?
- Why is she effective?
- How does her teaching technique fit her style with this material?
- What does she do that I could adapt to my style?
- What could she do better and how would that improve me?

When you observe another teacher, keep in mind the importance of supporting and affirming other teachers. Teaching is a hard job. We teachers can help each other. We can spur one another on towards love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). And, we need to remind each other that we are not alone; God the Holy Spirit can overcome our worst teaching.

### **Observing Ourselves**

While teaching a seminary externship course on education at Beeson Seminary, I required the students to video tape themselves teaching. I have always disdained hearing myself on audiotape and had never had the opportunity to see myself on video. I decided what was good for my student would be good for me also, so I taped myself. Watching myself teach and evaluating myself was very helpful. I can easily see that I move too much, I don't enunciate as much as I should, and I don't vary my voice as much as I could, and I make some other basic communications mistakes.

In evaluating ourselves whether by mentally reviewing the lesson or by listening or viewing tapes there are some things to ask ourselves:

In what direction are my students moving?  
 How are they dealing with adversity?  
 Am I am provoking my students to think anew, to examine themselves?  
 Does my teaching communicate clearly? Does it go beyond communication?  
 How many stories and illustrations did I use? Did they connect with the students?  
 Did the story/illustration tie in clearly with the lesson? Was the time and effort  
 required proportionate to its importance? Was the class ready for it? Was it  
 desert or main course? (Hendricks HHP-p. 54-55).  
 What did I do well?  
 What did I do poorly? (Hendricks HHP-p. 72-74,p.111)  
 How would I do it differently next time?  
 Was the lesson limited to only a few key concepts?  
 Was it age-appropriate?  
 Were ideas and objectives connected?  
 Were good teaching activities and resources utilized? (Griggs p. 44)  
 Were there good questions reflecting real student interest?  
 Did students get to make choices?  
 Was there variety in the class and across the term?  
 Were there new concepts?  
 Could the room have been arranged to generate interest and facilitate learning?  
 Was there sufficient time for the point to be made? (Edge pp.118-

120)

Almost always we are very biased in evaluating our own teaching. There are some other  
 good sources. Your spouse, if she is in the class (and I recommend this for classes  
 composed of both males and females) can often give you some valuable feedback in a  
 way that doesn't hurt too badly. A close friend in the class can also help, especially if  
 they know something about teaching. You can ask a skilled teacher to visit your class on  
 occasion. Getting them to explain your mistakes and weaknesses will be a bit of a  
 challenge, but if you persist and resist the temptation to defend yourself, eventually  
 they'll decide that you really do what to hear the bad stuff too.

We all have improvements to make, but we can't get better unless we know what to fix.  
 We can see ourselves as others see us -- if we are self-disciplined enough to do it. In  
 evaluating myself I try to keep a basic principle in mind, I'm never as bad as I or others  
 think, nor I am ever as good as they say.

### **The Elijah Syndrome**

Hestenes (HHP-p. 124) talks about the Elijah syndrome that sometimes befalls teachers  
 after a term of teaching. Remember Elijah's attitude in 1 Kings 19? Elijah had just won a  
 major spiritual battle on Mount Carmel, totally vanquishing 450 prophets of Baal.  
 Despite having just seen God's sovereignty and power displayed in such a mighty way,  
 Elijah fled into the desert from King Ahab, and requests that God would take his life. In  
 his self-pity Elijah declares, "I am the only one (of God's prophets) left."

God in his mercy then reveals himself to Elijah, not in the rock-shattering wind, not in the

earthquake, or fire, but in a gentle whisper.

For the last few years I have experienced the Elijah syndrome, not at the end of a term, but a few weeks before the end. I experience a mild but demoralizing depression. The first time it hit, I thought I was dying. As I became aware of its recurrent nature, I realized that it was periodic, and that in a week to ten days it would pass and I would see things differently.

I do not know if my depression results from fatigue, from too much introspection, or from some other cause. I don't like it, but I do know that it will pass. If you find yourself in the Elijah mood, take heart, this too will pass, and if you listen carefully, you may hear God speak in a gentle whisper.

### **Pastor Search Committee Report**

Lest we be too tough on ourselves, keep in mind that no one is really qualified to serve the true and living God. Consider this report:

In our search for a suitable pastor, the following scratch sheet was developed for your perusal. Of the candidates investigated by the committee, only one was found to have the necessary qualities. The list contains the names of the candidates and comments on each, should you be interested in investigating them further for future pastoral placements.

NOAH: He has 120 years of preaching experience, but no converts.

MOSES: He stutters; and his former congregation says he loses his temper over trivial things.

ABRAHAM: He took off to Egypt during hard times. We heard that he got into trouble with the authorities and then tried to lie his way out.

DAVID: He is an unacceptable moral character. He might have been considered for minister of music had he not 'fallen'.

SOLOMON: He has a reputation for wisdom but fails to practice what he preaches.

ELIJAH: He proved to be inconsistent, and is known to fold under pressure.

HOSEA: His family life is in a shambles. Divorced and remarried to a prostitute.

JEREMIAH: He is too emotional, alarmist; some say a real 'pain in the neck'.

AMOS: Comes from a farming background. Better off picking figs.

JOHN: He says he is a Baptist but lacks tact and dresses like a hippie.

Would not feel comfortable at a church potluck supper.

PETER: Has a bad temper, and was heard to have even denied Christ publicly.

PAUL: We found him to lack tact. He is too harsh, his appearance is contemptible, and he preaches far too long.

TIMOTHY: He has potential, but is much too young for the position.

JESUS: He tends to offend church members with his preaching, especially Bible scholars. He is also too controversial. He even offended the search committee with his pointed questions.

JUDAS: He seemed to be very practical, co-operative, good with money, cares for the poor, and dresses well. We all agreed that he is just the man we are looking for to fill the vacancy as our Senior Pastor.

Thank you for all that you have done in assisting us with our pastoral search.  
Pastoral Search Committee chairman

### A Sample Student Evaluation of Instruction

CLASS EVALUATION  
Sunday School, May 1999, Grace Church

Evaluation is the highest form of cognitive function, according to educator Ben Bloom. Please take a few minutes to reflect on what has been done thus far during this semester of instruction. By supplying feedback you will be helping the teacher and future classes. Your candid comments are welcome. Quality criticism (both positive and negative) is a valuable commodity. This is anonymous.

- 1) Please describe any ways your relationship with God may have been influenced by participation in this class:

Please give examples:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

- 2) How have your thinking, actions or attitudes been influenced because of this class:

Please give examples:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

- 3) What aspects of the class were most effective:

**Please give examples**

- 4) What aspects of the class were least effective/ how would you do it differently?

Please give examples

Please provide any general comments that could be used to improve the class.

### A True Story

For a number of years, Jamie Buckingham periodically worked with healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman. He wrote in Coping with Criticism, "Although Miss Kuhlman was very sensitive to criticism, she never let it deter her from her goal. Instead, she used it to help her get there.

"Shortly after she went on nationwide television with her weekly program, she received a letter from a public school official.... 'I love you and love your program,' he wrote. 'It would have been much better, however, if you didn't have to spend so much time tugging at your skirt trying to pull it down over your knees. It was really distracting. Why don't you wear a long dress instead?' Kathryn read the letter. 'You know, he's right,' she said to her secretary. She never wore another street-length dress on her TV program.

"A lesser person would have responded with anger, or passed it off as just another senseless remark. But she was not that sort of lesser person. She heard. She coped. She let it help her toward her goal of communicating. All of which was possible because there was no root of bitterness to give a bad taste to everything that came into her life which presented another viewpoint."

"God's Little Devotional Book for Leaders"

By the same token, to invite evaluation of your teaching is to invite critics to take their best shot at your jaw. Consider another illustration from God's Little Devotional Book for Leaders.

Not every young bull makes it into a bullfighting arena. Bulls are carefully selected to play their part in this sport. One of the last tests for a young bull occurs within a bullfighting arena, far from the eyes and shouts of a crowd. A bull is jeered on only by a target holding a waving cape --- a target that is actually a picador riding a padded horse. With each charge, the picador pricks the young bull with a lance. The bull's bravery is carefully rated according to how many times the bull is willing to continue to charge its target, in spite of the sting of the pic. Cowardly bulls are sent to the slaughterhouse. Human beings may not literally be put to the "picador test," but the same principle holds true for us nonetheless. Those who give up when they feel the sting of a rebuff, a rejection, an insult, or a rebuke are those who will never realize their full potential for achievement. It is those who endure the stinging words and actions of others and who press on, again and again taking a running charge at their goals, who will score accomplishments.

### Summary

Evaluating and planning (Chapter 6) are inextricably linked. Part of planning for the next lesson involves evaluating the last. What was done and not done? What needs reviewing next lesson? How can we build on what was already accomplished? How can I plan my lesson to avoid my past mistakes?

Don't forget that learning requires two participants, a teacher (or at least an information source), and a learner. Some of the responsibility for learning lies with the learner. Consider the explanation of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. In this explanation Jesus clearly puts most of the responsibility on the learner rather than the teacher. And that's a good thing, because we teachers already have plenty of responsibility.

Ultimately, the true test of our teaching is life itself. Whether or not our students succeed at living the Christian life will be their own evaluation. While we will fortunately not be required to answer directly for them, we have a tremendous opportunity to contribute to their success. As teachers we are evaluated by other people, and by God himself. (Edge p 169-170).

Michael Warden offers a succinct checklist for self evaluation. He asks,

“Did I Trust Jesus  
 Did I Obey Word  
 Did Everything come from God  
 Did I Bring Glory to God.” (Warden p. 50)

We want to measure attendance etc. The outcome of Jesus' teaching was not impressive numbers, but changed lives. These changed lives impacted other lives for Christ. And ultimately these changed lives impacted the whole world, which is why we are here. May God use us to impact the world.

## Chapter 11. Some of Teaching's Greatest Bloopers

“Nothing would be done at all if a man waited until he could do it so well that no one could find fault with it.  
Cardinal John Henry Newman quoted in LeFever.

“We become too soon old and too late smart.” Chinese Proverb

“It's not what people don't know that's so dangerous; it's what they know that just ain't so.” Anonymous

### My 20 years of Personal Blunders

A teacher once asked a student, “ Alfred, how can one person make so many stupid mistakes in one day?” to which Alfred replied, “I get up early.” I suspect that getting up early also explains how I have been able to make so many mistakes.

I remember clearly my first couple of years as a full time professional teacher. Newly educated and highly motivated, I saw myself as God's gift to teaching. Then one day an undergraduate student, who was a little older but a whole lot smarter than I, came in to see me.

I've related this story in detail earlier in the book. In short, I probed him for compliments on the course I had just taught, and instead I got severely and thoroughly criticized. It was more helpful than a course on teaching. Criticism is painful, but I regret not getting more feedback from my students, not the surface syrup, but spending enough time and energy to get some serious feedback.

I regret it took me several years to figure out that teaching is like physical fitness, you have to work on it every single day. Why haven't I been more diligent in critiquing myself after every class and every lab?

I once made the mistake of routinely telling my students about deficiencies in my own education and experience. I discovered that most of these things just don't matter. I now realize that my students will pick up on my faults quickly enough without my help, and the ones they ignore, I'll work on anyway.

I regret poor leadership. I have erred in presuming certain students had more ability, or less ability, than I anticipated. I regret forgetting that the slogan, “Commend in public, reprove in private”, applies to students as well as military troops. I am sorry that when students are doing poorly, or are just disinterested, I haven't compelled them to meet with me privately to find out why.

I regret thinking the subject matter was more important than the recipient. My course material won't help the student who is contemplating suicide, whose parents are divorcing, or those whose world is coming apart. It has taken me several years to internalize the truth of the saying in Chapter 3, “Students don't care what you know, until they know that you care.” I want to teach well, and cover the material, but never at the expense of my students. I'd rather fail as a teacher of subject matter, than fail as a minister to those I am PAID AND PLEDGED to serve. The goal is not to transmit information, but to create a hunger for learning more.

Early in my teaching career, a colleague urged me to move to the other side of the podium. As I described in Chapter 10, I have taken six undergraduate classes for grade. My perspective has improved considerably since I started doing this. Why did it take me so long?

I am sorry I took the relevance of my course materials for granted. As a subject matter expert, I have assumed every student was just as interested as I was in my subject matter. Why haven't I tried to see it from their perspective?

I regret the damage I have done by inappropriate grading.

"A grade is: An inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite material."  
Paul Dressel, 1957.

In reality, grades aren't nearly as important as students think. But students' perspectives are still vital. The worst chewing-out I ever got was not at the hands of an upper-classman or a US Marine, but from a diminutive Master's candidate to whom I had given a "B" when she thought an "A" was clearly deserved. It has taken me a lot of years to recognize that grades are most useful when they can be used constructively to increase learning.

I'm sorry I haven't experimented more. As a researcher I never know how an experiment is going to go, but it's worth the attempt. Why haven't I tried more new approaches with my classes?

I regret not learning soon enough that I must always be a student myself. I am not the source of all wisdom and knowledge. Every student brings a unique perspective and some degree of experience to the class and they ought to be asked to contribute for the benefit of all. I have learned some terrific things from my students. I regret ever thinking that any admission of ignorance, or failure, or weakness on my part would erode student confidence. On the contrary, students are encouraged when they learn that profs fail too. Being "beaten" by my students ought to be a goal, not a fear, and questions are often more valuable in learning than answers.

Most importantly, I have finally figured out that for every new class, us teachers get to start with a clean slate. Whatever I have done poorly can be corrected. I expect to make lots of mistakes, but the only serious ones are the ones I never correct.



### **Blunder of Inappropriate Humor**

A Rabbi said to a precocious six-year-old: "So your mother says your prayers for you each night? Very commendable. What does she say?" The little boy replied, "Thank God he's in bed!"

I love to laugh. My students love to laugh. Learning can be fun, not all the time, but a lot of the time. But, some of us can make larger mistakes and quicker mistakes with humor than any other area. I have made fun of students because I make fun of myself. I thought surely they understood. But they didn't.

I have made jokes about fatness, jokes about errors, jokes about all sorts of things that happen. Was the laugh worth the pain I caused at times? That's probably not possible.

In general I strongly recommend that you avoid telling jokes. Though I haven't given up on humor, I have almost totally given up on jokes. The list is quite long of public figures who have gotten into serious trouble by telling jokes. Although most of us aren't public figures, we can learn without making all their mistakes. I recommend never making fun of anybody but yourself. I recommend never telling jokes, unless you yourself are the object of the joke. Look for humor, don't take yourself too seriously but don't ridicule anyone, ever, and don't make a blunder with humor. The laughs are nice, but not one of your prime goals. I have included a few jokes in this chapter that I hope are non-offensive. See if you can imagine any ways that someone could be offended by these. I'll bet you can.

### **Blunder of Assumed Interest**

A five-year-old said grace at family dinner one night. "Dear God, thank You for these pancakes." When he concluded, his parents asked him why he thanked God for pancakes when they were having chicken. He smiled and said, "I thought I'd see if He was paying attention tonight."

Here is a classic blunder I share with many teachers. The folks who write text books frequently make this mistake. Sometimes the first chapter of many otherwise good textbooks deals with a topic of limited interest to the student. For example, the opening sections of a text may deal with the history of the study of some subject, or a listing of famous people in this field. While specialists undoubtedly find these topics fascinating, the typical student doesn't quite adore the topic to the same extent as the author of the text. Don't assume your students are interested in a topic just because you find it intriguing.

### **Poor Planning Blunder**

Many of us like to teach but don't like to prepare (see Chapter 6). Poor preparation can cause us to fail to plan transitions between major segments of the lesson. How will I create interest in the introduction of the topic? Then how will I transition to the main body of the lesson. Then how will I transition to the conclusion? These transitions can be distracting, or they can contribute to the lesson. In most cases smooth transitions require careful planning.

Poor planning can result in insufficient student arousal (Edge p 124). I believe that almost any emotion contributes to learning. When you are excited, you learn better. If I can challenge your beliefs and make you insecure, you are probably ready to learn. If I can frustrate you appropriately, I think you are in a good position to learn. I believe this is why Jesus deliberately attacked the Pharisees, He wanted to provoke them to reexamine their thinking. He died for them and wanted to transform them.

Poor planning may allow the class to wander off the objective. This is serious, but perhaps not as serious as trying to cover the lesson at the expense of the students. Never forget we teach students, not lessons.

### **Blunder of Impressive illustrations**

Sometimes as our proficiency in teaching increases, we become quite creative with our teaching. We develop some terrific illustrations. The danger is that our students will remember clearly the illustrations, but forget totally whatever we were trying to illustrate. My friend Wes Fondren once gave away chocolate in a sermon. Everyone remembers the chocolate, but few remember what point he was illustrating.

Occasionally our illustrations take so much time the lesson is lost. A friend once spent a major portion of the 45-minute Sunday school class having students identify different types of literature. It was an important illustration of our ability to recognize different types of writing found in the Bible. Although his illustration made a strong and lasting impression, it prevented him from covering the key issues of much greater importance.

### **Blunder of Too Much Emphasis on Knowledge of Fact**

Sometimes we confuse acquisition of a lot of facts with learning. Anonymous

In western culture we are indoctrinated regarding education. In school we see education modeled as the expert standing in the front of the room dispensing wisdom. We see the students as the desperately bored, frantically recording every word uttered so as to be able to memorize these words and regurgitate them on some future exam. We also learn that it is the duty of the student to promptly forget everything just as soon as the final exam has been completed.

At the US Military Academy, where I taught one year as a visiting professor, this whole process has been given a code name by the cadets, it is called “spec and dump”. It literally means to come into a class, quickly determine what information is vital, then dump it from your mind as soon as its immediate utility has passed, so as to make more room for the next batch of new material. Clearly this approach is undesirable, but to some extent a natural result of our system.

We reinforce this notion of the overwhelming importance of memorizing facts with our multiple-guess testing approach. The testing motivates students to study in order to “recognize” the right facts, not to apply, or analyze, or synthesize, and certainly not to evaluate.

Teaching only facts is boring and is eminently forgettable. Failing to reach the higher levels of thinking (see Chapter 6) is a major blunder too often made.

### **Blunder of “Artificial” Teaching**

And this particular four-year-old prayed: “And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets.”

Both students and teachers are sometimes guilty of seeing classroom learning as totally artificial and removed from the real world. This is more common in younger students who sometimes make distinctions between school and the world, perhaps for legitimate reasons. We need to be realistic about what Scripture says and what it calls us to do.

In our attempt to avoid controversy, on occasion, sometimes we fail to challenge weakly

held or erroneous beliefs. We don't give students experience in problem solving and we go to extremes to hide or avoid controversial areas of Scripture. I remember teaching in a large church back in the mid-1980's. The Bible passage prescribed for this particular Sunday was an entire chapter of Luke, that is an entire chapter except for one verse. Naturally my curiosity was aroused. I looked at the missing verse and discovered that it dealt with divorce. Perhaps there were some very good reasons to avoid this issue for this lesson, but Christians in America vitally needs to hear good teaching on the marital relationship and the spiritual implications of divorce.

Allowing students to respond in terms of "what the teacher wants", instead of giving their sincere responses is a major blunder. Eliciting true feelings however, requires a sufficient investment in your students to build up a very trusting relationship. Likewise sometimes we inadvertently cause students to learn only verbalized concepts, which never really connect with the student's heart, or we may occasionally allow students to only have an emotional catharsis without understanding the need for a change of heart (Edge p. 16).

### **Blunder of Sophistication**

A little boy was overheard praying: "Lord, if You can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am!"

The objective for a teacher is to take complex issues and make them simple enough to grasp and learn. That's just the first half. The second half is, that once your students have grasped the simple things, to help them see the depth and complexity of full understanding of the topic. Often because of our own egos we want to make things seem so complex that only a person of our erudition can contemplate such lofty issues. Flee the temptation!

### **Excess Simplicity Blunder**

A daddy was listening to his child say his prayers, "Dear Harold". At this, dad interrupted and said, "Wait a minute, how come you called God 'Harold'?" The little boy looked up and said, "That's what they call Him in church. You know the prayer we say, 'Our Father, who art in Heaven, Harold be Thy name.'"

The opposite blunder to excess sophistication, is excess simplicity (Edge p 124). We do our students a disservice when we tell them too much. If it is too easy it has no value. If taking this approach is a bit unnerving, consider that Jesus himself didn't explain most of the parables. Let your students have the pleasure and rewards of discovery. Their own truth is worth more than the truth you freely give away.

Our failure to ask challenging questions is a similar mistake. We need to challenge our students to think in terms of applying their knowledge in new ways. When we give too many specifics to our students we fail to prepare them for the unforeseen applications.

Occasionally we as teachers can attempt to make very complex, mysterious topics unrealistically simple. For example, issues of the intricacies of justification have been studied and debated for millennia by theologians. I'm not likely to be able to clear all this up in a 30 minute Sunday School lesson, no matter how good a teacher I may be. To suggest otherwise might reveal an extreme pride.

### **Erroneous Apologies Blunder**

A woman invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to her six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the little girl replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the mother said. The little girl bowed her head and said, "Dear Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

We all have a need to apologize and seek forgiveness at times. These occasions are appropriate and in truth provide excellent opportunities to not only model righteous and humble behavior, but also to model transparency and "realness" to your class.

On the other hand, there are some things better left unsaid. One is the insincere apology that accomplishes just the opposite. Apologizing for being unprepared, is usually seen as insincere, because typically our reason for being unprepared is a lack of self-discipline or a view that preparation is a low priority.

Another mistake is the apology for something no one can do anything about. This is logically insincere because, since the situation is inevitable, you could never have done anything about it.

On several occasions I have called students' attention to one of my many shortcomings, which hurt the instruction, and had nothing to do with the students. For example, when I first started teaching potential physical education school teachers, I quite honestly admitted that I had never taught public school physical education except on the collegiate level. For obvious reasons this destroyed my credibility, and caused a certain amount of insecurity in the students. I have since discovered, that indeed I do know the subject matter well, and teach it fairly well. Since that time I have never again mentioned my lack of experience and it has never again been an issue with my students.

### **Blunder of Talking Down to Students**

"If there are any idiots in the room, will they please stand up" said the sarcastic teacher. After a long silence, one freshman rose to his feet.

"Now then mister, why do you consider yourself an idiot?" inquired the teacher with a sneer.

"Well, actually I don't," said the student, "but I hate to see you standing up there all by yourself."

Students need to be respected, especially older students. In our zeal to make things clear we can go too far. Jesus taught in parables on purpose. As we discussed earlier in Chapter 4, parables make the student work a bit. We can make the mistake of making class so easy that no change takes place. Be careful.

### **The Blunder of Accepting "Sunday School" Answers**

One night Mike's parents overheard this prayer: "Now I lay me down to rest, and hope to pass tomorrow's test. If I should die before I wake, that's one less test I will have to take."

Accepting the "right" answer can be a major blunder. Do your best to get through to the real inner person. Here's some illustrations. Tell your students to make three wishes. Compare the three wishes they make outside a Christian environment with those they'd make in a Sunday School class. If you want to prove this to yourself, just ask Christians in both locations and examine their answers. Outside, away from church people wish for "normal" things- wealth, fame, health, but in spiritual scenarios, we wish for spiritual things.

### **Other Common blunders**

An elderly Christian's grandson was visiting one day when he asked, "Grandma, do you know how you and God are alike?" She mentally polished her halo while she asked, "No, how are we alike?" "You're both old," he replied.

As a college professor a major problem I deal with is bad prior teaching. (And perhaps future teachers of my own students will have the same complaint). Students come to me with some of all of the following instructional problems:

- 1) Irrelevant approaches
- 2) Too much emphasis on Knowledge of Fact -our multiple-guess testing approach discourages more sophisticated thinking.

### **Good Outcomes to Bad Blunders**

Johnny had been misbehaving and was sent to his room. After a while he emerged and informed his mother that he had thought it over and then said a prayer. "Fine," said the pleased mother. "If you ask God to help you not misbehave, He will help you." "Oh, I didn't ask Him to help me not misbehave," said Johnny. "I asked Him to help you put up with me."

We can take some comfort with regards to our own preparation. If we have honestly tried to hear from God, and we have tried to avoid inserting too much of our own opinions, we can take trust the Holy Spirit can accomplish something in our classes. As we said earlier, Jesus himself allowed his hearers to leave a bit confused (Matthew 16). Likewise he sent the rich young ruler away sad (Mark 10:22).

Just because we might think we have blundered doesn't mean the Holy Spirit has not touched some heart. Our job is to connect our student's heart to God's heart. May God protect our students from us.

Even when things are going badly, we need to rely upon God with the realization that we very seldom see the big picture.

A story is told of a water bearer in East India, who had two large pots, each hung on one end of a pole that he carried across his neck. One of the pots was cracked. The other pot was perfect. At the end of the long trek from the river to the master's house, the good pot delivered a full portion of water, whereas the cracked pot arrived only about half full.

For two years this went on. Each day the bearer delivered only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, being totally competent for its purpose. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its failure. It was miserable because it was able to accomplish only half of what its purpose. After these two years of perceived failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the river.

"I apologize to you, I am ashamed of myself."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "Why are you ashamed?"

“I have been unable, for these past two years, to deliver my full load because the crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaw, you have to do a lot of work, and yet don't receive full value from your efforts,” the pot said.

The water bearer felt compassion for the flawed pot. Finally he said, “As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice your side of the path.”

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the leaky pot saw for the first time the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trip, the poor pot still felt bad because once again, it had leaked half its load. Once again it apologized to the bearer for its performance failure.

The water bearer said to the pot, “Did you notice that the flowers grow only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side?”

I have always known of your flaw, and I took advantage of your leak. I sowed flower seeds on your side of the path. Every time we walk back from the river, you water them.

For these two years you have helped produce these beautiful flowers that decorate my master's house. Because you are imperfect, the master has enjoyed this beauty to grace his house.”

Each of us is flawed. We're all either cracked pots or crack pots. But if we are willing to be used at all, the Lord will use our weaknesses to grace His Father's table.

As the old poem goes, God doesn't make junk. In God's great economy, nothing goes to waste. So as we seek ways to minister together, and as God calls you to do His tasks He has for you, don't be afraid of your flaws. Acknowledge them, work to compensate for them, but allow God to take advantage of them. By your willingness you can be the cause of beauty in His pathway.

The apostle Paul said, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 KJV).

### **A Lack of Proper Faith**

When teaching adults, Jesus talked about childlike faith (Luke 18:15-17). Our faith is an inevitable part of our style, whether we want it to be so, or not. But, in what do we put our faith; in our preparation, education, skill, colleagues, and commentaries? Scriptures teaches us that we ought to place our faith not in man's wisdom, but on God's power (I Corinthians 2:5) (Warden p. 29).

In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul spoke of childish thinking. In an article for Good News magazine, Duffy Robbins contrasts childish faith and childlike faith:

Childish Faith

1. Good Christians don't have pain and disappointments.
2. God wants to make us happy.
3. God always answers prayers.
4. Faith will help us to always understand what God is doing.
5. Good Christians are always strong.

#### Childlike Faith

1. God uses our pain and disappointment to make us better Christians.
2. God wants to make us holy.
3. Sometimes He answers with “No” or “Wait.”
4. Faith will help us to stand under God's sovereignty even when we don't have a clue about what God is doing.
5. Our strength is in admitting our weakness.

Here is the heart of the matter: Childish faith is self-centered and demanding. It expects God to shield us from all difficulties and to make life comfortable for us. In contrast, childlike faith focuses on God. It trusts Him to use even difficulties for our good and His glory. (Our Daily Bread, June 8, 1998\*\*\*\*\* get permission).

What kind of faith is yours?

#### **Living with Blunders**

Errors are inevitable, but fortunately our errors are not the end of the world. We need to be on guard lest we cause one “of these little ones to stumble”, but we should be more dependent upon the Holy Spirit and less dependent upon ourselves anyway.

Our most dangerous errors are those of which we are unaware. When we blunder, we must commit ourselves to learning and moving on. Our prayer ought to be that we would avoid repeating the same mistakes over and over.

#### **Summary**

As teachers we are put ourselves in peril of making many mistakes. Fortunately God's grace is sufficient even for us. Most of the blunders listed above come from my own experience. As we go through life we have two choices, we can learn from the mistakes of others, or we can endure the consequences of making them all ourselves.

One of my favorite sayings by one of my former professors is, “One of the great things about teaching is that every term we get to start over with a clean slate.” May God protect our students from our blunders, and may God give us the perseverance to start out another semester having learned from our mistakes.

Despite the risks in teaching, it's worth it. The final chapter will discuss a few of the blessings of teaching.

## Chapter 12. The Blessing

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew

5:19 (KJV)

“The smallest deed always exceeds the grandest of intentions.” Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa, who when asked once how she had accomplished such great things in her life responded, “None of us can do anything great on our own, but we can all do a small thing with great love.”

### A Vision for Our Craft

Once there was a wise writer that used to do his work near the ocean. He would walk on the beach each morning before beginning his work.

One day he as he walked along the shore, he saw someone dancing near the water’s edge. He was amused to think of someone who would dance to the day. He moved closer to investigate.

As he did, he realized that the young man wasn't dancing, but instead was picking up something from the sand and very carefully tossing it into the ocean. When he was close enough he called out, “What are you doing?”

The young man paused, then replied, “Throwing these starfish back into the water.”  
“Why are you doing that?”

“The sun is hot and the tide is leaving them stranded so if I don't throw them in, they'll die.”

“But, young man, there are many miles of beach and thousands of starfish. How can you hope to make a difference?”

The young man listened quietly. Then bent down and tossed another starfish into the sea and said, “I made a difference to that one.”

Are you making a difference today?

Adapted from the Joel Barker video, ‘The Strength of Vision’



### Why Do I Teach?

Teaching is a lot of work and it’s often a thankless job. To paraphrase Howard Hendricks, teaching is a bomb set for later detonation. That detonation may take months or even years. So the intrinsic rewards are delayed, and may never come, the pay isn’t the best, and the job requirements are pretty high.

Add to these the warning in James 3:1, that those who teach subject themselves to a lot of criticism. Again Howard Hendricks says, that teachers are required to think in public in front of an audience of students who may not have yet learned how to think even in

private. The sheer number of statements a teacher must make in the course of instruction means that teachers are going to make a lot of mistakes, even if their batting average is very good.

Good teaching requires a lifetime of preparation. Each individual lesson takes specific preparation, which requires time and energy. Delivering that lesson to the class takes more time and more energy. And there is always the possibility that the lesson will fail miserably and all that investment will be totally lost.

So I ask myself again, why teach? I see in my own experience that there are some distinct reasons I put myself through all this. I teach first because I reap great personal benefit independent of any benefit to my students. I get pleasure in conceiving a lesson, preparing it, and delivering it. I am compelled to teach, because that is my gift and my nature. In fact, I have to put forth some effort to restrain myself from teaching when teaching isn't appropriate.

The second reason is like unto the first, I teach because I get tremendous satisfaction in imparting knowledge. My greatest reward is in seeing "the light come on". When in a room of 15 students I see, or think I see, one of my students really catch on to whatever it is we're teaching that day, I'm energized. Even when no one gets it, I'm usually energized to figure some new way to get the message across. I am inspired by the way some students respond. I love the story of a kindergarten teacher who was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. As she walked around to see each child's artwork, she noticed one little girl who was working particularly diligently.

"What is that you're drawing, dear?" asked the teacher.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "but no one knows what God looks like."

Without slowing her work, the girl continued drawing and replied, "They will in a minute."

My third reason for teaching, and I really hope this is my primary motivation, is that when I am in the midst of preparing and teaching spiritual truth I really hear most clearly from God. I was amazed to realize a couple of years ago that I could memorize a passage of Scripture very easily and very quickly if I was going to teach it. I was amazed because in other situations I don't memorize well at all. I recall being in a teaching situation in Panama in which I was teaching with two other guys. We were not specifically prepared for the workshop that we were trying to teach, although we were all experienced in the various sub-topics. As I was teaching I heard from God in the some of the clearest terms I can remember. I felt a special closeness and communion with God. Who could ask for more than this?

Day-in, day-out, I hear God best when I am preparing to teach. I am quite sure He speaks many other times, but my ears are most in tune when I am preparing. And, I like to hear from God. The thrill of discovery, the excitement of seeing a new way to convey God's truth comes as God speaks in lesson prep. The satisfaction of trying on a new concept and seeing it fit snugly like a pair of warm gloves on a cold day is a great payoff. Many times in the midst of preparation I'll experience an "aha!" moment, where some knotted problem suddenly comes loose.

Teaching is the ultimate challenge for me. I get tired and sometimes I just have to take a break. But after a bit of rest, I am ready to try again. The challenge of teaching the unbelievable truth of God to a bunch of students who are generally thickskulled sinners just like me, can never be totally attained. Teaching is never perfected. It's always the unclimbed mountain.

So why do I teach? I teach because of four "to's". Because I have to, because I want to, because I need to, and because I get to.

### **The Teaching Burden**

As teachers we have a big job. We are trying to tell others what God has said. In some ways we are God's translator to our students. Hopefully we are not the only translator, and certainly our students themselves are accountable to God, but as we have said, it is an awesome responsibility. Our Goal is to change the heart of our students in order to change their attitudes and behaviors. On top of that, we are trying to glorify God in the process.

In accomplishing these goals we are constantly studying our students. We are attempting to follow Jesus' example. We are trying to master the learning process. We are preparing carefully. We are praying often for ourselves, our class, and our students. We are exploring new techniques, and evaluating when, and how to be most effective. In the process of working hard it is very easy to become over burdened.

Henry Moorhouse, the 19th-century English evangelist, was feeling loaded down with the burdens of his ministry. Then the Lord gave him a tender reminder of His care.

When he came home one day, his young daughter, Minnie, whose legs were paralyzed, was sitting in her wheelchair. He was going to take a package upstairs to his wife when his daughter asked if she could carry it. Moorhouse said, "Minnie dear, how can you possibly carry the package? You cannot even carry yourself."

With a smile on her face, Minnie said, "I know, Papa. But if you will give me the package, I will hold it while you carry me."

Moorhouse saw this as a picture of his relationship to God and the burdens of ministry he was carrying. But, praise God, he could proceed with confidence, knowing that the Lord was carrying him.

Almighty God, who promised to carry Israel (Isaiah 46:4 ), is the One who can carry us. Even though we must fulfill our responsibilities, we have the assurance of His never-failing support. We need not sink beneath the weight of our burdens.

Ask the Savior to help you. He will carry your burdens--and you. --HGB  
(Our daily Bread April 28, 1998.) Get permission\*\*\*\*\*

If God called us to the task of teaching, then He is certainly capable of carrying us through the task.

### **God's Role in Our Teaching**

We MUST depend upon God. As we saw earlier, apart from God all is lost. We must depend on Him if we are to succeed. The following poem captures the point:

#### The Road of Life

At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him.

But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable . . .  
It was the shortest distance between two points.

But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places. Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!"

I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?"  
He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine.

And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away; they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ.

And when I'm sure that I just can't do any more, He just smiles and says . . .  
“Pedal.”

--author unknown

### **What Matters in the End**

Regardless of where we may be now, what ultimately matters is how we finish the race. James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family, presented the 1997 commencement address at Huntington College on May 17. Before an audience of 3,500, he challenged the graduates to maintain proper perspective as they celebrated their academic accomplishments and launch careers. He urged them to “climb the right ladder.”

Dobson in his opening remarks to the graduates, recounted his ambition as a college freshman to win his school's tennis tournament. By the end of his senior year, Dobson said, he had won the tournament twice, and a trophy inscribed with his name was placed on permanent display - or so he thought.

Some years later, a friend sent the trophy to Dobson. He had found the “permanent” trophy in a garbage bin. Dobson's tennis victory had been forgotten. Dobson proudly displayed the trophy to his audience. “You are all welcome to file by and look at it,” he quipped. “Life is like that,” he said. “Given enough time, life will trash your trophies.”

He went on to recount the stories of many outstanding athletes who once were household names but now are largely forgotten. He also spoke with great pathos of Mohammed Ali, once the greatest fighter in the world, now debilitated by Parkinson's disease.

“Many of you have big plans and big dreams,” Dobson said. “That's good. It's natural and it comes from the Lord.” Dobson encouraged the graduates to use their talents and training to achieve, but urged them to apply an “end-of-life test” to every undertaking. The only things that matter at the end, said Dobson, are “whom you love, who loves you, and what you did together in the service of the Lord.”

“Success and achievement are really not all that important in life as ends in themselves. They tend to tarnish with the passage of time.”

To underscore his point, Dobson related the story of Pete Maravich, “one of the top five basketball players of all time.” Maravich’s fame and financial success did not bring him happiness, Dobson said. For many years, he tried to find satisfaction in wild living and heavy drinking. It was not until after his retirement from basketball that Pete Maravich found true happiness in Christ. “He gave his heart to Jesus Christ, and for the next five years, he was on fire for the Lord,” Dobson said.

Learning of his conversion, Dobson invited him to appear on his radio program in 1988. After the interview, they played a game of pick-up basketball with several others. When the game ended, Dobson turned to Maravich and said, “Pete, you can’t give up basketball. This game means too much to you.”

Maravich explained he had experienced pain in his right shoulder for more than a year, but now it had disappeared. “I feel just great,” he said.

Those were his last words.

Maravich collapsed on the basketball court, and minutes later, died in Dobson’s arms.

“Later that day, I sat down with my son Ryan, who was 17 at the time,” Dobson said. “I told him that what happened to Pete wasn’t an isolated event. This is the human condition. This is all of us. It will happen to me some day.”

Two years later, Dobson suffered a heart attack on the same basketball court.

“Pete Maravich didn’t have an opportunity to speak with his family one last time. But I want to tell you, be there. On resurrection morning, be there. I will be looking for you then. Nothing else matters. Be there.”

We will all soon be gone from this world. What will be your legacy? As a teacher, you have a great chance not only to be there, but to influence many others along the way. After all what matters is, “whom you love, who loves you, and what you did together in the service of the Lord.” (James Dobson, 1999).

### **The Teacher’s Eternal Influence**

In the daily devotional, “Our Daily Bread” for May 19, 1998, the writer talks about our ability to influence mankind.

“One of the Bible’s prime examples of enduring influence seems an unlikely choice. Abel was murdered by his brother before accomplishing anything we would call significant (Genesis 4:2-8). Yet his “picture” hangs in the Bible’s hall of faith with this caption: “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4 KJV).

Phillips Brooks, a 19th-century minister, said: “This is the difference between men whose power stops with their death, and those whose power really opens into its true richness when they die. The first sort of men have mechanical power; and the second have spiritual power. And the final test and witness of spiritual force is the ability to cast the bodily life away and yet continue to give help and courage to those who see us no longer; to be like Christ, the helper of men's souls, even from beyond the grave.”

How can we speak from beyond the grave? Through faith and obedience to God in the simple matters of daily life. What seems insignificant and mundane today may be the megaphone through which God amplifies your voice long after your journey on earth is done. –DCM”

As teachers we wield enormous influence and opportunity to impact lives beyond the grave.

### **Part of the Solution or the Problem?**

There is a poem, “10 Little Christians”, which captures the essence of the decision we all have to make. Will we contribute to the cause of Christ, or complain about the obstacles? Will we contribute to the confusion or the solution? God gives us the privilege of deciding. As a teacher, you attempt to influence more than just yourself. Think about your potential impact as you read the poem.

10 little Christians standing in line  
 1 disliked the Preacher, then there were 9.  
 9 little Christians stayed up very late  
 1 overslept, then there were 8.  
 8 little Christians on their way to Heaven  
 1 took the low road, and then there were 7.  
 7 little Christians chirping like chicks  
 1 disliked the music, then there were 6.  
 6 little Christians seemed very much alive  
 but 1 lost his interest, then there were 5.  
 5 little Christians pulling for Heaven's shore  
 but 1 stopped to rest, then there were 4.  
 4 little Christians each busy as a bee  
 1 got his feelings hurt, then there were 3.  
 3 little Christians knew not what to do  
 1 joined the sporty crowd, then there were 2.  
 2 little Christians, our rhyme is nearly done  
 differed with each other, then there was 1.  
 1 little Christian can't do much 'tis true  
 Brought his friend to Bible Study, then there were 2.  
 2 earnest Christians, each won 1 more  
 That doubled the number, then there were 4.  
 4 sincere Christians worked early and late  
 Each won another, then there were 8.

8 splendid Christians if they doubled as before  
In just so many Sundays, had 1,024..  
In this little jingle, there is a lesson true  
You belong to either the building or the wrecking crew.

As teachers we have a tremendous opportunity. We can be a builder or a breaker. We can encourage and we can discourage. As far as is possible in our teaching we must never lose touch with God.

### **Keeping Our Goals in Sight**

It's easy to become discouraged as a teacher. There are lots of opportunities to make mistakes, and few folks willing to commend you. Preparation can be tough and it may take many years to see positive results, if you ever do. So why do we teach? We have to have a motivation beyond the most obvious. We have to keep our goals and our calling in sight. As Paul wrote in Philippians 3: 14 (KJV), "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Maybe this true story will help you keep your eye on the prize.

Florence Chadwick saw nothing in front of her but a solid wall of fog. After swimming for nearly 16 hours, her body was numb.

She already held the record as the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions. Now, at age 34, her goal was trying to become the first woman to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast.

On that morning the 4th of July, 1952, the sea was icy cold and the fog was so dense to almost obscure her support boats. Sharks threatened her, only protected by rifle shots from her handlers.

She struggled on hour after hour, beaten by the frigid waves as millions watched her battle on national television.

Her mother and her trainer in one of the boats offered Florence encouragement. They assured her the shore wasn't much farther. But she had only her faith since all she could see was fog. They urged her not to quit. She never before had quit a swim, until then. With only a half mile to go, she gave up and was pulled out of the water.

Still recovering from her chills hours later, she told a reporter, "Look, I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen land I might have made it." Strangely enough, it wasn't fatigue or even the cold water that caused her to quit. It was really the fog. Unable to see her goal, she could not force herself to go on.

She tried again only two months later. This time, even with the same dense fog, she clearly pictured her goal in her mind, and she swam with faith. Knowing that somewhere beyond that fog was that celestial shore. This time she made it!

Florence Chadwick became not only the first woman to swim the Catalina Channel, but the record holder, having eclipsed the men's record by two hours!

(By Unknown Author Submitted by Michele Borba Adapted from A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul).

### **What am I Accomplishing?**

Early in my professional teaching career I ran across the following poem. I kept it posted in a prominent place for many years to remind me that I can choose to make a difference in my student's lives, or I can just teach the material. What will you do?

I have taught in high school for ten years, during that time I have given assignments, among others, to a murderer, an evangelist, a pugilist, a thief, and an imbecile.

The murderer was a quiet little boy who sat in the front row and regarded me with pale blue eyes; the evangelist, easily the most popular boy in the school, had the lead in the junior play; the pugilist lounged by the window and let loose at intervals a raucous laugh that startled even the geraniums; the thief was a gay-hearted lothario with a song on his lips; and the imbecile was a soft-eyed little animal seeking the shadows.

The murder awaits death in the state penitentiary; the evangelist has lain a year in the village churchyard; the thief, by standing on tiptoe, can see the windows of my room from the county jail; and the once gentle-eyed little moron beats his head against a padded wall in the state asylum.

All these pupils once sat in my room, sat and looked at me gravely across worn desks. I must have been a great help to these pupils – I taught them the rhyming scheme of the Elizabethan Sonnet and how to diagram a complex sentence.

Author Unknown

### **Don't give up!**

Several years ago I was ministering with a group of Christian Professor organized by Christian Leadership Ministries (The faculty ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ) in Mexico City. We were having supper one evening with a Mexican who was a Christian minister on campus there. As we waited before supper I spoke with his young daughters who were in about the second grade. They showed me their English assignment books, with almost every page covered with a second grade scrawl of difficult English. I leafed through and noticed the teacher had written in red on almost every page, "Don't give up!". When you're a second grader, whose native language is NOT English, it is important to persevere.

When you're a teacher and your students don't seem to get it, it's even more important to persevere. When the lesson isn't coming together, persevere. When you're too tired to do everything that has to be done, persevere. As the English teacher said, Don't give up!

This final parable has been a great personal help in my moments of despair.

A man was sleeping at night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light, and God appeared. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do, and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin.

The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. So, this, the man did, day after day. For many years he toiled from sun up to sun down; his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all of his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain.

Since the man was showing discouragement, the Adversary (Satan) decided to enter the picture by placing thoughts into the weary mind: "you have been pushing against that rock for a long time, and it hasn't moved." Thus, giving the man the impression that the task was impossible and that he was a failure.

These thoughts discouraged and disheartened the man. "Why kill myself over this?" he thought. "I'll just put in my time, giving just the minimum effort; and that will be good enough."

And that is what he planned to do, until one day he decided to make it a matter of prayer and take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord," he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock by half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?"

The Lord responded compassionately, "My friend, when I asked you to serve Me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all of your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to Me with your strength spent, thinking that you have failed.

But, is that really so? Look at yourself. Your arms are strong and muscled, your back sinewy and brown, your hands are callused from constant pressure, your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition you have grown much, and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yet you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. This you have done. Now I, My friend, will move the rock."

At times, when we hear a word from God, we tend to use our own intellect to decipher what He wants, when actually what God wants is just simple obedience and faith in Him.

By all means, exercise the faith that moves mountains, but know that it is still God who moves mountains.

**A Final Blessing**

I pray that God will speak to your heart. I pray for all of us that God will protect our students from our failings, our weaknesses, and our errors. I pray that God will speak to you as you prepare to teach and as you teach. Keep the faith. Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

May your tribe increase.

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### **Appendix 1, Making the Grades**

"A Grade is:

An inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite material"

Paul Dressel, 1957

This section has been included as an appendix since most people are not required, and have no desire to grade anything.

#### **Why Grade?**

Most of us give tests and other assessments and assign grades only because we are forced to do so. Having to grade tests is tough enough, but ultimately you have to assign grades. Giving good grades is easy; giving bad grades is tough on everyone.

If grading is hard, why would anyone do it? Well, most undergraduate students will tell you, if there were no grades they would not come to class. So the foremost role of grading is motivational, and that should never be forgotten by the grader.

Grades are also a valuable source of feedback. By looking at the student responses to individual questions, the grader should get a pretty good idea of which concepts are mastered and which need to receive extensive review.

Overall grades can tell you how the class is doing and how the instructor is doing. If everyone in the class does poorly, then there is something wrong. The problem may lie with the students, the instructor or the exam, but there is a problem. If everyone does very well, there may still be a problem, at least with the exam. If there is a near-normal

distribution of grades, that is if most people make a grade of “C” or average, and a few make “A’s”, and a few make “F’s”, then probably everything is about normal.

### Good Discrimination

In the previous section I said that if student all did very well, there might be a problem with the exam. Why would that be? Well if everyone does pretty well, it might be just a very sharp group. That does happen. What is also a possibility is that your exam failed to discriminate between those who really know the subject matter well and those who don’t.

If we fail to discriminate between those who know the material and those who don’t then we have NOT done a very good job of grading. On occasion we may have everyone pass a minimal competency test and still feel fine about it. After a cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course, students are typically tested on performance of CPR and cognitive knowledge of CPR. Hopefully everyone passes because the test is only concerned with determining who CAN and who CANNOT safely give CPR.

In most academic setting minimal competency is not enough and we need more exact discrimination (of the positive sort). We sometimes discriminate poorly because of our test mode. Multiple-choice tests are by far the most popular testing style. Multiple-choice is popular for mostly wrong reasons. It is popular because it is easy to grade and because it gives the ILLUSION of being objective. Clearly all test questions are at least partially subjective because a subjective entity, the teacher, decides what is important enough to be taught, what is important enough to be tested, how much each questions will count, how many questions there will be, and most subjective of all, which is the most correct answer.

Multiple choice questions, partially because they are easy to grade, test mostly on the lowest levels of cognition, namely knowledge of fact and comprehension. It is very, very difficult to write multiple choice questions on above the application level. That is, you see very few questions testing analysis, synthesis or evaluation.

Multiple choice questions usually provide 4 or 5 answers from which the student are allowed to choose. This means of course, that they have a 1 in 4 chance of getting the question correct even if they don’t bother to read it. In trying to work with multiple choice question. On the other hand, even if they have a pretty good idea, they may miss the question for various reasons. I stumbled upon a small variation that resolves these problems and also improves students study habits in preparing of the test. I ask the questions, then require them to tell why they picked the answer they did. I give half the points for the answer and half the points for the reason for the answer. These take a bit longer to grade but offer some advantages.

Multiple choice questions require that students only “recognize” the correct answer, so students study with that in mind. The nature of multiple choice questions is that the instructor already provides the correct answers on the test. These questions are very unrealistic. No one in real life comes up to you and asks you a multiple-choice question.

They ask you essay question and expect essay answers. If multiple choice questions are the most common type of test item, essay questions must be the least popular. And essay is least popular for about the same reasons multiple-choice is most popular. Essay questions have an illusion of subjectivity, they are very time-consuming to grade.

About the only reason anyone would bother to use essay questions is that they are the best way to reach the highest levels of cognition. Requiring students to apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate is as easy as putting those words or similar ones in the question itself. Questions can be long. Students must study with the idea in mind that they will NOT be selecting the right answer they will be supplying everything. Students will be gaining practice for what will happen on the job. People ask essay questions and expect essay responses.

Fortunately there are several steps which can be taken to increase the appearance of objectivity in grading essay questions. I recommend adapting these:

- 1) Try to organize your tests so the questions that most students will perceive as easiest will be read first. For some reason I find my students do better if I read the question to them at the start of the exam.
- 2) Develop a grading key and always develop your key BEFORE giving the exam. This helps you pick up errors in questions and makes grading more objective.
- 3) Assign the point values of questions in advance. This helps students gauge how comprehensive the answer needs to be. A 25-point question probably will have a more involved answer than a 5-point question.
- 4) Make sure the points given equals the “feel” of the answer. If the question is worth 20 points and you take off two points then that person is getting a 90% grade for that question. Does their response sound like an “A-“ answer?
- 5) Give the benefit of the doubt to the student. If a student comes up with a creative, but correct answer that is not in the key, give the student credit.
- 6) Write a few words showing what was omitted in the answer. Mark any erroneous statements. I take at least one point off these to call the student’s attention to it.
- 7) All answer sheets should be graded anonymously. Have student put their names ONLY on the back of the last answer sheet and have them staple their sheet together.
- 8) Grade question #1 for everyone, then go on to #2, then #3, etc. This is Very helpful for several reasons. It results in more consistency for a given question. It prevents a halo effect wherein a student who does well on Question 1 and 2 will be automatically expected to do well on numbers 3 and 4. By the same token a student may miss most of question numbers 1 and 2, she should get a fresh unbiased grading of the remainder of the test. I never know how the class is doing until I get all the tests graded then go back and add up the points.
- 9) Write a word of encouragement whenever you can. If a student is doing poorly try to schedule a time to find out why.

- 10) Note any weak areas that need improvement and any strong areas that have been mastered.
- 11) Note any misinterpretations by students so the question can be improved for the next year's exam.

### Using Grades Constructively

Earlier I suggested that the main purpose of grading was motivational. Most even serious students will admit that an upcoming exam causes them to at least review their material and some will actually study it. Since most of us can learn more with a little studying, then grading facilitates learning. I believe, if education is our goal, then grades can be used to leverage further learning.

### Misapplication of Grades

I feel it is an injustice to use grades as a penalty for other mistakes. Some teachers lower grades because of poor attendance. I can rationalize that view, this way. It is certainly fair to use participation as some portion of the final grade. If students are not in class they cannot possibly participate and therefore their grade is lowered. The problem with my rationalization is that there are some students who come to class every day, yet never or rarely contribute. Why do they get a better grade than someone that misses too often, yet contributes greatly when they are there?

But I think there is a better approach to excessive absences or tardiness. People who miss too many classes are required to make up the missed classes with extra work. I mean truly extra work. Since each hour of class takes about 3 hours to make up, I try to assign enough outside work to make up for their excess absences. The rationale is that the extra work will cause them to learn almost as much as if they had been in class.

I take the same approach with students who want to change their grades. They often have god reasons for wanting higher grades. They may hope to go to graduate school or get into some special undergraduate program. Many of my fellow teachers simply refuse, but I see it differently. A student wants a better grade? Here's another opportunity to leverage some more learning. I give these students a written contract specifying what they have to do to earn an improved grade. If they complete the contract they get the grade changed.

I have had a student beg for a grade increase, then after seeing the requirements, decide to look for another professor not quite so demanding. On the other hand I have had several students complete the work and earn a grade increase.

### Some General Guidelines on Grading

I have been assigning grades for well over 20 years. It still isn't easy. Over the years I have developed some basic principles. I hope you will find some of these useful.

My grading philosophy is not perfect. It probably doesn't suit everyone, but it's mine, and it is defensible.

- 1) Try to minimize test time. You can lose a lot of class time to testing if you test too much. Give fewer tests that are more comprehensive.
- 2) Try to reach higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognition on tests. Students most need skills of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. They must have knowledge of fact and comprehension to do these others, but they will never feel satisfied, and they will not retain much if they stay at these lowest levels of cognition.
- 3) Try to make test a learning experience. Ask questions in as realistic a fashion as possible. Try things such as "A friend of yours comes to you and asks.... Always go over every question to make sure the student understand the right answer and why it is correct. This makes a very good review and helps them see where they are weak. Her is a good time to let the students participate fully supplying al the answers.
- 4) Try to be objective. There isn't much objectivity in education, but try to appear as objective as you can. For example, tell them the steps you take to be objective in grading.
- 5) Try to minimize "teacher's opinion". Try not to base too much of the grade on "participation" , "effort" or other very subjective aspects of student performance. I try to avoid having to decide who passes - who fails - big decision - by setting down in advance the course requirements - by making it purely mathematical.
- 6) Try to grade hard initially. It is much easier to "ease-off" on course requirements than to have to tighten up when students take advantage of you, and they will try.
- 7) Try to reward creativity. Creativity is discouraged in much of our educational establishment. I like to try to encourage creativity even if it means giving a student a few extra points. Points on tests can be a useful capital for leveraging better work and motivating students.
- 8) Try to create the "feeling" of fairness. Everyone wants to be treated fairly and every teacher want to be perceived as fair. I am very quick to give students a few point rather than quibble. If I make an error I am quick to try to rectify it. Points are cheap. People are valuable.

### **Summary**

Grading is a tricky procedure fraught with many possibilities for error. It is easy to forget why we grade. I recommend trying to use grades as a means of leveraging better learning form your students. Although this is easier recommended than done, I also suggest you attempt to require students to operate on the higher levels of cognition talked about here and in Chapter 5. Requiring students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate in homework and on tests will help ensure that students actually learn rather than simply memorizing a few definitions long enough to take a test. Finally, strive to make your grading and exams an integral part of the educational process wherein students are motivated and equipped to learn.

Notes to self;

**Halverson Put “Stop and Think” Questions throughout the text—**

Develop list of key teaching principles

Work on chapter transitions

First, under the Publish tab on your login page, you should see a link called Document Manager (Upload). Click that. The second box down will be called Upload New Document. In the Add New Chapter to end of Story box select the document from the document manager and title it if you chose (default is Chapter the number), then click Add Chapter. Note: Do not add new chapters as new stories, this is against FFN's rules. The Document Manager is full, what do I do? Delete some of them. If you have a problem with any of these, go to another site like LiveJournal or create a writing blog on Blogspot or something. When I click on a story, I get an error or a Story Not Found message. It's probably in every first-year mailbox. One of the girls from Class B, Mako Amikura, spoke as she approached and hugged Ichinose. "Hey, you don't need to put up with this anymore. Why don't we talk to the teachers?" He tossed his letter into the trashcan, called for the elevator, and got in with Yahiko as it had been waiting on the first floor. Katsuragi's expression remained stern even until the final moment when the doors shut. Watching the elevator go up, I decided to return to my room as well. TL Notes: Part 1 should be pretty soon! Using the notes as a guide, complete the letter. Use one or two words in each space. The words you need do not occur in the notes. To: David. From: Head Librarian. Please draft a letter to all students who are leaving the college next week. Use the word given. Do not change the word given. a) I am not to be disturbed under any circumstances. no. Under no circumstances am I. Underline the one which forms a common collocation. Last week well over a thousand people (1) took place in/took part in our local round-the-city 10-kilometre fun run. This kind of race doesn't normally. (2) appeal to me/amuse me, as, frankly, I'm not really (3) cut out for/right for long distance running.