

# You Ought To Be Teachers

Hebrews 5:12a

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers...*

Teaching is not always a natural talent. In secular matters teachers must be trained on the ways to teach. How much more true this is in spiritual teaching. The purpose of this class is to prepare us for teaching in multiple settings.

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**GOAL: Learn the Characteristics of Jesus' Teaching Style**

One of the most important titles Jesus bore was that of teacher. In Matthew 23:8 Jesus said that He is the true Teacher; indeed, His teaching was prophesied (Isaiah 54:13). We know that this is primarily because, being the living Word of God, He was the embodiment of the message God was sending. But we might also consider that His teaching characteristics were the most effective way to teach. If we want to know what the perfect way to communicate one idea to another person, we ought to look at Jesus as a Master Teacher, and learn from the way He taught.

From the age of 12 we see Jesus teaching others. There are a number of specific tools Jesus used to teach. He often asked questions so that people could explain what they were thinking. He usually referred to Scripture as the veracity of His points. Sometimes He used props (such as sitting a child on His lap in Matthew 18:2). All of this reflects that Jesus was open to a number of approaches in teaching, so long as they conveyed the message He sought them to understand.

**1. Jesus taught with authority - Mark 1:22**

What does it mean that Jesus was one who spoke with authority? We know that He always spoke from Scripture, but not exclusively so; He would go so far as to give the meaning of Scripture. We are called to teach in such a way. But it also means that we speak with conviction and without hypocrisy. This type of communication is called being "dogmatic"; Jesus was a dogmatic teacher. We need to learn to teach with the conviction that what we say is true and vital.

- Using Scripture to teach
- Explaining Scripture in teaching

**2. Jesus taught with parables - Matthew 13:34, Luke 24:45**

Why did Jesus use parables to teach? The bible describes this in part of trying to hide deep truths in simple illustrations (Matthew 13:35). But it also enabled Him to make illustrations of doctrinal truths. We might compare this to using every day applications to ideas or knowing the person you are teaching. We need to make clear what we are saying.

- Using alternative ideas to teach a concept
- Teaching fits the point to the student

**3. Jesus taught the hungry - Matthew 5:6, Luke 5:32, Matthew 7:6, Matthew 13:58**

Jesus did NOT teach everyone, nor did He convict everyone He did teach. Jesus only taught those who wanted to hear what He was saying, and he commands us to do the

same. There are many in this world who simply do not want to hear (1 Corinthians 1:26), and we need to move passed them to those who are interested in what we say. When we failed to convict, we need to understand that (unless our hypocrisy is the issue) it is not our fault.

- Teaching only works to those who want to be taught
- Learn how to tell when it is not effective to teach

#### 4. Jesus taught with patience - Luke 24:25-27, Acts 1:6-7

We see how often Jesus had to repeat Himself on subjects to His most attentive students. Sometimes it takes a while to understand. Jesus was always willing to explain things another time, and we ought to be too. We need to be patient as teachers, being repetitive without judgment. Perhaps it requires approaching a subject different ways. This is, according to 2 Timothy 2:24-26, a key characteristic of a Spiritual teacher.

- Patience is the virtue of the teacher
- Repetition is the tool of the teacher

**GOAL: Before Being a (*good*) Teacher We Must Be a (*good*) Student**

Most disciples understand that even Jesus, the best teacher, could not teach everyone. He refused to teach some, and instructed us not to cast our pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). Others seemed unable to understand despite numerous attempts. It was not the Teacher, but the students that were the problem. They were hard hearted, stubborn, and often looking not for a message but for a miracle or a meal (John 6:26). Bad students don't want to learn, they want to be entertained.

Are you a good student? It might surprise you to know that most teachers could point out who are good students and who are not quickly. There is behavior and conduct that drives this pattern. Good students have an attitude and exert an effort that make the work of the teacher easier and more rewarding. They actually do things (sometimes as simple as nodding the head in ascent) in class that make the teacher more at ease and willing to work harder himself. How do you rank yourself as a good student?

**1. A student must know what he does not know – Matthew 22:29**

It is a strange truth, but most people want to study things that they already know. When we learn new things, it causes us to feel inadequate. Students of the Gospel need to understand that this is a prideful danger. A mature Christian understands that as a student, they need to study things that have application to their life and will make them better Christians. One of the hardest things we need to do is to self-examine ourselves and determine what we need to grow.

- Understand the areas of your knowledge and need
- Believe that every teacher knows something you do not

**2. A student must respect the rules of the study – Romans 15:2**

When Jesus' enemies came to challenge his teaching, even they understood that there was a decorum of a sort. We will see that there are a variety of teaching settings. We need to understand that there is a decorum in all of them. If you are studying with someone privately or in a class setting, learn how to listen. Learn also what questions or comments are appropriate to a classroom, and avoid being a distraction to others. Be respectful of other students, even when they are not understanding or respectful themselves.

- Understand what is expected of you as a student
- Learn to honor and respect the class/setting and the teacher

**3. A student must prepare themselves – Ephesians 4:29**

Do you work to encourage teachers? Two of the most discouraging things for a teacher is (1) students who did not do their assignments and (2) students who fall asleep in class. For many classes, materials are passed out ahead of time, often with questions. Other times it is simple assigned reading. You may not realize it, but the teacher can always tell who has not studied the material; sometimes it is revealed in off the subject discussions, other times it is because they

are commenting on portions of the study that are dealt with later. We need to prepare comments that aid study. Another part of preparation is being physically prepared. An example of this is getting enough sleep is important to being attentive. IT can be discouraging to a teacher when those in study cannot remain awake.

- Be prepared for the study at hand by prior self-preparation
- Be physically and emotionally prepared for a class

4. A student needs to make applications of what they learn – Matthew 9:11-13

The purpose of studying is to change ourselves and to become more. We need to be the student who hears and then asks themselves how they will apply it. Sometimes one is teaching another because it is understood that they specifically need this subject studied to be understood. We all need to grow, and even the weakest of teachers can offer something of substance for growth if we are students who have taken responsibility for our own growth.

- Ask the question “what do I do with this?”
- Take personal responsibility for your growth

**GOAL: Understanding the Calling and Warning of Being a Teacher**

It is a reasonable guess that many, when considering being a teacher, remember that somewhere in the bible we are told that not everyone should be a teacher. That admonition rings in our ears, and serves as a disqualifier for teaching others. However, it would be an error to make application of that without context. As we will see, the bible does suggest that everyone ought to be able to teach others.

At the heart of the point here is asking ourselves this important question: do I *want* to be a teacher? Because in all honesty, that is the first criteria that we need to have. Do I want to instruct others on the way of life? What is my motivation for sharing with others the good news of Christ. As we will see, the warning of being a teacher is based on our conduct and our purpose and intent.

**1. We all ought to be teachers – Hebrews 5:12**

If you were told you were required to teach, it might terrify you. But what is teaching? It is communicating something you understand to someone else; it is done in a variety of environments, including a class or a personal setting. If you obeyed the Gospel, you should be able to tell someone else what you did and why. If you cannot express the way you were saved, it may be that you are not saved! Jesus said we are to be a light of the world (Mat. 5:16); this is the most basic type of teaching, teaching by example.

- You are obligated to teach at the most fundamental levels
- Be able to communicate what you did to be saved

**2. Not many of us should be teachers – James 3:1, Romans 2:21**

If we are all meant to teach others, why does the Scriptures seem to say not many should be? The context of James 3 is for those who are not in control of themselves. It should be apparent that those who do not “practice what they preach” are not only not effective teachers, but damage the minds of others (Mat. 7:1-5). James is not saying we should not be teachers, but that we should not be hypocrites. The most important point a teacher needs to know is to be a living example of what they teach (Titus 2:7-8).

- Hypocrites cannot teach
- Most important requirement of teachers: live what you teach

**3. Learning what kind of teacher I should be – 1 Corinthians 12:4-6**

Spiritual teaching is not something that is just in a classroom setting. In fact, most of the teaching of Scriptures is not (e.g. John 4). Just by being a light to the world you are fulfilling the command to teach. Some of us may be able to teach the young; others may be able to teach an adult group. Some of us may be able to teach someone who asks questions about faith. All of us are able to teach the world by the lives we lead. You need to decide what type of teacher you will be.

- There are many types of teachers and teaching settings

#### 4. Never let the past define your present – Exodus 4:10-11

When God called Moses to lead Israel, he saw his past failings as his present ones. Many of us do the same; define our ability now by the ability of the past. We need to have an attitude that we can always grow. As well, sometimes we feel that we have “done enough” in the past, and should not have to be a teacher. This too would be an error. We do not stand on either the success or failures of the past in order to measure the present.

- Don't hold past failures as present ones
- Don't believe you have ever “taught enough”

**GOAL: How to Have a Critical Conversation (John 4)**

Open mouth, insert foot. Many of us would describe our most critical conversations as exercises in humiliation or confusion. Perhaps we are too hard on ourselves, but in truth everyone has bad conversations sometimes. Let's be clear; there is almost no way to perfectly avoid misreading the social cues we get from others from time to time.

But sometimes our difficulties lie in areas that we might be able to improve with just a little bit of foreknowledge or preparation. A statistical success (i.e. successfully saying what needs to be said more of the time) is possible if we can take some precautions and preparations in simple communications. Fundamentally we need to realize that it is usually (perhaps not always) true that it is better to try and fail than not to try, mainly when we have invested some time to prepare ourselves for critical conversations.

One of the best examples of how to have a critical conversation is in John 4. There Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well. If ever there was a conversation destined to fail, this was it. Yet Jesus handles this situation in such a way that an entire city is converted. Of course, some of this success is that Jesus knew the hearts of men (His point on the woman's husband, for example). But some of His success was in communication practices that we can learn and apply in our lives.

**1. Seizing the Opportunity – John 4:7-10**

As Jesus waited at the well, He created the opportunity talking about their circumstance (getting water) and the blessings of eternal life (living water). Opportunities arise around us all the time. Perhaps someone laments some bad event; perhaps another person wonders why bad things seem to happen. Some people are able to make opportunities, but most of us must wait for one to come. Not every teaching opportunity must be about the plan of salvation; John the Baptist taught Herod about marriage.

- Understand that you can create opportunities to teach, but it is not necessary
- Not every opportunity to teach means we need to cover the plan of salvation

**2. Being critical and not critical – John 4:14-19**

One of the important observations in the teaching in John 4 is that Jesus said several things that were very critical of the woman at the well. He was critical of her life choices (5 husbands and a live-in boyfriend) and He told her that her people did not worship with knowledge (i.e. they were wrong). But she did not leave angry, but responded that He must have been a prophet. Jesus did this by bringing these things up indirectly; His question about bringing her husband provoked her to declare her situation, and His statement about worship afforded that none were truly correct in regards to the coming kingdom.

- Be prepared to say the things that people don't want to hear
- Do so with gentleness (perhaps indirectly) that does not force them away

### 3. Answering the question at hand – John 4:19-24

The conversation and teaching surrounded the things the woman brought up to Jesus. She asked about the location of worship, and Jesus used that to lead into the worship of the Kingdom. Many times people may not want to talk about the plan of salvation, and we need to answer all of their questions (1 Pet. 3:15). It is important to establish our willingness to answer the questions at hand to establish the relationship that permits us to present the ultimate teaching moment.

- The woman asked about worship, and Jesus answered her question
- Be sure to answer what is asked in order to teach other things later

### 4. You lose more than you win – John 4:41-44

In the text we are told that all of the village believed in Jesus. But at the same time, we are also told that Jesus' home town would not listen. We might compare what Jesus said to the woman at the well with what He said to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19; both heard a hard truth, and both walked away. But to our knowledge only one made an application of what Jesus said.

- Even Jesus could not teach everyone
- Often success is something that is beyond our control

**GOAL: Being Ready With An Answer (1 Peter 3:15)**

Peter tells us the following in 1 Peter 3:15 “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear”. This may be the clearest commandment in so far as your obligation to teach. If nothing else, all Christians owe this much effort to any situation that might fall into the category of teacher: to be ready with an answer.

Consider this command in light of multiple aspects of it. First, be sanctified ahead of time. Second, understand that you are always required to be ready with an answer by preparation beforehand. Third, your most fundamental obligation is to communicate why you have hope in any circumstance. Finally, learn that almost every situation requires gentleness to the one you speak to and reverence towards God.

**1. Be sanctified before you respond**

We touched briefly the idea in class 3 that one of the most important characteristics of a teacher is that they are living examples of what they teach. Jesus said in Matthew 7 that before you teach (judge) any other you must first teach (judge) yourself; this is the theme of Romans 2:21. Sanctification means we live distinct (set apart) from the world. It is not just in the things you teach, but in all the principles of Christ. If you are not living sanctified, you are not yet a teacher.

- To be a teacher of anyone you must model the things you teach
- Few will listen to a hypocrite, or worse, you are teaching them to become one

**2. Be prepared when you respond**

There is no way to have every single possible answer prepared to any question one might be asked. But the majority of the time people will ask the same question, which we can be ready to answer. It helps to know the background thinking of the person you are meeting with; if they are Catholic, they may not have questions on speaking in tongues or end times, but may struggle understanding authority. If they are Mormon, the concept of the single Gospel would be beneficial. You can be ready for the most common question, and you can be ready for likely subjects if you are familiar with the doctrines commonly held by others. Even if you don't know, you can ask; many people want to tell you what they believe, and they will be more likely to listen to you if you listen to them.

- Know the answers to commonly asked questions
- Know generally what someone believes when they ask you a question

**3. Let your answers center on your hope**

People need to see your spiritual hope in order to believe that what you believe has value. No one will follow you to Christ if they don't think you love all of it. People need to see the hope that is in you; you need to reflect this hope in all things. Your words need to be seasoned with grace;

people need to see that you are enthusiastic in your hope. You are not a Christian just because it is what your parents were, or your spouse, or because it is easy or convenient. You are here because you believe this is the only truth there is. Show it.

- Let your hope and your confidence be central to what you teach
- If you are a child of God, you can at least share why you are confident in that

#### 4. Show gentleness and reverence

When Paul taught the Athenians, his opening statement was *"I see you are a religious people"* (Acts 17:22). Consider that he might have opened with a harsh characteristic of their paganism. We can be judicious in our words so that we can speak the truth in love. We want to provoke their interest, not their anger. We are commanded to teach with gentleness and reverence.

- Make sure you are teaching with gentleness
- Teachers must be patient and not project an attitude of disrespect

**GOAL: Overcoming Common Mistakes**

Not every opportunity to teach ends positively. Very often, avoidable mistakes were made. Knowing what those common mistakes are is a great way to prepare for success. Almost all teachers tend to stumble over the same issues. It might be a lack of preparation or a lack of personal godliness. But sometimes it is simple communication mistakes that can damage any conversation.

**1. Overly zealous – Romans 10:2**

It is easy to come on too strong when we want to share a message with someone. We might be over bearing or too harsh in our message. When Philip met the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 he asked him what he was studying as opposed to immediately telling him the truth of the Gospel. Philip was able, beginning from the passage the Eunuch read, to teach Christ. Often we need to consider how to create an opportunity to talk verses force the conversation.

- Be careful when we are initiating a critical conversation
- Learn how to gauge the temperature of another in conversation.

**2. Under-zealous - 2 Timothy 1:7**

More often than being over-zealous we are under-zealous. We exaggerate in our minds the willingness of others to hear what we might say about Christ. Ours is not a spirit of timidity to teach Christ, but a spirit of power (2 Tim. 1:7). Fundamentally we need to live a life that pronounces our faith; we need to be different than the world. It is a terrible thing to be told by someone that they did not know we were a Christian. While we understand that there are some times we should not press the battle, more often we are not certain, and then we need to try.

- Be sure to live a life that is full of faith in action
- When we are unsure, press the conversation

**3. Not establishing the parameter of study**

When we talk to others, we need to establish first of all a common ground. One of the most common mistakes we make in speaking with others is that we fail to get them to agree on a common ground. We might begin teaching from Scriptures only to find that they do not believe in the power of Scriptures. We might spend too much time talking about something others agree with, and then they are unaware of what we might not agree with.

- Be sure to establish an area of agreement before exploring disagreement
- Redeem the time; don't talk about things that are no profit to the hearer (2 Tim. 2:14)

**4. Not listening – James 1:19**

By far, the biggest mistake in teaching is not listening (Jas. 1:19). When we are not successful listeners, no one wants to hear us. Listening is a developed skill; it is not just hearing, but paying attention and ingesting the words of others. One tool counselors use is to repeat back to someone what they are saying, to clarify you understand their point. This confirms in the mind

of another that you are in fact listening to them. NO ONE WILL LISTEN TO SOMEONE WHO WILL NOT LISTEN.

- Learn how to listen to others; do not assume that hearing them is listening
- Learn and believe that other people may know something you do not

## ADDENDUM: AUTHORITY FOR BIBLE CLASSES

The second portion of our study on teaching involves teaching in a bible class setting. We need to clarify by what authority we are establishing and using bible classes. Authority is established by looking into the New Testament church pattern to find commandments, examples, and necessary inferences that establish for us generic and specific authority that permits expedient conduct. Let us define these terms for clarity:

AUTHORITY – permission by God to act

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH PATTERN – that repeated pattern found in the New Testament that established how a church of Christ is to conduct itself (e.g. elders, deacons, communion, etc.)

COMMANDMENT – A directive or statement from God either demanding action or abstinence

EXAMPLE – An approved apostolic example that we can discern we can and should emulate

NECESSARY INFERENCE – Any inferred deduction/conclusion that must necessarily be true

GENERIC AUTHORITY – an AUTHORITY that has multiple ways to be acted upon

SPECIFIC AUTHORITY - an AUTHORITY that has a specific (and exclusive) way to act

EXPEDIENCE – the most effective way to execute or act; reasonable or profitable (1 Cor. 6:12)

BIBLE CLASS – in churches in the United States, it refers to a set time period of study, a class (sometimes a work of the church) in which students are segregated by age or gender. Sometimes called *Sunday School*, although this term may also refer to an institution used by some churches

There is no direct mention (commandment) for a church to have bible classes arranged in the format of the bible. However, it is clear that teaching is a work of the church (as the office of teacher is mentioned often, Eph. 4:11-12 e.g.), and we necessary infer that the church is authorized to teach its members (Gal. 6:6). Therefore, a specified time for bible study (the definition of a bible class) would be an expedient way of carrying out this generic authority. Examples of non-worship bible classes are found in Acts 17:2, Acts 18:19 and Acts 19:9.

The second question is if there is authority to break classes up by age, gender, or other demographics. Some believe that 1 Cor. 1:10 with 1 Cor. 11:33 prohibit this; however, these passages speak to the doctrinal unity of the church, and the physical unity of worship assemble (the time in which the Lord's Supper is served). Teaching is a generic authority; there is no specified place or style to teach, and all may be taught expediently. Therefore, the bible class is an authorized means to teach.

### GOAL: Learning from the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8)

The most common opportunity for anyone in the church to teach in a class setting is with our children. The case can be made from Scripture that this is the most important opportunity we have to teach (Matthew 18:3, Matthew 19:14). Perhaps we should be so bold as to say that the most important work of the local church is the teacher (consider how Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:29 lists teachers as a local church work), and that the most important students in a local church are our children.

To this end, let us turn to one of the more difficult parables Jesus taught, the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16. There we are told a very simple message by Jesus: sometimes the world is wiser than us because it knows how to be practical. This means that sometimes, in terms of practical things, we can learn something from the world. This is not necessarily a controversial idea; we can learn many things about practical matters from non-spiritual sources.

In this case the suggestion is to learn from public education systems. They are not perfect, and indeed their very purpose and intent can be seen as ungodly in some ways. But there is much to consider and learn from too, and with spiritual discernment we can sift through to find what is practical. First, decades of trial and error have produced a great deal of understanding as to how children and young people learn, and those ideas ought to be taken by us to teach our young within the authority of teaching. Second, practical aspects of teaching (such as teaching plans and attitudes) can be adopted within the generic authority to teach.

#### 1. Every Child Learns Differently

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from the unjust steward that is public education, while not always a tool for righteousness, is a “son of this age” from whom we can learn a lesson on effectively teaching. There is one major foundation that modern teaching ideology builds upon: every child learns differently. This lesson has been learned after many mistakes in different approaches to teaching. We too need to learn that not all learn the same way; about 30% of students learn regardless of the setting; that means we need to focus our teaching style around the 70% who do not.

- Do not believe that the way you learned the truth will work for all (or even most)
- Be prepared to learn new ways to present old ideas

#### 2. Prepare a Lesson Plan

The unjust steward formed a plan of action. In our countries public education system, the lesson plan is the plan of action teachers form to cover things (on a daily basis). It sets goals and describes means to achieve. These lesson plans speak to what will be taught, to whom the lesson is being applied, why it matters, and it explains how it will be taught. We need to be prepared ahead of time to teach. Much of this requires an understanding of the dynamics of the students;

Jesus taught differently to His disciples than to all men (Mark 4:11). This is because He knew his students.

- Teachers need to set goals in each of their classes: who, what, why and how
- Prepare beforehand how you will approach teaching by knowing your students

### 3. The Need for Parental Involvement

Another resource vital to public teaching is the involvement of parents. This is sometimes a double edged sword, but ultimately far more important to successful classrooms. Parents need to be involved to ensure the following: attentive and on time; prepared and work done ahead; completion of memory work. The church is not the primary instructor of children, parents are (Eph. 6:4). Teachers need to remember that with parental involvement.

- Understanding that parents are the primary teachers
- Make clear expectations of parents

### 4. Teach *with* students and not *at* students

Too many teachers prepare a curriculum and then teach it at their students. It is important to learn what it means to teach to students, not at them. The point of the class is NOT to get through a material assignment; it is to ensure that they are understanding of the things of God.

- Do not forget that the purpose and intent of teaching is to pass information
- Do not teach at (throwing information) but with (aiding in receiving)

### GOAL: How to Teach Adolescents

Many of us were taught by bible class teachers who used principles of teaching that successfully enabled us to learn about the way of Christ. Some of these tools are quite simple. Others requires more work to prepare and use. Unfortunately, many times teachers of children don't want to invest the time (or perhaps humility) to learn better ways to present the messages of the bible to children. Other fails to understand the very simple idea that children do not learn the same way as adults.

Again, let us revisit our conclusion that this may be one of the most important aspects of teaching the church is authorized to conduct. But children lack the ability to describe their learning desires and accomplishments; too often we just continue to teach without goals because the kids don't complain. Perhaps this is our ultimate reveal; we need to teach as though it matters that our children learn about God.

#### 1. Using memorization the right way

One of the most important tools in bible teaching is memorization. This is something that is far more effectively done in the home rather than in church. It is not a tool limited to children either. Christians need to memorize books of the bible, lists of people and other things. Memory work is of vital importance, but it cannot be the substance of a bible class. It must be done outside of class.

- Be sure that memorization is part of the process of bible study
- Do not let memorization be the substance of bible classes

#### 2. Children learn by stories and songs

Actually, everyone learns by songs; this is why we sing (Col. 3:16). Moses taught Israel to sing a song to prepare them for their work (Deut. 31:22). Songs teach memory work, as well as important bible lessons and people. Our mistake is to reduce it to the youngest ages only, or to fail to bring in more songs with a variety of learning topics. In a similar vein, stories appeal to all. As mentioned before, this is how Jesus taught. Stories need to stir the imagination; Jesus used stories to lure all sorts into the heart of His teaching (consider Matthew 21:33-41). We need to take bible ideas and reduce them to stories for absorption; this is the pattern of God.

- Use stories and songs when teaching
- Understand that provoking imagination is the goal in bible teaching/learning

#### 3. Using activities to teach

We CANNOT expect children to learn the same way as adults. Lecture classes may be successful for adults, but are NEVER successful for the young. One of the best tools to teach are activities that teach. Again, our unjust steward of the previous class uses activities for all aspects of teaching. The young (especially but NOT exclusively) understand and commit to memory activities far better than just speaking.

- Use a variety of activities to teach; find resources to create activities
- Remember that children are not adults

#### 4. Avoiding common mistakes

What are some mistakes that we make in teaching the young? Sometimes we confine our teachers to women only, when men ought to be teaching adolescent classes too. Another mistake is to work to stop kids from talking and asking questions. Not all kids learn by sitting still and being quiet; some need to move and engage differently. Finally, we need to exercise caution in berating them for tardiness or lack of preparation. Parents need to be addressed, not kids. Finally, don't be a hypocrite. Adolescents have ultra-sensitive hypocrisy detectors. Finally, help them understand that not knowing is not failure, it is opportunity.

- Be careful in the expectations we set
- Remember: bible class is for them, not the teacher

### GOAL: How to Teach Young Adults

Sometimes it takes a special kind of patience to teach teenagers. They may seem sulky, uninterested or rebellious even in a class setting. Yet often their demeanor does not truly reflect their heart. Teenagers are at a critical age when they are trying to determine a personal identity. They are acting out to get a feeling for how the world reacts to them. Sometimes they have already be damaged by the world. The right teacher can do a great deal of good.

Teenagers are at the most critical stage in spiritual development. Statistically, the decision to join Christ or the world is most often made before the age of 21 (about 90% in generic statistics<sup>1</sup>). Yet very little of our spiritual group time is devoted to that group. If our children are the most important part of our work of teaching, then teenagers are the most critically charged aspect of that group.

#### 1. Teach the hard issues

As adolescents become teens, their world experience grows dramatically. In just a few years they go from being sheltered to being exposed to sex, drinking and drugs. Our teaching must reflect that the teenager of today is more exposed to sin than the teenager of 20, 30 or 40 years ago. In other words, don't mistakenly think that because you were not aware of sin at their age that they are not. We MUST teach frankly and effectively on subjects such as promiscuity, intoxication, and the lure of money. At the same time we must balance the appropriate way of communicating these things.

- Be aware that teenagers are far more knowledgeable of worldly things than you were
- Be tactful and bold in speaking to the issues

#### 2. Be ready to throw everything out to pursue a teachable moment

We have spoken about the importance of being prepared and giving students something to prepare for themselves. But we are also saying that in teaching teenagers, the great need for teachers in this group is to provide the critical answers that they need. Sometimes these important questions come out of the blue. In these circumstances, because of the enormous stakes, teachers need to be ready to abandon the teaching material (a teaching faux pas) and take the time to answer these questions.

- A teaching plan is important, but for young adults be ready to teach to the moment
- Be ready to answer tough questions, or at least to find answers and prepare them

#### 3. Don't try to be like them, be something that they want to become

A great temptation for teachers of young adults is to try to be friends with them. This is not a bad thing, but it does not make for a good teacher. This is especially true if we are copying their conduct, when we need to be setting a standard for young adults to pattern. We have seen before that Paul commanded Titus to be a living example of the things he taught (Titus 2:6-7).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>

- Be friendly with students
- Be an example of spiritual maturity and success

#### 4. Avoid common mistakes

Perhaps one of the most common errors is underestimating young people. Remember that we are telling them to behave like adults but to be treated like children, and that is hard to balance. They usually comprehend emotional complexity and spiritual ideas, and it is wrong to underestimate their ability. Don't embarrass them; as young adults being singled out for embarrassment is terrifying. Give them a break; remember they have a lot on their plates. Finally, when trying to relate the dangers of sin, be careful that personal examples don't alienate young adults by being too different from them, and don't glorify the sins of your past either.

- Don't underestimate what a young adult is capable of learning
- Don't be too hard on their awkward (and even undiplomatic) behavior

**GOAL: How to Apply Jesus' Principles to an Adult Class Setting**

Jesus taught both one on one (John 4) and to large groups, such as the last part of the "Bread of Life" teaching Jesus did, which was done in a public setting (John 6:59). Often Jesus used a lecture style sermon in public settings (consider the Sermon on the Mount), although it is hard to specifically point to a consistently applied teaching style; Jesus often changed His style based on how His audience was receiving what He said.

Let us consider different teaching styles Jesus used. When teaching on repentance in Luke 13:10 Jesus used events that were going on in the world as a place to teach; He asked questions of His listeners to get them to see their own views. He used examples around him. When teaching the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 22, Jesus often referenced Scriptures as the basis of His teaching. He also permitted them to ask Him questions, even questions that were testing Him. He asked them what they thought of certain passages, to get them to see points that He had been making.

**1. Jesus taught from the authority of Scriptures – Matthew 12:1-7**

One of the most common complaints by denominations and liberal brethren is the lack of bible study in bible studies. We need to spend our time in the Scripture in the Scriptures. Never mistakenly believe that your experiences, knowledge base or reasoning are effective in teaching. Let the Scriptures say it instead. When possible, take the class directly to the Scriptures to see for themselves the authority of God.

- Use the Scriptures to answer questions and teach principles
- Avoid using too many personal or worldly examples

**2. Jesus taught by asking questions of His listeners**

We have already suggested that one of the tools Jesus often used was to ask people questions. He might ask "how does it read to you" (Luke 10:26) to get someone to answer their mind. He might ask "what do you think" in regards to a moral issue (Matthew 17:25). Questions do several things; they cause a student to say out loud what they are thinking (and often just doing so causes them to be more certain or abandon a position). They also set a basis on which a teacher knows the mind of the student and what to cover. Although Jesus never did this, for us as teachers questions may give us answers we ourselves are lacking. An important point is to use an answer in a positive way; sometimes we need to help someone answering our question to perceive what the Scriptural view is, and direct their answer to that in a way that does not embarrass or provoke.

- Be prepared to ask questions
- Learn how to use answer in a positive way

**3. Jesus taught by using examples of things around Him**

When teaching in Luke 13, Jesus used a current event to establish ideas about repentance. Current events or pop-culture are things we have established in our minds that make for useful

tools of teaching. We need to use these references in both explaining and making application of our principles. Principles that have no practical application are not useful in teaching. Fundamentally, using examples of things around us are vitally important in the application of teaching. We are not teachers for the sake of being teachers.

- Use relevant examples in teaching
- Work to make an application for everything we teach

#### 4. Jesus permitted people to ask (dumb) questions

Jesus always answered questions asked of Him. This is a critical teacher quality; the point of teaching is to convey information someone may not have, and a question is the most fundamental manifestation of that. We often say “there are no dumb questions”, in an attempt to encourage people to ask despite the fear of appearing naïve or ignorant. Sometimes there even are “dumb” questions, or questions not related to the subject. Sometimes it seems like Jesus was teaching a great truth, and it was misunderstood. His disciples might ask questions unrelated to the actual subject. For example in Mark 8:15 Jesus commanded them to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees, and they began discussing bread. Jesus often patiently explained what He meant. Sometimes He even took time to answer questions which were

- Always take the time to answer questions
- Never reject a question because it is unrelated; if it is too far off topic, come back later

## **ADDENDUM: AUTHORITY FOR WOMEN TO SPEAK**

In establishing the idea that a seminar is the goal for most adult bible studies, we need to ask an important question: are all permitted to speak? We are considering the commandment found in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: *Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*

First, we need to understand the context of the passage in question. 1 Corinthians 14 pertains to the assembly of the church as a single body. The context begins back in 1 Corinthians 11:18-20, which describes this assembly as such: *For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.*

This context follows into chapter 14 discussing the use of speaking in tongues and prophesying (both spiritual gifts we no longer have). That context is still speaking of the church assembly that comes together (on the first day of the week, Acts 20:7) for the purpose of taking the Lord's Supper. We often distinguish that service by calling it our "worship" service. Therefore, Paul's command for women to keep silent is within the worship assembly. Bible classes are typically not part of that assembly; if they were, we would not be authorized to divide them by age, ability and gender (1 Corinthians 11:33).

But we need to make it clear that there is still an authoritative limit for women participating in a bible class. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 states *"A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet."* This would apply to any bible setting. In this case, silence speaks not to the idea of total silence (remember 1 Corinthians 14:35), but in context and by necessary inference implies the idea that women are not to be in the position of teacher in the class.

Not all may agree with this understanding; many women, respectful of the word of God, choose not to speak at all in a bible class setting where men are present in order to avoid any "teaching". Such must be respected per the guidelines established in Romans 14.

There is also the issue of the unbeliever who attends a bible study. Such (men and women) may seek to speak and to ask questions. It would be unfruitful for them to be denied an opportunity to do so (consider 1 Corinthians 14:16, 24-25). But at the same time, a teacher needs to be able to prevent their ignorance from derailing the class or causing disorder.

**GOAL: Learning to Create a Seminar of Teaching**

There are a variety of approaches to teaching for adults. There is the direct lecture, where an expert on a field speaks for a length of time and then permits some to ask questions (early in the church this may have been the case for the apostles). An open meeting is the opposite, where no one is recognized as a teacher, and instead the subject is examined by each person equally. Many bible studies among brethren are conducted in this manner. A balance of these ideas is the teaching seminar. A teaching seminar is one where there is a teacher who prepares a presentation on a particular subject, but the group is expected to participate in that presentation.

A teaching seminar is often the goal for an adult bible study. This is because it recognizes that the teacher is not necessarily (or likely) the most knowledgeable person on a specific subject. Indeed, in regards to the nature of a local congregation and the nature of the Word of God, many have substantial knowledge on Scriptures. The seminar enables a teacher to prepare a particular point, and allows those in class to participate in creating knowledge on that subject.

**1. Know how to ask the right kind of questions – Matthew 16:13-15**

One common complaint teachers have is that there is no discussion in the class. This is a terrible sign, not of the class but of the teacher, and a teacher should NEVER berate the class for a lack of discussion. Instead, the teacher needs to consider how to stimulate discussion. Questions are the answer; but not just any questions. Good questions need to be questions that merit more than one answer (i.e. “what are some ways” or “how many people did this”), so that one answer is not enough. One problem teachers have is asking factual and specific questions that are too hard (no one could reasonably have an answer) or too easy (no one wants to answer easy questions). If you want discussion, ask questions that anyone might be able to contribute an answer.

- Ask questions that have more than one answer or that petition personal insights
- Don't ask questions that are too easy or too hard

**2. Know when to prompt discussion and when to end it**

A proper seminar is both lecture and discussion. The balance comes by a teacher controlling discussion. Referring back to our “unjust steward” class, teachers need to plan ahead as to what to discuss and what to present as a lecture. Applications are good for lecture, while examples are good for discussion. Sometimes discussion can carry on too far (or even become inappropriate if it leads to error being taught or quarrels among members); NEVER let a class descend into a quarrel or a debate between brethren. Use tools to start discussion (questions), and use tools to end it (“this will be our last comment before moving on”), but be careful not to damage the interest in discussion by accusing the class of being off topic or problematic. In a seminar, the teacher is in control. A loss of control is usually the fault of the teacher, not the class.

- Prepare ahead of time to know when discussion is best introduced
- Use positive tools to bring discussion to an end

### 3. Know whose comments have more weight and value

An important point in any congregation is knowing that some people have more wisdom than others (1 Corinthians 6:5). Elders and deacons (and their wives) are tested to be firm in the faith and knowledgeable in doctrine. Older brothers and sisters are often blessed with experience and wisdom (Titus 2:2-5). As a rule, when elders want to make comments, the floor needs to be yielded to them immediately, as they are responsible for the entire group (Hebrews 13:17). At the same time, some may be immature in faith, and prone to comments that are not profitable for the hearers (2 Timothy 2:14). All opinions are absolutely NOT equal; a seminar teacher is charged with understanding this distinction and appropriately weighing the insights of various brethren.

- Know your class; know whose views are from maturity and whose are not
- Always openly permit elders to contribute

### 4. Know how to encourage questions

Even following tools to ask proper questions, some teachers feel that there is insufficient discussion in class. Part of this is that they have (unintentionally) created an atmosphere in which no one wants to participate. When teachers are dismissive or overly critical of observations, others may decide not to subject themselves to that level of criticism. A teacher needs to encourage comments, and learn how to handle poor comments. When asking a question, understand that the wrong answer may be because you asked the question unclearly; presume that the error is yours and restate the question as though it is a new one. If someone's statement is doctrinally or scripturally in error, but they are not attempting to teach error (consider Jude 22-23 or Acts 18:26), correct them in gentleness (2 Timothy 2:25), perhaps as a suggestion or even restate their view with the accuracy of Scripture.

- Understand that harsh correction of students leads to a lack of discussion
- Correct error gently and firmly as Scripture directs

**GOAL: Avoiding Common Mistakes in an Adult Bible Class**

We have all seen adult bible studies not go well, or fail to energize the class. Adult bible studies are often the heart of the collective thinking of a church, and when they are unsuccessful, many (unfairly) ascribe that condition to the entire work of the church. Adult bible classes are a problem when Scriptures are not being taught; when participants are not preparing for participation; when teachers are not trying to find new ways to explain the ideas of Scripture.

Sometimes there are issues beyond merely the means of teaching. Perhaps there is an undercurrent of false doctrine, or a weakness that needs to be confronted. But sometimes these issues are really with the teacher. There are certain common mistakes wise and mature brethren make in teaching an adult bible study that could be corrected by simple changes in style and presentation that would make classes more profitable. Avoiding these mistakes are something all teachers need to work towards.

**1. Understand when teaching a subject how to handle opinions**

For this study, an opinion is a specific position on a generic commandment of God. It is not the idea referred to in 2 Peter 1:20. We might call it an unnecessary inference. As an example, we are commanded to submit, be hospitable, love, and to reject false teachers. How we execute those commands may not always be the same. This does not mean we ought not present our view of how to execute a commandment; it means we need to accept that others may keep the commandment with some variation and still be right before God. Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 dealt with issues where brethren varied on commands to avoid worldliness; Paul declares we are not to judge something where God alone judges. In Acts 15 the Pharisees among the brethren had strong opinions as to what was holy; they were warned against assuming their view was the only way to keep holy. Successful teachers use their opinions wisely; they qualify them as opinions and present them in that context. Understand that when an opinion is not presented as an opinion, brethren may become (rightly) indignant on behalf of the truth.

- Be clear when establishing an opinion, and accept that others may disagree
- Work to understand when something is an authorized opinion and when it is not

**2. Remain in the subject at hand – 1 Corinthians 14:40**

Sometimes we use the expression “chasing rabbits” to describe how a dog is pulled off the trail on an abstract hunt. When teaching a class, we have a limited time to present an idea. In an adult class, the expectation is that others have prepared for this class. It is not fair to leave the subject at hand to pursue an interesting idea for a considerable purpose. Good teachers understand that occasionally exploring a particular idea is okay, but it cannot be often and it cannot be very far. Understand that straying off topic too much and too often is an inappropriate use of time.

- A teaching plan is important, but for young adults be ready to teach to the moment
- Be ready to answer tough questions, or at least to find answers and prepare them

### 3. Establish fair expectations

Sometimes problems arise in classes when either teachers or students have different expectations on a class. It is upsetting to prepare for a class only to find it is not the subject at hand. That frustration is compounded for students to learn that a teacher has simply decided (without notice) to change the direction or subject of the class. Teachers need to understand that time and preparation are investments others make that need to be respected. At the same time, we who are in the class need to respect the time and effort a teacher has gone to in order to present their class. Teachers need to have set reasonable expectations of their students, and students need to have set reasonable standards of the teacher. In the case of a class within the authority of the church, this expectation is even more important. This need balances with pursuing the teachable moment; to make the decision between these things is often the sign of a mature and experienced teacher.

- Set reasonable expectations for the class and the teacher
- Teach the subject that is expected to be taught (exception – the teachable moment)

### 4. Be ready to defend and enable weaker brethren – 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Another common mistake is not reigning in those who are overly opinionated or aggressive in their comments. A class is often composed of strong and weak brethren; sometimes that distinction is also about those with strong opinions and weak consciences (Romans 14:19). Sometimes those with strong views unintentionally overwhelm (bully) those who are weak. A teacher is filling in like a shepherd in that moment, and it is their purpose to watch over those in that setting. Classes where some are too opinionated need to be brought into control. Consider the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 as though they were said for a class setting: *“we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”*

- Don't let overly vocal brethren castigate the weak
- Be a teacher for both the strong and the weak

**GOAL: How To Use Technology In An Adult Bible Class**

Jesus was one to often use “props” in His teaching. He might ask for a coin (Matthew 22:19) or write in the dirt (John 8:8). Consider other teachers in the bible; Ezekiel used a diorama (Ezekiel 4) and Jeremiah used a yoke (Jeremiah 27:2). Using tools to teach is an authorized expedient. Being expedient means that they are not necessary, but are a reasonable tool with which to teach.

There are multiple tools we might use in teaching. Some use actual props effectively (one rule is to never allow a prop to be the teacher). Some of the most common tools include paper handouts, and electronic presentations (overheads and PowerPoint presentation). Some use them effectively, while others fail to make good use of them.

At the same time, some tools may be authorized but are not effective, and ought not to be used. For example, if one were teaching a song, using a recording of the song would probably cause more consternation than edification. Another consideration is not to let teaching tools become more entertaining than informative. Finally, consider whether or not these tools would be well received. If they might offend the conscience of some, they are not permitted. As an example, most brethren are not comfortable with audio or video clips in a sermon. Their conscience is important.

**1. How and when to use handouts**

Handouts are quite useful when going over ideas or material that required a great deal of substance to understand. They are meant to be something that can be used (1) to keep track of an idea and (2) to refer back to at a future time. A handout cannot simply be the entirety of the teachers materials; they are not the teacher. It is a poor teacher who just reads their handout. Below are some simple rules to consider in using handouts.

- Keep the font between 12 and 16 points; remember not everyone can see easily
- Try to keep a handout down to one page for one class
- Use Scriptural citations as opposed to writing passages (for which we have bibles)
- Use citations when quoting a non-biblical source
- Make main points more pronounced than sub points

**2. How and when to use PowerPoint**

Using a media presentation is a common tool in American churches. It is powerful because it can nearly double the memorability of a lesson (we are both seeing and hearing). For those who are hard of hearing, seeing bible passages and main points are undeniably profitable. However, many fail to use this projections in a way that maximizes their impact. Below is a list of simple does and don'ts for media projections to consider.

- Don't use Copyrighted photos
- Use large pictures that convey a feeling without being distracting
- Don't use small fonts; nothing less than a size 30
- Don't use bright contrasting colors
- Don't let a sentence spill over when possible
- Don't put more on a slide than can be read in 3 seconds
- Avoid visual noise (less is better)
- Try to use the 7x4 rule; 7 words per line, 4 lines per slide
- Don't put the entire outline into the PowerPoint
- Consider when it is best to quote an entire bible passage or just list the citation

### 3. Be ready to teach without technology

Most teachers will experience a moment when technology lets them down. If they are unable to teach because of that, they have overly relied on technology. Be prepared that if the projector is down, the class can go on. Don't become overly obsessed with getting things to work. If it takes more than 10% of your time to set up, it is too much.

- Be prepared to teach without technology
- Don't spend too much time trying to get something to work

### 4. Don't be a slave to the slides

Once a teacher starts using slides and handouts, they almost allow these things to dictate the nature of the class. We have previously discussed being prepared to leave the main point for a teachable moment, especially among teens. Always remember that your technology is not the teacher; you can leave these things behind at any time.

- Don't be so caught up in technology that you cannot teach without it
- Be prepared to move without your teaching aides