

Chapter 3

GOD AS TEACHER

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The hidden things belong to the Lord our God,
but the revealed things belong to us and our children forever,
so that we may follow all the words of this law.

[Deut 29:29]

I am a big-picture person. I am constantly trying to find the relationship among all areas of life. I see all disciplines as inter-related with one another. I find the term *compartmentalization* problematic because things need to come together at some point for me to understand them accurately. I also aspire to discover the source of who I am and the meaning of what I do. Fortunately, in God I find the purpose and explanation of my life.

Christian ministry also finds its *raison d'être* in the God of the universe. The church exists to glorify God as its single purpose.¹ Consequently, we have Christian education because God is a teacher. He is our model and source of teaching. God uses different methods to teach humanity. In Him, therefore, we find the model for creativity in our teaching.

This chapter introduces several concepts that will be developed further through this book. I will attempt to present a big theological picture of Christian teaching. The first section will address the value of theology, explain how God the Father is a teacher because He reveals Himself to humanity, and describe that God's ultimate purpose of His revelation is that we may know Him and obey Him. The second section explains how God is described as a teacher in

¹ A. Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 84.

the Bible and provides examples of His teaching in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Importance of Theology

All Christians are theologians. Theology is central to the teaching ministry of the church and to every dimension of our lives. The word *theology* means "the study of God." It comes from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (speech, reason, word). To do theology is to reflect on God. Our theology, or the lack of it, affects the way we think and live. A. W. Tozer once said:

What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . . The gravest question before the church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.²

Theology and ministry are like the two sides of a dollar bill. The two faces are inseparable for the bill to have value. It is impossible to separate them completely because they belong to the same bill. Although we may look at one side at a time, in reality both sides must go together. In the same way, we cannot serve a God we do not know, and we cannot know God and fail to serve Him. Some have argued that Christian teachers are "practical theologians." Yet we all must be theologians and practitioners at the same time. God is the source and model for Christian teaching. We are theologians who proclaim God's truths that affect our everyday lives.

Since theology affects our lives completely, believers should be wise to develop into good theologians. God said that the most important thing we can do as human beings is to know Him and understand Him in order to do His will (Jer 9:24). Therefore, the central question is, How can we know God so we, as teachers, can teach His ways? The answer is found in God's revelation.

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God's Revelation

We can know God because He reveals Himself to us. The word *revelation* means "disclosure." The God of the universe has taken the initiative to manifest Himself to us so we, as finite beings, can know Him, the infinite God. The Lord, then, is at the center of everything, and as the Creator, He determines and explains everything that exists. The Bible opens with the affirmation that God exists, and He created the heavens and the earth. Only in Him do we find purpose and meaning in our lives. As C. S. Lewis said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen—not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else."³

God reveals Himself to us in two basic ways—through general revelation and special revelation. God discloses Himself to human beings in a general way through creation and conscience (Ps 19). God uses creation to teach us about His power. Theologian Millard Erickson points out that general revelation "is God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places."⁴

God reveals Himself in special ways through His Word: the incarnate Word (*logos*) of God, Jesus Christ, and the written Word of God, the Bible. Christ is, therefore, the central focus of God's revelation, and the way we can know Christ is through the written Word of God. Through special revelation human beings are able to "identify God, understand something about him, and point others to him."⁵

Consequently, the Bible then must be the content of our teaching. Christian teaching is based on Christ and focused on the Scriptures. The Word of God is the main curriculum in Christian education (see chapter 6, "The Bible as Curriculum"). Christian teaching is the exposition of the Bible to people. Sometimes at the end of a sermon, I have thought to myself, *Great message, wrong passage*, or worse, *Great message, no passage*. Christian teaching and preaching must be based on the Bible. Christian teachers are messengers of God's revelation.

² A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 1.

³ A. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 102.

⁴ M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 178.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

God Is the Teacher

Every time the Lord reveals Himself to us, He is teaching us. Therefore, God, by His very nature, is a teacher. In fact, we teach because God is a teacher. Christian teaching exists because God is a teacher. The teaching ministry of the church finds its purpose in the active teaching of God. Job 36:22 says, "Look, God shows Himself exalted by His power. Who is a teacher like Him?" No one is a teacher like God. Therefore, it is good to be taught by Him. Psalm 4:12 says, "LORD, happy is the man You discipline and teach from Your law." The result of His teaching is blessing; we find goodness only in Him. Our main goal in life should be to know God because only in Him are we complete. Fortunately, it is His very nature to teach us!

In Psalm 25, we find the attitude God expects from us when we receive His instruction. The psalmist asks the Lord: "Show me," "teach me," "Lead me," and "Remember me." He recognizes that receiving God's teaching is an act of grace. Therefore, we should be grateful and desire His message:

Make Your ways known to me, LORD

teach me Your paths.

*Guide me in Your truth and teach me,
for You are the God of my salvation;
I wait for You all day long.*

*Remember, LORD, Your compassion
and Your faithful love,*

for they [have existed] from antiquity.

*Do not remember the sins of my youth
or my acts of rebellion;*

*in keeping with Your faithful love, remember me
because of Your goodness, LORD.*

*The LORD is good and upright;
therefore He shows sinners the way.*

*He leads the humble in what is right
and teaches them His way. (Ps 25:4-9, emphasis added)*

Every time the Lord manifests Himself to us, He is teaching us. He is a teacher. Moreover, God is the teacher. His objective is that we follow His instruction. When God teaches, He looks forward to

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our compliance with His desires. The result of His instruction is not information but our action and a change of lifestyle. The following passages make this situation clear:

*I will instruct you and show you the way to go;
with My eye on you, I will give counsel.
(Ps 32:8, emphasis added)*

And many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us about His ways
so that we may walk in His paths."
For instruction will go out of Zion
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
(Isa 2:3, emphasis added; cp. Mic 4:2)

When we receive God's words, we ought to follow them. He shows us the way in which we should go and the path in which we should walk. When God speaks, we need to obey. This is God's simple but indispensable expectation when He teaches.

God's Primary Educational Goal

Faith should be our appropriate response to the knowledge of God we receive through the revelation (disclosure) He has made of Himself. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). When God teaches us through His revelation, He expects us to respond in faith, believe Him, and obey Him. We can know God and recognize Him as God when we trust Him completely.

God expects our complete obedience in love. He does not take the initiative to speak to us just to satisfy our curiosity but to change us according to His will. Thus, obedience is the purpose of God's revelation to us as Deut 29:29 says: "The hidden things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our children forever, so that we may follow all the words of this law" (emphasis added). Every time God speaks to us, we are wise to comply with His words. Every time we teach the Bible, our expectation is that our students will obey God's Word.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 summarizes God's educational goal for the Jewish people: "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart." This passage, known as the *Shema* from the Hebrew word for "hear," constitutes the "basic confession of faith in Judaism."⁶ All Jewish believers were to recognize the Lord as God and to love (obey) Him with all their being.

In the New Testament our Lord Jesus Christ also made the claim that the summary of God's written revelation is to love Him completely and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:37-40). As a matter of fact, loving Jesus above everyone else is a requirement to follow Him (Matt 10:37-39). We must love Christ preeminently in order to be His disciples.

We prove that we love God when we follow His commandments. The purpose of Christian teaching is our transformation. We need to "be transformed by the renewal of" our minds (Rom 12:1-2) in order to see life as God sees it. We transform our minds when we change our thinking according to God's revelation. Only when we adapt our thoughts to God's can we understand His will. The teaching of the Bible must affect every area of our lives.

The goal of Christian education is to present everyone perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1:28). Our final examination measures whether we are like Christ, behaving and living like Him. Therefore, we teach to change lives!⁷ The application of the Bible becomes, then, the key section for a lesson. God's standards should affect how I relate to my wife, students, and the people with whom I rub shoulders every day.

Examples of God as Teacher in the Scriptures

The Bible provides a record of God's different methods of teaching human beings. Our God is creative and has related with His people in diverse and varied ways. He chose a way to communicate His messages according to the context and situation of His people, the "learners." In the Bible we find the record of God's desire to com-

municate with humanity. The Holy Scriptures tell us the story of salvation: God's intent to restore us to Himself in the context of the history of revelation.⁸ The Old and New Testaments describe God's methods of unfolding this story. The Bible, then, is God's teaching book.

Old Testament

God created humanity so that He could enjoy a personal relationship with us. He created both men and women in His own image (Gen 1:27). Adam and Eve, the first human beings, had the benefit of listening to the Creator's voice and hearing His instruction (Gen 2:16). However, they sinned against God, and that relationship was affected profoundly (Gen 3). The connection between God and humanity was broken because of sin (Rom 5:12). Therefore, the main plot of the Bible is the story of redemption.

The Lord established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. God chose Abraham, and through him He planned His redemptive plan of salvation (Gen 12:1-3; Gal 3:8). He taught the first Hebrew patriarchs in different ways: dreams, theophanies, angels, miracles, and His audible voice. Jacob, Abraham's grandson, became Israel, the father of 12 sons who would form the Jewish people (Gen 35:9-12).

After they spent over 400 years in Egypt, with freedom at the beginning as residents but later as slaves, God called Moses to liberate His people. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Moses was able to receive God's instruction as if they had a face-to-face conversation. The mighty hand of God performed many miracles to teach about His power and existence. The plagues against Egypt ended with the death of every Egyptian firstborn. God culminated His victory by opening and closing the Red Sea to deliver Israel and to slay his oppressors. Everyone learned about God's power and majesty.

The Lord established a covenant with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt (Exod 19:5-6). God promised them that He would be their God and they would be His people if they obeyed His commandments (Jer 11:4). The Lord wanted to be at the center of their lives. From that moment "every

⁶ E. D. Radmacher, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 243.

⁷ H. Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1987).

⁸ J. I. Packer, "God Has Spoken," in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister McGrath, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 167.

aspect of Hebrew culture by design aided in the process of forming the belief of the faith community.⁹ Every social activity had the intention of placing God as the focal point. God established feasts and festivals for the Hebrew community as opportunities for instruction about His intervention in their daily lives. Through these activities every person learned about their history and God's generosity.¹⁰ We can learn that "teaching" happens at different times and circumstances, not only inside of a classroom.

The Hebrew community celebrated three main national festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Passover commemorated the deliverance from slavery and oppression in Egypt. Also known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread, this holy convocation was held on the fourteenth of the first month (Nisan). During seven days every person in the community had to eat unleavened bread (Lev 23:6). God was teaching them to remember His holiness, the seriousness of sin, and its consequences. It was also an opportunity to remember God's provision to cleanse His people's sins and offer them salvation.

The Festival of Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after the Passover (Lev 23:26). This special day commemorated the giving of the law. Also known as the Festival of Weeks, this holy celebration took place at the end of the wheat harvest on the sixth day of the month of Sivan. Every person was reminded that the Lord is the One who provides. Therefore, they gave Him back from their firstfruits as God blessed them (Deut 16:10). God taught them, as an agricultural society, to keep in mind His goodness through the fruits of their labors. Even though they worked hard, the Lord made their harvest possible.

The Festival of Tabernacles, also known as the Festival of Booths, commemorated the journey of the people of Israel in the wilderness. This special feast lasted seven days; the people dwelt in booths to remember their wanderings as the Hebrew people left Egypt (Neh 8:14). The people of Israel gathered at the end of the fruit harvest to focus on the Lord's deliverance and to recommit their total dependence on Him. God was teaching them that disobedience to His will brings affliction and purposeless living.

⁹ J. R. Estep Jr., ed., *C.E.: The Heritage of Christian Education* (Opolin: College Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁰ W. Barclay, *Educational Ideas in the Ancient World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

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God commanded the people of Israel to celebrate other special days. The Sabbath was observed as a holy day (Lev 23:3). Every week the Hebrews devoted a whole day to the Lord. They were commanded to rest because God rested after He created the world. Later on, a main purpose of the synagogue Sabbath services was religious instruction.¹¹ The people of Israel focused on God and His teachings. The Day of Atonement was a holy convocation for the people to afflict their souls and offer sacrifices for the sins of the nation (Lev 23:27). They remembered that their God was a holy God and that sin goes against His nature. Every occasion was a teachable situation, as Siew points out:

Through a system of elaborate celebrations, the people remembered their humble beginnings (Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread), celebrated God's sustained grace (Feast of Weeks, Feast of Ingathering), received cleansing (Day of Atonement), and regularly consecrated themselves to holy service (Sabbath, New Moon).¹²

Old Testament laws and regulations told the Hebrew people how to relate correctly to the holy and majestic Creator. Acts of obedience were the appropriate reaction to God's teaching.

The Hebrew sacrificial system was also a response to the holiness of the Lord. Priests interceded before God by offering sacrifices on behalf of the people and themselves.¹³ Priests were also educators: First, they provided religious instruction to younger priests. Second, they instructed people regarding offerings, festivals, and all special days in the Hebrew calendar.¹⁴ We learn that God also uses people to teach His truths to others.

God was supposed to be central in everyday life activities. Everything in the culture was intended to point people toward God. The Hebrew mind-set emphasized a holistic approach to see life under the Lord's authority with the main goal of pleasing Him in every

¹¹ Barclay, 24.

¹² Yan-Man Siew, "Hebrew Education through Feasts and Festivals," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 325.

¹³ J. L. González, "Priesthood," in *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

¹⁴ M. J. Anthony and W. S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003).

area and with every decision.¹⁵ God did not want them to compartmentalize their religious duties from the rest of their lives. God's teaching ought to relate to everything we are and do. This reality permeates the Old Testament story as Reed and Prevost point out:

The history of the Jews is a record of their relationship with God as expressed in covenant. Their educational system arose as an instrument to pass on that relationship to subsequent generations. It also was an act of obedience to God's commands within the covenant. The Jews believed that, as God has chosen them, God was concerned with the means by which they should educate and be educated.¹⁶

New Testament

The New Testament focuses on Jesus Christ, how He completes the plan of salvation and the reestablishment of God's dominion over His creation.¹⁷ Jesus brings fulfillment to Old Testament prophecies of salvation and restoration. He is the main object of God's revelation, as Heb 1:1-2 affirms: "Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by [His] Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe." God uses different methods to teach humanity, but His supreme revelation is through His Son. In Jesus human beings can see and comprehend God (John 14:9). Chapter 4 further explores the role of Jesus as Teacher.

God also teaches through His Spirit (John 14:26). Chapter 5 develops the Spirit's role. God uses believers to instruct one another (Rom 15:14). The Lord accomplishes His purposes through His Word (John 17:17). God communicated in the New Testament through different instructional methods like miracles, the apostles, and the church. The Lord is not limited to only one way of teaching.

We can conclude that God is the model of creativity in teaching. He reveals Himself in different and varied ways. He teaches people according to their circumstances. He is not limited to a single

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teaching technique but uses diverse methods throughout history. Therefore, we should follow His example when we teach His Word. Creativity becomes necessary in Christian education because God is creative.

I still remember a Sunday school class when I was a teenager because of the teacher's creativity in presenting God's message. As I was approaching the classroom, I noticed something unusual. The setting was like a funeral service. At the center of the classroom was a black coffin. Everything was dark, and the smell of coffee was filling the air. The teacher told us that someone had died and that we were to mourn the death of that person. He taught about death and our destiny after we die. At the end of the lesson, he asked us to decide whether the dead person in the coffin would spend eternity with God. He told us to look at the face of the dead person, one by one, and then guess his destiny. As I reluctantly looked inside the coffin, I realized it had a mirror. As I saw my face there, I thought about the imminence of death and the importance of making a decision for Christ while we are still alive. That teacher was creative and wanted to present God's message in different ways so his students could learn.

Our Lord provides the greatest example of diverse teaching methods. Michael Lawson summarizes the diverse methodology of the Creator:

1. He spoke directly and audibly from heaven.
2. He wrote on tablets of stone.
3. He became flesh.
4. He revealed Himself in supernatural beings.
5. He gave vivid dreams and visions.
6. He wrote on the walls of a palace.
7. He made an animal talk.
8. He voiced truth through human prophets.
9. He composed poetry.
10. He provided visual reminders of promises.¹⁸

¹⁵ W. R. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville: B&H, 1996).

¹⁶ J. E. Reed and R. Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 45.

¹⁷ D. L. Bock, "Introduction," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. R. B. Zuck and D. L. Bock (Chicago: Moody, 1994).

¹⁸ M. S. Lawson, "Biblical Foundations for a Philosophy of Teaching," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching: A Comprehensive Resource on the Distinctiveness of True Christian Teaching*, ed. K. O. Gangel and H. G. Hendricks (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 62.

Conclusion

Christian teaching exists because God is a teacher. Pazmiño in his excellent work, *God as Teacher*, concludes, "God as the creator is the educator from whom all content of education issues."¹⁹ The Lord's desire to communicate with His creation establishes the foundation of Christian education. God's self-revelation is the source of teaching. Therefore, the content of our teaching must be God's written revelation (the Bible).

We teach to change lives. Our goal is to see life as God does. We need to renew our understanding, to adjust our thoughts and actions so we can understand God's will (Rom 12:2). God's expectation is the same every time He teaches: complete obedience. Therefore, we must expect obedience to God's Word when we teach. Application, then, becomes central in Christian education. The goal is transformation not merely information. The purpose of our teaching must be communicating God's truth in ways that "create genuine understanding and the desire to change in accordance with God's self-revelation."²⁰ To follow God's example, we also need to be creative when we teach.

God helps us see the big picture of life and ministry. In Him we find meaning and purpose for everything we do. All aspects of the teaching ministry of the church center on God. Our theology affects our existence and service to the Lord. He desires to communicate with us and reign over us, as John Calvin concluded:

For how can the idea of God enter your mind without instantly giving rise to the thought, that since you are his workmanship, you are bound, by the very law of creation, to submit to his authority?—that your life is due to him?—that whatever you do ought to have reference to him? If so, it undoubtedly follows that your life is sadly corrupted, if it is not framed in obedience to him, since his will ought to be the law of our lives. On the other hand, your idea of his

nature is not clear unless you acknowledge him to be the origin and fountain of all goodness.²¹

Discussion Questions

1. Explain the relationship between theology and Christian education.
2. How does God's revelation affect the content of Christian teaching?
3. What methods does God use to teach today in comparison with the methods He used in both the Old and New Testaments?
4. Explain God's educational goal with the Shema.
5. Why is creativity important for a Christian teacher?

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- ¹⁹ R. W. Pazmiño, *God as Teacher: Theological Basis in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 33.
- ²⁰ M. Young, "Biblical Foundations for a Philosophy of Teaching," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. M. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 80.
- ²¹ J. Calvin and H. Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae religionis*. Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–1846. (1, ii, 2) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997).

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Chapter 4

JESUS, THE MASTER TEACHER

Rick Yount

So as He stepped ashore, He saw a huge
crowd and had compassion on them,
because they were like sheep without a shepherd.
Then He began to teach them many things.

[Mark 6:34]

When Jesus had finished this sermon, the
crowds were astonished at His teaching,
because He was teaching them like one who
had authority, and not like their scribes.

[Matt 7:28-29]

God revealed Himself as Teacher. Jesus clearly connected Himself to the Father when He stated, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). It is no surprise then that Jesus, though He preached the good news and met many physical needs, was known best as *Rabboni*, Master, Teacher.

Further, Jesus connected Himself to the Father specifically as Teacher: "For I have not spoken on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a command as to what I should say and what I should speak. I know that His command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me" (John 12:49-50). And again, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who lives in Me does His works" (John 14:10). When the Pharisee Nicodemus met with Jesus at night, he acknowledged, "We know that You have come from God as a teacher" (John

3:2). Jesus came teaching what He had learned from His Father. And what was the result? Sherwood Eddy, in his classic *Maker of Men*, writes:

He was allowed less than three years in which to do His work; little more than a year in His public ministry, and a year in retirement training His pathetic remnant. He was cut off in His young manhood, a little past the age of thirty. Socrates taught for forty years, Plato for fifty. Aristotle had lived long and filled libraries with his learning. Buddha and Confucius had fulfilled their three score and ten.

[Jesus] was among a crushed people, under an oppressive legalism, zealously opposed and hated by scribes and Pharisees, betrayed by Jews and crucified by Gentiles. He left no book, no tract, or written page behind Him. He bequeathed no system, no philosophy, no theology, no legislation. He raised no armies, held no office, sought no influence, turned His back forever on might, magic, and cheap miracle.

Yet He transformed the bigoted Jew and universalized his religion; He showed the philosophizing Greek the highest truth; He won the proud Roman to plant the cross on his standard instead of the eagle; He stretched out His hand to the great continents and transformed them—to Asia, to savage Europe, to darkest Africa, to America.¹

Since Christian teachers desire a Christ-centered teaching ministry, it is natural to focus attention on Jesus as Master Teacher, the Example, the Model. God the Teacher in flesh. What kind of students did He have? What characteristics did He display? What methods did He use? What principles did He espouse?

In exploring these questions, we risk the danger of trampling the beauty of what we analyze. A botanist, for example, may carefully dissect a delicate flower and yet destroy it in the process, reducing it to wilted bits. We analyze Jesus in His role as Teacher with an intentional sense of awe and reverence. We honor Him as Lord even as we study Him and imitate Him as the Model of how we should teach.

¹ S. Eddy, *Maker of Men* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1941).

The Students of Jesus

A friend of mine, a fellow minister of education, invited me to join him for a cup of coffee at a local cafe. He was as depressed as any minister I'd ever known. As he poured out his heart, he returned again and again to the same lament: "If only I had a few committed people to work with!" and "If only we had some church members with the leadership skills to direct our programs!" Seminary had taught him about programs for children and youth and adults; singles and seniors; outreach and in-reach; organization and enlistment; church councils, weekly workers' meetings, and appreciation banquets. Where do we find the people to make these programs come to life? Where do lay leaders come from? Seminary had exposed him to a wide variety of *Christian ministry ideals*. He found himself in the *ordal of local church ministry*, and he was sinking fast.

His experience is not unique. I suppose every minister has had feelings like these from time to time. But we are not called to some abstract, academic ideal. We are called "for the training of the saints in the work of ministry," or, as *The Message* has it, "to train Christians in skilled servant work" (Eph 4:12). We take the saints as they are, and disciple them—helping them grow to become all God intended them to be. That is our calling. And that is exactly what Jesus did with His disciples.²

We tend to think of the disciples—especially Peter, James, and John—as great men of faith. This they became. But they were not "great men of faith" when Jesus chose them. Though they were chosen carefully and prayerfully (Mark 6:12-16), they were very human. Let's look at some of the basic characteristics of the 12 men Jesus chose as His closest students.

The Disciples Were Imperfect

Scripture provides us ample evidence that the Twelve were rough in character and demeanor. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were so short-tempered that they were nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). On one occasion when a Samaritan town did not welcome Jesus appropriately, James and John suggested He call

² See chapter 22, "Ministering alongside Volunteers," for practical help in this essential ministry.

fire down from heaven to destroy it. Jesus rebuked them for their outburst and went on to another village (Luke 9:54-55).

Simon was impetuous and unstable. Though Jesus gave him the name Peter (*Petros*, "rock," Matt 16:18), Peter gave little evidence of stability. Jesus told the disciples about His impending death in Jerusalem, but Peter protested. When the guards came for Jesus in Gethsemane, Peter drew a sword and cut off Malchus's ear (John 18:10). Though Peter had bragged that he would die for Jesus (John 13:37), he later denied being a disciple to a servant girl, to one of the men standing by the courtyard fire, and to one of the high priests' relatives (John 18:17, 25-27). Peter was impetuous and unstable, even after three years of living with the Master.

Thomas was a realist. He had been absent the first time Jesus had appeared to the disciples (John 20:24). "So the other disciples kept telling him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'If I don't see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe!'" (John 20:25). Where had Thomas been the last three years? He had witnessed many miracles at the hands of Jesus. He had lived and worked with these men. Why was he so stubborn?

And yet he was honest. When the facts presented themselves, he did not hesitate to act on them. A week later Jesus stood among them and invited Thomas to inspect His wounds. Thomas's reaction was immediate and absolute: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Then the political power brokers, Judas Iscariot and Simon the zealot, saw in Jesus a potential Jewish King who might overthrow Roman oppression. Further, Judas was a thief, pilfering money from the common purse, which he was responsible to keep (John 12:4-6). The disciples were far from perfect.

The Disciples Were Slow to Learn

Jesus chose the Twelve during His first year of ministry.³ For nearly three years they lived with Him, following Him and observing many miracles. But they were so slow to learn. He talked to them

of His impending death and resurrection (Matt 16:29), and yet they were shocked when He actually died and they were surprised by His resurrection (Luke 24:6-11). Even when He appeared to them after His resurrection, some of them doubted (Matt 28:17)! They were slow to learn.

The Disciples Were Self-centered

As Jesus and the Twelve made their last journey to Jerusalem, the cross dominated Jesus' thoughts. Peter, however, could only think of the sacrifices *they* had made. "Look, we have left everything and followed You. So what will there be for us?" (Matt 19:27).

At another time Jesus and the disciples were making their way across the Sea of Galilee. A violent storm arose and nearly swamped the boat. What was their reaction? "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?" (Mark 4:38). Jesus clearly revealed their self-centeredness: "Why are you fearful? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). He had told them they were going over to the other side (Mark 4:35)—drowning in a storm had not been part of His plan.

Still another example of their self-centeredness is revealed at the arrest of Jesus. We've already noted Peter's false bravado: "I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37). And again, "Even if everyone runs away because of You, I will never run away!" (Matt 26:33). Then Jesus told Peter he would disown Him three times before morning (v. 34). "Even if I have to die with You . . . I will never deny You!" And all the disciples said the same thing" (v. 35). But when Jesus was arrested, "all the disciples deserted Him and ran away" (v. 56), and Peter succeeded in protecting himself through the night by denying Jesus three times (vv. 69-75).

The Disciples Were Uneducated and Unprofessional

The center of higher learning in Jesus' day was Jerusalem, and many of the inhabitants of Judea were well educated in the Law. Galilee was a different matter. Galilee provided rich soil for farming, an abundance of hard workers for a vast array of trades and businesses, and a bountiful lake for fishing. Its beauty may have led some to meditation and prayer, but it certainly did not evoke the dark fanaticism of the religious in Jerusalem. So, while Galilee was home to "generous spirits, warm hearts, simple manners, and earnest

³ A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 4th ed. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Sons, 1894; reprint, New Canaan, Conn. Keats Publishing, 1979), 12. See also A. Eidersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 348.

piety," it was looked down on by the rabbinic leaders in the south.⁴ Eidersheim reports the following common saying: "If a person wishes to be rich, let him go north; if he wants to be wise, let him come south."⁵

Jesus began and built His ministry in Galilee (Luke 23:5) and chose men of the north to be His disciples. They were not educated men, but they hungered for real righteousness, being sick of the righteousness then in fashion. They demonstrated basic elements of faith and devotion. They displayed a willingness to grow and to learn. Jesus saw great potential in these men.⁶ That's why He could call unstable Simon "Petros," because He saw the "rock" that Simon would ultimately become.

The Disciples Were Apprentices, Not Mere Learners

The differences between north and south can also be seen in two words used for "learner." Coleman makes the distinction between *mathetas* (practical apprentice) and *talmid* (academic scholar).⁷ A. B. Bruce underscores the idea of *mathetas* when He writes that Jesus "desired not only to have disciples, but to have about Him men whom He might train to make disciples of others" (emphasis mine). And again, "The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher's influence on the world should be permanent; that His kingdom should be founded on the rock of deep and indelible convictions in the minds of a few, not on the shifting sands of superficial evanescent impressions on the minds of the many."⁸

The disciples were not trained, but they were *trainable*. They had not been taught, but they were *teachable*. Nothing more in learners should a teacher desire, and nothing more does a teacher need!

The disciples were rough-hewn, imperfect, self-centered, and untrained when Jesus prayerfully chose them. That is, they were normal people with all the problems and potential of people today. Yet from among these Twelve came leaders who turned the entire known world upside down for the Lord.

⁴ Eidersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 224-25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶ Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 5-8.

⁷ L. Coleman, *Why the Church Must Teach* (Nashville: Broadman, 1984), 23.

⁸ Bruce, 13.

How can we teach so that our learners become *mathetas* and, in time, leaders and teachers of others? What can we glean from Jesus' words and actions that will help us develop our skills in the teaching ministry of the church? It is to the Teacher that we now humbly and carefully turn our attention.

The Characteristics of Jesus as Teacher

In both the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, "Who we are in the Lord" comes before "What we do for the Lord." Our best teaching flows out of our hearts—who we are—not merely from mouths or methodologies. So before we look at the methods of Jesus, we need to learn something of the person of Jesus.

Jesus Was What He Taught

Years ago I explained how "Jesus was the Model of what He taught," but what some students understood by that missed my intention. Jesus did not "model His teaching" like some runway queen parading the latest fad. His lifestyle was no put-on, conceived to reinforce His words. Jesus simply lived what He taught. What He taught flowed out of who He was.

One day, after Jesus finished praying, an observant disciple asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-2). Educators call this a "teachable moment." Creating a climate of teachable moments, particularly in a formal class setting, is difficult. Jesus wasted no time responding to the request of the disciple.

Teaching naturally flowed from Jesus' life. His words and actions reinforced each other with an authority that amazed His hearers.

"What we are" speaks more loudly than "what we say." Faith learning is more "caught from" than "taught by" a teacher. Some 30 years after Jesus had ascended to heaven, Peter wrote to pastors, "Shepherd God's flock among you . . . not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being *examples* to the flock"⁹ (1 Pet 5:2-3, emphasis mine). Jesus

⁹ Consider this command of Peter, the *pastor's* pastor, learned from the Master, when you consider the meaning of "pastoral authority." I had the privilege of preaching in a Kyrgyz Baptist church in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in June 2007. The pastor translated my Russian into Kyrgyz. After the meeting I said to him, "You have a fine church here." He responded by pointing heavenward and saying, "It is His church. I am only His servant." He understood Jesus' meaning ("It shall not be so among you!") and Peter's admonition against "lording over."

was the Example to Peter, to the Twelve, and to all who would follow Him. If we wish to pattern our teaching after Jesus, we will strive to be living examples of what we teach.

Jesus Was Comfortable with People of All Kinds

Effective teachers, that is, "lifechangers," establish rapport with learners. Rapport building is a social skill that requires some degree of sensitivity to those we teach. The Scriptures reflect Jesus' amazing ability to be at home with a wide range of people—whether they were poor or wealthy, Jew, Gentile, or Roman; male or female. Let's look at just a few examples.

- Jesus spoke confidently with Nicodemus, a devout Jewish leader. He showed no anxiety as He taught the "up-and-out" member of the ruling Sanhedrin (John 3).
- He invited Himself to dinner at the home of the "down-and-out" tax collector Zacchaeus. He demonstrated no discomfort being in the company of wealth (Luke 19). He chose another tax collector, Matthew, as one of His disciples (Matt 9:9-12). He conversed openly with an "out-and-out" Samaritan woman who had come to draw water from a well. He broke with the social customs of His day: a respectable man did not talk with women in public, nor a respectable Jew to Samaritan "half-breeds." But Jesus drew this Samaritan woman to faith in Himself. And through her He reached into her village (John 4:28-30).
- Jesus healed the demon-possessed daughter of a heathen woman after He taught her who He was (Matt 15:22-28).¹⁰

¹⁰ The Canaanite woman entreats Jesus, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus' behavior appears rude: "Jesus did not answer a word" (Matt 15:23). When she continued, "Lord, help me!" (v. 25). His language sounds strangely harsh: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (Matt 15:26). Edersheim explains that the woman's approach to Jesus was "not as the Messiah of Israel but an Israelish Messiah—this was exactly the error of the Jews which Jesus had encountered and combated, alike when He resisted the attempt to make Him King, in His reply to the Jerusalem Scribes, and in His Discourses at Capernaum. To have granted her the help she so entreated, would have been, as it were, to reverse the whole of His teaching, and to make His works of healing merely works of power. . . . And so He first taught her, in such manner as she could understand—that which she needed to know, before she could approach Him in such a manner—the relation of the heathen to the Jewish world [dogs, children] and of both to the Messiah, and

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- The disciples rebuked parents for bringing their little children to Jesus, but Jesus welcomed them: "Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this" (Matt 19:14).

Besides these instances Jesus surrounded Himself with people of all kinds. He healed all sorts of diseases in crowds and drove out demons from the possessed (Mark 1:34). He healed the deaf (Mark 7:32 ff) and the blind (John 9:1 ff), the lame (Matt 21:14) and the leprous (Matt 8:3). During His arrest He healed the ear of Malchus, one of the high priest's servants (Luke 22:51; John 18:10).

We naturally tend to stay with "our own kind." Discomfort mounts as we deal with people much richer or poorer than ourselves. It isn't easy to deal with people of a different race, language, or age bracket. To do so requires an extra degree of energy and commitment. But teachers who build bridges to all people are the most effective.

Jesus Was Compassionate Toward His Learners

Jesus protected the disciples from harm (John 17:12). He gave the disciples instructions before He sent them out (Matt 10). Whether He used a strong rebuke (Matt 16:23; Luke 24:25) or a gentle explanation (Matt 16:21; Luke 24:27), His focus was on the disciples' welfare: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

Jesus cared more for learners than lessons. One day Jesus was teaching about fasting (Matt 9:14-17). Jairus, ruler of the local synagogue, appeared and asked Him to attend to his sick daughter. Which was more important to Jesus, finishing His lesson on fasting, or helping Jairus and his daughter? "Jesus and His disciples got up and followed him" (v. 19). In all these ways Jesus demonstrated His compassion for learners.

We will be more effective as teachers when we care for the people we teach: accepting them, visiting them, gently directing them, looking out for their welfare. Effective disciplers can honestly say to their

then He gave her what she asked" (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 39).

learners, "You are not here for me; I am here for you." Such a view comes from a heart of compassion.

Jesus Had a Strong Self-concept

Our society has gone overboard with the idea of self-esteem and positive self-concept. Fifteen years ago *Newsweek* reported that American high school students were significantly more *confident* (subjective perception) in their math and science skills than were their Japanese counterparts. The only problem was that Japanese high school students were significantly more *competent* (objective achievement) in math and science than American students.¹¹ Things have only gotten worse as we have worshipped "feel good" at the expense of "think well" and "do well." The result, which many of us have predicted for 30 years, has been more self-esteem problems than ever. Jesus provided the proper perspective of self-concept, as well as the appropriate self-esteem that results from it. He demonstrated a healthy self-concept in five ways.

1. **Jesus was a man on a mission.** Jesus did what He did because He was sent by the Father (John 5:23)—given a mission—and this gave Him focus. His work was what the Father had given Him to do (John 5:19–36), a visible expression of the Father working through Him (John 14:10). Jesus' self-concept was based on a "Father first" perspective rather than the "me first" philosophy of our day. He sought His Father's will and did it, not turning to the left or right. He was a man on a mission, and knowing this generated focus to teach with authority.

Each of us has a personal yoke, *His* yoke, which is our mission to perform. When we find and accept that mission, we find rest and refreshment in the Lord and learn from Him (Matt 11:28–30). In short, we find our selfhood as God created us to be. This discovery of "self" is far better than trying to make something of ourselves for the Lord! Find the Lord's place for you and give yourself—first to Him and then to it.

2. **Jesus was a man of dynamic humility.** Nowhere in the Gospels do we find Jesus demanding worship from the disciples. Jesus did not fret when He experienced a lack of recognition, nor did He

¹¹ J. Adler, et al., "Hey, I'm Terrific: The Curse of Self-Esteem," *Newsweek* (17 February 1992): 46–51.

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grumble when those He healed weren't more grateful or when the religious leaders didn't give Him the respect He deserved. Though He did not demand worship, He did, on at least one occasion, acknowledge it when given. But look how He used it:

"You call Me Teacher and Lord. This is well said, for I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done for you. I assure you: A slave is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." (John 13:13–17)

Jesus came as the humble "Suffering Servant" (Isa 53; Matt 16:21). Yet His humility was not passive. He never played the victim, apologetically kicking the dirt because people—His own people—rejected Him. His was a dynamic humility, an energetic submission. Even when He stood before Pilate, the one man who, humanly speaking, could rescue Him from the cross, we see our Lord submissive and powerful: "You would have no authority over Me at all . . . if it hadn't been given you from above" (John 19:11). Jesus did not put Himself down, except to exalt the Father (Luke 18:19). He never belittled His ministry. He never grinned with embarrassment when people praised Him. He displayed the dignity of authority.

While He never demanded worship, neither did He reject worship when it was given. When the rich young ruler fell on his knees before Him, Jesus gave no sign of discomfort. He simply dealt with the man's desire (eternal life) and his need (to be rid of his life-choking wealth). Sadly, he chose to reject Jesus' solution (Mark 10:17–22). When Thomas saw Jesus after the resurrection and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus gave no indication that Thomas's adoration was out of line (John 20:28–29). Jesus' dynamic humility was a vigorous meekness, a vital submissiveness, an aggressive lowliness.

We are in trouble if we expect others to praise us for our good work. Sooner or later we will be disillusioned. The best course is to do good and let go all thought of it: "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matt 6:3). We are in trouble if we cannot accept another's praise without embarrassment. This usually

indicates some level of self-consciousness. The best course is to accept compliments graciously, without dwelling on them. Such dynamic humility frees us from social traps of disillusionment and self-consciousness.

3. Jesus' calmness under attack. Jesus' self-concept is shown by calmness when attacked. He healed two demon-possessed men¹² by casting the demons into a nearby herd of pigs. Those tending the pigs ran into town and told what had happened. The whole town went out to confront Jesus over their loss "because they were gripped by great fear" (Luke 8:37). They feared Jesus' power and were angry over their loss. There is no more volatile mix of human emotions than fear and anger. They begged Jesus to leave (Matt 8:34). How did Jesus react? Apparently without a word of defense or explanation He "got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own town" (Matt 9:1).

How many of us would attempt to defend ourselves and our actions? How many of us would want to explain to the villagers what had happened—the very Son of God had just now restored two men to their right minds by casting out a legion of demons? How many would beg them to understand that what had been done was for the best? Jesus simply left quietly.

4. Jesus' patience with His disciples. As we have seen, the disciples had many weaknesses, yet Jesus never gave up on them. "I guarded them and not one of them is lost, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled" (John 17:12).

He demonstrated patience when the disciples lacked faith during the storm: "Why are you fearful? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). He demonstrated patience when they were unable to heal the demon-possessed boy. Why? "Because of your little faith" (Matt 17:20). He demonstrated patience when they fell asleep in the garden: "So, couldn't you stay awake with Me one hour?" (Matt 26:40). He never gave up on His disciples because they were a part of His mission: "I pray for . . . those You have given Me, because they are Yours" (John 17:9).

¹² Mark and Luke record that Jesus healed one demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26). Edersheim explains this by saying, "From these tombs the demonized, who is specially singled out by Mark and Luke, as well as his less prominent companion, came forth to meet Jesus" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 607). See Matt 8:28.

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Insecure teachers easily lose patience with students because they see a negative reflection on their own teaching ability when students fail. Secure teachers patiently try again, until their learners master the subject.

5. Jesus' self-concept was tied to identification with the Father through prayer. We emphasized at the beginning of the chapter the dependence of Jesus on the Father for His work and teaching. The ongoing connection between Them was prayer. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place. And He was praying there" (Mark 1:35). On another occasion we are told specifically that Jesus "spent all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). Luke tells us that Jesus *often* prayed in lonely places (Luke 5:16). Jesus reinforced the importance of prayer through the parable of the persistent widow: "to pray always and not become discouraged" (Luke 18:1). Further, Jesus underscored the importance of *asking the Father*, who "gives good things" (Matt 7:11), does what we ask in Jesus' name (Matt 18:19; John 15:16; 16:23), and gives the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13).

Prayer—the personal connection with the heavenly Father—was an essential part of Jesus' self-concept. And if Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity (Matt 28:19), in whom the "entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily" (Col 2:9), needed time alone in prayer, how much more do we?

Prayer is the connection. The Word is the means. The Spirit is the power. Jesus is our Lord and Example. All combine to remake us after His image.

A healthy self-concept, a godly sense of self-esteem, is important: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Matt 19:19). For Christians, knowing to whom we belong is an essential part of learning who we are. And knowing who we are in the Lord gives us the confidence we need to teach others. As we make this holy journey, we will find that our self-concept takes care of itself, because Jesus came so we "may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10).

Jesus Knew His Learners

One of the reasons Jesus' teaching was so special is that it focused on the real-life needs of those whom He taught. Jesus knew His

learners, and He used that knowledge to focus His teaching for maximum effectiveness in each situation. Jesus understood the balance of Scripture and learner needs.¹³

Jesus' knowledge was both divine and human. Being divine, He could read the hearts and minds of the people around Him. When the Pharisees claimed Jesus' miracles were done by Beelzebub, the prince of demons,¹⁴ Matthew tells us Jesus knew their thoughts (Matt 12:24-25). When many people believed in Jesus because of the miracles, John writes, "He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). Later, when many of His followers began to desert Him, John tells us, "Jesus knew from the beginning those who would not believe and the one who would betray Him" (John 6:64).

Mark gives us the clearest picture of Jesus' ability to discern the thoughts of others. Men, wanting to get their paralytic friend to Jesus, lowered him through the roof of a crowded house. "Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2:5). Some of the scribes were thinking to themselves: "Why does He speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus knew what they were thinking, and He said to them, "Why are you reasoning these things in your hearts?" (Mark 2:5-8).

Even though Jesus had supernatural power to read hearts and minds, He also depended on His human knowledge of people. Much of what He knew about people He learned through observation, conversation, or by asking questions. To Peter: "What do you think, Simon?" (Matt 17:25). To the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?" (Matt 22:42). To Pilate: "Are you asking this on your own, or have others told you about Me?" (John 18:34).

Whether Jesus used divine or human knowledge, He used that knowledge *in order to teach*. He knew the Samaritan woman's need for water and, on a deeper level, a satisfying marriage and, deeper still, salvation. So He used water and husbands to teach her about

¹³ Jesus' dual focus on teaching eternal truth to learner need is the source for the foundations stones of the Disciples' Model.

¹⁴ Edersheim renders the name "Beelzebub" rather than "Beelzebub," which is a reference to Baalzebub, the "ty-god of 2 Kings 1:2." He retranslates "Beel" (master) and "zibub" (sacrificing to idols), so "Beelzebub" means the "lord or chief of idolatrous sacrificing," vol. 1, 646.

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Himself Jesus understood the heathen woman's ignorance of the true Messiah, and so He taught her about Himself with children and dogs and then granted her request. Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel (John 3:10). Yet he did not understand the spiritual meaning of what he taught until Jesus instructed him. Jesus knew His learners and used that knowledge to focus His teaching.

Disciplers study general characteristics of those they teach.¹⁵ They learn specifics of the learners in their classes through conversation, sharing, questions, and prayer requests. What we learn, we use to focus teaching preparation and execution to connect with our learners as they are.

Jesus Was a Master of the Old Testament

While the scribes and Pharisees embellished the Old Testament with their own corollaries and exceptions, Jesus displayed a fluent mastery of Scripture. For example, the Pharisees hated Jesus because He healed people on the Sabbath (Matt 12:9-14). They justified their indignation by reckoning Jesus' healing as "work," forbidden on the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11). Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy and *interpreted the Law in light of the whole Old Testament*: "What man among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out? A man is worth far more than a sheep, so it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt 12:11-12).

The Pharisees considered principles more important than people and derived their power from holding principles over people. Jesus explained it this way: "[The Pharisees] tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matt 23:4).

Jesus saw people as more important than arbitrary principles. Religious leaders twisted the Old Testament to fit their own purposes of power and control. The "Sabbath rule" was one example of this. They would rather an invalid remain unhealed than accept Jesus' violation of *their interpretation* of Sabbath rest. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people,

¹⁵ A simple search for "Teaching Preschoolers" at www.amazon.com on October 2, 2007 revealed 48 books on preschooler characteristics and activities. Denominational publishers produce books on age groups (preschool, children, youth, adult) and target groups (singles, young marrieds, senior adults).

"There are six days when work should be done; therefore come on those days and be healed and not on the Sabbath day."

The Lord answered him, "Hypocrites! Doesn't each one of you unite his ox or donkey from the feeding trough on the Sabbath and lead it to water? Satan has bound this woman, a daughter of Abraham, for 18 years—shouldn't she be united from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"

When He said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things He was doing. (Luke 13:14-17)

Which was primary in the Old Testament, principles or people, rules or relationship? Jesus spoke plainly when He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Even the Old Testament accuses the Pharisees:

Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
or with ten thousand streams of oil?

Should I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the child of my body for my own sin?

He has told you men what is good
and what it is the Lord requires of you:

Only to act justly,

to love faithfulness,

and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic 6:7-8)

When the Pharisees threw the adulterous woman at Jesus' feet, their intent was to uphold the law and trap Jesus (John 8:5-6). The law was clear: there was no shade of gray: "must be put to death" (Lev 20:10). They cared nothing for the woman. Their intent was to destroy this One who questioned their authority and power. Principle and power, not people.

In contrast to the Pharisees, Jesus cared for the woman and led her away from her sin. He displayed the loving-kindness of Yahweh, God of Israel. His challenge, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7), refocused their attention on their own need of salvation from sin. The oldest, and evidently the wisest, were the first to understand Jesus' meaning. They dropped their stones and left, followed by the younger men,

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who may have been more passionate and less ready to miss a "God-honoring" killing.

Jesus acted as He did because He was Master of the heart of the Old Testament. In a fanatically religious nation, religion was the means to power. The scribes and Pharisees were trapped, as it were, by their own egotistical need for power. The Word of God was merely another tool to be used to maintain control.

Jesus rejected this hypocrisy, knowing that the Old Testament was God's Word, the revelation of His Father. Jesus analyzed the teachings of the Law and the Prophets and synthesized the central thrust of the Father's perfect loving-kindness in two brief statements of relationship: "Love the Lord your God," and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-40). These were not new teachings. Jesus was quoting the Old Testament, specifically Deut 6:5 ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength") and Lev 19:18 ("Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord"; emphasis added). But He went beyond knowledge of the Scripture and mere understanding. He expanded the Old Testament in His "you have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you" teachings (Matt 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44).

Have you noticed the balance in Jesus' teaching? He was Master of the Scripture, and yet He focused that mastery on *teaching people* where they were. People were His focus. Scripture was His means. As He applied Old Testament Scripture to real problems in His students, He provided solutions uniquely suited to each one.

Disciples are stretched in the same way. On the one hand, we focus on scholarship: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). Commentaries, study aids, Bible dictionaries,¹⁶ and Bible handbooks provide windows into the text. Yet we focus all the fruit of our study at the point where learners live in the now, leading them as scholar-counselors away from chaos and into truth.

¹⁶ It is important to use a Bible dictionary rather than a general English dictionary to define Bible words. The English dictionary gives us the way words are commonly used in contemporary American speech. Bible dictionaries give us definitions and explanations of word usage in biblical times.

Jesus' Methods of Teaching

Now that we have an idea of who Jesus was, let us explore the way He taught. We do not focus here on typical teaching methods—lecture, question and answer, small-group discussion¹⁷—but rather on His primary emphases in teaching. We will look at 10 such areas.

Jesus Established Relationship with His Learners

Teaching from mouth to ear is very different from teaching heart to heart. If “getting the lesson across” is the main goal, there is little need for relationship between teacher and student. But if transforming students toward Christlikeness is the goal, a warm positive relationship is essential.

Jesus “appointed 12 . . . to be with Him” (Mark 3:14). Bruce indicates that their selection passed through three stages. In the first stage, the Twelve, as well as others, believed in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ,¹⁸ and occasionally accompanied Him at their convenience. The second stage involved leaving their secular occupations and traveling with Him. The third stage began when they were chosen by the Lord and formed into a select band to be trained for the great work of apostles.¹⁹ The apostles lived together and ate together. They witnessed the miracles of Jesus together. They suffered rejection together. All the while, Jesus loved them, taught them, protected them.

Like coals in a fire, their mutual support and service strengthened them. Pull a coal from the fire, and it soon cools down. Peter’s denials. Thomas’s doubt. Scattering at Jesus’ arrest. Despite obstacles, Jesus fanned the individual sparks of the Twelve into a family of fire, and within that context He taught them.

We build relationships with individuals, teacher to learner, and encourage relationships among learners as well. As we interact, we learn from one another and teach one another. One learner’s answer raised a question for another. A third learner’s question caused several others to think in different ways. A matrix of relationships generates multidirectional, multilayered teaching.

¹⁷ If you are interested in specific teaching methods, consult Yount, *Called to Teach* (Nashville: B&H, 1999).

¹⁸ “The Anointed One of Israel,” the Messiah (Hebrew, OT), the Christ (Greek, NT).

¹⁹ Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 11–12.

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Jesus Stimulated and Maintained Interest

Jesus stimulated interest with dramatic illustrations and exaggeration. His illustrations included an unmerciful servant (Matt 18:23–35), equal wages for unequal work (Matt 20:1–16), murdering tenants (Matt 21:33–43), undeserving wedding guests (Matt 22:1–14), unprepared virgins (Matt 25:1–13), wise and foolish investors (Matt 25:14–30), wise and foolish builders (Luke 6:46–49), a good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), a rich fool (Luke 12:16–21), a lost sheep, coin, and son (Luke 15:3–32), a shrewd manager (Luke 16:1–13), a rich man in hell (Luke 16:19–31), and the condemned Pharisee and forgiven tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). Such stories seized the hearts of Jesus’ listeners because they came directly out of their own frustrations and disappointments.

Jesus stimulated interest through exaggeration. If your hand or foot causes you to sin, “cut it off” (Mark 9:43, 45). If your eye causes you to sin, then “gouge it out” (Mark 9:47). The only way to be Jesus’ disciple is to “hate [your] own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even [your] own life.” Jesus made a dramatic point about priorities. If one puts family or self ahead of Him, he “cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). Sound too strong? Jesus merely personalized one of the Commandments: “Do not have other gods besides Me” (Exod 20:3). Illustrations and exaggerations helped to stimulate interest.

Jesus not only secured the interest of learners; He maintained it. He asked questions. He focused His teaching from the perspective of His students. He used parables with the masses but explained them when He was alone with His disciples (Mark 13:10–18; 5:33–34). Those who truly hungered for righteousness would follow, learn, and grow. Those who were merely curious would fall by the wayside.²⁰ We stimulate interest in Bible studies by means of “learning readiness” activities: raising questions, sharing a personal testimony, providing a demonstration. We maintain interest with stories, questions, and discussions of various types. See chapter 13, “Planning to Teach,” for specific examples.

²⁰ And Jesus let them go. So why do we pursue disinterested lost people with such abandon? Are we more serious about evangelism than Jesus, or are we merely losing His pearls at swine?

Jesus Taught by Example

Jesus inspired His disciples to imitate Him. Pray as I prayed. Love as I loved you. Serve as I served. Take up your cross as I took up Mine. Care for the sheep as I cared for the sheep. Finish your course as I finished Mine. But here we focus on His method.

Jesus pointed to faithful behavior as examples to His disciples: the widow who gave all she had, the Roman centurion who believed Jesus could heal by spoken word, children who ran to Him, the boy who gave his lunch to Jesus and then ate his fill, the persistent Syro-phenician woman, the woman with an issue of blood. He pointed to bad examples of faith: religious zealots, legalistic scribes, puffed-up Pharisees, corrupt politicians. He pointed to examples from nature: wind, seeds, sheep and goats, pearls. Tangible examples provide mental imagery that fills two-dimensional words with meaning. We will teach more effectively as we focus attention and thinking by means of examples.

Further, the best teachers are case studies of what they teach and help learners themselves to become living examples of biblical truth. Peter wrote to young pastors to be “*examples to the flock*” (1 Pet 5:3; emphasis added). Transforming Bible study—whether in church or college or seminary—molds teachers and learners into better examples of the Truth rather than mere living libraries of it.

Jesus Taught People More Than Lessons

Not once in Scripture do we find Jesus saying, “Our lesson for today is Leviticus, scroll 3.” His teaching flowed out of the needs of the people He taught. It flowed out of problem situations they presented. It flowed out of the real crises of life.

This is not to say that lesson planning or organized curriculum is unnecessary. None of us can teach like Jesus did, so adhering to specific principles of lesson planning helps us order our structure and methods.²¹ Curriculum writers provide enormous assistance to teachers in our churches. Well-designed materials target a wide range of issues relevant to growing in the Lord.²² But the prime emphasis of disciples is the *people in the chairs*, not the lines in the les-

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son. God's Word is Truth. But it becomes “truth that matters to me” for learners as it intersects learners where they live.

Many teachers in our churches, both volunteer and professional, do not understand this balance. The goal for many is to “cover the lesson”—that is, ensure that every assigned verse is discussed. When teachers aggressively pursue this goal, learner questions are ignored, learner comments are curtailed, and the sharing of relevant personal experiences is restricted. “Mildred, I wish we could discuss your question, but I have four more verses to cover.” This teacher may cover the lesson, but he hasn't taught Mildred. Expect interruptions and questions. *No, welcome them!* Because these provide fertile ground for learning. Encourage openness. Teach people, not lessons.

Jesus Emphasized Character More Than Content

The Pharisees knew their content. They memorized the five books of Moses. They mastered the myriad details of proper prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. Their religion was a superficial, technical, external show of rote actions and memorized rules, a tedious rule book that led them to become “sanctimonious faultfinders.”²³ They were so good at religious regimentation that they were held up as the standard to be followed.

Jesus was more interested in internal character than external show. Character focuses on the heart: knowing what God has said and understanding what He expects. Character focuses on the heart: committed to God's message and devoted to His kingdom priorities. Character focuses on the hand: employing spiritual gifts and natural abilities to accomplish God's mission in the world. This trilogy forms the basis for character-building teaching.²⁴ How do we help learners know God's Word and understand its meaning? How do we inspire commitment to God's way of life and galvanize devotion to His priorities? How do we provoke awareness and engagement of gifts toward accomplishing God's mission to the world? By teaching to build character.

For learners to grow in character, they must have freedom to think and decide for themselves. Jesus understood this. His disciples

²¹ See chapter 13, “Planning to Teach.”

²² See chapter 19, “Selecting and Evaluating Curriculum.”

²³ Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 27.

²⁴ See chapter 11, “The Goal of Christian Education: Christlikeness” for an in-depth discussion of this trilogy.

freely chose to follow Him. The rich young ruler freely chose not to. Judas chose to betray Jesus. Thomas chose to doubt. Peter chose to deny the Lord. The disciples chose to run away when Jesus was arrested. The Pharisees hated this freedom because their basic desire was to gain power and maintain control.²⁵ For all their religious power, the Pharisees were "like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every impurity" (Matt 23:27).

Jesus Focused on Ever Smaller Groups

"Large crowds followed [Jesus] from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan" (Matt 4:25). Throughout His ministry Jesus taught the crowds. From the crowds Jesus chose two specific groups of workers. He first chose the Twelve (Matt 10:1ff) to be trained as apostles to carry on the work after He left. Later "the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go" (Luke 10:1 NIV). The Twelve were chosen to be with Him; the seventy-two to go before Him. Both groups were given power to drive out demons, but only the Twelve were given power to heal diseases (cf. Matt 10:1 and Luke 10:1,17).

From the Twelve, Jesus chose three for special attention: Peter, James, and John. These three men experienced things with Jesus that the other nine did not.

- They witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt 17) while the nine remained at the bottom of the mountain.
- They accompanied Jesus into the home of Jairus when Jesus raised his daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37) while the nine remained outside (Luke 8:51).
- When Jesus and the disciples went to Gethsemane, the nine stayed back while the three moved forward with Jesus into the garden (Mark 14:32-33).

The apostle Paul tells us that Peter, James, and John became pillars in the early church as a result of their advanced training and personal attention (Gal 2:9).

²⁵ See Matt 12:1-8 and 15:1-11 for two vivid examples of this.

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Of the three, Jesus paid the greatest attention to Simon. He gave Simon the new name of Peter (*Petros*, rock; John 1:42). He healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8:14-15). He allowed Peter to try something miraculous—walking on water—and fail (Matt 14:28-33). Jesus recommissioned Peter after he denied Him (John 21:15ff). Peter served his Lord faithfully until his death.

Noted Christian educator Howard Hendricks once said he was finished with building great churches. He wanted to give the rest of his life to *building great people*. "Even if you build a church of 3200 people, if none of them develops, 3200 times 0 still equals 0. But 1 times 1 equals 1, and that is 100 percent better. The question you must ask is 'Whose life are you impacting?'"²⁶ This approach to teaching ministry is certainly in line with that of Jesus, who poured Himself into ever-smaller groups.

Jesus Recognized the Worth of His Learners

Local church ministry is people intensive. We plan programs, but without people to lead and staff the programs and reach others to participate in them, our planning is in vain. In the hustle and bustle of church ministry, it is easy to focus on "getting the job done" and take for granted the very ones who are doing the job. In this kind of corporate-hive atmosphere, learners are simply the means by which ministry is done. This utilitarian view of people tells worker-bees that they are valuable so long as they produce. "Fail to meet organizational standards and you'll be replaced by someone more dedicated to the corporate-hive." In such a system leaders can easily abuse the very people of God in the name of reaching strangers (who are then abused in order to "win" more).

The disciples were not the *means* of Jesus' ministry. They were the *end* of it. Jesus did not use (that is, *abuse*) His disciples to reach the crowds. In fact, Jesus pulled away from the crowds in order to teach the disciples. They were not tools in the hands of a clever public relations man but rather beloved friends (John 15:15). Jesus poured His heart into them, and after He left, they carried on His work.

²⁶ Student report on conference notes, Howard Hendricks, February 10, 1992. Dr. Hendricks was professor of Christian education at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, at the time.

Many church members are hungry for pastors and ministers who care about them for who they are and not merely for what they can do for the minister's career. Before being challenged to reach "10 more next Sunday," they would like to know that we've noticed them, that we care for them, that we love them. Our flocks are worthy of compassion, and we are called to lead with compassion. See chapter 22, "Ministering alongside Volunteers," for practical ways to do this.

Jesus Emphasized Quality of Effort over Quantity of Learners

The "quality versus quantity" debate has long raged in Baptist circles. Those who emphasize "quality Bible study" in Sunday school may create classes that are self-satisfied, self-sufficient, internally focused, and indifferent toward outsiders. *Cloistered cliques*. Those who emphasize "quantity" through outreach efforts may create classes that are shallow and spiritually stagnant, and whose members are indifferent to one another. *Exhausted strangers*.

The Great Commission calls for both reaching (evangelism) and teaching (discipleship). Jesus' preference between the two is clear, and Bruce's description bears repeating:

The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher's influence on the world should be permanent; that His kingdom should be founded on the rock of deep and indestructible convictions in the minds of a few, not on the shifting sands of superficial evanescent impressions on the minds of the many.²⁷

Measures of spiritual vitality are constantly tied to the circus side-show measure of how many people gathered, rarely to what actually happened in those people because they gathered. Jesus never bragged about the crowds of people who gathered around Him to be healed or fed or taught. *Attendance* was not His concern; *people* were. Yes, numbers are people. But when leaders become overly concerned about "10 more next Sunday," they seldom care about *who those 10 are*.

Later, as Jesus increased His emphasis on "denying self" and "taking yokes" and "bearing crosses," people began to drift away. As the crowds left Him, Jesus did not change His message. The rich young

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ruler walked away from Jesus, unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship. But Jesus did not change His message. *He did not evaluate the quality of what He was doing by the quantity of people following Him.* He knew He was in the Father's will, and He was faithful.

There were money boxes in the temple where the faithful deposited their tithes and offerings. The coins were deposited in metal cones made in the shape of a trumpet.²⁸ When a person dropped several coins into the opening, they clinked and clanked as they fell through the cone. The Pharisees loved to pour a bag of coins into the box so that people nearby would hear the ringing of the trumpets and turn to see who had made such a large offering.

One day Jesus sat near the offering boxes, watching the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Several rich worshippers poured in their coins and sounded the trumpets. *Brrrr-ring!* Then a poor widow happened by and put in two small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. *Tink-tink-tink. Tink-tink-tink.* Calling His disciples, Jesus said, "This poor widow has put in more than all those giving to the temple treasury. For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she possessed—all she had to live on" (Mark 12:41–44). It was the quality of the gift, not its quantity, that caught Jesus' eye and evoked His praise.

When we find ourselves in small places—in a Sunday school class, a small church, a difficult mission field—let us not fret over numbers, but let us give ourselves to these few, giving the Lord our best efforts, and leave the results to Him.

Jesus Emphasized Action More than Knowledge

Jesus defined the terms *wise* and *foolish* not on the basis of what one knows, but on the basis of what one does with His words (Matt 7:24,26). When our students leave our classes, have we helped them to practice what they've learned from God's Word? They have heard the words, but do they put them into practice? If we haven't, then Jesus says we have sent them out as fools. When your congregation leaves the sanctuary after worship, they have heard the words, but do

²⁷ Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 13.

²⁸ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 387.

they practice them? If they do, then Jesus says we have sent them out as wise.

Encouraging students to practice what they learn in the study of God's Word is worthy of serious attention. This can be achieved through assignments done during the week, case studies in class, personal experiences related to the subject, and even class mission projects. Putting the Word into practice is essential in developing biblical wisdom in our learners.

Jesus Focused on Structure More than Detail

As a master of the Old Testament, Jesus taught its key themes. Jesus majored on truth, the Pharisees on trivia. Jesus majored on love, the Pharisees on legalism. Jesus majored on justice, the Pharisees on judgment.

When we teach, say, the story of the good Samaritan, are we more interested in covering every verse in the story or helping our learners become "better good Samaritans"? Do we curtail questions from learners in order to complete our lectures? When there are five major truths in a given lesson, are we more inclined to cover all five equally, or would we rather choose the one that relates best to our class needs and focus on it?

The pinnacle of our teaching ministry is lifting high the Lord Jesus and letting Him draw all our learners to Himself. There is no greater reward in teaching than to see a life transformed by the love and power of the Lord. May God grant you many such rewards as you offer your teaching ministry to Him.

It is easy to get lost in the details of a particular study and miss the central truth God is conveying. My teenage son was an active Bible drilller at our church back in the early 1990s. He had just passed the associational drill competition with flying colors and was headed to the state competition. He knew his memory work! We were practicing his verses one day. After he perfectly quoted an Old Testament verse, I asked him what it meant. He sighed heavily, rolled his eyes, and said, "We don't have to know what the verses *mean*, Dad. We're just supposed to memorize them!" Great on details. Weak on meaning. So I explained the meaning of the verse. Take care not to lose your learners in a mass of detail, even if the detail is God's Word.

Jesus Stressed Long-Term Rather than Immediate Results

We have already noted that Jesus consciously poured His life into a select band of believers, who could then carry on His mission after He left. He did this even though He could have drawn a crowd anywhere He went with His dramatic teaching and miraculous works. Jesus made this choice because the in-depth training of the Twelve formed the foundation for the early church, which then carried His gospel around the world.

In one sense Jesus' training of the Twelve was preparation for ministry. His words and explanations and parables formed the raw material out of which the disciples learned to be apostles. But even at the end of Jesus' ministry, as He prepared to return to the Father, the disciples were ill-suited to take on the power of the Sanhedrin and the power of Rome. They had been trained, but they lacked the power to carry out their mission. However, Jesus promised them that they would "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

And so, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the believers and empowered them to do all that Jesus had commanded them. They had been prepared. Now they were transformed. The day of Pentecost forever divided history into two eras: the first, in which the Holy Spirit was imparted to God's chosen for specific purposes and short periods; and the second, in which the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence (Eph 1:13) in the life of the believer in Jesus (1 Cor 12:3).

Jesus knew He had to return to the Father so that He could send the Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all believers everywhere: "Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7). But the work of the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, is to glorify Jesus, not Himself (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit does not speak on His own, but speaks only what He hears—presumably from Jesus (John 16:13). And in His earlier teaching on the Holy Spirit, Jesus intimated that He Himself would be coming to them (John 14:16,18). Both Peter and Paul used the terms *Holy Spirit* and *Spirit of Christ* interchangeably—so when

Christians say that Jesus “lives in our hearts,” we reflect this dual meaning.

The point here is that the teaching of Jesus provided the raw material for the transformation that took place at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit called to remembrance all that Jesus had taught the disciples and used that teaching to grow them into the leaders of the early church. See chapter 5, “Holy Spirit as Teacher,” for more.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6–7). We may teach or preach our hearts out, week after week, and see little spiritual fruit resulting from our efforts. Then one Sunday, for no apparent reason, the Lord moves in the hearts of several of the members, and a spiritual breakthrough occurs. There is an insidious temptation to do “whatever works” in order to make the church grow. This is fleshly, worldly thinking. Ends seem to justify the means. But it is not we who build the Church—God does. “Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain” (Ps 127:1a).

Does this mean we do nothing but simply wait for God to do whatever He is going to do? No. Paul continues, “The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor 3:8). There is a work to be done. What is that work? Praying and teaching the Word: that is our labor. And God grows His Church by His Spirit in His time and in His way.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you react when you work hard to do a good job but no one congratulates you on your efforts? When you serve faithfully in a difficult position and few seem to notice? When you’ve done your best to be fair, honest, and open in a church issue and people accuse you of petty self-interest? (*Dealing dynamically with frustration.*)
2. How do you react when someone you’ve helped says, “Thank you”? When someone in your church praises you to your face?

When someone praises you in a public gathering? (*Dealing humbly with praise.*)

3. Discuss human characteristics and methods of Jesus that you possess and use by His grace.
4. Discuss human characteristics and methods of Jesus that you lack and need His help to develop.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT AS TEACHER

Octavio J. Esqueda

Not by strength or by might,
but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.

[Zech 4:6]

The Holy Spirit is essential in Christian teaching. God collaborates with Christian teachers through the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish His purposes. Both teachers and students need the Spirit's illumination to understand and apply the Scriptures.

The Rooster's Hidden Meaning

In 1996 Gabriel García Márquez, winner of the Nobel prize for Literature in 1982, shared a story related to one of his novels that illustrates the privilege Christian teachers and students enjoy with the Holy Spirit.¹ His son was taking a literature course in high school. The teacher required the reading of *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (*No One Writes to the Colonel*), a novel by García Márquez.² In that novel a rooster appears in different sections of the story.

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The old, poor colonel expects to make some money with the rooster to support his wife during their final years. The high school teacher explained to the class how this rooster was essential for a clear understanding of the book. "The rooster is the hidden main character of the novel," the teacher concluded.

At the end of the day, the son of García Márquez went home and told his dad that his class talked about one of his novels. He asked his dad about the real meaning of the rooster. Gabriel García Márquez was puzzled by the question and answered, "What rooster? The rooster is just that, a simple rooster! There is not a hidden meaning whatsoever."

Every student and the teacher left the class with a misconception of the novel. Only one person had direct access to the author and received the correct instruction about this work because of the father-son relationship.

A Personal Relationship with God through the Spirit

All born-again Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and enjoy direct access to the Father. The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, and He enables believers to understand the biblical text through His work of illumination. We have direct access to the Author of the Scriptures! The Holy Spirit helps us to understand, follow, and obey the Father. The Bible is the only book in which all Christians benefit from a personal relationship with the Author and can go directly to Him at any time.

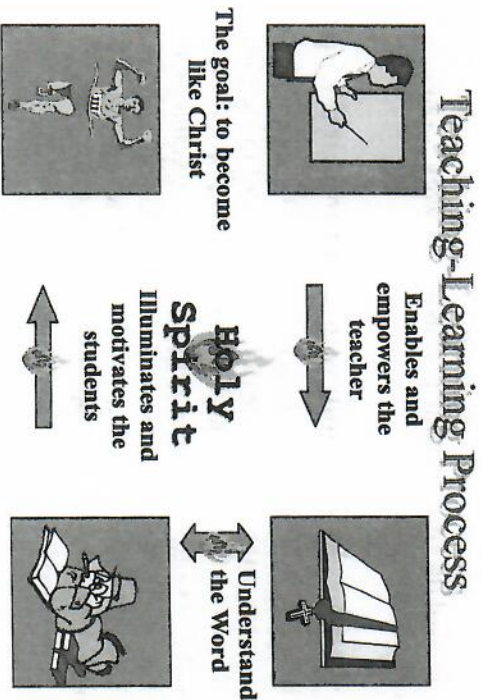
The Holy Spirit Is Central in the Teaching-Learning Process

The role of the Holy Spirit is essential in the supernatural transformation of learners through Christian education. The Holy Spirit is vital for all spiritual tasks. Therefore, Christian education apart from the Holy Spirit is meaningless. Fred Dickason points out, "The Holy Spirit is the sovereign, most wise, and ultimate teacher of spiritual truth. He makes God's truth relevant to the persons involved and

¹ I had the opportunity of spending four days with Gabriel García Márquez. He is one of the best Latin American writers and a leader of the literary movement known as "magic realism." García Márquez shared during these days about his life and work to a select group of 26 people from all around the world as part of a lecture series sponsored by the University of Guadalajara's *Colegio Julio Cortázar*. Angelica, my wife now but my fiancé at that time, and I were the only two literature students taking part in these lectures. The rest of the participants were professors and scholars who had specialized in the literary work of García Márquez.

² G. G. Márquez, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (Barcelona: Random House, 1999).

bles application that causes life and growth. Our teaching and learning efforts are in vain unless we cooperate with the Spirit.³ The Holy Spirit helps Christian teachers by giving them discernment of God's truths and empowering them to instruct students in a way that produces spiritual transformation. As the author of God's revelation, the Spirit helps both teachers and students to understand the Bible's message through illumination. The purpose of illumination is to understand biblical truths. Only the Holy Spirit can effect the necessary change so that believers can achieve the goal of becoming more like Christ. The following illustration summarizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the teaching-learning process:



The Holy Spirit makes Christian education dynamic and distinct from other types of education. Zuck argues that three factors define Christian education: "(1) the centrality of God's written revelation, the necessity of regeneration, and (3) the ministry of the Holy Spirit."⁵ The Holy Spirit, then, plays the vital role in Christian teaching.

3. F. Dickason, "The Holy Spirit in Education," in *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future*, ed. Robert E. Clark, Lyn Johnson, and Allyn K. Sloat (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 121.

4. Illustration developed by the author for use in teacher training conferences. B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 2.

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Although most Christians affirm the importance of the Holy Spirit in ministry, we can at times fail to practice what we claim to believe. A few years ago, I was a committee member for the educational program of a local church. We always started our meetings with prayer, as most Christian gatherings traditionally do. On one particular occasion, a committee member, a respected deacon of the church, arrived just a few minutes late to our meeting. He apologized for being late, and the committee leader responded, "Don't worry, you just missed the prayer." He answered with a combination of relief and irony, "It's OK then. I have heard many prayers in life." In this case prayer was nothing more than the first item on the agenda. Tragically, we can make the same mistake in our teaching ministry.

Since the role of the Holy Spirit is essential and God's work relies primarily on His power (Zech 4:6), we would be more effective if we spent more time praying and less time planning or talking. Our actions reflect our convictions more than our words do. Christian teachers are most effective when they bathe their lesson planning and teaching with prayer. Prayer, then, is the essential element in the teaching-learning process.

Names of the Holy Spirit Relating to Teaching

Scripture reveals several names for the Holy Spirit that connect Him to the ministry of teaching. These include "the Spirit of truth," "the Revealer of God," and "Counselor-Helper."

Holy Spirit as Spirit of Truth

The Holy Spirit is truth, as John 16:13 states: "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth." God the Father is truth (Deut 32:4) and the Son is truth (John 14:6). Therefore, the Word of God is also truth (John 17:17). As the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), the Holy Spirit guides believers to discover and understand truth.

Consequently, all truth is God's truth. Christian educators need not be afraid of finding truth in secular sources because a distinction does not exist between sacred and secular truth.⁶ It is common for

6. F. E. Gaebelen, *The Pattern of God's Truth: The Integration of Faith and Learning* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1968).

eminary students and believers in general to struggle with "secular" knowledge with implications for Christian ministry. However, since the Trinity is the source of faithfulness, God is present wherever truth is found. Truth is an attribute of the Godhead that emphasizes reliability and steadfastness. For that reason we can trust in the faithfulness of God and His Word.⁷ Truth cannot contradict itself in order to remain truthful. With the Bible as the standard, believers should not be afraid of pursuing knowledge regardless of the source. Truth is always sacred because it flows from the Godhead.

Another implication of the Holy Spirit as the source of truth is the realization that God hates lying and falsehood. Proverbs 6:16–19 contains a list of the things that God detests. The list includes "a lying tongue" (v. 17) and "a false witness who speaks lies" (v. 19) as part of the seven things God loathes. Only falsehood is repeated twice on the list! Jesus referred to Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44). Christians must "gird their waist with truth" in order to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:14). Therefore, God expects His children to reject falsehood and pursue righteousness and truth (Eph 4:22–25). It is better for Christian teachers to admit their ignorance when students ask questions than to invent answers to avoid appearing uninformed. All believers need to walk in truth because the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6). Apart from the Spirit, God's truth remains elusive!⁸ Christian teachers are messengers of truth—a big responsibility indeed.

The Holy Spirit as the Revealer of God

The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor 3:18). As the Third Person of the Godhead, He is the main agent in divine revelation.⁹ He reveals God because the Spirit is God. The Spirit can understand the deep things of the Father and the Son and is able to reveal them to believers. The apostle Paul explains the reason the Holy Spirit can reveal God:

K. J. Vanhooser, "Truth," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhooser (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

A. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007).

J. D. Pentecost, *The Divine Comforter: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997).

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What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what has never come into a man's heart, is what God has prepared for those who love Him. Now God has revealed them to us by the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the concerns of a man except the spirit of the man that is in him? In the same way, no one knows the concerns of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, in order to know what has been freely given to us by God. (1 Cor 2:9–12)

It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we comprehend God's truths. A person needs the Holy Spirit in order to understand God and receive His instruction (v. 14). Through the Spirit of God, we can possess the mind of Christ (v. 16). Only with the help of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation can we know God better (Eph 1:17). Again, dependence on the Holy Spirit is imperative for Christian teachers.

Zuck defines evangelical Christian education as "the Christ-centered, Bible-based, student-related process of communicating God's written Word through the Power of the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of guiding individuals to know and to grow in Christ."¹⁰ Spiritual preparation through prayer is an essential element in Christian teaching. Professors should pray for their students during the week with the expectation that the Holy Spirit will teach them deep things between class sessions and use them to teach others. Christian teaching is a process that lasts more than the actual lesson because of the continuing teaching of the Holy Spirit beyond the session.

The Holy Spirit as Counselor-Helper

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as our "Counselor" or "Helper" (John 14:26). The Greek word used in this passage to describe the work of the Holy Spirit is *paraclete*. It literally means "one called alongside." The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to help and counsel believers into God's truths. God the Holy Spirit lives in us as believers in Christ to assist us in our understanding of the Father and to respond in obedience to His Word. Therefore, Christian teaching cannot succeed apart from the "counsel" of the Holy Spirit. The Holy

¹⁰ R. B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, ix.

pirit is the main motivator in Christian education. Only the Spirit moves our students completely and can meet their needs.¹¹

Jesus requires His followers to love Him completely and supremely above all other relationships (Matt 10:37–39). To be true disciples of Christ, we need to love Him with all our being. The proof of our love is obedience to His commandments (John 14:15,20). We need to keep His words, which are the same as the Father's: "The one who doesn't love Me will not keep My words. The word that you hear is not Mine but is from the Father who sent Me" (John 14:24). Rememberance and compliance to Jesus' words are imperatives for His disciples.

However, how were the original disciples able to remember His words? The answer: through the Holy Spirit. Jesus was present with His disciples, but the Holy Spirit now dwells with Christ's followers (John 14:16). Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers can benefit from Jesus' presence: "I [Jesus] will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you" (John 14:18). The Father sends the Spirit to Jesus' disciples. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit helped Jesus' disciples to remember His teachings. The Spirit leads believers into the truths that Jesus lived and taught.¹² The Holy Spirit's instruction always about Jesus and goes beyond His teaching only in deepening our understanding of His words.¹³

Teaching Ministries of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit ministers to us, and through those ministries He teaches us. He operates in various ways to fulfill God's purposes. For example, He was actively involved in creation (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps 104:30) and empowered the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35). Moreover, the Holy Spirit plays the vital role in the relationship between Christians and the Church. The Spirit carries out every aspect

¹¹ N. N. Pérez, *Jesus, el Maestro: Su plan educativo transformador* (Rio Piedras, PR: Palabra y Más, 2006).

¹² M. M. Turner, "Holy Spirit," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

¹³ J. M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006).

of the work of the Church through different ministries, and in doing so, He teaches.

The Holy Spirit makes possible the salvation of humanity. He converts of sin (John 16:8) and regenerates sinners so their relationship with God can be restored (Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit incorporates us into the body of Christ during His baptism (1 Cor 12:13). Salvation and the reception of the Holy Spirit occur simultaneously as two sides of the same coin. The Holy Spirit makes us new persons and dwells in all Christians (John 14:7). Every believer receives the Spirit at the moment of conversion:

To receive the Spirit is to begin the Christian life (Galatians 3:2–3); righteousness through faith and the promise of the Spirit are equivalently regarded as "the blessing of Abraham" (vv. 1–4); to be baptized in the Spirit is to become a member of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13); if anyone does not "have the Spirit of Christ" that person does not belong to Christ, is not a Christian (Romans 8:9); only reception of the Spirit makes it possible for us to be children of God, to call on God as Father (vv. 14–17); the divine seal establishing the bond between God and the believer is now the Spirit himself, not circumcision (and not baptism—2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13–14).¹⁴

All believers are called to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. We are to be faithful in our efforts to witness. However, it is the Spirit who does the supernatural work of conversion.

We noted above that the Holy Spirit guides believers into God's truth (John 16:13), but He does more. He illuminates our understanding of God's calling, power, and the riches of His grace (Eph 1:18–19). The Spirit enlightens our minds to understand God's revelation. Through the ministry of illumination, the Holy Spirit enables believers to discern the meaning of God's message, receive it as from God, and apply it to our lives.¹⁵ Consequently, we should live and teach according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In fact, "all our

¹⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, "The Doctrine of God the Holy Spirit," in *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in One Volume*, ed. David Horton (Bloomington, MI: Bethany House, 2006), 154–55.

¹⁵ R. B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*.

ministry, whatever form it may take, is to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit"¹⁶ if it is to be effective and produce fruit that abides. Sometimes the Holy Spirit does His work in subtle ways. In 2003, I was invited to teach a Christian education course at a Bible seminary in Guatemala City. My wife and I arrived there on Saturday evening and the one-week course started the following Monday. Our host told us that he would pick us up the next morning to attend a church service. That Sunday morning I heard someone knocking on the door a few minutes before the time we were expecting our guest. When I opened the door, I recognized him and said, "I thought you said that you will come later."

He replied, "Yes, I will come back in 15 minutes. I just came now, let you know that *you are the preacher this morning*. I forgot to tell you last night."

I had just a few minutes to prepare a sermon without knowing anything about the congregation. I had studied Isaiah 40 before, and decided to preach through that chapter. The passage talks about the Lord of hope and how He is able to keep His promises. Therefore, we can receive His comfort and trust Him.

After the service a leader from the church came to me and told me that the message was exactly what the congregation needed. A family from the church had an accident that week that shocked the church family. The whole church was grieving, and I did not know about it, but the Holy Spirit led me to choose a Bible passage that spoke to the church's needs. The Spirit illuminated the minds and hearts of the people to understand the Word and receive God's comfort.

The Bible is the Word of God because the Holy Spirit inspired the writers. Second Peter 1:21 states, "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The Spirit is the Author of the Scriptures. Inspiration "is that supernatural work of the Holy Spirit whereby He so guided and superintended the writers of Scripture that what they wrote is the Word of God, inerrant as originally written."¹⁷ The following chapter, "The Bible as Curriculum," further develops the nature of the Word of God.

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The teaching ministries of the Holy Spirit are also essential for the Christian life. Believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit in order to live as God intended (Eph 5:18). To be filled with the Spirit means to yield complete control to the Spirit's direction and authority. This filling influences every aspect of believers' lives. Christian character, worship, and ministry are made possible only as a result of the Holy Spirit's filling.¹⁸ A life controlled by the Holy Spirit produces fruit (attitudes and qualities) that please God: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal 5:22-23). The word "fruit" is singular but has a collective connotation. The essence of the Christian life is to let the Holy Spirit direct our actions. Therefore, it is impossible to please God apart from the Holy Spirit. Any teaching ministry to be effective requires teachers filled with the Holy Spirit because this filling is a "divine empowering for a specific ministry."¹⁹

The Gift of Teaching

The Holy Spirit bestows special abilities on every Christian for the spiritual edification of the Church. The Spirit provides these gifts as part of God's grace (*charisma*) to all believers. The Bible mentions the spiritual gift of teaching in three different passages: Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28; and Eph 4:11. The Spirit uses gifted teachers to prepare, equip, and train Christians to serve one another within the body of Christ.²⁰

The gift of teaching is the ability to explain God's truth to people. This gift is connected in some instances to the gift of pastor as in Eph 4:11 but could be given alone.²¹ Although all believers are called to teach God's Word to people (Matt 28:20), the Holy Spirit especially empowers some individuals with the gift of teaching. Millard Erickson points out four important considerations about spiritual gifts according to 1 Corinthians 12 and 14:

¹⁸ E. Woodcock, "The Filling of the Holy Spirit," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January-March 2000): 68-87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁰ G. C. Newton, "Holy Spirit," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. M. J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 340.

²¹ C. C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1999).

¹⁶ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 649.

¹⁷ Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 31.

1. The gifts are bestowed on the body (the church). They are for the edification of the whole body, not merely for the enjoyment or enrichment of the individual members possessing them (12:7; 14:5,12).
2. No one person has all the gifts (12:14-21), nor is any one of the gifts bestowed on all persons (12:28-30). Consequently, the individual members of the church need one another.
3. Although not equally conspicuous, all gifts are important (12:22-26).
4. The Holy Spirit apportions the various gifts to whom and as He wills (12:11).²²

The use of spiritual gifts could be neglected in some local churches because of the difficulty of clearly identifying the gifts among believers. The Bible does not provide a checklist or questionnaire for discovering spiritual gifts. However, Scripture clearly mentions the importance of spiritual gifts and their relationship to the spiritual growth of the church (Eph 4:11-16). How can church leaders discover the spiritual gifts in their congregations? They can do it only by spending time with their members. There are no shortcuts. Spiritual gifts inventories can be helpful, but a close relationship with people is essential. A relationship (discipleship) is necessary to get to know believers and their gifts. It takes time to equip people to do the work of ministry.

Christians with specific spiritual gifts should exercise them in every area of the church. For example, in local churches people with the spiritual gift of teaching should be the ones "formally" teaching in the congregation and instructing others how to teach. Unfortunately, in some cases the teachers are the ones available or willing, not necessarily the ones gifted by the Spirit, to do it. In these instances the local church is missing God's empowerment that causes the growth of the body (Eph 4:16). Spiritual gifts are closely related to the Spirit's filling: "No matter how gifted or spiritual a teacher may be, learning and growth towards Christ-likeness will not

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take place unless a learner allows the Holy Spirit to work within his or her heart."²³

Conclusion

Through the Holy Spirit the God of the universe, the mighty Creator, dwells in all believers and empowers them to serve Him. It is amazing and humbling to realize that the Lord partners with us in the teaching ministry of His church! This point is underscored by Zuck, who writes, "Christian education is a cooperative process, a venture involving both the human and the divine. Human teachers communicate and exemplify truth; the Holy Spirit seeks to provide guidance, power, illumination, and insight to the teachers."²⁴

The Holy Spirit does not replace Christian teachers. He chooses to teach through us and through our ministry to others, as we rely on His power to accomplish His purposes in building the Lord's Church. What a great Teacher, and what a great honor to be channels of His teaching to others!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Holy Spirit essential in Christian teaching?
2. Since the Holy Spirit is truth, why do some believers differentiate between *sacred* and *secular* truth?
3. How does the Holy Spirit serve as a counselor-helper in the teaching-learning process?
4. Is it possible to serve God apart from the Holy Spirit? Explain.
5. In what ways can we partner with the Holy Spirit to help us teach? Some use "dependence on the Spirit" as an excuse for poor preparation. How would you explain that this attitude is a misconception of the Spirit's role?

²³ G. Newton, "The Holy Spirit in the Educational Process," in *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 127.

²⁴ R. B. Zuck, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Christian Teaching," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching: A Comprehensive Resource on the Distinctiveness of True Christian Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 37.