

**The**

# **Disciplers'** **Handbook**

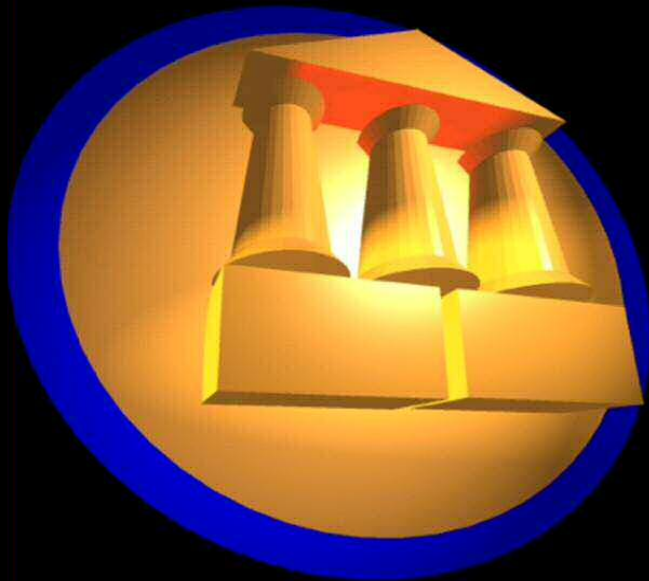
*From Transmitting Lessons*

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*To Transforming Lives*

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*In Sunday School*



**“. . .that ye might live a  
life worthy of the Lord  
and please Him in every way:  
bearing fruit in every good work,  
growing in the knowledge of God,  
being strengthened with all power  
according to his glorious might. . .”**

Colossians 1:10-11

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## HISTORY

The **First Edition** of *The Disciplers'* was produced while serving Columbia Baptist Church as minister of education in 1979. My goal was to provide a text for ministers of education to use in training their teachers.

The **Second Edition** was produced for use in my Principles of Teaching classes at Southwestern Seminary, where I began teaching in 1981. Over the years, through conferences and class notes, additions were made to the text and new editions produced. The **Eighth Edition** of *The Disciplers' Handbook* was produced in 1992 and was a complete re-write of the material.

The present **Tenth Edition** has been formatted to be placed on the web as PDF files, and can be downloaded free of charge by Christian educators for use in equipping disciplers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Karen Anderson**, a Communication Arts student at Southwestern in 1992, took my rough stick figure ideas and transformed them into many of the illustrations in the text. Her illustrations include "dry bones," "running in the dark," "never irrelevant!," "smiley face," "browbeating," "the kite," "drive the sheep," "lead the flock," "blah, blah, blah," "wait three seconds," "aimless shooting," "stretch," "late start," "picture or movie," "woman at the well," "many to one," " " and "I'm the leader!" Many thanks to Karen for using her talents to enhance the text.

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## About the Author

Dr. Rick Yount retired from **Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary** in Fort Worth (July 2012), where he served as Professor of Foundations of Education, School of Church and Family Ministries. He was a member of the **education faculty since 1981**. He taught courses in research and statistics as well as principles of teaching, educational psychology, the teaching ministry of the church, and philosophy of education.



Yount now serves as Visiting Professor of Christian Education, **New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary** (August 2012-). Yount also teaches courses for **Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary** in Kansas City, Missouri, and **BH Carroll Theological Institute**, in Arlington, Texas.

Yount and his **wife Barbara** were married in 1969. Barb teaches American Sign Language at Texas Christian University, having earned her Master's degree in deaf education in 1985. Their **daughter, Bonnie**, born in 1978, is married to **Robert Lampasona**. Their daughter Madilyne is ten [2014]. Their **son, Chris**, born in 1981, is married to **Meredith Jones**, and works as a financial officer in a medical software firm in Bedford, Texas. Their sons Jack and Luke are 4 and 2 [2014]. Rick has traveled annually since 1996 to teach pastors and Christian educators in seminaries and Bible Institutes of the former Soviet Union (Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan).

Yount received the **Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)** degree in Foundations of Education from Southwestern Seminary in December **1978**, and the **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** degree in Educational Research from University of North Texas in **1985**.

Church experience includes **eleven years ministry among the deaf, five years as full time minister of education** at Columbia Baptist church, Falls Church, Virginia, and **sixteen years as interim minister of education in five churches**. His present ministry outside of teaching seminary classes focuses on teaching an "empty nesters" **Sunday School class** at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth. Yount conducts local church, associational, and state-wide **workshops and seminars**, including "The Disciplers' Model and Method: Teaching that Transforms," and "The Christian Teachers' Triad." He also conducts **faculty development workshops** on "Neutralizing Toxic Teaching and Testing."

Yount has written six books besides this present volume: ***Be Opened! Introduction to Ministry with the Deaf*** in **1976**, ***Created to Learn: A Christian Teacher's Introduction to Educational Psychology*** in **1996**, ***Called to Teach: An Introduction to the Ministry of Teaching*** in **1999**, ***Called to Reach: Equipping Cross-Cultural Disciplers*** in **2007** with co-author Mike Barnett, ***Teaching Ministry of the Church*** (2nd ed.) in **2008**, and ***Created to Learn*** (2nd ed.) in **2010**. All were published by Broadman & Holman, Nashville, Tennessee.

Hobbies include writing, blogging, Russian, computers, and chess. For blogs, stories and pictures, go to

<http://drrickyount.com>

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# Preface

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**S**eminary was the best educational experience of my life. The Master of Religious Education (1975) and Doctor of Education (1978) degrees at Southwestern inspired me with ideas of spiritual leadership in the local church. Principles of teaching, organizing, and “equipping the saints” were simple and clear in the classroom. Ideas flowed easily into my notebooks. Then came the opportunity to put what I’d learned into practice. Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, Virginia, called me to be their minister of education.

## Local Church Focus

I quickly discovered that there is a difference between academic program and ministry process. The grade books of seminary and the local church are worlds apart. This book is the result of my journey from student to staff minister in my first years on the church field. I wrote it initially for seminary students and novice ministers of education. But it has been enthusiastically received by pastors, staff ministers, and Sunday School leaders.

**Chapter One** presents a model for building a discipling Bible study program. While the model uses Sunday School as its focus, these principles can be applied to preaching, member and leader training, and missions education. **Chapter One presents the disciplers’ model.**

**Chapter Two** addresses specific teaching suggestions that will enable teachers and leaders to move toward a discipling process in Sunday School. We analyze the problem of limited time. We present case studies that show differences between traditional and discipling approaches to planning. **Chapter Two presents the disciplers’ method.**

**Chapter Three** analyzes the way Jesus led the twelve disciples. We draw principles for contemporary ministry from scripture and illustrate them by case studies. The way we lead is an integral part of our teaching ministry and there is no better example than Jesus. **Chapter Three presents the disciplers’ manner.**

## A Window, Not a Program

The Disciplers’ Model is not a “program” to implement. It is a point of view, a perspective, a philosophy of Bible study that will carry your church education organizations beyond “teaching lessons” to transforming lives in Jesus’ name. The model gives you a clear way to differentiate between minor skirmishes and major battles in leading. It provides insight by which to make decisions and solve problems. Using your gifts and your particular resources, you will be a catalyst for spiritual growth in your particular church situation. As a result, members will study, integrate, and ultimately live out the Word of God in personal decisions, family relations, church work, giving and missions.

## Teachers and Disciplers

I use the term teacher in the text to refer generally to those who have been elected by their church to teach in one of the educational organizations of the church. It is a position term that points to a place in an organizational chart. I use the term discipler to refer to those teachers, directors and ministers who have moved beyond lesson transmission, "getting the lesson across," to life transformation. It is a term of function which points to active involvement with the needs and hopes of God's people. In every church there are those individuals who, through the grace of God and the good example of others, have developed an approach to education ministry that disciplines learners. I meet seminary students every semester who are preparing for vocational ministry because of such a teacher back home.

So I make the distinction between teachers and disciplers. In this context, the teacher majors on facts, the discipler on persons; the teacher on lecture about the Bible, the discipler on learner interaction with the Bible; the teacher on story telling, the discipler on

the walk of class members; the teacher on forty minutes in class, the discipler on a lifetime. The distinction is made only to present the material of the text. I do not see any advantage in beginning to call Sunday School teachers "disciplers" per se. This is mere semantics. The key question is whether our teachers are discipling those God brings to them.

## To Make Disciples... and Disciplers

Our task as ministers is to help teachers become disciplers. Our only hope to succeed in this effort is to be disciplers ourselves. It takes time, talent and energy. It requires love for others and wisdom from above. It takes an open mind, a loving heart, a submitted will. None of these possessions come easily. May God bless you in the journey toward ministry this semester and throughout your life.

My prayer is that the Lord will speak to you through these pages. That He will cause you to reflect on your call to ministry, your motivation, aspirations, and expectations. And will, as a result, make you a more effective discipling minister.

W. R. Y.



# Table of Contents

## Chapter Zero: Birth of the Model

<b>BEFORE SEMINARY</b> .....	1
Lives in a Blood Pump?	
Religious Code Words	
From Code to Clear	2
The Beginning of Change	
<b>DURING SEMINARY</b> .....	3
<b>SINCE SEMINARY</b> .....	6

## Chapter One: The Disciplers' Model

<b>THE PROBLEM IS RITUAL</b> .....	10
Advantages of Ritual	10
Dangers of Ritual	10
Why Have a Model?	11
Focus on How-to?	
First, Focus on Why!	
Leaves and Fruit	12
Using the Model to Solve Problems	

## THE MODEL'S THE SOLUTION .....

<b>LEFT FOUNDATION STONE:</b>	
The Bible: God's Eternal Word	13
What is the Bible?	
How Do You Use the Bible?	14

## THE RIGHT FOUNDATION STONE:

The Needs of People	15
Jesus Focused on Needs	
Our Learners have Needs	
General Needs	
Specific Needs	16
<b>Two Stones in Tension</b>	<b>16</b>
Unrelated History?	
Group Therapy?	17
Stay Out of the Ditches!	

## THE LEFT PILLAR:

Helping People Think	18
What's an Ebenezer?	
Thinking Supports Growing	
Three Stages of Thinking	
<i>Knowledge</i>	19
<i>Understanding</i>	20
<i>Wisdom</i>	22
Growth is an Upward Spiral	23

## THE RIGHT PILLAR:

Helping People Unmask	24
The Smiley-Face Mask	
Jesus Wore No Mask	
Emotional Freedom	25
Removing Emotional Barriers	26
Emotional Growth	27
Teacher as Model	28
<b>Balance Left and Right Pillars</b>	<b>29</b>

## THE CENTER PILLAR

Helping People Relate	31
Vertical Relationship	
Horizontal Relationship	32
<b>Summary of the Pillars</b>	<b>35</b>

## THE CAPSTONE

Helping People Grow in Christ	35
Kinds of Church Growth	
Paul's Treatise on Church Growth	36
The Purpose of Growth	
How Do You Measure This Growth?	37
So What's the Problem?	39

## THE CIRCLE

Holy Spirit as Discippler	42
Prayer - <i>Ask Him!</i>	
Priority - <i>Seek Kingdom First</i>	43
Position - <i>Servant, not Boss</i>	
Spiritual Triad	44

## QUESTIONS TO AID PLANNING .....

## Chapter Two: The Disciplers' Method

<b>TEACHING METHODS</b> .....	47
Regardless of Method	47
Variety of Method	48
Central Methods	52

## THE LESSON PLAN .....

1. Objective	53
Set Up Targets	
Targeted Teaching	
Learners Most Important	54
Type of Learning Desired	

2. Learning Readiness	55
"Priming the Pump"	
Remember Your Objective	56
Avoid Gimmicks	57
Build a Bridge to Bible Study	
3. Bible Study	57
"Hauling the Freight"	
Organization	
Principles of Teaching So They'll. . .	59
...Remember	
...Understand	60
...Personally Respond	65
...Do the Word	71
4. Conclusion	75
"Tie It Up in a Bow"	
5. Assignment	76
"Move It Into Life"	
In Summary	
<b>THE UNIT PLAN</b> .....	<b>76</b>
Synthesis of Plans	77
Benefits of a Unit Plan	78
A Drastic Example	79
Lessons from Example	83
<b>THE SUNDAY SCHOOL HOUR</b> .....	<b>83</b>
Fragmented Time	
The Double Squeeze	84
Steal the Thunder	
You Do Your Thing	
Whole Hour Focus	85
Whole-Hour Requirements	86
Whole-Hour Benefits	
Whole Hour Example	87
<b>SPIRITUAL PREPARATION</b> .....	<b>88</b>
Lord, Save Us from Presumption	
Lord, Lead Us to Prepare	89
<b>THE LONG LOOK</b> .....	<b>90</b>
Jesus' Students	
Snapshot or Movie?	91
<b>CHAPTER SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>94</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Disciplers' Manner</b>	
Divine Logos	95
Human Leader	
<b>1. THE INDIVIDUAL IS IMPORTANT</b> .....	<b>96</b>
Principle One: George	97

<b>2. RELATIONSHIP IS IMPORTANT</b> .....	<b>99</b>
Power or Relationship?	
Principle Two: Frank	100
<b>3. JESUS PRACTICED HUMILITY</b> .....	<b>102</b>
Principle Three: Don	103
Larry	104
<b>4. JESUS MET PEOPLE'S NEEDS</b> .....	<b>104</b>
Principle Four: Jack	106
<b>5. JESUS SUPPORTED HIS FOLLOWERS</b> .	<b>108</b>
Principle Five: Bill	110
Principle Six: Henry	111
Principle Seven: Leroy	112
<b>6. THE DISCIPLES WERE ORGANIZED</b> .	<b>114</b>
The Twelve Divided	
Special Attention to Three	
Special Status of Peter	
From Many to One	
Principle Eight: Virginia and Joan	115
<b>7. JESUS' AUTHORITY TO LEAD</b> .....	<b>116</b>
Principle Nine: John	116
Principle Ten: Steve	118
Principle Eleven: Roger	119
<b>8. JESUS KNEW NO FAILURE</b> .....	<b>120</b>
Principle Twelve: Fred	121
<b>9. REFLECTIONS FROM PETER</b> .....	<b>121</b>
The Church is the Body of Christ	122
The Christian leader. . .	
. . .nurtures the Church	
. . .is an example	
. . .is humble toward others	
. . .is humble before God	
. . .depends on God	
. . .is in control of himself	
. . .faithfully stands	123
In Summary. . .	
We are Called as Program Leaders	
We are Called as Servants	
The Tension. . .	
. . .is Resolved in Christ!	
<b>EPILOGUE</b> .....	<b>124</b>

# Birth of the Disciplers' Model

**T**he Disciplers' Model grew out of my struggles in teaching. Long before entering formal studies in education ministry at Southwestern seminary, I wrestled with common problems associated with teaching Sunday School. Inattention, sporadic attendance, and general disinterest were the prevalent traits of my learners during those early years.

## BEFORE SEMINARY

During the three years before entering seminary I taught a Sunday School class of deaf college students. My wife and I worked as dormitory counselors at Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C. and directed the deaf ministry at Columbia Baptist Church (SBC) in nearby Falls Church, Virginia. These young adults were bright and enthusiastic, but they lacked experience with the Bible and the language of the church.

## Lives in a Blood Pump?

One day I was talking with several students about salvation. "What do you mean by 'saved'," one of them asked. I tried to explain the term in words I had learned in Sunday School and Church Training. "It means to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior." *What do you mean 'accept Jesus'?* one asked.

Hmmm. "Well, it means to invite Jesus into

your heart." More puzzled looks. *How can Jesus live in my heart? Is He that small? How can He live inside a muscle that pumps blood?*

Hmmm. "Well, it means to let Jesus guide your life." *How can He guide me if I can't see Him?*

Good questions. How do I answer them? After all, they had to move beyond simplistic answers to real understanding if they were to grow in the Lord.

## Religious Code Words

The crux of my communication "problem" was that I grew up, physically and spiritually, in a Christian environment. I grew up in a Christian home. I was saved on Easter Sunday morning, 1954, at the First Baptist Church of Rockville, Indiana. I gave all I knew of myself to all that I knew of the Lord at six years of age.

In 1956 my family moved to El Paso, Texas, where my mother and I joined the Trinity Baptist Church. Several men began visiting my Dad on Thursday nights. He was not a Christian at the time, and their informal but sincere witness made quite an impact on him. Within the year he made his commitment to Christ and I was able to see --even at the age of 8-- what a change could come when one surrendered his life to Christ. At age fourteen, I surrendered to full time Chris-



tian service.

My relationship with the Lord was real, but my *ability to explain* that relationship to my deaf listeners was limited. The religious code words expressed concepts of new life and relationships with the Lord and with other believers. At Church, “the faith” was proclaimed enthusiastically in the jargon of the saved, but it was rarely explained so a child could understand what all the words meant. This jargon still has deep meaning for me, but it communicates only to those who already know the lingo. The question haunted me: “*How can I share the Gospel so that my students can grasp it? Relate themselves to it? Embrace it? Live it? Share it with others?*”

## From Code to Clear

I began to translate my beliefs and personal experiences into language that --by trial and error I found-- had meaning for my students. I formed new ways to express the truth of Christ and how the reality of His Presence helped me day by day. The reality had not changed. The truths were not compromised. But I was obsessed to find ways to explain what the truths meant to those who had yet to experience them.

As I analyzed my religious jargon and the problems it posed in witnessing, I began to ask myself other questions: *How much do I know about the learners who sit in my class? How much of my teaching do students carry with them back to their dorms? Why didn't they ask questions? Why did they seldom make comments, or share personal experiences?* Sunday after Sunday they looked to me --their **teacher** -- to tell them what they should believe. But by Monday they had forgotten most of what I'd worked so hard to tell them. *Oh, Rick, you teach much, and you teach well, but it all goes in*

*one eye and out the other, one of them told me. There had to be a better way!*

## The Beginning of Change

I began to make conscious changes in the way I taught. I asked more questions. I began to use more time to discuss Bible concepts *with them* and less time lecturing *to them*. I learned that their responses to questions and their contribution to discussions revealed how well or poorly I had communicated. In the process, I also learned about experiences in their lives which distorted their understanding of God and His love. I listened for anger and frustration and cries for help. I listened for testimonies of joy and discovery.

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---

Sunday Bible study sessions took on new life. Over the weeks and months that followed, the Bible began to speak to these learners as it had spoken to me for years. I felt the growing expectation of learners as they gathered in the classroom on Sundays. Through assignments made and questions asked the week before, they had already learned. They had already received. They were ready to celebrate together what God had taught them through their Bible study

and personal experiences of the past week. Attendance increased in quantity and consistency. We grew from ten to twenty to thirty during the year. During that same year, 22 committed their lives to Christ and were baptized. Members became leaders and accepted positions of responsibility in the class. Lives were transformed through the study of God's Word. This was my first taste of **discipling** Sunday School.

## DURING SEMINARY

In 1973, I entered Southwestern seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, to study education ministry. In November of that year I was called by a local Southern Baptist church to be Director of Deaf Ministries. The members of the deaf department were no less intelligent than the college students I had taught in Virginia, but they had less formal education and less facility with English. While at Gallaudet College, my sign language skills had been limited to a simplified English syntax. But the people in Irving used American Sign Language (ASL), the language of the deaf community in America. It is rich in its ability to express ideas, feelings, and actions, but it is nonetheless a language in its own right. It is no more like English than is German or Russian.

## More Problems to Solve

The principles I had begun learning in Virginia entered a second stage of development in Texas -- still riveted by a single, crucial question: *"How can I present biblical Truth in a way that my learners can understand, accept, and live out in their world?"* Some of the problems I saw in our adult class included these:

### Teaching = Talking?

The teacher talked about the Bible (and anything else she might have read that week), but she gave no opportunity for the learners to respond or question what she said.

### Maintain Interest?

The teacher seldom gained, and rarely maintained, the interest of her learners. Attendance was motivated primarily by free coffee and doughnuts and annual attendance contests.

### Focus on Teacher or Learners?

The teacher lectured at length every week about her own interests and problems. The members contributed nothing to the session but their presence. The teacher was merely a performer; the learners spectators.

### Learners' Experiences Important?

Members were not invited to participate in the class, nor were they asked about their own views, feelings, or experiences. There was a lot of hidden talk in the back of the room. But none of it related to the Bible study!

### One-way Communication?

The teacher simply stood before the class and talked through what she had prepared to say. She did not help her learners wrestle with the implications of the Bible for real living.

### Sit Still While I Instill?

Members were inhibited. They had been taught not to interrupt the teacher. Learner needs and hurts remained undiscovered and unmet. They came lonely and left lonely. Their lives were untouched by the Bible lessons.

## Mechanical Routine?

Sessions were routine and mechanical. There was little evidence of spiritual growth in the members. To these learners, Bible study was a religious ritual that had little to do with how one lives from day to day. It was something to fill the time until the next attendance contest.

## Concern for Producing Leaders?

There were few leaders in the group. The majority were content to sit back and let the few do the work. Most members had little or no interest in serving the Lord.

## Potential Exposed

While considering how to overcome the problems in our Bible study program, I began to find answers through my studies at Southwestern seminary. I studied educational psychology, principles of teaching and educational philosophy. Clusters of ideas for effective Christian teaching began to develop from the mix of seminary courses and church discoveries. Through months and into years, I was exposed to potential solutions to the problems that continued to hinder my teaching. During my third year in seminary I witnessed a radical approach to classroom teaching that changed me forever. The two-day experience was a furnace that fused education principles learned in seminary with the practical teaching approaches tested with the deaf youth and adults in Irving. The result: the basic elements of the Disciplers' Model.

## Potential Observed

The experience began as a simple visit with my Dad in Lawton, Oklahoma. He was teaching a course for the Army on a newly devel-

oped radar system. I knew he had an excellent reputation as a platform instructor, so I expected to observe a good model of classroom teaching. But I was not quite prepared for the impact that came.

Early Monday morning, I watched as the men shuffled into class. Some yawned from lack of sleep. Some bragged of their misadventures of the night before. Others moved away from the noise and bright lights to nurse their hangovers. Coffee was consumed. Seats were begrudgingly taken as Dad stepped up on the raised platform at the front of the room.

He held the civilian rank equivalent of full Colonel, but his demeanor reflected a person who saw himself more as a guide, or advisor, to these men he was charged with teaching. He resisted the temptation to "pull rank" to manipulate his enlisted students.

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**If this kind of interest  
can be generated  
in Army enlisted men  
studying the tedious details  
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---

He walked to the blackboard and drew a simple diagram that they had used the week before. He turned to the class and said, rather offhandedly, "Now fellahs, there's something wrong with this diagram. We

went over the components and terminology of the system last week. Let's see if we can find the problem. Do any of you have an idea about what's wrong here?" There was silence for a time. A low mumble began on the other side of the room as three soldiers collaborated. Several opened their manuals to check relevant specifications. A question was asked, and Dad provided the requested information. Slowly, other members of the class began to ask questions and make observations based on previous lectures and assignments. Within twenty minutes the class was huddled together in groups of various sizes, reviewing notes and checking manuals.

Additional problems were introduced and alternative solutions developed. Dad moved from group to group, teaching new material, questioning solutions, encouraging comments, and answering arguments. Before I knew it, two hours had passed and it was time for a coffee break. The soldiers stretched their legs, got some more coffee, and went back to work on the problem before break time was officially over. I thought, "If this kind of interest can be generated in Army enlisted men studying the tedious details of radar maintenance, how much more should we be able to generate interest in Christians studying the Book of Life?"

## Potential Realized

When I returned home, I began to put together a special Bible study class. The class would be based on the Disciplers' elements that had been dancing around my mind. I wanted to see if I could teach a Bible class in a way that eliminated the problems I had observed in Sunday School. I wanted the kind of enthusiastic learning I had seen in my Dad's Army classroom to happen in my

Bible study class.

The "test class" was held on Wednesday evenings. I took a low key approach to publicizing the new class -- I did not aggressively promote it or go out of my way to "encourage" people to attend. No refreshments were provided. The only incentive for participating in the class was "better understanding of the Bible." Out of a Sunday morning attendance of 20-25 deaf adults, we had a Wednesday night group of 5-10. I lectured "conversationally," asking questions often and requiring the participants to dig out the answers. I made assignments every week to encourage individual preparation. In seven months, I noted the following trends.

### We Let the Bible Speak

The class used the Bible as its text. We did not merely talk about the Bible, but discussed God's Word and its relevance to our lives. We let the Bible speak.

### Interest Based on Relevance to Life

Interest in the class remained high during the entire course of study. Attendance was more stable than in our Sunday School. Learners in the class were consistently enthusiastic because they saw for themselves the relevance of the Bible to their own daily problems and decisions.

### Initiative Improved

At first, class members waited for me to explain the Bible to them. I had difficulty getting them to answer questions or search for answers in the Bible. As time passed, however, they became less dependent on me and searched the scriptures more for themselves.

### Mutual Respect Grew

They learned to respect one another's opinions and feelings. Put-downs and arguments



among members decreased. Self-worth grew as problems were shared with trusted members in the group. Solutions were offered and discussed.

### **Result: Changed Lives.**

Learners applied both heart and mind to their Bible study. They discovered new ways to express the meaning of the Bible to their friends at school and work. They applied its Truth in their daily lives. Lifestyles began to change for the better.

### **Trust Increased**

Class members shared more deeply with one another, after only a month or so, than I had seen in two and a half years prior to the class. Trust level among members increased.

### **Insight into Learner Needs**

I learned so much more about each member of the class in these seven months than I had learned in the previous three years. I learned about their level of Bible knowledge, spiritual maturity, likes and dislikes, and so on. With this information, I taught more effectively.

### **Confidence Improved**

Members became more confident in their own ability to serve. Church Training and Sunday School efforts were made stronger because of the involvement of these Wednesday nighters.

### **Willingness to Serve Increased.**

The desire of learners to do something for the Lord increased as they discovered their gifts and gained personal confidence. They began to minister to friends and acquaintances. Numerical growth increased as members engaged in personal ministry instead of

games and gimmicks.

## **SINCE SEMINARY**

The experiment was held on Wednesday nights, but its results have been applied in regular Sunday School programs ever since. I have served several churches as minister of education: five years as a full-time minister, and then eight years as interim minister of education in three Fort Worth area churches. I have led dozens of Sunday School workshops and conferences across the Convention. I have talked with scores of teachers who struggle with the same frustrations I had: disinterest, mechanical teaching, passive learners, and little apparent growth in the Lord.

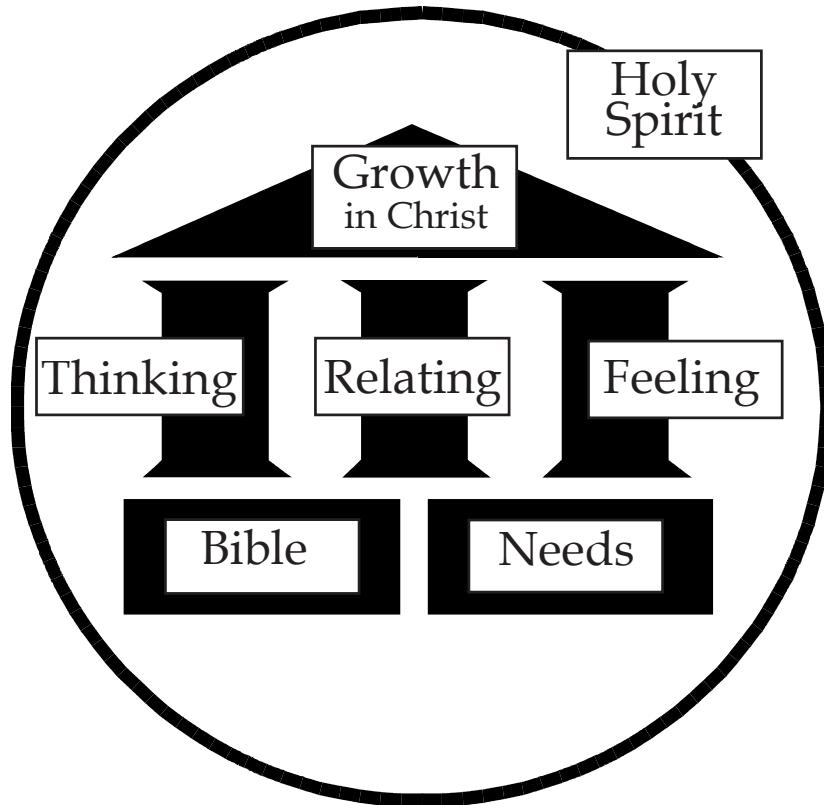
As a seminary professor, I talk with students every semester who are ready to give up on Sunday School as an obsolete and unworkable organization -- until they get a vision for the ministry that is possible through a discipling approach to Bible study.

The principles that began in a deaf college Sunday School class in 1971, that developed through Master's and Doctoral degrees in education, that were molded through years of teaching deaf adults, have since been applied in teacher training seminars in scores of churches and seminary classrooms. The response has been strong and overwhelmingly positive.

You can see similar results in your Sunday School ministry, but it may require fundamental changes in the way your teachers view their task. The required changes in teachers and leaders require time, patience, and consistent effort from the pastor or education minister.

***The Disciplers' Handbook outlines just how to accomplish this task.***





# The Disciplers' Model

**S** watched them as they slowly gathered in the conference room. It was time to start another new Sunday School year, and the church had brought me in to stir up the troops. Here were the dedicated ones, the ones who faithfully attended training sessions and planning meetings. But many of them looked as if they were suffering from battle fatigue.

The minister of education led the group in prayer: "Oh Lord, help us to redouble our efforts this year. Forgive us when we fail to serve You as we should. Now, give us open minds to learn how to be effective teachers. Amen."

I stood to speak. As I looked into the eyes of those teachers, all I could see was weariness and futility. What could I say to them that would ignite their enthusiasm for the greatest challenge in the world? What could I say that would overcome their shell-shock and battle fatigue from months and years in the trenches of spiritual warfare? I smiled at the group, and a few smiled back. After a few introductory remarks, I invited them to open their Bibles to Ezekiel 37.

*<sup>1</sup>And the hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and*

*set me in the middle of a valley: it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"*

*I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know."*

*<sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!' <sup>5</sup>This is what the Sovereign*



*Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup>I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord'.*

*<sup>10</sup>So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and*

*stood up on their feet--a vast army."*

"Do you ever get the feeling at the beginning of a new Sunday School year that you are standing in a place much like Ezekiel? Do you look at your class and see little more than 'dry bones'?" I noticed several heads nod, and a few faces smiled knowingly. "How do we prophesy to the dry bones who sit in our classes? How do we let God put flesh and skin upon them and life in them? How do we teach so that God can raise up an Army among us, to live for Him, and to serve Him? That's what our conference tonight will answer." At that moment, I saw the Spirit of God move among those teachers. Eyes brightened. Bodies leaned slightly forward. Hands picked up pencils and opened notepads. And another journey into the fascinating world of Christ-centered, Bible-based, person-oriented teaching had begun.

. . .

Chapter Zero explained *why I became* so enthusiastic about discipling Bible study. But it is the responses I get from Sunday School teachers – conference after conference -- and from seminary students – semester after semester -- that *continues to excite me* about the Disciplers' Model. The Lord continues to use the Disciplers' Model to renew the hope and commitment of those He has called to teach. That is the real blessing of sharing the Disciplers' Model with others. "Then you will know that I am the Lord'."

But before we examine the answer to 'dry bones' in Bible study, we need to understand the root cause of those dry bones. Just what is the problem?

## THE PROBLEM IS RITUAL

The dictionary defines "ritual" as "prescribed

forms of religious worship or practice; observance of prescribed forms in religion" (The New Webster Dictionary of the English Language, 1965, p. 727). A ritualized Bible study, then, is a religious duty imposed from without rather than a spiritual privilege embraced from within. The former is revealed by words like, "The good Christian ought to go to Sunday School!" The latter by the words, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" (Psalm 122:1) The former is 'dry bones,' the latter 'living spirit.' But ritualized Bible study and worship are not new. Ritualized religion grows out of the natural tendency to simplify life.

## The Advantages of Ritual

Ritual saves time and mental energy. When I go into a clothing store, I don't spend any time at all deciding whether to steal a suit. I give it no thought at all.

When I sit down in a restaurant and the waitress asks, "Care for a cocktail?", it takes no time at all for me to say "No, thank you." I spend no time wondering whether I should or shouldn't. I spend no emotional energy worrying about it. I give no thought to whether I'm being watched or not.

I made these decisions, as well as many others, long ago. They are part of my lifestyle. I take these actions for granted and my life is less confusing because of it.

## The Dangers of Ritual

Even with these advantages, ritual is dangerous because it impairs personal relationships. If I give my wife the impression that I'm taking her for granted, our relationship will suffer. Or when I take a friendship for granted, I may soon lose a friend.

When we ritualize Bible study and worship, the Lord has no active role in them. Ritual closes hearts and minds to the moving of the Spirit of God. The result of taking Him for granted in religious activities is 'dry bones.' The Lord told prophet Isaiah: *"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up of rules taught by men."* (29:13, NIV)

Religious ritual is so natural. It is so subtle. We drift into it without knowing what's happening unless we consciously work against it. But ritual in singing hymns, attending Sunday School, giving money, or visiting prospects closes spiritual channels through which God can transform our lives. We must intentionally invite Him into our studies and into our classrooms.

## Why Have a Model?

A model is an uncomplicated representation of complicated reality. It simplifies complex ideas. A model helps us 'take in the whole' of a problem and think about it in a way that isn't possible without it. It unfolds a mental map for our thinking.

The Disciplers' Model is a simple graphic that has helped me analyze the complexities of Christian teaching for more than fifteen years. You will learn the elements of the Disciplers' Model quickly. But you will be able to use it for the rest of your life to enhance and balance and evaluate your teaching.

## Focus on How-to?

'Dry bones' Bible study is definitely a situation that needs study. But some are tempted to short-circuit the analysis. Some want to

hurry on to the practical how-to's of method and technique. It's a mark, I suppose, of our instant culture. We are action-prone. We want results! But the world of constant doing has little room for contemplation or meditation or "waiting on the Lord." The world of "how?" and "when?" has little room for "why?"

## First, Focus on Why!

But, you say, there is much to be said for aggressiveness and action. It gets the job done! And that's the bottom line.

**Sure, there is a lot to be said  
for action.  
But there is danger also --  
like running in the dark.**



But what is the job? Why are we doing it? Sure, there is a lot to be said for action. But there is danger also like running in the dark. If we neglect the purpose for Bible study, we risk creating a Sunday School that operates in a aimless, mechanical way.

We *may* end up building an organization that runs helter skelter, consuming the time and energy of many people, with little or no regard for spiritual direction or ultimate purpose.

What is the *why*? of our ministry?

### Leaves and Fruit

Jesus saw this in the religious organization of His day. Early in the morning, the Monday of Easter Week, He and the twelve made their way from Bethany to Jerusalem. As they walked along the road, Jesus spotted a fig tree covered with leaves. Since the fig tree produces leaves after bearing fruit, He had every reason to believe He'd find figs on the tree. But when He parted the leaves He found no fruit. The tree was barren. It was a deceiver, a hypocrite, giving the appearance of fruit-bearing when it actually produced nothing but leaves. Later in the day Jesus found the temple organization in the same condition. There were religious leaves in the hustle-bustle of religious activity, but no spiritual fruit. On both the tree and the temple He issued stern condemnations (Mark 11:12-20).

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**There were  
religious leaves  
in the hustle-bustle of  
activity,  
  
but no spiritual fruit.**

---

We can grow leaves on our educational tree without a model to guide us. We can increase attendance, enlist leaders, train teachers, and hold meetings with no more aim than to reinforce the organization. Leaves are important. Trees die without them. But if we want spiritual fruit among the leaves, we need a biblical model to give us direction as

we lead and teach God's people.

### Using the Model to Solve Problems

John was sitting in his study, thumbing through his sermon notes for Sunday one last time before heading out to the hospitals, when the phone buzzed. It was Ethel, a Sunday School teacher for one of the ladies' classes.

"Brother John, I'm so frustrated with my class that I just don't know what to do! You know how hard I work. I've taught that class for years! But I've seen so few results. They refuse to participate or answer questions. They won't study for class during the week! They're not visiting. I'm ready to give it up and let someone else try!"

With a few well-placed questions drawn from the Model, John was able to diagnose Ethel's real problem. He made several suggestions for her to try over the next several weeks. He commended her good work and encouraged her to stay with the class. He listened carefully to her and shared with her. "Let me know how things go these next few weeks," he said as he hung up the phone.

John helped this teacher in several practical ways. He supported her ministry as a teacher. He affirmed her as a child of God. He gave her practical suggestions to help alleviate the problems that were frustrating her. He heard her, and helped her. Things did improve as she tried his suggestions. Her attitude toward the class and her ministry of teaching improved as well. John had a model that helped him analyze the situation and provide concrete help.

### THE MODEL'S THE SOLUTION

My solution to the problem of ritualized



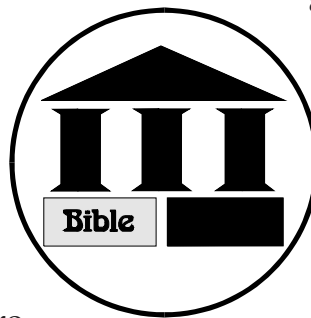
Bible study, as you learned in Chapter Zero, is the Disciplers' Model. The Model grew out of my struggles--both as a Sunday School teacher of adults and as a minister of education training adults to teach. The struggles centered around eliminating "dry bones" in the teaching ministry of the church. The remainder of the chapter defines each of the seven elements and shows how they work together to help believers "live a life worthy of the Lord, and please Him in every way." (Col 1:10, NIV)

## THE LEFT FOUNDATION STONE: The Bible: God's Eternal Word

The left foundation stone of the model represents the Bible. Efforts in Sunday School come and go: high attendance Sundays, re-organization plans, building programs. But unless these efforts produce a clearer understanding of the Bible, with its call to personal commitment to Christ and His Church, all our efforts may produce "wood, hay, and stubble" (1 Cor. 3:12, NIV). For teaching to be rightly called "Christian," it must be built upon the sure foundation of God's Word.

### What is the Bible?

Southern Baptists are serious about the Bible. Leaders have written volumes defending the Scriptures and attacking those who hold views different from their own. Yet the arguments, which often give off more heat than light, usually focus on interpretations of Scripture, and not the nature of Scripture itself. Southern Baptists differ in their interpretations, but all claim to be "People of the Book." As we try to bring order out of the chaos of human attempts to defend the Bible, let's look at what "the Book" says about



itself.

**Divinely inspired.** "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I [the Lord] have spoken to you" (Jer 36:2). "the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel. . . There the hand of the Lord was upon him" (Ezek 1:3). "the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David" (Acts 1:16). "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). "For the prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet 1:21).

**Sacred.** Do not alter Scripture by adding to it or taking away from it. Deut 4:2, 12:32; Prov 30:6; Rev 22:19.

**Powerful in its influence.** "I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes." (Jer 5:14). "Is not my word. . . like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jer 23:29). "The gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). "Take the. . . sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17). "It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb 4:12).

**Written for a purpose.** "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31). "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us" (1 Cor 10:11). "I write these things. . . so that

you may know that you have eternal life" (1 Jn 5:13).

**Eternal truth.** "Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens (Ps 119:89). "The word of God stands forever. (Isa 40:8). "My words will never pass away" (Mt 24:35). "But the word of the Lord stands forever" (1 Pe 1:25).

### How do You Use the Bible?

God's Word is Eternal Truth. Few would argue about the *nature* of Scripture. But how do you *handle* Scripture as you teach? Whether you are effective disciplers depends directly on how you we handle Scripture. Even with the highest regard for Scripture, you may not help your learners grow in the Lord.

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**But even with  
the highest regard  
for the Bible,  
teachers may not *disciple*  
their learners**

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#### "Talk About It."

A popular way to handle Scripture is **to talk about it**. Study the lesson and then tell the class about the Bible passage for the week. I remember spending hours every week preparing to "teach the lesson" on Sunday. I read the assigned passage, studied the accompanying teaching helps, and wrote out several pages of notes: my "lesson." On Sunday I stood behind a podium or at a desk and "taught my lesson." I can remember Sundays when I taught so hard (using sign language with deaf college students) that I liter-

ally sweat through my suits! Yet several days later, members of my class remembered little of what I had worked so hard to teach. How could they become "doers of the Word" if they couldn't remember what the Bible said?!

I was merely talking about the Bible. The study was little more than a history lesson to my students.

Test this yourself. Ask members of your class next Sunday what they remember from last week. Be prepared for a shock! Most of what you said will have been forgotten by Monday! Telling people about the Bible is a good first step, but *discipling* Bible study requires more. There is a better way to help people grow spiritually.

#### "Let the Bible Speak!"

The better way to handle Scripture in the classroom -- and the approach I've found to be helpful in really changing learners -- is to let the Bible speak! When I ask thoughtful questions and lead my learners into God's Word for the Answers, I find that they remember what we've studied far better than when I simply give them my own ready-made answers. Further, while learners search for answers in assigned Scripture passages, the Lord can speak to their hearts directly. Insights may have little to do with the questions I ask, but the Lord speaks to learners out of His Word nonetheless -- and when He speaks, learners seldom forget! *Well, I certainly see your point in verse 4, but I noticed something in verse 6 that really hit me...*

The Bible, God's eternal Truth, is the sure foundation of discipling Bible study. Let us unsheath our Swords! **Let the Word speak**, that it may convict and comfort, warn and console, revive and refresh us -- so we might become all He intends and do all He com-

mands. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105, NIV).

## THE RIGHT FOUNDATION STONE: The Needs of People

The right foundation stone in the model represents the *personal needs* of learners in the class. The Bible is not like other so-called holy books that just fell out of the sky. The Bible is the Holy Book written by men who were inspired by God, who hungered for Him, whose deepest needs were met and whose lives were filled by a loving God. Learners discover these riches by applying biblical teachings and experiences to their own needs.

### Jesus Focused on Needs

Jesus taught people the meaning of scripture by focusing it at their point of personal need. Zacchaeus was lonely. Jesus asked to have dinner with him (Lk. 19:10). Jairus grieved at the death of his daughter. Jesus raised her to life (Mk. 5:21ff). Nicodemus the Pharisee sought Jesus' words on the kingdom of God. Jesus gave him specific instructions (Jn. 3).

Jesus did not dine with everyone, nor raise all dead people, nor give special instructions to all. *He met needs in the lives of people -- the leperous, the lame, the deaf, the blind, the lonely and the religious -- and in doing so, taught us about our Father and His Kingdom.* Jesus pointed to soils and light and salt and sheep. He illustrated eternal truths with basic things that were familiar to those who pressed close to hear Him teach. He had no need of attendance prizes or candy or free trips to manipulate interest or enthusiasm. He spoke the Words of Life we all hunger



for! He shared with His learners a caring Father Who wants only the best for them. The Eternal Truth of Scripture became real to the persons He touched. It became "Truth that matters to me!"

### Our Learners Have Needs

We have the same basic, personal needs that Jesus found in the people of His day. Many have rejected the Answers to their needs because Scripture is so often cloaked in religious jargon -- "church talk" -- and dark moralistic tones. Some make the "lesson" more important than their learners. *I wish we had time to discuss your situation, but I have five more verses to cover!* We need to follow the Master's example. Love your learners and teach so they can apply scripture in the nitty-gritty concerns of living.

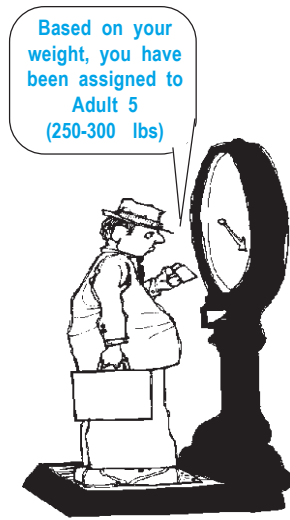
What the Bible says is unchanging, but how we explain it varies with those we teach. Why? Because our learners have different needs. These differing needs are both general and specific.

### General needs

The general needs of learners are factors which most people have in common. An important general need of learners is age-appropriate learning activities. Preschoolers learn differently from children, and children differently from youth. The adult age range spans 60 or more years and involves major life changes. Learners within given age categories experience similar things in life: growing, school, adolescence, marriage, family, home, career, retirement. Similarity of life experiences helps the group focus on relevant Bible teachings.

**Group Adults by Age or Weight?** This is the

main educational reason for age-grading in Sunday School. We have "X" people to put in "Y" spaces. How can we do this to provide the best educational setting for Bible study? I once suggested that, since so many of our members were complaining about **age-grading** that we grade our Sunday School by **weight**. Adult 1 would consist of adults under 110 pounds and Adult 6 would be those over 300. After that, grading by age didn't seem so bad after all!



You will be able to communicate much better with the group you teach if you have a good understanding of the group's general age characteristics.

But there are other general need areas: the need to know the Lord personally, to grow in the Lord, to use his or her gifts in a place of service to others. Every believer needs to pray. Every believer needs fellowship with other believers. These general areas of need guide the discipler as he or she prepares to teach.

### Specific Needs

But there are areas of *specific needs* as well. These needs are unique to individual learners and include such things as personal failures or successes, past tragedies, present struggles, and areas of spiritual drought. There are an amazing number of aches, pains and scars in a Church Family. I learned that years ago when I helped a counselor on our church staff. During the group sharing times, I heard church members share experiences

and tragedies that had twisted them all out of shape. But you would not have known it to look at them on Sunday morning. Until an atmosphere of trust can be established, these areas of need remain hidden.

**Know your learners one by one.** Make a point to know your learners as individuals, as persons. Rejoice with them when they celebrate and empathize with them when they hurt. I found it helpful to keep a notebook of special events, prayer requests and experiences shared in class by learners. I used this notebook to help me plan our Bible studies to address these areas of concern.

### Two Stones in Tension

The model requires a stable, firm foundation if it is to stand. Both foundation stones must bear their share of the burden. If either crumbles, the model falls. If teachers place too much emphasis on the text -- names, dates, places -- and ignore the needs of learners, they tend to teach history lessons. If teachers place too much emphasis on learners and their needs and ignore the text, they tend toward group therapy. Let's look more carefully at these two extremes.

### Unrelated History?

Some people enjoy history, but the Word of God is much more. When teachers are more concerned with "the lesson" than with the Christian walk of their learners, they place too much focus on content. Learners subjected to this kind of imbalance ask "What does this Bible passage have to say to me?" Unrelated to their present needs or concerns or interests? Hmm. *Irrelevant history?* I'll never forget the night a retired judge nailed me over that term. I used the term in a conference with over three hundred teachers of adults who had gathered from across three different associations. As I made my point





...but we can teach so that our learners think it is!

about "history lessons" and "relevancy," he stood to his feet, pointed his finger at me and said, *Young man, I'll have you know that the Word of God is never irrelevant!*

Three hundred pairs of eyes turned toward me to see how I'd respond. I said, "Well, of course you're right," I said. "But if we merely talk about the Bible, if we never help learners see how the Bible can address their own

problems and needs, then they will **think** it's irrelevant. And the result is *dry bones* teaching." To help the lost understand their need for the Lord, and to help believers grow in Him, we must do more than tell Bible stories and teach history. We must make God's Word relevant to the needs and problems of our learners.

### Group Therapy?

On the other hand, members who merely share concerns and needs with each other, without addressing those needs out of scripture, will not grow either. Group therapy is fine in its place, but it isn't Bible study. It doesn't provide Answers to the questions raised. I once overheard two teachers talking in a hallway. One of the teachers had attended my conference on leading discussions and was telling his friend about it. "Oh, I don't have a problem getting a discussion started in my class. We can always talk about football!" There may be discussion, but there will be little growth in the Lord. Some classes consume much of their Bible study time sharing prayer needs. Other classes spend their time catching up on the latest news. Good fellowship. Good sharing. Getting to know each other. But real needs remain untouched. God's Word is not allowed to speak. *Where's the substance?*

### Stay Out of the Ditches!

And so our road has ditches on both sides: unrelated history lessons on the left and group therapy on the right. Taken together,





however, Eternal Truth and Present Needs provide a super highway for discipling Bible study. As you provide a place where the Word of God speaks directly to the real needs of your learners, you establish a personal ministry that is both relevant and eternal.

We have laid the foundation for Bible study that helps people grow in the Lord: God's Eternal Word, and learners' present needs. On this sure foundation, we are ready to erect the three pillars of discipling Bible study: helping people think biblically, helping learners remove masks, and building *koinonia*.

## The Left Pillar: Helping People Think

We began the chapter talking about ritualized Bible study and its deadly effect. Ritual holds us hostage in our religious status quo. We may be comfortable, perhaps, but we are also spiritually dry. Ritualistic Bible study paralyzes the thinking process. The result is members who can only repeat religious clichés and give pat answers to complex problems. Believers mouth memorized prayers: *Lord, be with the sick and afflicted (whoever they may be)*. Respond to hardships with glib phrases: *Well, just praise the Lord anyway! (so long as I don't have to go out of my way to help or anything)*. Or sing hymns and choruses without a thought to what the words mean: *All to Jesus, I surrender. All to Him I freely give (so long as I can do as I please)*.

### What's an 'Ebenezer'?

In my early years of ministry with the deaf, I was preparing to interpret the hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." One of the verses begins

*Here I raise my Ebenezer,  
Hither by Thy help I'm come.*

I have enthusiastically sung this song many times, but at that moment I realized that I had no idea what an "Ebenezer" was. A little bit of study uncovered 1 Samuel 7:12:

*Then Samuel took a stone and set it up  
between Mizpah and Shen. He named it  
Ebenezer  
saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us."*

So I learned that the Ebenezer was a memorial to the Lord, a thanksgiving to God for helping Israel against her enemies. This is exactly what the verse says: *Hither by thy help I'm come*. How did I interpret it in the worship service?

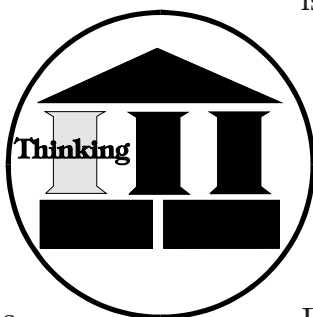
*Here I raise my praise to Jesus,  
Up-til-now You've helped me a lot.*

Well, it doesn't translate well into English, but it conveys meaning.

And that's what had I missed. I had sung that song all my life without ever thinking about what the words meant. Such mindless ritual hinders Christian growth.

### Thinking Supports Growing

If you want to grow in the Lord as you study the Bible, you must think about what it means! If you want to disciple those you teach, then you must help them to think clearly. Not merely parrot your answers, but to weigh evidence, to ask questions, to analyze the answers of others, to confront the status quo with God's Word. The "Thinking Pillar" represents the disciplers' *objective focus* in teaching: helping learners translate the familiar stories and passages of the Bible into principles and standards by which they



can make decisions in everyday situations. How do we teach so that thinking skills are improved?

### Three Stages of Thinking.

Paul gives us a keen insight into the role of thinking in Christian growth when he wrote to the Colossian believers:

*“. . . We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9).*

Here Paul presents us with three components of spiritual growth through using the mind. These are knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

### Knowledge

We commonly use the word knowledge to refer to facts that the learner commits to memory. “To know” something means to be aware of, or to be able to identify something.

*More than information.* “Giving people information” is different from “establishing knowledge.” When you succeed in teaching for knowledge, learners remember what was taught. Many Sunday School teachers deal more with Bible *information* than they do Bible *knowledge*. Information simply doesn't stick until it is actively processed by learners. In my early days of teaching Sunday School, a deaf college student told me “You teach too much -- it goes in one eye and out the other!” Bible facts will be quickly forgotten unless we do more than simply talk through the lesson.

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**Many  
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than they do  
Bible *knowledge***

---

*Heart knowledge.* But Paul goes beyond the idea of “head knowledge” in this passage. He does not use the more common word for knowledge, *gnosis* [NOsis]. He was writing against the forerunners of the Gnostics [“gnosis people”] who held that, without their secret knowledge, believers could not get to heaven.

The word Paul did use in this passage to convey his meaning of knowledge is *epignosis* (ayPEHGnosis). The word means “knowledge that reaches out and grasps its object and is in turn grasped by its object.” An example might be a baseball fan’s knowledge of baseball. He reaches out to grasp the game, and also is grasped by it. It is a term of intimate relationship, akin to the idea of husband and wife knowing each other intimately. The term includes head knowledge, but moves beyond it into what we might call “heart” knowledge: a knowledge that affects the way we live.

*What does the Bible say?* The beginning point for effective Bible teaching is to convey what the Bible says. Clear interpretation of Bible teachings requires knowledge of Bible persons, terms, places, and events. Without an adequate background in the setting of a given Bible passage, the learner will interpret the words of the Bible in light of his culture and experience. The Baptist Sunday

School Board provides Southern Baptists a veritable treasure chest of background helps in teaching materials. Suggested teaching plans, commentaries, the *Illustrator* magazine for adults, and resource kits provide more information than any teacher can cover in a Sunday School hour. As good as this biblical all-you-can-eat buffet is, problems arise when teachers view this feast as required diet.

**Overemphasis on facts.** Too much emphasis on background facts can take so much teaching time that we never address the other stages of thinking. "I wish we could discuss your question, but I have three more verses to cover." If you do nothing more than tell facts, you will not help learners to grasp or be grasped by God's Word. You will not establish knowledge. You merely flood your learners with information, and this they soon forget. *In one eye and out the other.*

"But I thought my job is to Cover The Lesson." I hear this so often in Teacher Conferences. By "Cover the Lesson," teachers mean they feel an obligation to tell their class about all the material in the Teacher's Quarterly. No matter what the learner needs. No matter what questions they ask. No matter what problems surface. They believe their job is to "Cover The Lesson."

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**I wish  
we could discuss  
your question,  
but I have three more verses  
to cover."**

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God has called us to a more important task

than talking through a Sunday School lesson in front of a group of people. Lead learners beyond biblical information to a closer walk with Christ. Help learners think about the implications of God's Word for daily living. This requires moving learners to understanding.

### **Understanding**

Learners *understand* when they have organized knowledge into concepts and principles that can be used. When learners understand a Bible passage, they can explain it to others in their own words. They are not limited to repeating verbatim what others say. They have the ability to describe ideas and terms, give examples of what words do and do not mean, and create examples and illustrations to clarify the idea.

Paul knew the Old Testament well. He had studied under the great Jewish philosopher Gamaliel. He was trained in the best Pharisaical schools. He was zealous in his persecution of "liberal" Jews who were following a dead Nazarene carpenter. He demanded that they return to the "Old Time Religion." But when He met the Risen Lord on his way to Damascus, he saw things in a completely new way. During three years in an Arabian desert, he studied the Old Testament with a new perspective. The Book of Romans gives us the result of his thinking. Before, he knew what the Old Testament said; now he understood what it meant in the light of the resurrection of Jesus.

**What Does the Bible Mean?** Is there a difference between what the Bible *says* and what the Bible *means*? I've had more than a few students who insist that there is no difference: "The Bible says what it means, and it means what it says!" This will always rouse a hardy "Amen!" The only problem is that it isn't necessarily true. The first time I read

Colossians 1:9 ("asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will") I assumed the word "knowledge" meant what I used the word to mean: memorization of facts, or ability to recall. That is not what Paul had in mind when he wrote that statement under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When learners read their own definitions into Bible passages, and then interpret what the Bible "says" accordingly, *they make the Bible reflect their own ideas*. They are not letting the Bible speak to them. I learned the danger of this one night after a deaf revival service in our church. I was talking with a deaf man about the Lord. His heart had been warmed by the message, but he wasn't ready to make a commitment. He wanted to end our discussion of his spiritual condition quickly, so he simply said,

*I can't be saved.*

"Why?" I asked.  
Without hesitation, he said,

*...because I'm deaf.*

"Because you're deaf?! What makes you think that you can't be saved because you're deaf??"

*The Bible says so.*

"Where does the Bible say you can't be saved because you're deaf?"

*Oh, I don't know where exactly.*

*But it says:*

*If you confess with your mouth,*

*"Jesus is Lord," . . .*

*you will be saved.*

*So. . .I'm deaf.*

*I can't confess with my mouth.*

*So, I can't be saved.*

His logic sounded good, though I knew it was wrong. He was really saying, "God made me deaf. He says I can't be saved. It's His fault. So get off my back, preacher."

"But **that's not what that passage means**," I said, wanting to reassure him that he could be saved. But with great finality, he looked me in the eye, and with conviction he said,

*That's what the Bible SAYS!*

**Words or Concepts?** And so I learned in a very practical way that what the Bible seems to say may not always be what the Bible actually means. There is a difference between "words" and "concepts." Knowing words and understanding concepts are two different things.

**What did Jesus say?** Let's take "Love your enemies" as an example. Anyone who has been associated with Sunday School or church for even a short time knows that Jesus said "Love your enemies."

**What did Jesus mean?** J But what did Jesus mean when he said this?

What do I do when I love enemies?

And who are my enemies?

Must I like my enemies?

How will "loving enemies" change the way I live day by day?

I use this familiar phrase each time I present the disciplers' model in conferences. It is amazing to me how much difficulty seasoned Sunday School teachers have with Jesus' concepts in this simple phrase. We often get into quite a discussion about what Jesus meant. This is because answers to these questions involve understanding that love (agape) is "acting toward another in his best interest."



*Agape* does not require emotion or affection toward the one being loved. It is intentional action for another's good. Whose good? My enemies. "Enemy" describes one who is acting against my best interest.

Jesus defined his own words in the passage as He said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Mt. 5:44). "Agape" means blessing and doing good and praying for. Nothing here about how I feel about them. "My enemy" means those who curse me, and hate me, and use and hurt me. My enemy can be my best friend, my colleague, my wife, or a fellow church member. When people close to me hurt me, I do not feel like loving them. But I am commanded to love. Not to feel warm and fuzzy, but to act in their best interest.

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**Unless Bible teaching  
can move learners  
from isolated words  
to biblical concepts,  
we will see  
little spiritual growth  
in our members.**

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It is far easier to know the words "Love your enemies" than it is to understand their meaning. But until learners clearly understand what Jesus meant, they will not be able to "love their enemies" in the way He intended. Unless Bible teaching can move learners from isolated words to biblical concepts, we will see little spiritual growth in our members.

*"Joy is. . . Joy".* A seminary student

wrote a lesson plan on the Fruit of the Spirit [Gal 5:20-21]. His purpose was to help class members understand each of the nine Fruit listed by Paul. This is the pattern he followed throughout the plan:

*So what is joy? Joy is wonderful. It is the kind of joy that only comes from God. It is the joy we'll experience in heaven. The joy of the Lord is a real blessing. . . .*

I wrote on his paper, "So, what is joy?" He never explained what joy (or any of the other Fruit) actually means. How do I experience this joy? What is it like? How does it differ from pleasure or fun or even happiness? His learners never got a clue from his teaching. Nice words, fitly spoken. But little in the way of meaning. **We might call this religious talking, but it certainly is not Christian teaching.**

Holiness. Salvation. Prayer. Ministry. Church. Sin. Sacrifice. Faith. Hope. Patience. Anger. What do these and hundreds of other biblical terms mean?

Mercy and Truth. Love and Wrath. Free will and predestination. Holy anger and forgiveness. Grace and conviction. These biblical concepts pull us one way and then another. Only clear understanding of their associated meaning will lead us to proper action. It is my personal conviction that teachers could improve Sunday School teaching ten-fold simply by giving attention to the concepts that are addressed in assigned passages of scripture. It is far better to help learners master a single biblical concept that they will remember for years than it is to tell them 35 facts that they will forget by Tuesday. But even proper understanding isn't sufficient for growing Christians. We have one step yet to take: helping learners grow in wis-



dom.

### **Wisdom.**

Learners become wise as they put into action Jesus' teachings. At least, this is my understanding of Jesus' definition in Matthew 7:24-26.

...everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice* is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

...everyone who hears these words of mine and *does not put them into practice* is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

**Put Into Practice.** The clear distinction between "wise" and "foolish" in Jesus' definition is the term **put into practice**. Wisdom relates more to what we do than what we know. More to lifestyle than to schooling or position or diplomas. As we learn what the Bible says, understand what the Bible means, and then strive, labor, battle to live in its light, the result is wisdom. Doing the Word! Not hearing only.

**Do What the Bible Commands.** Let's pick up "Love your enemies" again. Your learners know the words. They understand the concepts. Now the question is, *Do they go out and love those who are enemies?* If they don't, then Sunday School is little more than an academic exercise. "The foolish man hears but does not put into practice."

---

**The Lord Himself teaches  
when  
learners live  
by biblical truths.**

---

People hurt, disappoint and frustrate us. This is a normal part of life. How do we respond? In anger? With retribution? If we let Jesus teach us how, if we respond in their best interest, then we "love" (agape) them. If our real-life responses follow this biblical pattern, we demonstrate biblical wisdom.

### **Growth is an Upward Spiral**

Knowing, understanding, and doing carry us upward toward spiritual maturity. Learners discover what the Bible says (knowledge). They process this knowledge in order to clarify Bible concepts (understanding). As they use these biblical concepts to make decisions (wisdom), they grow spiritually. As they grow in wisdom, they learn more about what the Bible says (more knowledge), which in turn allows them to deepen concepts, and so on throughout life.

Christians "take on the mind of Christ" as they spiral upward through knowledge, understanding and wisdom; I spiral upward in Christ. Paul writes to believers, "Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2, NIV).

How do we transform our minds? Paul has already told us:

know what the Bible says,  
understand what it means, and  
live it out  
at home, at work and at church.

**Why Study?** The purpose of this growth, says Paul, is not just to know a lot about the Bible, but to **live biblically**.

"...we pray this in order that you may *live a life worthy of the Lord*, and may *please him* in every way: *bearing*

*fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge [epignosis] of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might" (v. 10, NIV).*

This is the left pillar of the Disciplers' Model. Teach in a way that helps people think biblically, in and out of class. Over time, learners will develop lives "worthy of the Lord." Lives pleasing to God. Fruitful and Strong. Why? Because they know what the Bible says, understands what it means, and does as it commands.

## THE RIGHT PILLAR: Helping People Unmask

Ritual does not limit its cancer to the *thinking* of Christians. It also saps the ability of Christians to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15, NIV). The right pillar in the Model symbolizes the subjective focus in teaching. It addresses the emotional aspects of Christian growth and maturity. Spiritual growth results in an emotional life that is balanced and controlled. Teaching which disciplines students helps them use their emotions appropriately.



### The Smiley-Face Mask

Sunday morning can be a real test of patience. Get the family up and dressed and fed. Off to church late. Strained emotions cause children to fuss and fight, and parents to overreact. By the time the family arrives at church, everyone is angry! But as they make their way to their separate classes, they wear a smiley-face mask.

Or Teenager has a drug problem, but Mom and Dad are afraid to share their anguish with their Sunday School class. "What would people think?!" And so they keep their smiley-face masks firmly in place.

Young married couple in seminary have an infant which requires a special formula. The formula takes most of their food budget, but they don't tell anyone. They're literally starving because they know "God will take care of them." Behind their smiley-face masks lurks hunger and fear.

Or Unemployed can't find a job, but he keeps this to himself because someone might think him a failure. Or Rising Executive gets a surprise promotion, but he keeps it to himself because someone might think him conceited. Religious masks. Hidden hearts. Real problems. Dry bones.

### Jesus Wore No Mask

Jesus was **real** in the way He reacted emotionally to life. He wore no smiley-face mask. He dealt with the world realistically. He was not a dark-hearted prophet of doom, nor a light-hearted Pollyanna. He met life as it was and responded appropriately to the events of His life. When his good friend Lazarus died, Jesus didn't grin and shout "Praise the Lord Anyway!" He wept (Jn. 11:35). When his disciples were exhausted by the press of the crowds and their ministry, Jesus didn't try to pump them up with false enthusiasm. He led them to a place of rest and recuperation (Mk. 6:31). Even when dying on the cross, He arranged for His mother to be cared for (Jn. 19:26).

**When Lazarus died,  
Jesus didn't grin and shout  
"Praise the Lord anyway!"**

**He wept.**

Jesus wore no pious mask to hide his inner feelings. Nor did he gush frothy feelings for all to see. He was not controlled by His emotions, nor did He repress them. He owned them and used them to manage life's circumstances. He directed them into tangible expressions of love and concern for others.

### **Emotional Freedom**

Two key qualities distinguish classrooms where masks can be removed and the real discovered from those where learners play it safe and silent. These qualities are class openness and a personal willingness to share.

#### *Openness.*

Students learn more in a safe, caring atmosphere than they do in a cool and indifferent one. They learn more, and they learn better, when group members trust and accept each other. Masks cannot be removed unless there is an atmosphere of openness in the classroom. The teacher has the most control over how warm and accepting the class atmosphere is. I heard of a professor who would begin classes each semester by informing his students: "I am not here to entertain your ignorance. You are here to learn from me. So, please do not interrupt my lectures with your questions." What level of openness do you think existed in his classrooms? Is this Christian teaching?

Learners can sense the degree of openness in a group just by observing it in action. Is class conversation spontaneous, or is it dominated by the teacher? Does the teacher welcome class questions, or act as if they are distracting interruptions? Are personal experiences shared in class? Is there opportunity for learners to suggest applications of the Bible study, or does the teacher make the application?

Jesus met the woman at the well and changed her life forever. But He had to open a channel to her before He could teach. He did this by talking first about her major interest: water. He opened Himself to her, a Samaritan woman. Remember, respectable Jewish men simply did not talk with women or Samaritans, and especially not Samaritan women! But He bridged the gap, with her interest, so that He could teach her. She became open to **His words**. He told her of the Messiah, the Thirst Quencher, the Water of Life. She then became open to **Him**, and learned from Him, and finally followed Him.

I've seen a Sunday School teacher kill any chance for openness in a class by saying, "I wish we had time to discuss your questions on this, but I have so much to cover this morning!" Translated, this means, "Please sit quietly while I tell you what I studied last week." Dry bones. We develop openness in learners by being open to learners.

#### *Willingness to share.*

Think about two classes which meet in neighboring rooms. In the first, the learners respond to the teacher's occasional questions with awkward silence. Members keep their ideas and opinions to themselves. They do not answer questions. They wait on the teacher to answer them. Learners do not interact with the teacher or each other. Discus-

sion dies quickly.

In the second class, learners respond quickly to questions from the teacher or other learners. Ideas and opinions flow freely throughout the hour. Learners eagerly share with the teacher and each other.

These two classes have very different trust levels. A willingness to share with others is a strong indication of trust -- subjective strength -- in the class. But classes differ in the degree of openness because they have been *taught to respond the way they do*.

How do teachers weaken trust and openness in the class? Here are some possibilities:

- Embarrassing learners.
- Letting a few talkers dominate classtime
- Lecturing too much
- Treating learners' questions as "interruptions"
- Standing behind a podium or desk to teach
- Seating learners in rows facing the teacher.
- Responding harshly to questions or comments.

Any of these actions will impair learners' willingness to share, and will eventually drive people away from the class. Disciplers reinforce the willingness to share in class by gently drawing into the discussion those learners who seldom participate. "Margaret, we've not heard from you this morning. What has meant the most to you?" They also carefully restrain those who talk too much in class. "Thanks for your response, Jack. Someone else?"

## Removing Emotional Barriers

Eventually, as openness grows, you will have to deal with some real problems in the lives of your learners. You will be confronted by hang-ups, bad experiences, problems, and misunderstandings that keep them from coming to the Lord, or growing in the Lord. This is part of dealing with the real in life rather than playing church games. Do not shun this side of teaching. It is absolutely necessary if we are to move beyond 'dry bones' to 'living spirit.'

No matter how well you explain what the Bible means, the message will not be received until these emotional blocks can be removed. "How do you tell a hungry man about the Bread of Life?" "How do you share the Father's love with an orphan child?" These lines from the hymn "People to People" underscore the importance of the subjective side of teaching.

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**Folks who sit in our classes  
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which keep them from  
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serving, receiving.  
It is the subjective side of the  
model  
that will touch them.  
Not doctrine, not logic, not  
words.  
But the gentle touch  
of caring  
and listening and loving.**

---

My paternal grandmother would not listen to the Gospel because years before a priest told her that if a baby died (Her baby?) with-



out being baptized, it could not go to heaven. I remember as a five-year-old hearing Gramma Yount say to my mom, "If your God can send a little baby to hell, then I want no part of Him!" My mom tried to clear away the debris and share her faith, but Gramma's mind was bolted from the inside. Folks who sit in our classes have hang-ups which keep them from trusting, growing, giving, serving, receiving. It is the subjective side of the model that will touch them. Not doctrine, not logic, not words. But the gentle touch of caring, of listening, of loving.

### *Stonewalling Steve.*

Steve, a college student at Gallaudet College, came to our Bible study class because his girl friend made him. If he wanted to date her, then he had to attend Sunday School. When he came into the class the first morning, he sat in the back of the room facing a side wall. For the entire hour he sat facing that dull, boring wall. And since he was deaf, he heard not one thing I said -- with his ears or with his eyes. He was an angry young man. You could see it in his defiant eyes and his unkempt clothes.

Week after week he came, because he had to. And week after week he sat facing the wall. Regardless, the members of the class began to reach out to him. They would greet him on campus, ask him about his classes, invite him out with the gang. He began to warm to the group.

One week I noticed him turn slightly in his chair so that he could see out of the corner of his eye what I was saying. Week by week he watched a little closer and a little longer, a little more openly. Then one morning it happened. With defiance in his eyes and anger in his trembling hands, he barked back at me, "You don't really believe Jesus can help

anyone, do you?!" He sat back, stunned at his own outburst, fearful, I think, of how I would respond. I smiled at him and said, "Good question. Let's see." I turned to the class of deaf students and asked them, "How has Jesus helped you?" Several in turn shared personal testimonies of what Jesus had done for them. I shared what Jesus had done for me. "Whatever your need, He'll help you if you'll let Him."

After class, Steve stayed behind. He wanted to talk some more. He told me about his life, of being deaf. He told of hearing parents who would not learn sign language, nor make any attempt to talk with him. His drinking began around age 8. By age 10 he was an alcoholic.

Now, at 19, the doctor had given him 2 years to live unless he stopped drinking. With tears rolling down his cheeks, he looked at me with haunting, searching eyes -- no longer defiant -- and asked, "Can Jesus *really* help me?"

I assured him He could and told him how he could know the Lord personally and walk with Him day by day. He prayed the sinners' prayer and asked Jesus into his heart. When he looked up at me again, there was no doubt what had happened. Those defiant, then searching, eyes were now radiant with joy! His whole face shouted hope. He made his profession public in the worship service and was baptized that night. The next week he came to church, not with a scowl as before, but with an award-winning smile. His hair was combed, his face shaven, his clothes pressed. His self-image had certainly changed for the better!

### *How about Your Steves?*

Steve's hang-up was his deafness: God had made him deaf. Why should he open his life

to Him? But learners in your class may have personal hurts, secret burdens, or twisted hang-ups that keep them from coming to the Lord or sharing with the class, or growing in the Lord. It is the subjective side of teaching -- openness, sharing, modelling -- that will make the difference in these situations.

### Emotional Growth

What causes the majority of problems in a church? Is it doctrine? Is it worship style? No. Most conflicts and disputes within a fellowship come from symptoms of emotional immaturity: rash comments, fickle conduct, irritability, fear, anxiety, short temper. The subjective focus of the Model reduces the effects of these destructive traits as learners develop love for and trust in one another.

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**Most conflicts and disputes within a fellowship come from symptoms of emotional immaturity: rash comments, fickle conduct, irritability, fear, anxiety, short temper.**

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There is a positive effect as well. An open and accepting atmosphere in the classroom *strengthens positive emotional traits* in learners as they accept themselves and others more honestly. These positive traits include such things as working well with others, managing impulses, expressing good feelings without embarrassment, refraining from worry, and accepting constructive criticism.

We see the emotional transformation Jesus brings to life as we study the Gadarene demoniac. The demons who possessed him pulled his mind in a thousand different directions. He abused himself and others. Then Jesus came and replaced the turmoil and confusion with wholeness. And when the townspeople found him, he was "sitting there, dressed and in his right mind." (Mk 5:1-20). Jesus can also bring emotional wholeness out of our chaos of uncontrolled feelings, if we will let Him. Oh, how we need a strong dose of emotional growth in our churches!

### The Teacher as Model

Subjective learning is more *caught from* the teacher than *taught by* the teacher. *Who I am* as a teacher registers more deeply with my learners than *what I say*. Teachers who are open in the class teach openness. Those who display reverence for God's Word teach reverence. Those who cooperate with department leaders and staff ministers teach cooperation. These teachers have a double influence: their actions reinforce the words they speak, the concepts they explain, and the truths they share.

#### *Talk the Walk?*

Then there are teachers who talk commitment but neglect worship service attendance or complain about stewardship sermons. There are teachers who talk cooperation but avoid opportunities to cooperate. There are teachers who talk outreach but never visit, or talk ministry but never minister, or talk missions but never give or go. They defuse their own teaching. They produce confusion. They weaken church efforts to reach out. They produce dry bones.

Paul wrote to Timothy and reminded him of the subjective learning he had experienced.



He said, "You saw my endurance and love and patience as I met all those persecutions and difficulties. . .you know how the Lord brought me safely through them all" (2 Tim. 3:10-11). The knowledge of Timothy came through personal, first-hand observation. Timothy saw Paul go through them and learned from what he saw. Paul was Timothy's model.

### *Walk the Talk!*

We have no choice about being a model. People who know us will be influenced for better or worse by our lifestyle. We put "our brand" of Christianity on display every day. Without any fanfare or conscious effort, the basic values, attitudes, prejudices and convictions we hold most dear flow into the lives of those we teach. The stronger the bond of rapport and love, the stronger the influence. Whether our values are positive or negative, destructive or constructive, godly or ungodly, the process marches on. As teachers, we are models. What we do as models is ours to decide.

## **Balance Left and Right Pillars**

The left and right pillars work together to support the structure. Both are necessary. But keeping a proper balance between the two is not easy. We tend to drift toward one side of the model or the other.

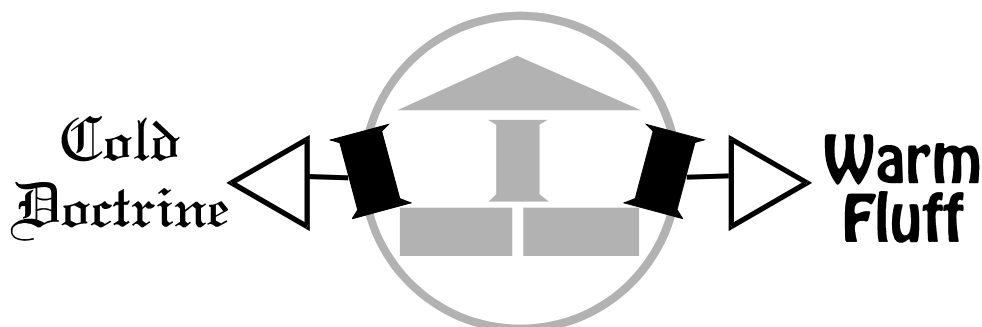


**"If you'd get right with God, you'd agree with me!"**

**This isn't teaching.  
It's religious browbeating.**

### **Cold, Callous Dogmatism?**

When the teacher places too much emphasis on the objective side of the model and neglects the subjective, Bible study becomes dogmatic. Neglect of the subjective in teaching produces a cold, callous dogma that has little sympathy or concern for the feelings of others. I recently heard of a Sunday School teacher who addressed his class on the subject of tithing as follows: "I have heard that some of you men do not tithe. I just want



you to know that I can scarcely imagine how a person who does not tithe can be a Christian." My pastor friend, a long-time tither -- he's in his 80's!--, explained his distress by saying, "It almost made me want to stop tithing!" As we move further and further to the left from the balanced model, we cease to think altogether. "I know what I believe, and if you'd get right with God, you'd agree with me!" This is not teaching. It is religious brow-beating.

Jesus warned against this error. His followers are to be "as little children" (Mt. 18:3). That is, they are to hold the Father in awe and wonder, and completely trust and depend on Him. Calling fire down from heaven on those who disagree with us is not Jesus' solution to problems (Lk 9:54-56).

### Warm Fluff?

When the teacher places too much emphasis on the subjective side of the model and neglects the objective, Bible study becomes a touchy-feely emotional roller coaster. The best term I know to describe it is "fluff."

Neglect of the objective focus in teaching results in a Bible study that is little more than cotton candy. It may taste good for a moment, but it is soon gone and leaves nothing of substance behind. Immature believers throughout history, like the Ephesian Christians, have been tossed back and forth by changing doctrines of smooth-talking charismatic leaders who use deceitful methods to entrap them in their schemes (Eph. 4:14). Jesus warned us of these wolves in sheep's clothing. How do we escape from them? They sound so sincere! They sing so well! They make me feel good! They use the same words I do! Be very careful. Freedom comes by knowing the Truth, becoming "wise as serpents" (Jn. 8:32, Mt. 10:16).

### Left and Right

It is not a matter of being childlike or wise, but *childlike and wise*. Not cynically wise, nor callously wise, but lovingly wise. Not childishly trusting, nor naively trusting, but realistically trusting. Paul captures this objective-subjective tension when he writes "speaking the truth. . .in love, we must grow up in every way to Christ" (Eph. 4:15). We



are not to speak the truth so harshly that it “breaks the reeds” or “quenches the flax” of faith. Nor are we to “love” others so sentimentally that we lose our integrity, in the name of graciousness, by winking at sin. We are to speak the truth in a loving manner. We are to love others with integrity. The writer of Proverbs said the same thing this way: Bind truth and mercy as an ornament around your neck (Prov. 3:3). Not truth or mercy, but **truth-mercy**. In this tension, we find favor with both God and mankind (Prov. 3:4).

### Wind and String

A kite cannot fly unless it is, first, firmly anchored to the ground by way of string, and, second, lifted by a prevailing wind.

If I let go of the string, the kite falls.

Or, if the wind stops blowing, the kite falls. Spiritual soaring requires the firm anchor of God’s Word and the lift of the Wind of God’s Spirit in my personal life. Objective and subjective. Thinking and feeling. Rational and emotional.



### Thinking and Feeling Questions.

We can control whether our learners respond objectively or subjectively by the kind of questions we ask. If we ask an objective question, we lead learners into the Bible to find an objective answer. If we ask a subjective question, we lead learners into themselves for experiences, opinions, and feelings.

For example, a **good thinking question** in a study of John 3 might be “What did Nicodemus ask Jesus?” This question has a correct answer that can be discovered from the text. Learners read the text in light of the question to build their understanding of the passage.

A **good subjective question** on the same passage might be, “If you had been Nicodemus, what would you have asked

Jesus?” There is no right or wrong answer to this question. You are asking learners how they would respond in this situation. I once asked this question of a group of adult Sunday School teachers at an afternoon training session. One elderly woman responded, “I don’t know. I wouldn’t have been there because I don’t go out at night!” I learned nothing about her understanding of John 3, but I learned something about this teacher. This was why she didn’t attend teachers’ meetings. So I began sending her a copy of the teachers’ handouts I prepared each week. Three years later, on my last night at Columbia Baptist church before leaving to teach at Southwestern, I preached a farewell sermon. This dear lady attended our evening services and the reception in order to thank me for helping her teach her class through the notes I’d sent her. But I would not have known her need, and would not have been able to help her, had I not asked that subjective question!

The Thinking Pillar stands on the Bible. Objective, thought-provoking questions drive learners into the Word for God’s Answers. The Feeling Pillar stands on Needs. Subjective, open-ended questions permit learners to remove their masks and share themselves with the class. Both are necessary, but it is essential that teachers master the difference between the two kinds of questions.

### THE CENTER PILLAR: Helping People Relate

Ask a minister of education what he believes to be the central function of the church and he will likely say it is to “equip the saints for works of service.” Ask a minister of music and he might say “to worship God through

praise." An evangelist? "To win the lost." A missionary? "To carry the Gospel to those of another language or culture." A pastor? He might say any of the above. But when we look at these tasks, what is the central focus of them all? Is it not relationship? When Jesus was challenged to name the Greatest Commandment, He condensed all of the Law and the Prophets into two statements of relationship:

*Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart, soul, and mind  
and (the second is similarly important)*

*Love your neighbor  
as you love yourself. (Mt 22:37,39)*

### Vertical Relationship

Our relationship with the Father ("Love the Lord your God") begins with faith in Christ and empowers all we do. Spiritual power for worship and service, praise and thanksgiving, repentance and renewal come through this vital link with the Lord. We will consider this vertical dimension of spiritual power in more detail when we discuss the role of Holy Spirit as teacher. For now, let's focus on the horizontal relationships among believers.

## People with People with Jesus in the Middle

### Horizontal Relationship

The relationships with others ("Love your neighbor") involve missions, evangelism, equipping, ministering, and befriending. The central focus of "church" is to establish and strengthen relationships. This is why "help-

ing people relate" stands as the central pillar of the Disciplers' Model.

The relative (reLAYtive) focus emphasizes the growth of relationships among believers. This social dimension of spiritual growth happens as we worship God through Bible study, share our joys and concerns with fellow members and reach out to the unchurched. Our lives become joined together. "People with people with Jesus in the middle" as a friend of mine once said. We build "community," the "Body of Christ," the "Church Family."

### Fellowship or Koinonia?

We sometimes use the word "fellowship" to express this social dimension of faith. But "fellowship" in a Sunday School context can mean little more than coffee and doughnuts. *Let's have about ten minutes of fellowship and then we'll go to our classes.*

The New Testament term **koinonia** expresses far more than shallow socializing. The word means fellowship in the sense of togetherness or partnership in mission. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Ac 2:42)

*Koinonia* means to give aid or relief. "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (He 13:16)

### A Supporting Family of Faith

Growing Christians are tied to other believers. We are bound together. The binding together of individuals into Family happens as learners share with others around the Word of God. We remove our masks and share ideas and understandings, joys and hurts, triumphs and failures, happy times

and sad. Not with gushing emotions, but realistically. Not with cold intellectual detachment, but with warm regard for others. As we do this, we build a network of relationships, a Family, which sustains us through life's good times and bad. The Family strengthens us to live and work and minister in our world.

### *Masks on the Fringe*

How sad to see people live on the fringe of the church. They come to services from time to time, but never plunge into the Family Life. They keep up appearances, but never build bridges. They have no group where masks can be laid aside and the real discussed.

What happens to them when tragedy strikes? What do they do when faced with death, or a serious illness, or divorce? They search in vain for "the church" and for "God" and wonder why neither can be flipped on like their CableVision. The *koinonia* of Scripture and of the Church grows over time. There are no shortcuts.

### *Social Garments*

Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae and warned them about characteristics which could either hurt or help their community of faith. He listed hurtful characteristics that Christians should remove from their lives, much as someone would take off dirty clothing: **anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language** (3:8, NIV). **Anger** is an outburst of temper toward another. **Rage** is a long-standing evil temper toward another, and can be thought of as settled anger or hatred. **Malice** is wishing harm toward another. **Slander** is hurting another's reputation through gossip. **Filthy language** is unclean talk or abusive speech, akin to browbeating.

Paul then lists helpful characteristics that Christians should develop in their lives, much as someone would dress themselves with clean clothes: **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience** (3:12, NIV). **Compassion** is the heart-felt desire to help another who is in need. **Kindness** is responding to another's need with specific action. **Humility** is a proper mental attitude toward others. Humble people think about themselves correctly. They do not think too highly of themselves (*No one can do this as well as I can!*), nor do they think too lowly of themselves (*I can't do anything for the Lord. I have no gifts.*). **Gentleness** grows out of the proper mental attitude of humility. Gentle people help others succeed without feeling superior to them. They praise others who succeed without feeling inferior to them. **Patience** means restraining oneself in the face of injury or insult from another.

Why would a clean person want to wear dirty garments? We have been washed from our sins. Now we should remove from our lives the "dirty garments" which belong to our former life and clothe ourselves in the spotless Spiritual Garments that builds Christian community. But how do we do this? What is the mechanism that allows us to become socially mature and build *koinonia* with others?

### *The Secret of Changing Garments*

We find the answer in Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. In the last verses of John 11 we read, *Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."* (Jn. 11:43-44, NIV)

Who gave Lazarus new life? (Jesus). Who



removed the old grave clothes of Lazarus and set him free? (His friends) .

Who gives us eternal life? (Jesus). Who removes our old grave clothes, our "old garments," and sets us free? (Our brothers and sisters in Christ). Each of the characteristics listed by Paul is *social*. We cannot grow spiritually without brothers and sisters in Christ. We take off the old and put on the new *as we learn and live and work with others*. Jesus established the Church to reach the world. But an integral part of the mission of the Church is to help change the world, to change the way people treat each other. The Church is a Living Laboratory of human relationships.

### *Raw Materials of Growth*

I used to wonder why churches suffered so much turmoil. If we are commanded to love one another, why do we find so much contention and fighting? But the irritations, conflicts and confrontations that occur to some degree in every congregation of believers are a normal part of Christian growth -- the social dimension! They are an essential part of the growth of koinonia, of relationship, of Family. Why? Because church members are people with varying backgrounds, cultures, languages, and interests called into one Family of faith because of a mutual love for Jesus. Our conflicts are part of the process of becoming "one Family in Him." These social dilemmas and people problems are the raw materials of Christian character and community. God works in and through these human situations to grow us into the image of His Son, for "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

### *Rough Rocks - Precious Stones*

My parents used to live near in Tampa, Florida. On one of our visits there, my wife and I walked down a beach that faced the western Gulf. Waves rolled in, first kicking up and then laying down the smooth wet sand. As we walked along the water's edge, we noticed hundreds of pretty black stones. They were so smooth and beautiful. As we walked around the beach into a small bay, we noticed that the sand was littered with rough, dull rocks. They were the same type of rock, but without the pounding surf and the grinding sand they lacked the crucial ingredients that could change a rough rock into a precious stone.

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When believers remain aloof--on the fringe of church life--when they neglect their gifts, refuse to join brothers and sisters in ministry, they forfeit their opportunity to experience God's presence and care when they. They are like the stones in the bay, undisturbed, and unchanging. On the other hand, when believers learn to share with others, to serve with gladness, to use their God-given gifts for the good of the Family, they experience deep satisfaction and fulfillment. The only way to learn from Jesus is to pull with Him in the comfortable yoke He offers (Mt. 11:28-30). As they trust Him for strength and

guidance, they are able to tackle larger tasks with confidence. The work brings frustration, as well as joy, but it is this bitter-sweet mix that matures us. Those who tackle new tasks, face new challenges, and experience the greatness of service become "polished stones" -- and prized possessions of the Family.

### *Flip Sides of Relationship*

So we find in the relative focus two aspects: one is positive, the other negative. We find the **positive aspect** of relationships in the growing koinonia of the Church Family. Getting to know and learning to love brothers and sisters in Christ. Building a network of authentic relationships which give real support to life in good times and bad.

We find the **negative aspect** of relationship in the grinding of differing human personalities on each other within a congregation. It is "putting up with" unlikeable brothers and sisters in the Family ("forbear one another", Col. 3:13). It is struggling with fellow members on a committee. It is wrestling with difficult and divisive issues (and people) in a business meeting. These two aspects of relationship mature us. We cannot substitute this process with television or radio personalities.

### *Sunday School the best place*

The best place in the Church to develop these required relational skills is in the Sunday School class: a small group of caring persons, who give and receive, who comment and listen, who minister and are ministered to. Here members learn to share ideas and experiences openly. Here learners come to know each other and trust each other as persons of worth. Here believers pray for each other and support one another. In this kind of class, members have opportunities to re-

ceive from others in this small intimate group, learners gain confidence and encouragement to share the Good News with others.

Jesus prayed for this kind of relational network in the Upper Room:

*I pray also for those who will believe in me through [the eleven disciples'] message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (Jn. 17:20-23, NIV)* This spiritual unity develops in believers as they gather in small groups to study the Bible, to share with each other, to affirm each other, to minister to one another.

### **Summary of the Pillars**

So we have three pillars: the objective, the subjective, and the relative. Erected upon the sure foundation of eternal Truth and the needs of learners, these pillars support the capstone of discipling Bible study.

## **THE CAPSTONE: Helping People Grow**

The term "church growth" is used predominantly to mean **numerical** growth. Numerical growth is the increase in the number of members of local congregations. This growth may result from the conversion of children of church members who are won to Christ through the consistent witness of their own parents. Or from the conversion of lost persons through direct witness and ministry. Or from transfer of membership, in which church members of one congregation move their membership to another.

Sunday School is the major channel for numerical growth in our churches. We have high attendance Sundays, enrollment plans, visitation programs. But unless the Sunday School produces committed “doers of the Word,” we may be producing “wood, hay, and stubble” with our numbers.

### Kinds of Church Growth

There is a difference between expanding a religious organization and growing the Kingdom. Let's look at some other kinds of church growth.

#### *Organic growth*

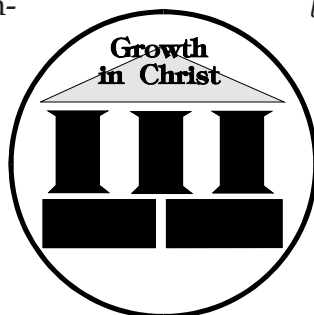
Organic growth concentrates on internal structure. It is the growth of relationships among leaders, the training of new leaders, the restructuring of organizations for better efficiency. Organic growth helps departments and committees and deacon bodies work more smoothly.

#### *Incarnational growth*

Incarnational growth concentrates on growing in Christlikeness. It enables the Church to influence its culture, to make a difference in its community in Jesus' name. This type of growth is seen when a congregation ministers to the needs of groups and individuals in the surrounding community.

#### *Maturational growth*

Maturational growth concentrates on the believer's personal growth in Christ. It results from a process of knowing, understanding, and doing the Word of God; of removing masks of pretense, and building Family with other believers. **The capstone of the model represents this process of growing in the Lord, of becoming like Christ.**



### Paul's Treatise on Growth

Paul's treatise on Church Growth in Ephesians Chapter 4 focuses on this maturational theme:

*It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ **may be built up** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things **grow up into him who is the Head**, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, **grows and builds itself up in love**, as each part does its work (Eph. 4:11-16, NIV).*

### The Purpose of Growth

Paul says the purpose of this maturational growth is “works of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ” (v. 12, NIV). These “works of service” -- taking on the yoke of Christ in various ministries -- is the result of maturational growth, which comes from understanding the Written Word, experiencing the Living Word, and becoming part of a Ministering Body. Service is the end, the three pillars are the means. These “means” equip the saints for changing the world. They produce the “being” that must precede effective “doing” in the Kingdom.

You see, God comforts us, not merely to

make us comfortable, but to make us comforters. God forgives us, not merely to enable us to live free of guilt, but to make us forgivers. God gives gifts to us, not merely to create gifted individuals, but to make us givers. "Make me a channel of blessing today." This is the road to maturity.

Maturation growth cannot be demanded, coerced, forced, rushed, or programmed by calendar. We can explain Truth, but it must become "Truth-that-matters-to-me" before our learners can grow.

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---

Our model is Jesus. He does not force His yoke on us, but invites us to take it (Mt. 11:29). He does not break down the door of our hearts, but patiently knocks, waiting for us to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). He did not come to condemn, berate or humiliate us, but to save us (Jn. 3:17). Yet, we are tempted to use harsh methods to "force people" to work and serve "for their own good." This approach will ultimately produce dry bones because it is not God's way.

### How Do You Measure This Growth?

The major reason we depend heavily on numerical growth is its ease of measure. Counting heads is easy. More heads is better than fewer heads. But how can I know if my class is maturing? How do I measure that?

### Paul's Spiritual Yardstick

Paul gives us a "spiritual yardstick" in his letter to the Galatians. This passage gives

two lists of traits. One contains traits that should decrease in Christians over time. These "works of the flesh" include "immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (5:19-20, NIV).

The second list contains traits that should increase in Christians over time. These "fruit of the Spirit" include "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (5:22-23, NIV).

Some works of the flesh vanish when we come to know the Lord. Others, like envy and ambition, plague us every time we get our eyes off the Master and wrap ourselves up in "personal success." The **power and dominion** of this fleshly nature was destroyed when we were saved. We are a "new creation" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV). But the **practice** of fleshly ways is destroyed over time as we grow in Christ. The fruit is produced by the Spirit as we open ourselves to Him and give Him freedom. The **power** to bear this fruit, to grow these traits, was received when we were saved. But the actual bearing of the **fruit** occurs throughout our lives as we grow in Christ.

Disciplers focus, then, on providing a learning environment that will encourage the decrease of fleshly behaviors and the increase of godly behaviors. If your class shows little joy in their salvation, encourage more spontaneity and sharing of what the Lord has done in class. If your class is fragmented into cliques, each small part demanding its own way, plan learning experiences that develop relationships among the members. The pillars of thinking, feeling, and relating -- anchored on the Bible and the particular needs



of learners in the class -- culminate in a discipling process which reduces the fleshly and increases the heavenly.

**Maturity Not Size.** Look back at the Ephesians passage. Notice that Paul's emphasis was not church size, but church maturity. He established churches all over the Roman Empire that almost emptied the pagan temples. Numerical growth was in Paul's day, as it is in ours, a sign of a healthy church. The Great Commission of our Lord was taken seriously by Christians who risked imprisonment and death to share their faith. "As you go, make disciples. As you go, baptize. As you go, teach." It was the command to make sharing the Good News a natural part of our lifestyle. This lifestyle develops, as we have seen, over a lifetime of maturing in the Lord.

Some say, "I know God is pleased with our spiritual growth *because we are growing numerically.*" They have cause and effect backwards. They preach numerical growth in hopes of producing church health. See, IF we have the numbers, THEN we must be spiritually healthy. In Old Testament times, many believed that rich people were good because "wealth is a blessing from God." IF rich, then GOOD. This was wrong theology then, and it's wrong theology now. There are times I think we have lost our minds over "ten more next Sunday." It is a Golden Calf. Leaves without Fruit. Crowds without Family. Organization but not the Body. An aggregation but not a congregation.

So focus on spiritual growth by teaching God's people how to live biblically. Numerical growth may well follow -- all things being equal. But making numbers primary will lead you into all sorts of sin.

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---

**More Isn't Always Better.** Common sense says "more is better." Businesses want more sales. Lawyers and doctors want more clients. CEOs want more profits. Churches want more members. But if we apply the "more is better" logic to Jesus' ministry, we will be disappointed. The numbers were high when He healed the sick and fed the hungry during His second year. The numbers declined in the third year as He began to preach Kingdom discipleship: loving enemies, serving others, turning cheeks, submission to authority. He was doing exactly what the Father showed Him to do (Jn 5:19), yet the number of people following Him continued to fall. He really knew what He was saying when He taught that the road is narrow, and few really find it (Mt. 7:14).

As a minister to the deaf, I found my church group built around games and fun and entertainment. As we began to train teachers and improve Bible study and focus the ministry, several families stopped coming. Our numbers suffered. The pastor had taken a risk to call a part-time minister for the deaf group, and now Sunday School attendance was declining? But within the year, new leaders began to function. The ministry focused on the Lord and His Word. Friends and co-workers began to be reached. We not only



grew back to our former size, but we were much healthier besides.

**'How Many?' Can Be Dangerous.** One of the favorite questions asked around churches is *howmanyjahave?* A new Sunday School class meets for the first time. *Howmanyjahave?* A new discipleship training class starts. *Howmanyjahave?* A new mission begins in the community. *Howmanyjahave?* It's the first thing many think to ask. But we need to be careful about "how many?" David was obsessed with finding out how many warriors he had in Israel. He commanded that a census be done. The result was that 70,000 Israelites died by plague because the Lord God was so displeased with his desire to know "how many?" (I Chr. 21). An overemphasis on "How many?" can lead us into all kinds of mischief.

**Size is Irrelevant.** Of course, there's nothing sacred in "smallness" either. Paul's kind of church growth underscores the fact that size is irrelevant. Paul preached church health, and the result was numerical growth. Therefore, my efforts at numerical growth are misguided if my goal is to increase the size of my church. We find spiritual maturity in both large and small congregations. We find spiritual immaturity in both large and small congregations. Size is irrelevant to spiritual health. As ministers of the Gospel, let's focus on spiritual health, on *growing up into Him Who is the Head, even Christ.*

**Reaching Not Resting.** Does this mean that programs of witnessing and visitation and outreach are wrong? No. **Being satisfied** with our present membership and ignoring the lost around us **is unscriptural.** One primary reason for our existence as a church is to break into the lost community surrounding us a draw individuals to Christ

(Ac. 1:9; Mt. 28:19-20; et al). This is part of the relative focus of the disciplers' model. The believer who is concerned for the lost and works to win them to Christ is reflecting the Father Who "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rm. 8:32, NIV).

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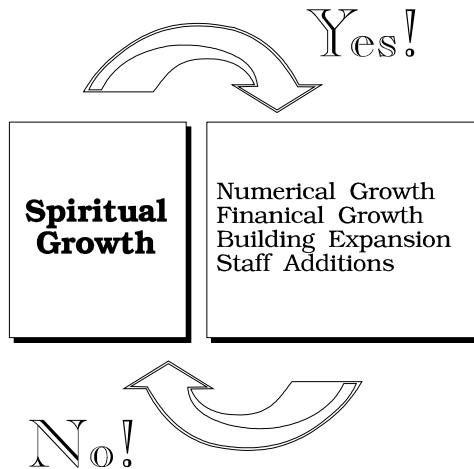
**Being satisfied  
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**BUT...**

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Jesus' command was clear:  
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We tend the flock,  
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Secondly, numerical growth was a **central characteristic** of the New Testament churches. This growth resulted from revival and renewal (Ac. 2:41), spontaneous witnessing (11:19-21), organized teaching (11:22-26; 12:24); and planned efforts (19:10,20) until the Church had "turned the world upside down" (17:6, NIV). Jesus' command was clear: "Go, baptize, and teach."



Make no mistake about what I am saying here. I **want** the church to grow. I **work** to improve reaching and teaching. I keep and study attendance records. But the **abuse of God's flock** through guilt and manipulation for the sake of reaching strangers is **also unscriptural**. Jesus' command was clear: "Feed my sheep." We tend the flock, care for the lambs, provide nourishment, and God brings the increase.

### So What's the Problem?

The problem is emphasis. If we feed the flock, nurture their faith, open the Word of God to them, guide them into works of service that fit their God-given abilities, and lead them to see the need of lost people for Christ, we will see numerical growth. This is healthy. It builds the Body both spiritually and numerically. If we focus on building up the size of the church through attendance gimmicks and promotional fads, we may see a short-term numerical increase, but it will ultimately collapse. It abuses the Body and may even cause declining attendance!

This illustration below shows both emphases. If we focus on ministries that grow the church *spiritually*, we will see numerical

growth as God brings the increase. Numerical growth causes growth in finances, and building and staff needs. If we focus on "getting the numbers up," we may well lead our congregations to work in their own strength rather than the Lord's. We may lead them away from surrendered service toward self-centered sufficiency. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain" (Psalm 127:1, NIV).

### Weight Loss

The spring before I came to seminary, my brother-in-law and I began a race to lose weight. Our plan was to lose 30 pounds in four months. We set our goals and weigh-in times. We began applying the principles of weight loss: reduce calorie intake and increase physical exercise. All went well through the first weigh-in. I applied the principles consistently and lost weight. I had no problems.

During the second weight loss period I failed to keep my food intake down and I was irresponsible with my exercise. On the day before our second weigh-in, I stepped on the scales and saw that I was 5 pounds over my goal! This required drastic action! I ate nothing but fruit all day Friday. I ran my 5.2 mile course Friday night. I ate no breakfast, but drank a cup of black coffee. I went to a Church Council meeting that morning, had another cup of coffee. I literally vibrated in my chair from the effects of caffeine. I ate no lunch, but mowed our front and back lawns. Even though it was 94 degrees and humid, I drank no water. Since Steve was late in arriving, I decided to run the 5.2 miles again -- just for good measure. He and his wife finally arrived about 3:00 p.m. and we weighed. I had lost 7 pounds! I had won! I beat his weight loss! I was a success! Or was

I?

We sat down to dinner: grilled spare ribs, potato salad, orange salad, corn on the cob, yeast rolls, and, of course, diet soda. For dessert we had home-made ice cream and cookies.

The next morning I woke up after a night of tossing and turning. When I stepped on the scales I found that I weighed exactly what I'd weighed Friday morning. I had reached my numeric goal on Saturday afternoon, but I ultimately paid the price of abusing my body. I was lethargic. I had difficulty thinking. I was irritable. I couldn't run three blocks. And my goal? My purpose for it all? Even that was lost. My "weight loss" of Saturday afternoon was a phantom -- gone by Sunday morning.

I had taken my eyes off my real purpose, which was to burn fat off my body. I had concentrated on the numbers of my bathroom scale. I had misused the principles. The result was abuse of my body. I didn't burn off much fat on that Friday and Saturday. What I did was drive 7 pounds of water out of my body. The numbers on the scale didn't know the difference, but I did!

The same can be said for paying too much attention to Sunday School attendance records. If we focus on the principles of good teaching and effective reaching, starting new classes, providing space, contacting prospects, and enlisting new workers, we will grow. If we focus on "ten more next Sunday," we may forget our real purpose and abuse the Body in the process.

### Statistics

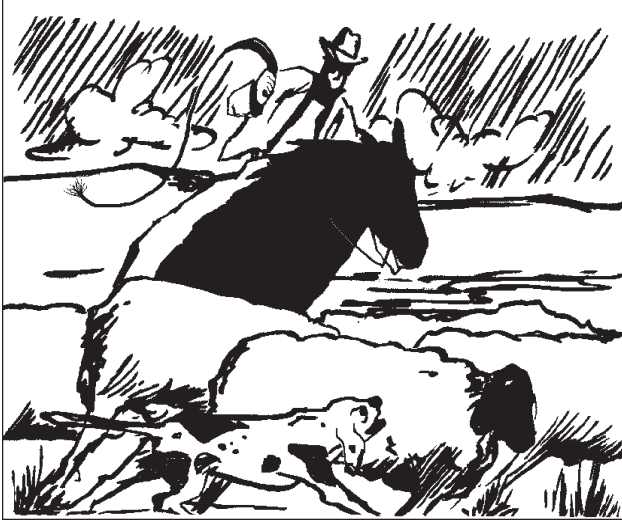
The main reason I was called to teach at Southwestern was to provide support for

the research efforts of the seminary. My major role is to teach courses in research design and statistical analysis in the School of Religious Education. The purpose of research is to collect data in a way that produces numbers that have specific meaning, and to analyze those numbers with appropriate tests to provide valid interpretation. Both parts must be carefully designed. Otherwise the results of statistical analysis are meaningless.

Sunday School attendance figures are useful in pinpointing potential problems in an organization. But numbers mean nothing in isolation. Meaning requires an **interpretation of the numbers**.

For example, *decreasing numbers are not always bad*. When Columbia Baptist Church moved from one to two Sunday Schools, we experienced a decline in attendance for two years. But during that two years **good things** were happening: leaders were enlisted and trained, departments and classes built "Family", space was reallocated. In the middle of the second year, the pastor began to get anxious. We had been showing declining attendance for 18 months. He had been very patient. Yet at that very time the momentum of the two Sunday Schools was increasing. By the end of the third year we saw a consistent increase in attendance. We moved over the 1,000 mark. In 1986 the church started a third Sunday School and averaged about 1,500.

Further, *increasing numbers are not necessarily good*. One year I received a call from our associational minister of education. I had not reported any enrollment under the category "Adults Away" on our annual associational report. He explained that this category included any college students or mili-



**Western Shepherd  
"Drive the Sheep"**



**Eastern Shepherd  
"Lead the Sheep"**

tary personnel who had not moved their membership. We had not reported anyone in this category for at least three years. I went back through the records and found that 174 fit in this category. Since they had not been reported previously, they were considered "new members." We won honors that year in the association for largest enrollment increase, both in numbers and percentage gain. It was legal. It certainly helped the association's numbers. But the numbers did not really mean what they appeared to say.

### **Eastern and Western Shepherds**

It is the misuse of church growth principles for a short-term numerical end that causes dry bones. Misusing the principles to "get the numbers up!" Ministers are shepherds of their flocks (I Pet. 5:2). But some have taken on the model of the **Western shepherd**, who moves behind the flock, and, with the help of sheep dogs, drives them where he wants them to go. We need to recapture the model of the **Eastern shepherd** who walked toward water and green pasture, followed by his sheep who knew his voice and trusted him.

A discipling Sunday School is more than a religious organization set up to transmit bits of Bible information while we "get the numbers up." *It is the church reaching out and transforming lives, in Christ, through study of His Word. In the process of doing this, our numbers do increase!* As persons are drawn graciously, lovingly, carefully to the Christ of the Cross and the Empty Tomb, they receive new life. Their celebration carries them back to friends and family with the Good News of life in Christ. Numbers increase as a result, a byproduct, of our discipling efforts. This is the capstone of our model.

### **THE CIRCLE Holy Spirit as Discipler**

The final element in the model is the circle which represents the surrounding and indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit of God. We have spoken of the "dry bones" of Sunday Schools that have become mired down in routine. It is Holy Spirit Who breathes life into dry bones. How do I allow Holy Spirit to teach my class? What do I do to open up



the spiritual communication lines? How can I become a “channel of His blessing” to my class? Prayer, priority and position are the three essentials which determine how I answer each of these questions.

## Prayer

If I want the Lord to have a part in my Sunday School class, I must ask Him to take part. Remember the Lord’s words to the Laodecian church?

I stand at the door and knock.  
If anyone hears my voice  
and open the door,  
I will come in and eat with him,  
and he with me.  
Rev 3:30, NIV

Here the Lord has been shut out of the church, but He beckons to individuals in the church who desire fellowship with Him. The presence of the Lord is not automatic. We must ask Him, invite Him, welcome Him into our classes.

Pray for the members of your class by name. As you think of each one, we pray for their life situations, their problems, their needs. Pray that they might have experiences during the week that will point them to the scripture passage to be studied Sunday. Pray that they will be ready to study Sunday morning.

Pray for insights into the assigned Bible passage. Pray that you will be open to personal experiences that relate to scriptural truths. That the Lord Himself will teach you as you prepare during the week.

Pray for guidance in selecting learning ac-

tivities as you develop the lesson plan. This prayerful preparation insures that Sunday morning Bible study is a joint effort between you and Holy Spirit.

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**The presence of the Lord  
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## Priority

The proper priority for Christians is to “seek first the Kingdom of God.” Still, a major problem in Sunday School work is the notion of “turf.” By “turf,” I mean the personal kingdoms that are built in classes or departments “in the name of the Lord.” Church members begin teaching out of pure motives to reach and help people. But somewhere along the line, the class becomes “mine.” At promotion time the “turf” teacher fights to hold on to “his” members.

Suggest that one of the members would make an excellent teacher in another age group, and you will get a similar response: “Don’t you touch him! He’s one of my most faithful!” Well, excuse me. Who do you want me to get as a teacher -- someone who never attends? Turf teachers have their priorities wrong. They are not cooperative. They just want their classes left alone. Such arrogance grieves Holy Spirit and impairs the spiritual growth of the class.





Disciplers, however, work in support of department and division goals. They see their work as part of the larger work of God. If a request is made that will help the overall Sunday School, disciplers do all they can to support that decision. They “model the role” of cooperation for their members. They are positive in their support for the “big picture.” Disciplers see promotion as a way to send “missionaries” to the next department. If some of their members are sought for teaching positions, they see this as a confirmation of their role as disciplers. Disciplers are mature enough to forgo “turf” as they maintain the proper priority of “Seek ye first the Kingdom . . . .”

## Position

From the world’s view, the most powerful position is at the top. Rank Hath Its Privilege. The higher the position, the more power one has to control others. It's not supposed to be that way with Christians. We talk so much about servanthood and sacrifice. But the desire for power affects anyone who isn't consciously surrendered to the Lord.

As a teacher, or a director, or minister of education, or pastor, or denominational employee, are you primarily leader or servant? If the Spirit is leading you, you are first a servant. The influence of spiritual leadership comes from your ability to serve others effectively. Jesus said it this way: *Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all*” (Mk. 10:43-44, NIV).

How do disciplers serve? They sacrifice their own time and talent and energy to create a learning environment that proclaims the Word of God and meets the rational, emotional, and relational needs of people. They

sacrifice their own teaching time to allow others to share. They serve department directors by contributing to planning meetings. They give up their own “rights” from time to time in order to enhance teamwork in the department. They support the Sunday School staff by participating in training meetings, learning from and sharing with others.

Disciplers are served, in turn, by their members who relieve some of the teaching burden from time to time. They are served by their department directors who provide support for their teaching through administration of the department: literature, equipment, and planning. They are served by Sunday School staff who provide support in the way of long range planning, age-group cooperation, and budgeting. This mutual cooperation and service builds a spirit of teamwork throughout the Sunday School.

## Spiritual Triad

These aspects of spiritual teaching -- prayer, priority, and position -- rise directly out of our dependence on and submission to the Holy Spirit. Programs come and go, plans succeed and fail, gimmicks for “10 more next Sunday” thrive and fade. But through all of this runs the Golden Thread of God’s work: the drawing, winning, and maturing of people in Christ. This holy work proceeds only with surrendered disciplers.

Fasten your eyes on this Golden Thread and find true success. Ours is a higher calling than transmitting religious facts. We are called to make disciples (Mt. 28:19) and to “prepare God’s people for works of service. . . until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13,

NIV). This is an awesome task! But we need not fear the challenge.

Have I not commanded you?  
Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be terrified;  
do not be discouraged,  
for the Lord your God will be with you  
wherever you go.”  
Joshua 1:9, NIV

## QUESTIONS TO AID PLANNING

While teaching plans cannot cover every element of the model every Sunday, every element can be used over a period of a few weeks. The following questions can be used to set appropriate goals for teaching as you plan.

### The Word of God

- How am I allowing “the Bible to speak” in this session?
- Am I merely talking about the Bible?
- How will my learners use their Bibles in this study?
- Am I doing anything that makes light of scripture or the Lord?
- Do I handle the Bible with reverence? Do I teach it as if it is my Guide, my Authority, my Lamp?

### The Needs of People

- How well do I know each person in my class/department?
- What are their specific needs that relate to this passage?
- How does this study help meet those needs?
- Do the learning activities I’ve chosen fit the way my members learn best?

### Objective Focus

- How am I leading members to **think** during this study?
- What activities am I using that will stimulate

mental struggle?

- How am I encouraging members to study during the week?
- How am I increasing member desire for self-discovery and action?

### Subjective Focus

- How am I encouraging learners to share opinions, experiences, and feelings in class?
- What opportunities do members have to share themselves in class?
- Am I open to my learners? Am I living the truths I teach?

### Relative Focus

- How am I encouraging interaction among learners?
- How am I helping to build bridges between members?
- How am I helping learners to reach out to unsaved family, friends, and co-workers?
- What kinds of small-group activities have I planned?
- What opportunities are there for ministry among members?

### Growth in Christ

- How is my class/department growing spiritually?
- What goals have I set for spiritual growth for the year?
- What opportunities am I providing for growth outside of class?
- Am I demonstrating the blessings of spiritual growth by the way I live and work?

### The Holy Spirit

- How am I preparing spiritually to teach?
- Have I done all I can to prepare well while depending on Holy Spirit to guide my preparation?
- Have I prayed for the learners individually? For the session?
- How willing am I to cooperate with Sunday School leaders in order to increase harmony and build a spirit of “team work”?
- How dependent am I on the Holy Spirit as Discipler?

These questions (and many others that can be drawn from the model) pinpoint areas of “dry bones.” They allow us to apply biblical remedies and bring showers of blessing to our Sunday School classes. We can help them move from merely transmitting facts to transforming lives. But there will be **problems in this process** of retraining. There are what may seem irresistible forces and immovable objects standing in the way of discipling Bible study. **How do we move from where we are to where we want to be? How do we do all of this in the limited amount of time we have?**

It is to these questions we now turn our attention.

# The Disciplers' Method



**W**hen I lead Sunday School conferences for churches or associational meetings, and I finish explaining the elements of the Model in Chapter One, a common reaction of teachers goes something like this: I really like the idea of the Disciplers' Model, but how can I do all this in thirty minutes a week!?

Good question! How can we do all that the Model describes when we have such a limited amount of teaching time? Paul cautioned us

*Look carefully then how you walk, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Eph5:15-16*

The Amplified New Testament renders the phrase "redeeming the time" this way: "Making the most of the time--buying up each opportunity . . . ." How do we make the most of our time in Sunday morning Bible study? How do we buy up each opportunity for Bible study that transforms the lives of teachers as well as learners? Chapter Two answers these questions in the following six sections:

Section	Page
Teaching Methods .....	47
The Lesson Plan .....	52
The Unit Plan .....	76
The Sunday School Hour .....	83
Spiritual Preparation .....	88
The Long Look .....	90

## TEACHING METHODS

### Regardless of Method...

Methods of teaching are ways of managing learning experiences in order to secure change in a learner's knowledge, understanding, personal response or purposeful action. Follow these suggestions, regardless of the method you use, to 'redeem the time' for your teaching,

#### *Focus on student learning*

Emphasize what learners will do during the Bible study. Plan methods that will help your learners hit your teaching target.

#### *Teach for more than mere content*

Teaching involves living spirit, kindling interest, stimulating thought, stirring imagination, creating ideas, and helping members express their learning in action.

#### *Focus on learner attitudes*

Attitudes and values endure throughout life. Learners quickly forget obscure facts that do not relate to their lives. It is much easier to "tell the facts" than convey proper attitudes, but facts evaporate and attitudes remain.

#### *Be patient and show a desire to help*

Avoid derogatory or sarcastic behavior toward students. This breeds humiliation, fear, and sometimes hate toward teacher and the subject. God didn't create us for the Bible. He gave the Bible to help us. Love your students. Help them learn.

*Focus on solving problems*

Use the biblical content to deal with issues related to learner needs. Don't teach merely to "get across" material. Your students will soon forget most of the content you "get across" unless you help them use the material. Skills in using the Bible to solve real problems endure.

**Variety of Method**

Teaching is too complex a process to depend solely on a single method. 'Redeeming the time' requires the use of a combination of methods. The foundation stones of the model call for variety in teaching. The approach you choose should fit the Bible passage as well as the needs of the learners sitting in your class.

---

*Redeem the time  
by mastering the essential  
teaching approaches:  
Conversational lecture,  
Discussion,  
and  
Question & Answer*

---

*Conversational lecture*

Lecture is the most common teaching method. Yet when I ask classes to list their teaching method preferences, most will invariably list "lecture" near the bottom. When I ask for specific reasons for this response, I usually receive a barrage of experiences with bad lectures: unprepared lecturers, rambling organization, poor platform skills, lack of application to "real life," and a monotone delivery.

If you want to be a good lecturer, present your material in a **well-organized**, clear manner. Use language, style, pace, and vocabulary that is **appropriate for your learners**. Cultivate a friendly conversational tone that draws your learners into your thoughts. Avoid tangential ideas or thoughts that lead the class away from your main flow of thought. **Relate your material to past and future** studies by reviewing key ideas discussed in the past and previewing how "today's" session will help your learners later. Review the main ideas in your material at the lecture's conclusion.

**Advantages.** There really are several advantages in using the lecture method. It is the most **efficient** for conveying the teacher's knowledge, convictions, and experiences in a given period of time. Lecture is **less threatening** than other methods for some learners because it is "safe to listen." The lecture method is the only really viable approach for teaching classes larger than thirty. It is the best approach to **display the teacher's rich experience and knowledge** in the field. The class is less likely to become sidetracked into minor issues. **Reinforcement** of key ideas can be controlled by the teacher's intensity, logic, humor and clarity. The **content can be !brought to life!** by the enthusiasm and warmth of the teacher.

**Disadvantages.** But there are also disadvantages in using lecture that you must overcome. There may be little or no interaction between teacher and learner. Lecturing can be a **one-way process**. There is **no interaction** among learners. A single lecturer cannot speak to the varied needs of all the learners at the same time. Lecture requires teachers with polished **public speaking skills** that are possessed by relatively few.





**Teach while you talk!** Use a “conversational” approach to lecture to emphasize the advantages of the method and minimize the disadvantages. Punctuate your lecture with questions. Call for comments from the class, or ask learners to discuss examples of the ideas you’ve presented.

Use visual aids to improve your lectures. My favorite visual medium is a “living chalkboard.” I teach with a piece of chalk in my hand. I build visual images on the board as the lecture proceeds. These changing visual images reinforce the aural-mental images that I convey with my words. This dynamic, growing, changing “living chalkboard” is far better than a static chalkboard, filled with a detailed outline at the beginning of class. Flip charts, maps, charts, posters and overhead transparencies help learners visualize the words of the lecturer.

### *Discussion*

A discussion is an orderly conversation among learners that moves the class toward your teaching target. Group discussion is less popular today than it was during the Encounter Era of the late 1960’s and 1970’s. Abuse of discussion by teachers who were

unprepared to teach--“Let’s open to I Corinthians 13 and see what the Lord lays on your heart”--has all but killed interest in this approach.

**Advantages.** There are several advantages to using the discussion approach. It helps learners become **participants in learning** rather than passive receivers. It helps learners to **organize** their own learning. Discussion provides the best way to help your learners **interact with each other**. The free-wheeling give-and-take among learners can uncover misunderstandings and **clarify ideas** in a way that no other method can. This approach allows the teacher to become part of the group, rather than remain above it as lecturer or question-asker. This helps tear down barriers between teacher and taught, which **personalizes the session**. Learners **learn to listen to each other** better.

**Disadvantages.** There are disadvantages as well. Talkative, dominating learners can quickly **frustrate a class** who would rather hear the teacher. Discussion is ineffective when you must deal with **difficult or unfamiliar content**, such as Books of Hosea or Jude. Discussion **takes more time** than a

comparable lecture. If your time is limited, don't start a discussion.

**Teach while you discuss.** Still, you can do so much good in a Christian context by using discussion techniques from time to time. Start with a **common group experience**: a reaction to a quotation, an analysis of a case study, or a report on an assignment.

As the group members share their reactions and opinions, **ask questions** to direct the course of discussion. **Intervene** when discussion moves off course so that the group moves toward the session objective. Your intention in using discussion should be to **enable learners to share their answers**, not to express their own. You need a good general knowledge of the subject.

Develop a **"comfortable" atmosphere** in your classroom. Help learners to become acquainted with each other. Set the example by being friendly, tactful, courteous, and patient in and out of class. Be a **good listener**. Arrange the class in a **semi-circle or circle** so that learners can see each other easily.

Address questions to the **whole group** rather than to individuals. **Show appreciation** for each member's contribution to the class. Do not harshly reject learners' statements you consider incorrect. Rather, **ask questions** to direct the discussion to the correct response. Or better yet, **let the class evaluate** comments by saying, "Have you had this experience?" or "Do you agree?" or "Are there other thoughts on this?" Encourage more **interaction among learners** and less teacher-learner dialogue. Bring in alternative ideas and perspectives to keep the discussion balanced.

Use **personal examples** or good illustrations

to keep discussion informal. **Develop a cooperative spirit** in the class. Be fair yet firm. Clarify problems. State questions, case studies, and problems clearly. **Avoid "fuzzy" explanations** and definitions. Ask questions or pose problems in a way that focuses discussion. For example, this question is too broad. It does not focus discussion sufficiently.

"What is the most exciting experience you've ever had?"

The following question is much better.

"Think about your salvation experience. How did you find the Lord."

**Encourage participation.** Take advantage of the rich resource of experience of the group by endeavoring to involve every member in the discussion. **Avoid domination of the group.** Learner to learner questions and responses are best. Speak only to clarify, redirect, rephrase or elaborate on group answers. **Summarize frequently.** Tie together major points from time to time throughout the discussion. Let the learners participate in this summary. Strive to end the session with **spirits high** and an **increased desire for further study** and discussion.

### *Question and Answer Method*

Questions require learners to think. Since learning is directly tied to the degree learners think, the ability to ask the right question at the right time is an effective teaching tool.

The question and answer method you ask a prescribed set of questions to test how well your learners understand the lesson content. The Q&A approach is more flexible than lecture because each question can evoke several responses and interactions. It is more

structured, however, than a free-flowing discussion, because the questions to be asked have been planned ahead of time. You will succeed with the Q&A approach to the extent you can create good questions.

**Advantages.** The question and answer method has several advantages. It allows the teacher to evaluate **learners' quality of thought**. It stimulates the **integration** of learners' experience and subject with more control and direction from the teacher than permitted by discussion. It permits a **step-by-step** inductive approach — that is, moving from real life examples to biblical truths — to new material. It **reveals the misconceptions and misunderstandings** of learners. And finally, the question and answer method helps **build rapport** between leader and learners.

**Disadvantages.** The disadvantages of question and answer include such things as these. It permits **little or no interaction** among learners. Some questions **threaten** learners, and this hinders learning. The question and answer approach can become  **boring** if questions are too easy. The practice of merely asking questions falls short of good definition of teaching. The asking of questions **cannot provide knowledge** the learner doesn't have. And, finally, the question and answer method presents the danger of leading learners to make **mechanical**, unthinking, responses.

**Ask good questions.** The Q&A approach will succeed or fail depending on the quality of the questions you ask. Good questions **make sense to students**. They are **logical** rather than confusing. **Direct** rather vague. **Clear** rather than muddled. Questions should be easy to understand and a challenge to answer. That is, the difficulty of a question should not be in its technical jar-



gon, stilted language, or complicated grammar. Adapt your questions to the experience level of your learners. Avoid questions that call for “pat” answers. Good questions do not suggest their own answers. **Avoid leading or rhetorical questions.** “Do you see that Paul is saying here that. . . ?”

**Time out!** Give your learners enough time to answer your questions. Craig Pearson conducted research in 1980 on the amount of time teachers waited for students to answer their questions.\* The average length of time was **0.9 seconds!** Teachers were instructed to wait three seconds after asking a question by counting “1-one-thousand, 2-one-thousand, 3-one-thousand.” The behavior of the students changed significantly in the following ways:

- **Student answers were longer.** This means that the learners had more to say when they were given time to think.
- **More students volunteered answers.** Learners were more confident in what they knew, and were willing to share it more.
- **Fewer students failed to respond.** More learners had something to say than before.

\*“Can You Keep Quiet For Three Seconds?” LEARNING: The Magazine for Creative Teachers, Vol. 1, Number 6 (Palo Alto, California: Education Today, February, 1980)

- **Students inflected fewer answers.** Fewer answers had a "?" on the end, such as "Jesus?" as an answer to a question.
- **Students worked together more.** Participation and sharing increased.
- **Students inferred more from what they knew.** Quality of thinking improved.
- **More children asked questions.** Curiosity and motivation increased.
- **Learners generated questions of their own.** Learners thought at a higher level.
- **"Slow" students increased response rate.** The "slower" students participated more.

So, when you ask your class a question, give them **time!** to interpret your meaning, form an answer, and respond in a clear and logical manner. By doing this, you increase the impact of your questions. By investing teaching time in learner thinking, reflecting, and analyzing, you 'redeem the time' in the quality of learning.

The Q&A method is a wonderful blend of lecture and discussion. It provides more structure than discussion and more flexibility than lecture. Yet it allows for interaction among learners, and reasonable control by the teacher.

So as you can see, no one approach can do everything that needs doing for a discipling approach to Bible study. I have only touched the surface of possible teaching methods that you can use. But whatever method you choose, choose one that is appropriate to the **learner**, the assigned **content**, the **session objective**, your skills as a **teacher**, and the

type of **facilities** you have to work with.

### Focus on Central Methods

We have emphasized three major methods of teaching: conversational lecture, discussion, and question-and-answer. We have intentionally avoided the often discussed but seldom used methods. These include the panel, forum, debate, listening team, role play, and drama. The Three cover the majority of teaching situations. Master these and you will quickly develop a reputation of an outstanding teacher. The special methods are effective in small doses, but require far more time and effort to do well than the three we've discussed.

## THE LESSON PLAN

A lesson plan reflects the care and planning that a teacher has made, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, for what will happen in a particular Bible study session. During planning, teachers open themselves to the Word of God and the illumination of God over a period of time. The teacher who merely "fills time" on Sunday morning without a clear vision of where he is taking the class will waste a great deal of that time. Redeeming the Time for Bible Study requires careful and prayerful planning. Let's examine five key ingredients to an effective lesson plan:

Aim to learn	<b>Objective Learning Readiness</b>
Prepare to learn	
Proceed to learn	<b>Bible Study</b>
Review learning	
Transfer learning	<b>Conclusion Assignment</b>

# 1. OBJECTIVE

## “Set Up Targets”

When I was a boy, my parents gave me a bow and arrow set for Christmas. We were living in El Paso, Texas at the time, so I was able to get an immediate start on my bow-and-arrow skills. I set up a cardboard box with a target in front of the stone fence that went around our backyard. I took careful aim and fired my first arrow. I missed the target. I missed the box -- and I hit the fence! My arrow split right down the middle.

### *Aimless Shooting*

Since I only had two arrows left, I decided against shooting at the target. So I made up a new game. I stood in the middle of the yard and fired my arrow straight up. Keeping my eye on the arrow, I moved myself under it -- following the wind currents that pushed it one way and then another. The arrow would

<b>Objective</b>
<b>Learning Readiness</b>
<b>Bible Study</b>
<b>Conclusion Assignment</b>

stall, and then turn and fall back to earth, straight toward me. The object of my game was to see how close to my foot I could get the arrow to land. It was great fun (until my mother saw what I was doing and put an end to my game), but the sad thing was that I never learned how to shoot an arrow and hit a target.

### *Aimless Teaching*

Years later I would discover -- much to my dismay -- that I was teaching Bible studies much the same way. I would “fire” the Bible out to my class, let “The Wind” carry it wherever “He wills,” and then be glad for whatever happened. My teaching was as aimless as my bow-and-arrow game, and there was no way it could improve. There were no guidelines by which to evaluate it.

### **Targeted Teaching**

Instructional objectives “target” your teaching. This target gives you something concrete to aim for--a place to end up--at the

Let's see...  
I'll just shoot  
my arrow  
up in the air....



Now how d'ya 'spect  
he'll ever learn to hit  
anything thataways??

...and wherever  
it lands  
will be fine!



conclusion of the session. Consider a family who spends their two-week vacation aimlessly driving from place to place. They have no idea where they will be during the two weeks, nor how far they will go, nor what they will see. The goal for the trip is nothing more than to spend two weeks on the road. Granted, they will stumble into some interesting experiences. There may even be some excitement in choosing from moment to moment what direction they'll travel. But they will also waste a lot of valuable time.

---

*Redeem the time  
by  
knowing where you're going  
as you teach.*

---

Consider a second family who decides to spend their vacation in Orlando, Florida. Given their destination and the length of their vacation, they have already reduced a lot of wasted time. Detailed planning will fill the gaps of what to do and see on the way to Orlando and back. But the setting up of the target 'redeems the time' for what they want to do.

It is the same with teaching. When you set up a target to hit during a class session, you avoid a lot of aimless talk. Detailed lesson planning will fill in the gaps with what you will do during the session, but the mere setting up of an instructional target clarifies your purpose. You have already begun to 'redeem the time.'

### Learners Most Important

An instructional target underscores the importance of the learner. The learner is the most important ingredient in the Bible teaching-learning process. The Pharisees of Jesus'

day put the observance of the Sabbath above the people who observed it. They criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, because healing is work and work is forbidden on the Sabbath. But Jesus put the observer above the observance: "The Sabbath was made on account and for the sake of man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27, Amplified). The learner is the key ingredient in the learning experience. What will the learner be able to do at the end of your teaching that he could not do before? What impact will you make on the individuals sitting in your class? How have they been changed? In writing an instructional objective, you are planning ahead of time, with prayerful dependence upon the Lord to lead you, what your learners should get from your teaching.

### Type of Learning Desired

Instructional targets differ according to the emphasis you desire in a given lesson. We can identify four major emphases in teaching: knowledge, understanding, personal response, and purposeful action.

#### *Knowledge*

Knowledge refers to the learner's ability to identify or recall information that he has been given. The learner will demonstrate his knowledge of...

...John 3:16 by quoting it from memory.

...Paul's first missionary journey by identifying from a list of Asian cities the names of the cities he visited.

#### *Understanding*

Understanding refers to the learner's ability to explain, illustrate, or describe--in his own words--biblical concepts or principles that he has studied. The learner who understands has moved beyond the words and grasped

the meaning of the words. The learner will demonstrate his understanding of...

...John 3:16 by explaining in his own words the terms “loved the world,” “believeth in Him,” and “everlasting life.”

...the Armor of God (Ephesians 6) by explaining how truth is a “belt,” salvation is a “helmet,” faith is a “shield,” and the Word of God a “sword.”

The outcomes of knowledge and understanding belong to the Left Pillar of the Model.

### *Personal Response*

Personal response refers to the learner’s willingness to share a personal experience or opinion related to the topic being discussed. The learner will demonstrate his appreciation for...

...Paul’s missionary journey by sharing an experience in missions with the class.

...John 3:16 by giving a testimony in class about his life before and after he was saved.

The personal response outcome belongs to the Right Pillar of the Model, and helps learners ‘remove their masks.’

### *Purposeful Action*

Purposeful action refers to the learner’s ability to solve problems in class or put what he has learned into practice during the week. The emphasis can come either from the left or right pillars of the Model.

The learner will demonstrate his understanding of the Armor of God (Ephesians 6) by giving, in class, correct solutions to case studies involving spiritual warfare. (Prob-

lem-solving)

The learner will demonstrate his appreciation for Paul’s first missionary journey by working in one of our church’s mission projects over the next month.

The instructional objective sets the direction for the teaching session. Learning Readiness focuses the hearts and minds of learners on the subject to be studied. The proper use of learning readiness activities is an area that would **immediately** improve the quality of teaching in the church.

## 2. LEARNING READINESS

### “Priming the Pump”

Not so very long ago, folks used manual pumps to draw water. A pitcher of water was poured into the pump to secure the seal. This would provide enough suction to lift the water out of the ground and into whatever container they had. Without “priming,” the manual pump could not begin to draw water.

Objective
Learning Readiness
<b>Bible Study</b>
Conclusion
Assignment

*Redeem the time  
by preparing hearts and minds  
to receive a word  
from the Lord.*

The teacher who walks into a classroom thinking his class is ready to learn is making a dangerous assumption. The individuals seated before him have their minds on their own thing. Their hearts may or may not be

ready to focus on the things of God. Jesus said, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (Mt 7:6). You may think me guilty of overkill to apply this passage to teaching in the church. But the truth remains that your class is not ready to study spiritual truth when they walk into the class. Their pumps need priming. And this is what the learning readiness section of a lesson plan does. Here are some guidelines to follow in designing learning readiness activities.

### Remember your Objective

It does not help the learning process to begin your session with a class discussion of last week's football game, or the morning's headlines (unless that discussion can lead directly into the passage being studied). Discussion for discussion's sake is not helpful. The intention of pump priming should be to focus hearts and minds on a central issue that will prepare the way for the learning activities that follow. Here are some examples drawn from the objectives we stated above.

#### Objective:

The learner will demonstrate his knowledge of Paul's first missionary journey by identifying the names of the cities he visited from a list of Asian cities.

#### Suggested Learning Readiness:

Hang a large map of the Middle East and Asia Minor on the front wall. This can be hand drawn on several sheets of newspaper. Identify each of the major cities in Asia Minor with a large dot. Have the names of the cities written in large print beside their respective dots. Be sure to include all the cities Paul visited on his first missionary journey. Then ask the class to trace the route Paul took on this first journey. (The Bible study

will retrace the route, and emphasize major events that took place on the journey.)

#### Objective:

The learner will demonstrate his understanding of John 3:16 by explaining in his own words the terms "loved the world," "believeth in Him," and "everlasting life."

#### Suggested Learning Readiness:

Write the following words on the chalkboard as learners come into class: "love," "world," "believe," "everlasting," "life." (You've already begun to focus attention.) As the class begins, ask learners to define each of these terms in light of John 3:16. (The Bible study will analyze these terms in light of John 3:16 and parallel passages.)

#### Objective:

The learner will demonstrate his appreciation for Paul's missionary journey by sharing an experience in missions with the class.

#### Suggested Learning Readiness:

Write the words "Experiences in Missions" on the chalkboard and share a personal experience you've had in a mission project or on a mission trip. Emphasize how you feel and what impact the experience had on your life. (The Bible study will focus on Paul's journey and the experiences class members have had in mission work.)

#### Objective:

The learner will demonstrate his understanding of the Armor of God (Ephesians 6) by giving, in class, correct solutions to case studies involving spiritual warfare. (Problem-solving)

#### Suggested Learning Readiness:

Write the following words on individual pieces of blue poster board: "belt," breast-

plate," "shoes," "shield," "helmet," and "sword." Write these words on pieces of yellow poster board: "truth," "righteousness," "gospel," "faith," "salvation," "Word of God." Tape these words randomly on the front wall of the classroom. At the beginning of class, have learners match them up. (The Bible study will focus on the meanings of the pieces of spiritual armor.)

### Avoid gimmicks

Avoid gimmicks that might shock, frighten or offend learners. You will certainly get attention by using sudden loud noises (firecrackers, air horns), rude comments, abusive remarks, or embarrassing skits. Youth ministers seem particularly fond of such tactics. But shock will do more to disrupt learning than enhance it.

### Build a Bridge to Bible Study

Plan carefully for the transition from the learning readiness to Bible study. The learning readiness section should lead naturally into the study portion of the teaching plan. If the pump has been primed correctly, your learners will be eager to get into the Scripture to find answers, clarify meanings, or share the experiences of Bible personalities. In just a few moments, you have focused the attention of your class on the very issues you've targeted. You've made a major step toward "buying up the opportunity" you've been given to teach.

## 3. BIBLE STUDY

### "Hauling the Freight"

During my teenage years I had a friend you spent the weekends polishing his candy-apple-red pickup truck. Chrome-plated dual

Objective
Learning Readiness
<b>Bible Study</b>
Conclusion
Assignment

exhausts. Mag wheels. Wide tires. One day I made the mistake of asking him how much it could carry. "Carry??!" he shrieked. "I don't carry anything in this truck. It's for show!" He was offended at my lack of understanding. Well, excuse me. I thought pickup trucks were meant to be used to haul cargo.

It is amazing to me how many teachers--professional and volunteer--polish their trucks and ignore the freight. They give years to gathering information, and minutes to planning how to teach effectively. For these individuals, teaching is nothing more than telling what they know. "The more one knows, the better teacher he is." This viewpoint yields nothing more than a polished truck. The essence of teaching is conveying experience, understanding and attitude to learners in a way that changes their lives. This is the freight.

---

*Redeem the time*  
by  
**"rightly dividing the Word of Truth"**

**Organize your teaching to maximize learning.**

---

If you want to 'redeem the time' for Bible study that changes lives, focus on hauling freight. Let's consider how to organize the Bible study section and what teaching methods are most appropriate.

### Organization

Organization of the Bible study section can take one of several general forms. Let's consider verse-by-verse study, group study, key

concepts study, and personal response.

### *Verse by verse study*

This organizational pattern involves explaining each verse of scripture in the assigned passage by the teacher. It is by far the most common approach in youth and adult Bible studies. Perhaps this is because the lesson commentary provides information on the passages in this way.

You must carefully stimulate and maintain the learners' interest with this approach. Otherwise the session will decay into boring recitations of monotone facts. Maintain learner interest by peppering your explanations with questions. Questions focus learner attention on the material, cause them to reflect on what you've said, and require them to invest themselves in your interpretations. If they answer correctly, you are assured that they understand what you've said. If they answer incorrectly, you can correct their misunderstandings on the spot.

In general, follow this procedure when teaching a verse-by-verse study: Explain the verse or verse fragment, ask a question about your explanation, and then correct any misunderstandings.

**Example:** The study of Paul's missionary journey could follow the verse-by-verse pattern. Trace his journey from Antioch to Asia Minor and back, verse by verse. Focus attention on each city and its associated events as you go.

### *Small Group study*

Break the class into several groups of three to five members. Give members a question or list of questions and let them study the assigned passage to find answers. This allows the Bible to speak to them as they dig

out the answers for themselves. Plan about half your teaching time for group work and half for class discussion on their answers. It is during the group discussion of questions that you will have the opportunity to clarify meanings and correct misunderstandings.

You must carefully avoid having the groups merely "pool their ignorance" -- that is, to base present answers on past learnings. Give a brief background to the passage and explain key terms ("Prime the pump") before sending the groups into the scripture to find answers.

**Example:** Read Acts 13-15 and answer the following: Who was the leader of the first missionary journey at the beginning? Who was the leader at the end? When did this change happen? Why? How did the older, established leader react to the new leader? Who deserted the team? What was the reaction of the two leaders to this "quitter"? Which of the two reacted more like you would? What key discoveries did you make in these 3 chapters?

### *Key concepts study*

This approach to Bible study organization pivots around the key ideas in an assigned passage. In Revelation 1 we have the twin pictures of Jesus as "Lord-and Judge" and Jesus as "Friend." In Galatians 5 we have a contrast between flesh-works and Spirit-fruit. Separate the related key concepts in a given passage and help learners analyze them.

**Example:** A study of Ephesians 4 could focus on verse 15: "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (NIV). Organize the Bible study section around these four concepts:



**Speaking the “truth”**

Christians should live lives of integrity

**Speaking “in love”**

Christians should live lives of mercy

**Speaking “the truth in love”**

A fusion of the two.

Not callous conviction.

Not sentimental fuzziness.

Loving with integrity.

Speaking truth mercifully.

**Growing up into Christ**

The result of

balancing truth and mercy

is spiritual growth.

Compare Proverbs 3:3-4

I enjoy the “key concepts” approach, because the ideas reach down where people live, uproot misunderstandings, and help learners tie biblical principles to everyday experiences.

**Personal Response**

This organizational pattern organizes the Bible study around the personal experiences of class members. This approach is the most unstructured of any discussed so far. It is also the best way to involve learners in the class discussion. Focus attention on positive testimonies that illustrate the principle you are teaching. If you are discussing prayer, ask learners to share times they’ve prayed effectively. Avoid asking them to confess their failure to pray. If you’re discussing tithing, ask for testimonies on good experiences in giving.

Carefully anchor the sharing of personal experiences to the Bible passage being studied. Otherwise, the study can result in mere fluff. Still, this kind of positive sharing

breathes “real life” into the study.

**Example:** After surveying the first missionary journey of Paul, ask class members to describe mission activities and projects they’ve personally experienced. (Remember the learning readiness for this was a personal testimony of the teacher. Earn the right to ask members to share by sharing yourself first.)

**Principles of Teaching**

We’ve introduced you to four basic ways to organize the Bible study section of a teaching plan. Now let’s look at several sets of teaching principles that relate to these four emphases.

**Teach So They’ll Remember**

Teaching for knowledge requires more than telling learners about the Bible. When you set up a target of knowledge, you want your learners to remember the essentials of what you teach. If your learners don’t remember from one week to the next what you’ve taught, then you are not establishing knowledge. You are merely transmitting information. Here are some suggestions to enhance your learners’ memory.

---

*Redeem the time  
by  
helping learners remember  
what you teach.*

---

**Advance Organizers**

The newsprint map of the cities of Asia Minor suggested under the discussion of learning readiness is an example of an advance organizer. An advance organizer tells the

learner at the beginning of class what information will be covered in class.

Tell the class your objective for the day. "At the end of the class today, you will be able to list the pieces of the Armor of God from memory."

Or, give a short self-graded quiz over the major points of the session.

Or, write out an outline of the key points on poster board and tape it to the front wall of the class. Each of these help learners get a complete picture of the material.

### *Structure*

Learners remember the material much better when it is organized and presented in a clear manner. Emphasize major points as you go along. Use verbal markers to separate one topic from another: "Okay, we've seen how the disciples avoided Paul when he came to Jerusalem. Now let's see how and why they eventually accepted him." Review the section on "organization" for specific suggestions.

### *Sequence*

Learners do better when your material seems to be "going somewhere." Sequence your presentation logically from point to point. Help learners visualize the sequence much like a series of snapshots that tell a story.

### *Active review*

The learner will remember key points better if you use active review throughout the Bible study section. Have learners repeat key points from memory during the session. This is more effective than passive review, in which you repeat the key points for your learners. Enhancing recall requires some measure of drill and practice ("All right, let's

say these together"). Keep the drills short to avoid monotony. Space them out over the session rather than doing them all at once. Memory of items increases when your learners concentrate on remembering part of a list, then relax while to discuss items in the list, then remember, and so on.

### **Teach So They'll Understand**

It is important for learners to know what the Bible says. But you must carry them beyond the mere recall of biblical facts. Unless they understand what those facts mean, they can't live them in a consistent way. Remember the student in Chapter One who thought he was explaining the meaning of "joy," but was merely talking about it. There is more to teaching than getting the right answer. The following story is a favorite of mine and illustrates the point well.

---

*Redeem the time  
by helping learners  
understand  
what you teach.*

---

An educational researcher was observing a 5th grade science class. They had been studying the composition of the earth. "Do you mind if I ask the class a question?" the researcher asked. "Why no," responded the teacher. He turned to the class and asked, "If I were to dig a hole 100 feet deep, would the bottom of the hole be warmer or colder than the surface?" There was no response. The teacher said, "I don't think you asked the question right. Let me try." Turning to the class she said, "What is the condition of the interior of the earth?" Immediately the class responded in unison, "Igneous fusion!" The teacher beamed. "Very good," she said. "So,"

continued the researcher, “would the bottom of the hole be warmer or colder than the surface?” No one ventured a guess.

They knew the answer, but did not understand what it meant. Many of your learners “know the Bible,” but do they understand what the Bible means? They may know the answers to a lot of religious questions. But do they understand those answers? If they don't, you are simply playing “Bible trivia” with them. This will fill time, but it will not redeem the time. Here's how to enhance understanding.

### *Simple to Complex*

Begin with simple, single concepts. Then move to more complex principles that synthesize these concepts together into a meaningful whole.

The “key concepts” organization on page follows this sequence. First explain the meaning of speaking “the truth.” Few would object to that idea. Then explain the meaning of speaking “in love.” Again, few would have a problem with that idea. But when you put the phrase together, “speaking the truth in love,” you present a principle that will be new to many of your learners. People can speak truthfully (often losing their tempers). And they can speak lovingly (often ignoring the truth of wrongdoing). But to speak with love-truth, simultaneously, is a complex concept to teach!

### *Concrete to Abstract*

Begin the session discussing things that your learners are familiar with: their experiences, opinions, or ideas. These are tangible, concrete things known by your learners. Then move to Bible words (knowledge), Bible meanings (concepts), and finally to eternal principles. Each stage moves the learner far-

ther from his own tangible reality into greater levels of abstract thinking. Jesus' parables are excellent examples of this sequence. He began with tangible things his hearers knew about: wind, sheep and goats, treasure. Then He moved them to consider how these things reflected the Kingdom of God.

### *Examples and Non-examples*

Clarify concepts by using examples of what the concept is and examples of what the concept is not. For example, in a session on agape love, you want to separate agape love from other kinds of love your learners know about. What kind of love is agape love? What kinds of love is it not? Both kinds of comparisons are important. Contrast agape love with eros (lust) and phileo (brotherly affection). This removes the emotional and affectionate aspects of our English word “love” from agape, which means “doing good to others.” Jesus does not command us to “like” everyone, but He commands us to agape them--do for them in their best interest. In a similar way, “Christian joy” should be contrasted with concepts often confused with it, such as happiness, pleasure, and fun.

When you set up a target for understanding, ask yourself repeatedly, “How do I explain this?” “What examples are there of this?” “What confuses people about this concept?”

### *Ask Questions*

Clarify the meaning of concepts by asking questions. By far the most important part of teaching for understanding is being able to ask the right question at the right time. The **kind** of question you ask is critical.

**Avoid rhetorical questions.** Do not ask a question and then answer it yourself. When you use rhetorical questions, you actually condition learners not to answer. Then

when you ask a question you **do want** your learners to answer, you may wonder (often in cold silence) why no one responds! The reason is clear: you've taught your learners to wait for you to answer your own questions. Rhetorical questions reduce participation and hinder thinking. Much of the lag time between question and class response is due to learner uncertainty. They simply do not know whether you really want them to answer or not. Once they see you really want them to answer, **then** they begin thinking about your question. My rule is simple: Never ask a question unless you want a learner to answer it. If you will consistently apply this rule in your teaching, you will discover the lag time between question and response will diminish to almost nothing.

**Avoid leading questions.** Do not ask questions that have obvious answers. Such questions bore learners and stifle their interest in the study. "Do you see that Paul is saying that we should. . . ." (Well, of course!) "Do you understand that Jesus is teaching us to. . . ." (Sure! That's what you just said!). It is better to explain what the passage means than to ask leading questions.

**Avoid simplistic questions.** Avoid yes/no questions. "Was Jesus Jewish?" "Was the apostle Peter married?" "Did Cain kill Abel?" "Who was David's second wife?" "Was Barnabas the one who helped Paul in Jerusalem and Antioch?" These factual questions extinguish the thinking process.

**Use conceptual questions.** Focus learner attention on meaning. "John describes Jesus' eyes as 'a blazing fire' (Rev 1:14). What does this mean?"

Or, another: "In Col 3:8-15, Paul lists some characteristics that Christians should take off,

and characteristics we should put on. How are these characteristics related?"

Or another: "Jesus says, 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' (Mt 5:16, NIV) He also says, 'Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen of them.' (Mt 6:1, NIV). How would you explain this apparent contradiction?"

**Probe for understanding.** Probing questions cause learners to "dig deeper" for answers. Go beyond initial responses to get at the heart of what learners understand. Ask for more detail. For example,

You ask: "How can we go out this week and agape the people we meet?"

A learner says, "Be kind to people."

**Probe:** "Okay. How would you do that?"

The learner thinks a moment and says, "Well, I'd be nice to people."

This is still too vague. You are looking for some specific action the learner will take.

**Probe:** "So, how exactly will you be nice to people?"

The learner thinks a little more. Then, as if a light snaps on, he says, "I know! I could visit my friend who's in the infirmary!"

"Excellent! You've got the idea! Someone else have a suggestion?"

Learners reorganize the material in order to answer your questions. This reorganization

of material enhances their understanding.

**Redirect questions.** Probing questions can cause discomfort for learners. You can make a learner feel as if you are harassing him if you continue to probe too long. Redirect the question by asking the class as a whole for an answer.

Let's say that the learner in the example above shows signs of embarrassment at your question.

**Probe:** "So, how exactly will you be nice to people?"

He stammers ("uhhhh..uhhh.....uhh"). He looks at the floor and pats his leg.

**Redirect:** "Class, what specifically can we do to be nice?"

The heart of good teaching is knowing what question to ask and how to ask it. The best teachers can frame questions spontaneously out of lecture material or group discussions. Practicing each of the question types above will enhance your skills in the classroom.

### *Clarify meanings by problem-solving*

When you pose a problem related to the subject you're studying, the responses of the learners give a clear view of how well they understand. Problems are considered differently by learners. Priorities and values are reflected in the decisions learners make. Problem-solving takes you as close to real life events as you can get inside a classroom. Let's look at examples of three types of problem-solving: statement response, situation response, and case response.

**Statement response.** Write a statement on the chalkboard before class begins. At the

beginning of the class, give learners time to analyze and then respond to the statement. Write down the responses for use later in the session. Here's an example:

Mary is finishing a unit on discipleship. She wants to reinforce the major issues they have discussed over the past four weeks. At the beginning of the session, Mary steps to the chalkboard and writes,

**The essence of being a Christian  
is obeying  
the teachings of Christ.**

Turning to the class she says, "Over the past four weeks we've studied the book of Colossians. We have discussed what it means, as well as what it doesn't mean, to be a Christian. Take the next fifteen minutes to reflect on our unit of study (she points to the unit poster she's used during the month) and think about this statement (she points to the board). Decide whether you agree with the statement and why. Use the key ideas and passages we've discussed to support your decision. You might want to join forces with several of your neighbors and share recollections of our studies. I'll be glad to help any of the groups if you need it. Otherwise, we'll come back together in about fifteen minutes.

To react to the statement, learners have to define "essence" and "Christianity" and "obeying the teachings of Christ." They must review passages they've studied. They gather information, define and refine definitions of key terms, and spur each other's thinking as they go about forming a position for or



against the statement. After the fifteen minutes, Mary calls the groups back together and asks them to share their positions. The general position might be something like this:

Following the teachings of Christ is certainly part of the Christian lifestyle! But the essence of being a Christian is being yoked to the Teacher, not the teachings. The essence of being a Christian is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27, NIV). Those who are "in Christ" spend their lives growing in their commitment to His teachings and living them before the world.

In 30 minutes, Mary brought together four weeks of lecture and discussion, dialogue and personal study. Through this one simple exercise Mary stimulated active review, reflection, and group recall of important facts, definitions and concepts. Each learner was free to contribute from his own experiences and discoveries. Learners gained insight and understanding as they listened to and shared with each other.

**Situation response.** Rather than giving the class a statement to react to, provide them a situation they might face. The closer the situation fits the learners' real world, the better. This is because relevant situations help learners integrate Bible teachings with their own views. Here's an example:

Matt's class has been studying a unit on the atoning work of Christ. The study has included passages from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Romans and Hebrews. Posters and charts that summarize and emphasize key teachings adorn the walls. Matt hands each member a slip of paper containing

the following situation:

"A friend stops you during lunch break and, after a few minutes of small talk, says, 'I know you are a church-goer. I just don't understand how you can believe in such a bloody thing as death on a cross. It's just a holdover from ancient pagan sacrifices, seems to me. How do you explain it?'"

Matt divides the class into groups of three and gives these instructions. "The key question of the day is, '**How would you respond to your friend's question?**' Think about the passages we've studied over the past four weeks for clues to a proper answer.

This is a complex learning task. The gap between Sunday School words and an actual response to a friend is wide. Integrating the past (recall) and present (posters and chart summaries) into a specific response both requires and promotes understanding.

**Case response.** Case studies bring together multiple truths or principles into one problem. Mary's "statement" focused on Bible study concepts. Matt's "situation" focused on learner actions. Both are helpful in promoting understanding. Yet they are limited because they usually aim at a single truth or principle. A case study reflects real life issues better than statements or situations because they are more complex.

There may be more than one correct answer to a given case because learners will approach it in different ways. Some may approach the case with rational coldness. They have light but no warmth. Others may approach the same case with irrational emotion. They have warmth but no light. Cold

light and warm darkness fail to solve the case biblically. We need both light and warmth. Learners discover the values and ideals of others as they solve the case. This process reveals blind spots in learner thinking. As learners share their solutions, each gains experience in looking at the situation from perspectives other than his own. These elements make case studies an effective tool for learning to solve problems. Here's an example:

Martha is introducing a new unit on Christian relationships in the home, at church and at work. She writes the following case study and hands it out to her members at the beginning of the first session.

"Helen has been a Christian for two years. Her conversion made a real difference in her life. Out of a thankful heart she has become involved in several programs at church. Frank, her husband, is not a Christian and views her change with something less than celebration. One of Helen's favorite activities is a weekday Ladies Bible Class that meets in the homes of the members. Helen has become somewhat of an adviser to the group. She's a concerned friend, a good listener. One afternoon a member of the class calls Helen for help with a problem. Helen agrees to meet with the caller that evening, though she knows Frank had made plans for dinner. 'We can go out for dinner another time,' she thinks to herself. 'And besides, this is the LORD'S work!'"

Evaluate Helen's actions and reasoning based on your understanding of Christian relationships. Was her

decision right or wrong? Could she have handled the situation differently?

There are several responses that could be expected. Some may consider Helen's actions wrong because she broke a prior commitment. This is bad manners. She rationalizes by labelling it "the Lord's work" and yet her own husband is lost and needs a patient, loving witness too. She should have followed through with the original plans and arranged for meeting the caller.

Others may consider the actions justified under the circumstances. Her commitment is first to Christ. Frank is not a Christian and has been less than supportive of her faith. She should not let his desire for a "night out" hinder her ministry within the class. If this were a consistent pattern, there might be cause for alarm. But her friend is hurting and needs Helen's help. She did the right thing.

Still others might look at the situation from "wives submit to your husbands" and see Helen as a rebellious and unsubmitive wife. (This would surely stimulate discussion.)

This kind of flexibility and discussion scares some people. Pat answers are safer and more reassuring than several "possible solutions." But look at the benefits. Martha learns about her members as they respond to this case. She can include specific questions and examples in future sessions to address misunderstandings shared in class. She will know how the learners feel about the sensitive issues of home and Christian friendships. She will direct class learning more effectively because they shared these ideas and opinions.

## Teach So They'll Personally Respond

The securing of personal responses from your class depends on how free learners feel to share experiences, opinions, or feelings. There must be an atmosphere of freedom, of openness, in the classroom, or learners will keep their ideas and experiences to themselves. As we have seen, learner ideas and experiences are essential to your goal of 'redeeming time' and helping them grow. The more you can involve your learners in the session--the less detached and isolated they are--the better you can teach them. How do we improve the openness of our classes? How do we help learners become personally involved? Let's look at these two vital aspects of Bible study.

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*Redeem the time  
by  
helping learners become  
personally involved  
with God's Word and  
other believers.*

---

### *Improve openness*

To help members remove their masks and share personal experiences with others, build an atmosphere of trust and acceptance within your class. You might want to review the right pillar of the Model in Chapter One as you consider these methods.

**Use subjective questions.** Subjective questions allow the learner to share personal opinions related to the passage. They do not require detailed knowledge of the Bible passage, nor do they depend on the learner's ability to think clearly or logically. The in-

attention of the question is to "open the learner" to the class--to see how the learner is feeling or thinking within himself. Here are some examples of subjective questions.

"Jesus forgave Peter for his betrayal during the trial (John 17). How would you have reacted if you had been in Peter's place?"

Or, "What experiences of forgiveness have you had?"

Or, "God gave Moses a task that seemed impossible. Have you received God's call to what seemed an impossible task? How did you respond? What happened?"

Questions such as these move into the hearts, as well as the minds, of learners. These do much more to build an interactive environment than factual questions that call for specific answers. "Can anyone name the twelve disciples?" "Henry, tell me who Saul was. (The first King of Israel?) No, no, the other one." "What was David's wife's name? (Bathsheba?) No, the first one." "Where was James when he wrote Revelation? Oh, I meant John!" Teachers who use too many factual questions will reduce their members' willingness to contribute in class.

**Ask the Whole Group.** Ask questions of the whole group rather than of one individual. Calling a learner's name before asking a question puts the "chosen one" on the spot. Also, since you have already decided who will answer, the other learners in the group do not need to think about the question. This limits their thinking. Asking questions of the whole group gives each an opportunity to think and allows anyone to share.

**Earn the right.** You have no right to ask your learners to share personal experiences if you are not willing to do so. Earn the

right to call for personal experiences by sharing one of your own first. However, this is not an invitation to put your 'every experience' on display before a captive audience.

**Focus on positive experiences.** A common mistake of inexperienced teachers is to ask students to share failures rather than successes. You will do more for class openness and trust if you only call for positive experiences. Such experiences focus learners' thoughts on the redeeming work of Christ.

It is true that learners may well share times of failure as they feel more comfortable in the class. This can be a wonderful display of openness in a class. But do not ask learners to share their failures in front of the group. ("Confession before the group" is an important principle of brainwashing).

Compare the two examples below. Which class would you rather sit in Sunday after Sunday?

- 1 -

Teacher: Okay, tell me. How many of you did not have a time of Bible study and prayer this past week. C'mon. Raise your hands.

Pupil 1: (Bows head, slowly raises hand)

Pupil 2: (Defiantly crosses arms, looks straight at the teacher, frowns)

Pupils 3,4: Smile knowingly, glance at each other, say and do nothing more.

- 2 -

Teacher: This last week I was feeling like God was far away. During my prayer and Bible study time, I asked God to give me an assurance of His presence. As I read the Bible, I grew closer and closer to the Lord. My feelings of separation from God went away. Have you had an experience like this? (several nod yes). Share your experiences with us.

Pupils 3,4: Share with the class their experiences of prayer and Bible study.

Pupil 1: Tells that he has not had a time of prayer and Bible study for a long time, but wants to start one. "How do I get started?"

Pupil 2: Thinks to himself: (I haven't given much thought to a devotional time, but since several in his class have...hmmmm?)

The sharing of personal experiences in the class, over time, helps members learn from each other and develops an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This atmosphere is evident in example two, but lacking in example one. Notice how the masks went up in example 1, and came down in example 2? This is the intention of teaching for personal response.

### *Handling wrong answers*

Give attention to how you respond to wrong answers. When a learner answers your question, it shows that he has developed enough confidence to risk being wrong. Take care to handle an inadequate or incorrect answer sensitively. If you react in a way that belittles or humiliates him, he will "put his mask up," and you will lose several weeks of teaching time as you try to win back his

trust. And you may lose the chance to teach him altogether! Look at the following example:

Teacher: Who built the great Temple in Jerusalem?

John: (Enthusiastically raises hand and says) David!

Now what should you do? The answer is not David, but Solomon. David gathered the materials, and wanted to build the Temple very much. But God would not let him. It fell to Solomon to build it. How does one correct the misinformation without belittling the answerer, or undermining future eagerness to answer questions?

An effective approach is to redirect the question to the class. "Okay, are there other ideas?" When another gives the correct answer, chances are that John will remember that it was indeed Solomon and that his answer is wrong. "That's right! It is Solomon." You can then affirm John for his eagerness to participate and answer. One problem with this approach is that, if you always respond this way to an incorrect answer, then the phrase "Okay, are there other ideas?" will soon be taken the same as if you said "Wrong!" One way around this problem is to use this response at times when the answer is right. "Okay, are there other ideas?" This causes learners to rethink the question and the answer. "Isn't that right?" "Am I missing something?" "No, that's the right answer!" And you can then affirm their response.

How, then, do we respond when a person answers wrongly, or shares an opinion that does not reflect clear biblical thinking? **Support the person** and deal with the answer. Throw the answer to the **class** for analysis.

Defend the learner's **willingness to share** if others criticize him, but guide the class to see what the Bible says. Or **respond yourself**. "I see what you're saying, but I have a problem with that. It seems to me that Paul is saying (express the idea in other words). "How do you react to that?"

Or when members begin to argue, **defend the right of all to speak** their minds. Keep the discussion on the **issues** involved. Defuse the emotions as much as possible.

We do not give up the Truth of God's Word to placate the feelings of people (2 Tm 4:1-5). Also, we do not condemn or ridicule God's people in the name of Truth (Jn 3:17-18). We teach the Truth by patiently leading them to compare their own conceptions with those of the Bible. This requires trust and openness.

Nothing hampers openness in the classroom more than harsh, judgmental, humiliating responses to incorrect answers. The loving response affirms the learner, corrects the answer, and teaches both biblical content and Christian behavior simultaneously.

#### *Avoid a harsh or negative attitude*

When you present a negative, dominating spirit, you build psychological walls between yourself and those who disagree with you. You hinder learner participation. And you may well destroy your opportunity to teach. Immature teachers believe they are "standing strong" for their convictions. "If they'd get right with God, they'd agree with me!" Such egotistical attitudes destroy the fragile atmosphere that helps learners grow.

#### *Model desired attitudes and behaviors*

Real changes in the lives of your learners come not from the words you speak, but the



life you live. Subjective learning is more “caught from the teacher” than “taught by the teacher.” As you prepare to teach, ask the Lord to help you live it. Aspire to narrow the gap between the biblical ideal and your way of living. Your struggle toward Christlikeness will be a living example to your class members.

### *Work with small groups*

Learners feel less threatened in a group of four than they do in a group of fourteen or forty. There are always a group of learners in a class who seldom raise a question or make a comment. They do not have the confidence to speak up in the larger group. But when placed in the small groups, they are less anxious and are more willing to share.

Further, only one person can speak at a time in an intact class. When you divide the class into smaller groups, more learners share because more than one person can speak at once. The result is greater freedom for sharing and participation by more learners.

### *Learners are worthwhile individuals*

Whether your learners agree with you or not, whether they are pleasant or not, they are individuals for whom Christ died. They are worthy. They are valuable. Treat them as precious jewels. You may “lose the battle” today, but ultimately “win the war” if you persevere in loving the individual.

A graduate professor stands before his classes on the first day of every semester and says, “You are here to learn from me. I am here to teach you. I am not interested in your ideas. Please do not interrupt me with questions. Study your texts, take good notes, and you will do well in the course.” During one semester a student interrupted this professor with a question on the assigned reading

for the day. “That is one of the most stupid questions I’ve ever been asked. I’ll not take the time to respond to it.” Such harsh and abusive treatment destroys any desire for personal involvement. Indeed, personal involvement is defined in this professor’s classroom as an “odious interruption.” Such a professor could be replaced with video tapes of his lectures! It is obvious he has not translated “Christlikeness” into his behavior in the classroom!

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Consider Jesus’ treatment of the Samaritan woman, the Roman centurion, Matthew and Zacchaeus--the tax collectors, and Nicodemus the Pharisee. Treat your learners as Jesus would. God has brought your learners into your class. You are a steward of those you teach. You will find that “love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8, NIV). A teacher who loves his students overcomes many deficiencies in style or technique.

### *“Rabbit-chasing.”*

During a Sunday morning session, an issue or question not directly related to the topic may capture the class. In just a few seconds, individuals in the class can move the discussion away from the teacher’s line of thought to something completely unrelated. This un-

expected diversion from the lesson plan is called “chasing a rabbit.” This can cause frustration for class members and fragmented learning in the class. As a feeling of openness grows in the class, there is a tendency to ‘chase rabbits’ more. There are several ways we can handle these “rabbits.”

**Stop the rabbit.** Though we invite sharing in class, we also restrain chit-chat that we deem unproductive and irrelevant to the study at hand. If you judge the issue or question as unproductive, gently bring the class back to the main line of thought. “That’s an interesting point you’ve raised. It is something we could spend an hour on, but we need to focus very carefully on the question before us, which is. . . .”

**Follow the rabbit.** If the question or issue captures the interest of the class, you may choose to spend time dealing with it. You will learn when to do this, how much time to spend on it, and its value to the class only through repeated experiences with a particular class. Every time a “rabbit” appears, you must decide whether to stop it or follow it. You will inevitably make wrong decisions, and will either waste time needlessly or miss a good “teaching moment.” But this is just part of learning how to best ‘redeem the time.’

**Postpone the rabbit.** Consider postponing a “rabbit” until after class. It’s fine to do this when there is little classwide interest in the issue. By doing this you avoid addressing the issue in class while showing that you really care about your student’s concerns.

“Rabbits” generate interest in Bible study. Learning that is relevant to learners literally ‘explodes!’ out of spontaneous questions

raised by learners. But balance is required. Too much rabbit-chasing will destroy the best of lesson plans. Watch the ‘body language’ of your class for clues of their interest in a particular rabbit. Disinterest or frustration (“Here we go again!”) is shown by crossed arms, crossed legs, looking at the ceiling or floor, rolling eyes, heavy sighs, tapping feet or fingers. Interest is shown by such things as leaning forward to hear, looking at the person raising the issue, asking a question or agreeing with the point, and spontaneous chit-chat among class members regarding the issue.

### Teach So They’ll Relate

Whether you build relationships among your class members depends on the opportunities you give them to work together. The greatest drawback of lecturing is that learners focus on the teacher, never on one another. Give your learners occasions for bridge-building among themselves. We have already discussed advantages of using small groups. Consider the variety of groupings that you can use.

#### *Vary group size*

Groups can consist of pairs, triads, quads, or quints (2, 3, 4, 5). You can divide the class in halves, thirds, or fourths. Each size grouping is different. Each has its own best use. Use larger groups of five or six when you want learners to review several weeks of Bible study. Groups need more heads for remembering content and principles of application. Use smaller groups when you ask them to share personal experiences, discoveries or problems. Smaller groups provide a better environment for sharing.

#### *Vary group type*

In an adult couples’ class, one could have husband-wife pairs, or men-only/women-

only groups, or randomly mixed groups. Each kind of group produces its own kind of learning outcome.

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*Redeem the time  
by  
helping learners build koinonia,  
a sense of community.*

---

**The husband-wife pair** allows couples to use their knowledge of each other. These classroom efforts might strengthen their relationship at home.

**Men-only/women-only groups** reflect the different viewpoints of men and women toward issues in our society. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen 1:27). Men and women differ, but both are created in God's image. As you lead your class to explore differences of perspective, in light of scripture, you contribute to a richer understanding of issue, scripture, and relationship.

**Random groupings** build relationships in the class as members work together in a common task. Since the groupings are random, the combinations of members differ from assignment to assignment.

**Plan gatherings outside the classroom**  
Relationships will remain tentative if the Sunday School classroom is the only place your learners meet. Mission projects, church work days, or a cup of coffee after church will build bridges fast. Plan occasional social events in homes, at the church, or "out on the

town" that get members together during the week.

While this aspect of relationships does not occur during the Bible study section of the plan, it does relate well to the goal of building koinonia in the class. Worthwhile Christian ministry does not occur among strangers. If your Sunday School class becomes the kind that ministers to one another, it will happen as members grow together in mutual relationships. You can 'redeem the time' for the process by including a variety of grouping procedures in your lesson plan.

### Teach So They'll Do the Word

Jesus made it clear that learning and action go together. "Go and do thou likewise" accompanied His teaching. It should accompany ours as well. The problem-solving activities and removing-the-mask techniques already discussed are excellent ways get learning out of the classroom. But how, specifically, can we coax learners into action?

You do it by assigning activities to be done during the week. These assignments can be made to individuals, groups, or to the class at large. Here are some suggestions.

#### *Individual assignments*

When one of your learners shows special interest or talent, suggest a special project that will allow them to use this interest or talent. He will learn more on his own. And he can share what he learns with the class as well. Let's say one of your members likes geography. Ask her to **draw a map** of the unfamiliar area the class is studying. Another might enjoy language study. Assign him a list of words from soon-to-be-studied passages. He can **dig into commentaries** and be prepared to share his findings in class. Others may have talents for drama or music

or poetry. They can **direct mini-plays** or **write songs or poems** to share in class.

This variety enhances the study. But the focused attention of learners on passages and places, on words and scripts, deepen their commitment to God's Word. Use sensitivity and patience in suggesting projects for your learners. If you encourage too little, the assignment may never be attempted. If you encourage too much, the assignment may seem like a requirement rather than a privilege. Weave the talents of your members into the class, as they are able to do and willing to do.

---

*Redeem the time  
by helping learners  
put what they learn  
into practice during the week.*

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**Doing for the Class.** Bill was a member of my deaf adult Sunday School class. One Sunday I introduced a new unit of study that began the next week. The theme of the study was the travels of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Bill asked me after class if he could help me by drawing a map of the Palestine area to use in tracing Jesus' travels. Bill had shown no evidence of drawing ability, so I applauded his willingness all the while doubting that anything of real value would be done.

I walked into the classroom the next Sunday and was surprised to see most of the class sitting there waiting for me! They had a different look about them -- expectant, I think. They said nothing but pointed to the front wall. And there it was. A map. Some six feet tall and four feet wide. Drawn in India ink

and decorated with pastels. Blue Mediterranean. Snow-topped Mt. Herman. Rivers and lakes.

There were fishing boats on the Mediterranean and Sea of Galilee. Each Roman Province was labelled in precise serif capital letters. Each major town and city was represented by a black dot, its name neatly lettered out beside.

Bill had studied all 13 lessons in his quarterly that week. He noted the major cities Jesus visited and one major event in each. These cities were represented by a black dot with a red circle around it. Beside the city, he drew a small illustration of the major event. There before our eyes was a graphical presentation of our next 13 weeks of lessons.

What a blessing to me and to the class! But more important was the change in Bill. He had learned so much that week. His work had been praised and was now on display for all to see and use. Bill was changed forever that week. At my request, he continued to draw poster illustrations for each lesson. We hung them around the walls for review. And when I left for seminary, Bill became the teacher of the class.

**Doing for others.** Toward the end of a lesson on I Corinthians 13, I asked members of the class what they could do "this very week" to love someone the way Paul described agape. Nearly everyone in the room shared something they could do. One young lady in the class volunteered to visit her friend in the infirmary. The next Sunday she came into class more excited than I had ever seen her. As we reviewed the study and the assignments, she shared her experience.

She had gone on Wednesday to visit her



friend, who had been in the Infirmary for three weeks. They visited for a long while. Then her friend said, "I've been here for three weeks and no one has visited me. Why did you come to see me?" The young lady smiled and said, "Because I know God loves me and cares about me. He loves you too, and wanted me to come see you. So, here I am!"

The next Sunday her friend visited our Sunday School class. It was the first time she had been to church in 8 years. It was not long until she made her profession of faith and was baptized. She had been touched by the Lord through one who was faithful in "doing the Word."

When you tie specific assignments to specific learners in your class, using their unique gifts to enhance Bible study, you come closest to the true role of a discipler. You can have no greater impact in the life of class members than to engage them in meaningful activities which mix their gifts and God's Word. As a craftsman carefully guides his apprentice, so we guide our learners into the riches of living out God's Word.

### *Group assignments*

Ask a group of learners to work together on an assignment. They teach one another in a relaxed setting outside of class. Their presentation in class adds variety to the hour. It gives the members a sense of belonging and usefulness in the class. Further, this is an ideal way to involve members who are hesitant to accept an individual assignment.

### *Class assignments*

Suggest from time to time a general assignment for the whole class to do. This might be a list of questions to answer. It might be a test or reaction scale to fill out. It might be a list of key words to define in preparation for

a brainstorming session. Or a case study to analyze. Or a spiritual diary to keep for the week. These kinds of assignments bind the class together in doing common tasks which will improve their understanding of the Bible.

Do the assignments yourself! You give the proper example to the class by doing this, but more, you make yourself part of the whole group.

### *Use assignments in class*

When you make an assignment to be done during the week, be sure to plan time in the next session to discuss what happened. Learners will quickly realize that the assignments are not important if you don't do this.

What is the benefit of this emphasis on outside work to Sunday School? To the learners? To you? There are many. Let's list some major ones.

**Develops the gifts** of learners.

**Increases interest** in personal Bible study.

**Increases enthusiasm** for Sunday School.

**Reduces teacher study time** as learners share in teaching.

**Increases the variety** of learning experiences. Encourages learners to **explore**.

**Builds rapport** between teacher and members.

**Develops teaching skills** in learners.

Helps **shy members to participate** with others.

Expands **Sunday School into the week**.

**Reduces dependence** on the teacher.

All of these benefits are within easy reach of the teacher who longs to see Bible truths lived out in the daily experiences of his learners, and who is willing to plan ahead in order to make it happen.





**Be patient  
and make changes  
gradually!**

### *Deciding what to do*

Over the past few pages we've concentrated on the complexities of the Bible study section of a lesson plan. How do you decide what to do in the Bible study section? Here are some suggestions to help you determine what learning tools to use when.

**Class history.** What kinds of teaching experiences is your class used to? Don't try to do too much too fast. Don't make drastic changes. Build trust first. Classes that are accustomed to lecture (and no participation) will not like being asked questions and may rebel at the suggestion of group work. Classes that are accustomed to free-wheeling discussion will not like to be lectured to, and may resent your trying to structure the class by way of questions or comments. Learn from your learners! Then move them gradually and gently into better methods of learning.

**Class preferences.** What are the methods that produce the best response? If the class enjoys group discussion, use this while integrating more explanation and "meat." If the class prefers lecture, use this while integrating more participatory activities.

**Choose new approaches wisely.** What new approach can you use without creating undue anxiety or resistance? The class has had testimonies before. Why not record answers to a central question at a Wednesday night supper, and play the answers for the class. The class has participated in discussions as a class. Is it time to try using small groups to extend this participatory approach? Build on new approaches that are well received. Stretch the class just as you might stretch a muscle -- slow, gradual movements.

**Prepare the way for new methods.** It is better to lead learners gently into new learning experiences than to shock them with an unfamiliar experience or class arrangement. If you plan to use a "new approach" (New to your class, at least), how will you prepare class members for it. "This week we focused on (content) by analyzing the passage as a class. Next week, let's work together in smaller groups to insure everyone a chance to participate."

**Choose appropriate activities.** You've set up a target for your learners to hit. Select the kinds of activities that will help them hit

it. If you're afraid the activities will be unacceptable to your learners, then you've set up a target that you cannot hit. Set up a realistic target for your learners, and then plan activities in line with that target.

**Watch for "the fire."** In time, one of your class members will "catch fire." A discovery made. An experience had. A lesson put into practice with positive results. Interest is ignited. Enthusiasm recharged. Move the class in this learner's direction by emphasizing his experience.

**Be patient and move gradually.** As one and then another of your learners catch the excitement of life-changing Bible study, you will be given greater freedom to do new things in class. Be cautious. Do not go too far too fast. Be patient with learners who aren't excited and don't seem to care. They may come around (think of disciple Thomas), or they may not (think of disciple Judas). Be faithful and continue to plant the seed.

**Hit the target?** The Bible Study section ends when your learners (or at least some of them) hit the target you've set up. If your target is knowledge, can they identify or recall what you've said they would? If your target is understanding, can they explain or give examples of the concepts you've taught? If personal response, have they engaged in sharing their experiences related to the study? If purposeful action, have they shared ways they can put the study into practice during the week?

If not, why not? Was the target too small? Did you fail to plan your time correctly? Did you use inappropriate methods? Did something unexpected happen in class? Each time you evaluate a session, you gain priceless help for your next teaching plan.

## 4. THE CONCLUSION

### "Tie it up with a bow"

A friend of mine is a wonder at wrapping gifts. He takes such care at how he cuts the paper to fit, how he makes each fold. He uses different kinds of ribbon to make intricate patterns on the package. Then, as a final touch, he designs a special bow that sets the whole effect. His packages are so beautiful that I hate to unwrap them.

The objective for the session has been accomplished. Now, in the closing minutes of the hour, conclude the session by summarizing, or leading the class to summarize, what has happened. What have they discovered? What are they carrying away from the class? How will they use what they've learned during the week?

The way you draw your session to a close is as important as Bill's gift wrap is to his packages. It is your last chance to 'redeem the time' for your learners. Here are some suggestions for "tying it up in a bow."

#### *Avoid total closure*

People want to close discussions and end learning activities in a satisfactory way. They want to find solutions to problems you've raised. Educators call this tendency closure. It is frustrating for learners to leave the class wondering what the point of the study was.

On the other hand, you create a sense of finality or ending to the session when you bring the class to total closure. This is not good, because you want the learning and experiences to follow your learners into the week. Therefore, draw the session to a close

Objective
Learning Readiness
<b>Bible Study</b>
Conclusion
Assessment

without coming to total closure. Here's how to do it.

**Review major points**

Briefly review the key discoveries of the session. You can do this passively (teacher review) if time is short, or lead the class to review actively what they've learned (learner review).

**Involve learners**

Ask learners to share their discoveries, feelings, and reactions to what they've learned from the session. If you listen carefully, you will pick up on the kinds of things that interest and satisfy your learners.

End the session by opening your learners to things they can do during the week that will solidify their growth in the Lord. Here are two key suggestions:

**Lead to commitment**

Ask learners to suggest ways they will act on what they've learned during the week. Write down these suggestions and review them at the beginning of the next class period (without names, of course!).

**Prompt for next session**

Raise a question, pose a problem, or provide a situation analysis for learners to work on during the week. This "advance organizer" for the next session helps extend Bible study into the week and establishes a beginning point for learning readiness in the next session.

Tying individual sessions together by way of assignments and reports in class pays rich dividends in the spiritual growth of class members. We'll discuss this more in the next session as we consider the unit plan.

**Redeem the time  
by making an assignment  
for learners to do  
during the week.**

**5. The Assignment**

**"Move It into Life"**

Most teachers believe they are finished when they've made their conclusion. But if you end the session with the conclusion and a closing prayer, you effectively cut off the Sunday School hour from the rest of the week. Sunday School is over. Very few class members will even think of Sunday School until next Sunday. If the mere thought of Sunday School never crosses their minds, how in the world can they begin to "meditate" on what they've learned. Do not end with the conclu-

Objective
Learning Readiness
<b>Bible Study</b>
Conclusion
Assignment

**In Summary**

Use this five-part format to build your teaching plans and you will put more punch into them. You will do much more with this approach than without it. You will 'redeem the time' in a very practical way. But there's more that can be done! How can we buy up time between Sundays?

**THE UNIT PLAN**

How you plan from week to week has a dramatic effect on the quality of learning that happens in your classroom. A common approach is to prepare for one session at a

time. Teachers learn all they can during the week about the “lesson” for Sunday. They gather materials and select methods. They write examples and organize notes. They build the “lesson” as a complete package: introduction, Bible study, and application. The learning experience ends when Sunday School ends. Next week, a new lesson will be presented by the teacher. The “Sunday School experience” is 52 disjointed sessions. Most of the teacher’s words are forgotten by Monday because there is no reason to think about the material between Sundays. Attendance is less consistent because members can be absent a Sunday or two without seeming to miss anything. They simply pick up where they left off. In this approach, one lesson is very much like the next one. Christian growth suffers.

section, you will solve most of the problems listed above. But there’s more that can be done. When you focus on one lesson at a time, you may find yourself losing direction during a month of studies. Just as a single session can disintegrate into aimless actions going nowhere, so can a **series** of sessions. Unless you tie together your lesson plans in a systematic way, you can lose much the ground you gain on Sunday during the week. You can solve this problem using a unit plan.

### A Synthesis of Plans

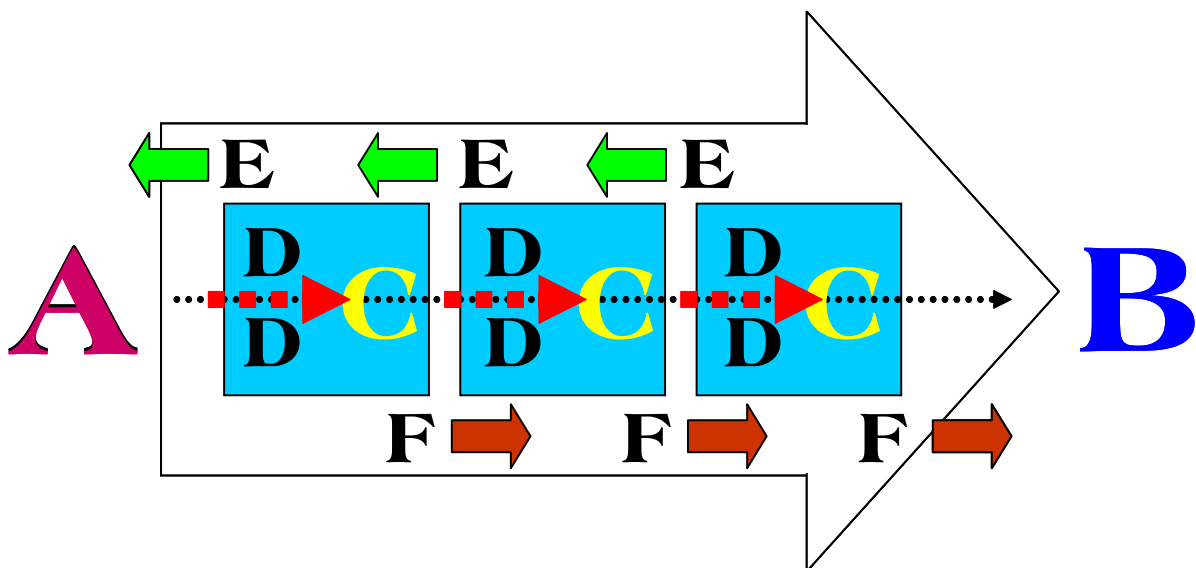
A synthesis is a mixing of things which results in something new. The color green is a synthesis of the colors blue and yellow. Glass is a synthesis of sand and heat. Nylon is a synthesis of two colorless chemicals.

A unit plan is a synthesis of several lesson plans. A unit of study may span a month’s time, but three-, four-, five-, and six-session units are not uncommon. Here’s how to develop a unit plan. Each lettered statement (A-F) matches the diagram below.

### *Redeem the time by merging several sessions into a single unit emphasis*

If you prepare lesson plans each week using the guidelines set out in the BIBLE STUDY

- A. Before the unit begins, study all the lessons in the unit. Isolate key terms, events, concepts, and possible applications for each session.



Make a note of the main instructional targets for each session.

- B. Decide on long-term instructional goals for the unit based on the content of the study and the needs of your learners. Use the pillars of the model for ideas: thinking focus, personal focus, relating focus.
- C. Sequence the individual lesson objectives to build toward the unit objectives. Keep moving in the same direction toward your unit goals throughout the unit. "This session I'll focus on analyzing scripture. Another session may lend itself to sharing with others and removing masks. Another to building relationships, and yet another, to meeting needs."
- D. Relate your learning activities directly to the short-term lesson targets and the longer-term unit targets. Avoid the myth of "Covering the Lesson." There is more material provided in every session than you can "cover" in 30-40 minutes. Tailor your teaching to achieve your targets with the assigned content.
- E. Give attention to how you will begin a session by **reviewing** the last one.
- F. End the session by **previewing** the next one. This learning network helps reinforce what your students gain week by week.

### Benefits of a Unit Plan

What do you get for looking ahead by units rather than by sessions? Is the additional time investment worth the outcome? I believe the answer is a resounding "YES!" Here are some advantages I discovered when I coordinated my lesson plans by units.

#### *Students as teachers*

I had many more opportunities to involve my students as teachers in my class when I knew where I was going "down the road." I did this by assigning reports and projects for

them to do during the week. Then I had them share the results of their learning in class.

#### *Sessions more flexible*

Because I had several hours to accomplish my unit objectives, each session had more flexibility. I was able to vary learning activities much more than when I planned one session at a time.

#### *Gaps between sessions narrowed.*

Continuity from Sunday to Sunday was increased by using a unit plan. The Review/preview network, as well as the assignments I made to class members, helped build bridges between sessions.

#### *Self-study encouraged*

The assignments encouraged many of my students to study the Scripture on their own for the first time. They were better able to contribute in the class time because they had done their homework before coming.

#### *Routine swallowed up*

The flexibility of teaching methods and the increased interest in Bible study made our Sunday morning studies times of celebration and renewal.

#### *Attendance more consistent*

Sporadic attendance declined and regular attendance increased because learners **wanted** to be involved! The Sunday School hour became a place of discovery for them. And by the way, if you worry about average attendance, consistency of attendance among members is more important than the number of new members you make. (What is the value to you or to a new member if he does not attend?)



*"Natural" Outreach*

Our members invited their friends, members of their families, neighbors, and co-workers more readily because Sunday School was a blessing to them. It was a blessing to be shared, not a duty to be performed for the "good of an organization."

*Save time in preparation*

Though more initial time is required to map out a unit plan, over the long term I found that I was spending less time in preparation week by week. There were two basic reasons for this. First, I had an overview of where I was going for the unit. That made it easier (and quicker) to plan meaningful learning activities for each session. But more than that, I had learners do part of the preparation. So I found that I could do a better job of teaching, yet actually spend less time than before!

**A Drastic Example**

Now this all may sound very idealistic. Unreal. Unbelievable. But I tell you the truth: I've seen these results in every class that coordinated their sessions by way of a unit plan. In every class. I've seen these results in every department that had director and teachers committed to unit planning. In every department. How might these ideas find expression in the lives of real teachers? Compare the following cases.

*The Traditional William A.*

Bill is a teacher of median adults at First Church. He sits down at his desk a week before he begins teaching a new unit entitled, "People Who Knew Jesus." The unit has four sessions. Each session deals with a person who knew Jesus: Mary, His mother; Peter, the Rock; John, the Beloved; and Judas, the Traitor.

On Bill's desk are two translations of the Bible, a commentary, and his Teachers' Quarterly. He reads over the passage of scripture for session one: "Mary, the Mother of Jesus". As he reads, he jots down a possible outline for his presentation. He uses ideas from the suggested teaching plans in his Teachers' Quarterly. He checks both translations and the commentary for additional help. Gradually a lecture outline begins to emerge.

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committed to unit planning.  
In every department.**

---

Bill lectures his class because he has found from experience that this is the best way to explain the entire lesson in 30-40 minutes. He completes his planning for session one by writing out a general application of the passage. On Saturday evening he reviews his notes. On Sunday morning, Bill stands behind a podium in front of his class and presents the material on Mary. He finishes on time. He has been helped by members who know not to interrupt him with ques-

tions or comments.

The next evening, Bill sits down at his desk and begins reading the passages of scripture assigned for session two. His lesson format is the same. His presentation varies little from the week before. Bill feels good about his class. He enjoys his responsible post in the church. Besides, the obligation to teach forces him to study his Bible regularly and he likes the added incentive! The class likes Bill. Members of the class consider him a good teacher. He is dependable and well-prepared. He would win honors in many churches as "teacher of the year."

Evaluate Bill's approach in light of the disciplers' model. Here are some questions to help you work through the model:

How much do **learners** study the Bible?

How are the needs of learners addressed?

How does Bill encourage learners themselves to think?

How do learners share experiences and discoveries?

How does Bill strengthen relationships among learners?

In what way are the sessions **informational**?

In what way are the sessions **transformational**?

How would the same month of studies look if it were planned as a unit rather than 4 separate lessons?

### **The Disciplex James B.**

As Jim sits down at his desk to begin preparing the new unit, he scans the entire unit. He

looks for emphases that relate well to the needs of his class members. He scans each session to see how it fits into the unit frame. He jots down major events in the lives of Mary, Peter, John and Judas that highlight their relationship with the Lord. These he will use for his unit introduction in session one. He reads the suggested teaching points. Some are relevant to his class, some others are not.

He pulls out of the material those emphases that directly relate to class needs. There are three new church members in his class. They will need some background information on these three persons to understand later sessions. There is a clique beginning to form that is causing some friction within the class. He wants to use this study to focus on that problem.

After a time of prayer for the members and their needs, for his time of preparation, and for the Sunday session, Jim writes down two major objectives for this 4-week study:

(1) Learners will demonstrate their understanding of Christian relationships by developing a list of relational guidelines based on Jesus' example with Mary, Peter, John, and Judas.

(2) Learners will demonstrate their appreciation for Christian relationships by sharing with each other times they have been blessed by the kindness of Christian friends.

Jim scans his card file of learning activities that might help him accomplish these objectives. He will use lecture to build a strong information base for later learning activities. This will help the new members participate with the class. Since his goal focuses on building relationships, he needs to plan sufficient time for members to work together. This will

build bridges and soften the isolation of the clique. This will also allow the new members to join the group more easily. Some members are showing increasing interest in creative Bible study. Jim decides this might be a good unit to involve them in a special way. Here is how Jim planned his unit of study.

**Session One.** Jim uses the first session to introduce the entire unit of study. He arranges colorful posters in the room that presents some highlights of each of the four sessions. Jim prepared his lecture well and covers the major emphases of **all four sessions** in the unit. He uses a flip chart to present the material one step at a time. He writes questions on the chalkboard as they proceed through the material. The questions give him feedback on whether the learners are understanding the material. That is, how well are learners translating facts and information into usable concepts and principles?

Near the end of the session, Jim asks for four volunteers to help with a special presentation the next Sunday. Three members volunteer quickly (he expected two of them; the third is a surprise) and a fourth volunteers with some gentle encouragement. Learners are already anticipating Sunday School next week.

In closing, Jim summarizes the major events in the lives of the four persons who knew Jesus. He uses the flip chart to give visual reinforcement to his review. He recommends reading more about the individuals in their Bibles during the week. "The quarterly has a good commentary on their lives, too! This study will help you enjoy next week's presentation more." In the final prayer, Jim asks the Lord to help each of them learn the true meaning of "Christian relationship". After

class, Jim meets briefly with the four volunteers. He assigns each of them one of the four characters. He gives them some additional information on their character and a guideline for writing a personal testimony. Their assignment is to give in class next week the "personal testimony" of their assigned character. They agree to meet Wednesday evening to make final preparation for Sunday.

**Session Two.** Jim briefly reviews last Sunday's overview using the flip chart. He reviews the tie-in with the unit study using the wall posters. Then he introduces the four special guests for the morning: "Mary," "Peter," "John," and "Judas." The four make their way to the four chairs facing the class at the front. The class sits in several rows in a large semi-circle. Each gives a 5-minute personal testimony about his/her life. The focus is on Jesus: how they met Him and how He had befriended them.

When the testimonies are finished, Jim (who is sitting with the class) encourages learners to ask questions of the four. The "experts" remain at the front of the class and do most of the answering. Jim clarifies issues and emphasizes important experiences in the lives of the four. He keeps the class "on track" toward his first objective: to develop an understanding of Christian relationships. Still, he does not dominate the class discussion. He encourages learner interaction by keeping his comments brief. As class members share with each other, they make their way toward Jim's second objective.

During the last five minutes of class, Jim summarizes the basic principles of Christian relationship that they studied (session 1) with good and bad examples (session 2). He then asks "Peter" to close in prayer, asking

the Lord to “help us apply these principles of relationship in our homes, at work, and in our own class.”

**Session Three.** After opening prayer, Jim asks the class what they have discovered so far in their unit of study. Key ideas of the past two weeks are reviewed by the class. “Today we will apply some of these ideas to a fictitious biography to determine how we might reach out to others in Christian friendship.”

Jim divides the class into several groups of four. He purposely places the new members with members who will accept them and include them in the discussion. He places members of the clique in several different groups. He passes out pencils and paper, and then the biography. At the bottom of the biography are these questions:

How is this person like the four Bible characters we’ve studied?

How is he different?

Using principles we’ve studied, how do you think Jesus would befriend this person? Be specific.

Do you know anyone like the person in the biography?

How would you, as a Christian, relate to this individual?

What problems would you have in building a Christian relationship with him?

Jim has written the biography to include some characteristics that some might find objectionable. He gives the groups 15 minutes to read the biography, review their stud-

ies, and answer the questions.

He watches facial expression to detect reactions of the members: frustration, boredom, interest, fear, or discovery. He watches for members who took charge of their small groups. This might suggest leadership potential. He watches for those who say little or nothing. He makes a mental note that these need some personal encouragement. He moves around the classroom several times during the 15 minutes, answering questions, giving details or explanations as needed.

After the 15 minutes, James calls the class back together to share what they have decided about the biography. The different perspectives are obvious. Groups emphasized different traits and made diverse assumptions, which in turn colored their approach to befriending this case study man. The different perspectives of the groups expand the views of each individual group. As the groups share their answers, learners encounter new ways of relating to people, based on their Bible studies.

Jim asks members to share some of the discoveries they made concerning Christian relationship through the day’s exercise.

Do you think these problems of relationship exist in the class?

How can the class strengthen their relationships with each other?

Answers to these questions are written on the chalkboard. Jim summarizes the ideas and relate them back to the way Jesus loved the four Bible characters they had studied. Then he closes in prayer.

**Session Four.** Jim uses the first half of this session to review with the class the highlights of their unit. He uses the flip chart again to reinforce information concerning the four. He shares personal experiences he has had the past month as he tried to live by the guidelines they discussed. He invites members to share with one another what they have experienced in the way of relationships.

One of the members expresses joy in finding a “Family” with which to share. She is so thankful for her Sunday School class. Three others express appreciation for the unit of study. Not only have they studied “relationship,” but they have lived it. One of the three is a member of the clique that worried Jim.

During the last part of the session, Jim introduces the new unit of study. Just as he links sessions into units, he also links units into quarters and quarters into years. He uses preview and review to strengthen these links and stimulate recall and application over long periods of time.

### Lessons from the Example

*The creativity, participation, and imagination for this unit's success are not “givens” in Sunday School classes. The ability of a class to work in this way requires a process of discipling.* Jim has not always taught this way. But he has grown in his skills, just as his class has grown in theirs. He made Bible study relevant to his members. He encouraged the sharing of ideas and opinions. He accepted learner suggestions and questions. By planning unit by unit, he “redeemed the time” for thinking, sharing, and relating in class. The result was a loosening of the clique and the acceptance of new members as part of the “Family.”

Though most units of study do not lend

themselves to this kind of organization, our example does illustrate what Bible study can become when teachers plan on a unit, rather than an individual lesson, basis. Also, this plan does not take into consideration what happens in the department time. Some of Jim’s activities — like the symposium — would be excellent department learning experiences. But, as we will see, moving a department to this approach takes longer than moving a single teacher and class. Jim’s department has yet to catch the vision. But other teachers have noticed something happening in Jim’s class. Their own curiosity will lead them to find out what and why.

## THE SUNDAY SCHOOL HOUR

The Adult Sunday School hour is usually divided into two unequal parts: the department director leads the first 15 minutes, and the teachers lead for the remainder of the hour. The Opening Assembly resembles a brief worship service: a song, an opening prayer, announcements, another song, a devotional thought, a closing prayer, and dismissal to individual classes. The “real Bible study” is done in the individual classes.

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*Redeem the time  
by building teamwork  
between department director  
and the class teachers.*

---

Within this structure there is yet another dragon to be slain, and it is the most difficult to defeat. It can only be controlled by steady teamwork among the teachers and the department director. *Team* commitment is always harder to achieve than *personal* commitment. The problem to solve is fragmented



time.

## Fragmented Time

We only have an hour for Bible study on Sunday morning. Anything that moves our focus away from God's Word, and its infusion into our lives and ministries, should be removed. A fragmented Sunday School hour prevents us from redeeming the time. This fragmentation comes in three major ways: the *Double Squeeze*, *Stealing the Thunder*, and *You Do Your Thing--I'll Do Mine*.

### The Double Squeeze

The Double Squeeze eats up time at both the beginning and end of the Sunday School hour. Here's a typical scenario.



**Starts late.** It's 9:30 on Sunday morning -- time to begin. Five people sit in the Open Assembly. The director, not wanting to start until *everybody shows up*, says, "Well, let's wait a few more minutes. I know some more are coming." She stands in the door and greets folks as they come in. Time passes. 9:40...9:45...9:50. Finally, twenty-five people have gathered in the department, and she decides there's enough to start. At 9:55 she begins. (Question: What has she just taught the five people who were on time? Answer:

Don't bother).

### Activities Unrelated to Bible Study.

The director takes 15 minutes to do "department activities." Most of this time is taken up with activities unrelated to the study of the Scripture for the morning: announcements, outreach assignments and reports, and the like.

**Members leave early.** So, at 10:10 the director dismisses the department to their classes. It takes five minutes for the classes to settle down in their areas: 10:15. Then at 10:25 several members leave to get to choir or nursery duties. Since most of the Bible teaching happens in the classes, and the classes are together for such a few minutes, it is obvious that not much life-changing learning can happen. There has to be a better way to structure the hour!

### Steal the Thunder!

When directors do attempt to prepare the department for the Bible study, they sometimes "steal the thunder" of their teachers by summarizing the main points of the lesson in their devotion. This is like telling a friend the end of a mystery when you loan him the book! This doesn't happen very long. Sooner or later teachers will complain: "I prepare to teach all week long, and then you tear the heart out of my lesson in two minutes?!"

### You Do Your Thing and I'll Do Mine.

Some directors avoid this problem by giving devotions that have nothing to do with the morning's focal passage. For example, if the lesson is from Matthew, the director uses a passage from the Psalms. The two "turfs" are separated by a departmental closing prayer and a class opening prayer. This approach requires no coordinated planning by

departmental staff: the director handles the assembly and the teachers handle the classrooms.

Still, teamwork and department unity are impaired. The focus of Bible study is in the classroom alone. Learning is fragmented within the hour. Opening assembly and class time do not carry through the major teaching theme. In time, class members may stop attending the opening assembly altogether. And because the opening tends to resemble a worship service, some even skip Morning Worship and elect to get home a little early, or to the local cafeteria ahead of the rush.

### Whole hour focus

The problem of fragmented time can be overcome by planning with a “whole-hour” focus. Directors should supervise the entire Sunday School hour. They should **work with teachers** to determine the best structure for the most effective learning based on the Bible content and learner needs. The director is, in effect, a “large group” leader. The teachers are “small group” leaders. The rigid line separating a 15-minute Opening Assembly from a 45-minute Class time is replaced with a movable line dividing Large Group and Small Group learning activities. These may include songs, prayers, devotions, presenta-

tions, guest speakers, buzz groups, questions, problems, films, cassette tapes, announcements and so forth. Here are some examples of the flexibility that is produced by this approach.

#### 1. lg-SG

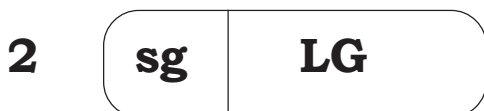
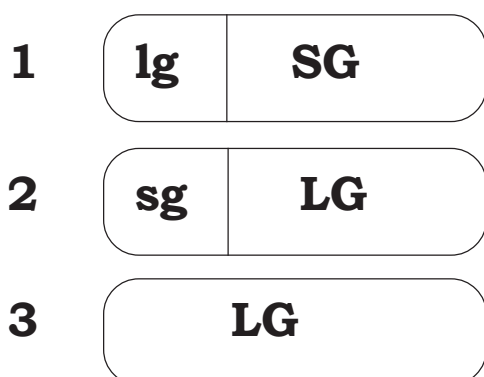
The traditional opening assembly style provides 15 minutes for large-group (department) activities and 45 minutes for small-group (class) activities. Raise questions in large group time and then study biblical answers in small group time. This pattern is used most often.

#### 2. sg-LG

In this structure, learners go to the classrooms for the first 15 minutes. Teachers raise questions in the small groups (classes). Then all the classes reassemble as a department for large-group study. This structure provides excellent opportunities to build “Family” across the whole department.

#### 3. LG only

Here, the whole department stays together for the full hour. The director, one of the teachers, or a guest speaker can lead the study. Good for unit introductions or summaries.



#### 4. SG only

In this structure, members spend the entire hour in their classes. There is no department assembly at all. This is good for building relationships and sharing more personal experiences. It enables more members to contribute to the learning experience than normally will in the larger (department) group.

#### 5. LG-sg

The Bible study is done during the large group time (45 minutes). Members then go to their classes to make personal application or discuss actions they can take during the week (15 minutes).

#### 6. SG-lg

The Bible study is done during the small group time (45 minutes). Members return to the large group to share their discoveries or to plan for departmental action based on the passage (15 minutes).

All of the traditional activities can be integrated into the whole-hour emphasis: outreach, prayer time, hymns, Scripture reading, welcoming of guests, and so forth. *But the key to success is that these activities are tied into the main theme of the lesson and unit.*

### Whole-hour Requirements

Defeating the Time-Eater requires an investment of time. The investment, however, costs less than the worth of the gains we make. Let's look at several types of required investments.

#### *Must plan together*

This approach to the Sunday School requires that the department director and teachers plan together because of the increased flexibility of the time structure. Will they do this? My experience has been that this ap-

proach to planning gives a tangible focus for planning meetings. Department leaders need to decide on which of the above formats to use, what points to emphasize, what learning activities to use, and, most important of all, how to meld large group and small group parts into a single learning experience.

#### *Must meet learners' needs*

The activities you plan, especially for the beginning of the hour, must touch needs in the learners' lives. If you don't, you will not encourage them to arrive on time. Tailor the hour to meet learner needs for learning, growing, reaching out and fellowship.

#### *Must start "on time."*

You must begin the hour at the scheduled time in order to 'redeem the time.' This means beginning at 9:45 even if there are just a few present. Let the latecomers come into the department in the middle of something worthwhile. It's all right for people to feel that they'll miss something. It will encourage them to arrive on time. Over a period of time, the percentage of the members ready to begin on time will increase.

### Whole-hour benefits

There are several important benefits that flow out of a whole-hour focus in planning. Here are a few of the major ones.

#### *More time for teaching God's Word*

The hour is united, defragmented, brought together, focused. God's Word receives primary emphasis. This one hour of Bible Study each week is united around the Word, for the Word, and by the Word.

When I listen to many of my colleagues talk about Sunday School work, I get the impression that, in their minds, the Scripture is little more than an excuse to draw a crowd. That teaching the crowd is less important

than gathering it. That Bible study is less important than statistics.

Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32, NIV). He was speaking of his death by crucifixion (v.33). Still, I have noticed that when Jesus is exalted in a study of God's Word, He does draw people to Himself and to each other. Let's put less focus on gimmicks for "drawing people" and more on "lifting up the Lord." A whole-hour focus of Bible Study would help us in this endeavor.

#### *More emphasis on DOING God's Word*

The focus of the Sunday School is on **doing** the Word. This involves action: internal ministry and external missions. A whole-hour approach provides a way to do ministry and missions as a natural outgrowth of, indeed, an integral part of, the Bible study. "Outreach," "Ministry," "Missions," and "Bible Study" need not compete for time and attention. The relevant Bible study session should result in outreach, ministry, and missions. The whole-hour approach helps meld these together.

#### *Greater variety*

When director and teachers plan together, week by week, unit by unit, there is bound to be an increase in the variety of learning in the department. This is not to be interpreted as "variety just for variety's sake," but variety that increases personal interest and reduces routine.

#### *Enhances departmental unity*

The department organization was born out of the problem of large crystallized adult classes. Teachers of these large classes wielded a great deal of power within local churches. Some fifty years ago, the departmental system was established to spread

leadership out over more people: a director, and class teachers.

We seem to be moving back to individual classes. In many churches the "department" is a dispensable arrangement of the past. I believe much of the reason for the demise of the "department" has come from the fragmentation described earlier.

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**I have served as director.  
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I have seen the force  
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**The whole-hour focus  
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---

But I have served a department as director. I have seen the power of large-group and small-group learning. I have seen the force of shared ministry within and among classes. The whole-hour focus does more than one large class or many isolated small classes can do alone.

#### *Builds a leadership team*

The director and the teachers can begin to work as a team with common goals when they all subscribe to a whole-hour focus. "Turf" is reduced and cooperation increased.

### Whole-hour example

A few years ago I was asked to direct an adult department. It sounded like a “dream” assignment. The department consisted of married adults (more settled than singles), aged 30 and up (young but maturing), who were students at seminary (committed, called to ministry).

#### *Set the Stage*

Before I accepted the position, I asked to meet with the five teachers in the department. A new director and established teachers: its the hardest combination in Sunday School work. When I arrived at the meeting, I found the five teachers plus 11 others present! I began the meeting with a question: “What can I do for you as your director? How can I help you do a better job?” We discussed many problems and ideas. Then the question came to me: “How can we help you succeed as a director?” It was a gift from heaven! I shared with them my vision for our department: the Model, unit planning, whole-hour teaching. “If you are not willing to do these kinds of things, then I shouldn’t be your director.” The decision was theirs. And their response was enthusiastic: “Praise the Lord! Let’s get to work!” I told the minister of education I’d take the position.

#### *The Curtain Went Up*

The first Sunday morning, I arrived at 9:15 to prepare the room and materials. At 9:30 (our starting time), **three** people had arrived. I began on time by asking one of them to pray. We shared names and a little of our backgrounds. By 9:40, **twenty** people had arrived, and I began a learning readiness activity for the class time. It was surprising to me that these seminary students had such little enthusiasm for Bible study. They seemed to drag themselves into class. I could almost hear their feet shuffling as they came in the

door. They were t-i-r-e-d. They seemed to know the members of their classes, but had little tie to fellow department members. When we dismissed to the classes at 9:50, **thirty-five** people were present. “Next Sunday morning, we’ll begin promptly at 9:30,” I said as we separated into classes.

#### *Offstage Rehearsal*

The next Wednesday night, I met with three teachers. We planned out the next unit of study together. I sent the plans we agreed on to the two teachers who were absent. (Subtle hint: “If you want to help plan what we do, you need to attend planning meetings.”)

#### *On the Road!*

The next Sunday, I began a series on the Disciplers’ Model during Opening Assembly. Over seven weeks, I covered each of the seven elements of the Model and tied it into the lesson for the day. (There were **12** people present when we began that Sunday.)

Within six weeks, average attendance had increased to about **50**. Most of these were present at 9:30. Teachers were more consistent and more enthusiastic in planning meetings. We used several of the LG/SG combinations to improve variety. It was a joy to watch this aggregation of individuals become a “Family in the Lord,” ministering to one another, reaching out to others, living out the truths we studied Sunday by Sunday.

My association with the department ended when I accepted a call to another church as their Interim Minister of Education. But the whole experience was a real blessing of ‘redeeming the time.’



## SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

### Lord, Save Us from Presumption

Neal Jones, pastor of Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, Virginia, once opened a Church Council meeting with a prayer I'll never forget.

Lord,  
We know that to depend on our organization to do Your work is to presume on our own abilities. We can do nothing without You.

We also know that to neglect our organization and piously depend on You to work is to presume upon Your will.

Lord, save us from presumption.  
Amen.

The circle of the Model stresses that the Holy Spirit is the One Who truly disciplines our learners. How do we plan for this to happen? How do we balance our dependence on the Lord with our own efforts toward improvement?

You determine objectives and select learning activities. You study commentaries and derive explanations of scripture that are clear and concise. You create visual aids and write questions. But, without proper spiritual preparation, you will not communicate the essence of God's Word. You should not presume on our own ability to teach. Lift planning and teaching to the Lord. Neither should you presume on God to teach the class in spite of poor preparation. Prepare as if success depends solely upon you, and pray as if success depends solely on God.

### Lord, Lead Us to Prepare

How do we do this? The following proce-

dures has helped me.

#### *Begin early in the week*

The unit plan, completed at the beginning of the unit, directs the thrust of the individual study. By beginning final preparation early in the week, the Lord has many opportunities to speak through His Word to us.

#### *Ask the Lord to teach you*

Jesus said that He did not teach of Himself, but said only the words the Father gave Him (Jn 12:49). This should be our prayer as well. Open yourself to the Lord's teaching as you go through the week. Ask Him to teach you through the week.

#### *Jot down ideas as they come to mind.*

A prayerful approach to scripture makes your heart and mind sensitive to ideas, illustrations, and examples that relate to the passage. A statement by a co-worker, a cartoon in the newspaper, a news report on television, or an experience in the family can powerfully illustrate a teaching point. If these gems are not written down soon after they happen, they will be forgotten.

---

*Redeem the time*  
by prayerfully preparing  
and  
consciously depending  
on the Lord

---

#### *Pray for your learners*

Ask the Lord to open your learners to experiences during the week that will prepare them for the study in Sunday. Ask for guidance in planning to meet their needs through the

Bible study.

### ***Pull it together***

Set a specific time near the end of the week to finalize plans. Thursday is a good target night. By this time you should have contacted any members who are making reports in class. You know what you want to accomplish. Setting time aside on Thursday also allows plenty of time before Sunday in case of any unforeseen emergency.

### ***Review plan on Saturday***

Briefly review the teaching plan on Saturday evening. The plan is made. The pressure is off. Scripture has been applied during the week.

### ***Pray for the Sunday School session.***

Pray for your learners again, one by one. Pray for the hour on Sunday morning. Pray for guidance and insight. Ask the Lord to be "Teacher" in the class.

### ***Get a good night's rest***

One of the best things a family can do to prepare for worship on Sunday morning is to get into bed at a reasonable hour Saturday night. Get a good night's rest to insure that you have the physical stamina and mental alertness you need during class.

Preparation like this "opens the door" (Rev. 3:20) to the Lord's serendipities. Nothing thrills me more than watching a class member find the Lord as personal Savior. Or observing a learner "bloom" as gifts are discovered and used in ministry. Or sharing with the growing Family of faith. These experiences make teaching so fulfilling, so rewarding. They result from spiritual preparation that allows God to teach the class.

## **THE LONG LOOK**

We live in an instant society that is mesmerized by the "now." Buy now, pay later. Instant food. Immediate satisfaction. Tomorrow is too far away and yesterday is gone. But we are on a mission which stretches into eternity. We plant trees under whose shade we will not sit. We need to take 'the long look.'

### **Jesus' Students**

Jesus chose Twelve to be with Him. We often put those twelve on a pedestal as "supermen of faith." But any study of these Twelve shows that they were ordinary men-who followed Jesus. Let's take a look at Jesus' "class."

#### ***They were imperfect***

James and John were called "sons of thunder" (Mk 3:17) because of their short tempers. Peter, the 'Rock,' was unstable and impetuous. Thomas had a "not until I see it with my own eyes" kind of faith. Judas and Simon were political power-brokers.

#### ***They were earthly-minded***

The disciples could not get beyond the idea of a reinstated earthly kingdom, with Jesus as King. Time and again Jesus taught them that His kingdom was not of this world, but they never quite got the message. Until He died on the cross.

They focused on the material aspects of Jesus' miracles rather than on the spiritual. Food, healing, power over nature. They missed the eternal significance of the miracles for the temporal gain.

#### ***They were slow to learn***

The disciples spent three years with Jesus, the Master Teacher. He taught them as they ate, as they travelled, as they prepared for

bed. But at the end of His ministry on earth, they still could not grasp his meaning.

### *They were self-centered*

Peter said, "We have left everything to follow you" (Mk 10:28), as if to say, "What do we get out of this?"

Even after Jesus taught them about faith (Mk 4:30-32), these burley fishermen were quick to panic in the Storm (4:35ff). Notice what Jesus said? He didn't say, "Let's go out to the middle of the lake and drown." He said, "Let's go over to the other side" (v35). But they did not believe Him.

They were quick to run from the Garden when the soldiers came. Even Peter, who bragged that he would die with Jesus (Mk 14:29-31), ran from the Garden. Later, he lied about knowing Jesus to protect himself from ridicule.

### *They were uneducated and unprofessional*

They were Galileans. They were fishermen and tax collectors. They were not trained in the "better schools." What kind of potential could they possibly have? Why would any-

one bother to teach them anything? What's the point? It's a waste of time!

Why, just take a picture of this group of Galileans! Take a picture of this! Do you really think anything good can come out of a place like Galilee.

### Snapshot or Movie?

Yet Jesus saw beyond the weaknesses and liabilities of the Twelve. He saw their leadership potential, and taught them. He did not take a snapshot of the Twelve and say, "Father, I could sure make an impact for the Kingdom if Peter were just more mature! Or if James and John could control their tempers. Or if Simon the zealot could get over his politics thing."

Rather, frame by frame, like a motion picture, He moved them away from where they were toward what they were to become. These men, these learners, these unworthy students turned the world up-side-down with their teaching. They made a difference in their world that we still feel today.

### *Picture-taker or Movie-maker?*

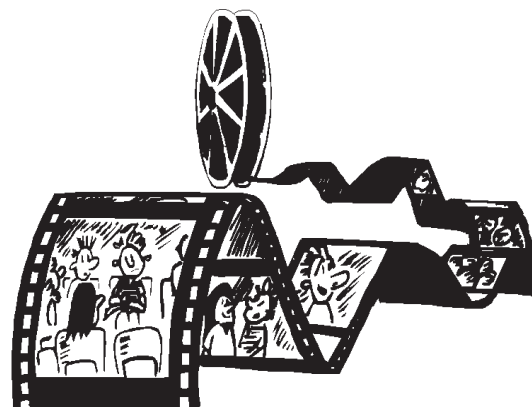
In every conference I lead, there is at least

"That's just the way we are!"



**STATIC**

"Growing in the Lord!"



**DYNAMIC**

one teacher who will say something like this. "Well, that may have worked for your classes, but you don't know **my** class. They. . ."

The teacher then proceeds to tell me why this or that aspect of the Model won't work with his class. They don't like questions. They don't want to read. They aren't interested in participating. They would never go for small group work. They just want me to "teach them the lesson." They don't have time to do projects. It's no wonder there are so many "dry bones" in our Sunday Schools. No growth. No stretching. No "equipping for works of service" (Eph 4:12). It's as if the teacher had taken a snapshot of the class in all its unteachableness. The teacher carries a mental snapshot to remind him that his class really doesn't want any more than he already gives. He ignores new ideas because none of them fit his snapshot.

What if others did this? What if a football coach took a snapshot of the team at the beginning of training camp, and then bemoaned the fact that new plays simply didn't fit the picture? A business executive and his employees? A drill sergeant and his new recruits?

No! These leaders know where they want to go. They know what kind of results they want to see. And they take steps to move their learners toward that goal. Frame by frame, like a movie, the players move and change and become what the leader sees. Sometimes changes come fast. Sometimes changes take longer. But step by step, leader and led move toward a common goal.

*Start moving, frame by frame.*

So your class won't answer questions? Why

not? What has happened in the past that has caused them to dislike questions? Were they asked factual questions that put them on the spot? Were wrong answers greeted with humiliating responses from the teacher? Were teachers more interested in showing how much they knew than in helping the class learn? What will you do to change their attitude? How can you move them away from fear and toward more openness in the class?

So your class wants you to "just teach them the lesson." Why do you think they prefer sitting and listening to participating and learning? Hearing the Word and not doing it produces fools, Jesus says. Do your learners really want to be foolish, or have they been disappointed so often that they simply don't care anymore? How can you help them care again?

Frame by frame, step by step, as in a motion picture, move your learners from where they are to where they ought to be. Disciples of Jesus. Knowers of the Word. Understanders of the Word. Doers of the Word. Masks removed. Koinonia strong. Growing in Christ. Motivated and energized by the Holy Spirit. Sensitive to people in need of love and care. In these two chapters we have described **how** to do it. Now the question is, **Will you do it?**

The problems are real, but the Master promises to make us overcomers as we yoke ourselves to Him. **His** yoke sets easily on our backs. Our ministerial burdens are light as we pull with Him in the yoke that **He** asks us to take (Mt 11:29). This is our final answer to the problem of time: Take the "long look." Plant seeds in Jesus' name. He will bring the increase. He will bring the harvest as we "grow up into Him, who is the Head, even Christ" (Eph 4:15).

## The Disciplers' Manner

We've established the Disciplers' Model and the Disciplers' Method.

The next step is to turn to the subject of the **leadership** of the discipler. How you lead -- whether you are a pastor, or a staff minister, or deacon, or church program director -- teaches others. Your manner of leading

others is an informal, but powerful, teaching tool. Remember the old adage, "I can't hear what you're saying because what you're doing speaks so loud"? **Chapter Three** focuses on leading that disciples your followers by analyzing the principles of leadership Jesus demonstrated as He led the twelve disciples.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

The question begged answering: How do we make the most of every opportunity for Teaching That Transforms? Bible Study that Disciples? Chapter Two has presented my solution.

### Teaching Methods

that explain, involve, and prompt to action

### Lesson Planning

that produces a focused sequence:

Set Up the Target, Prime the Pump, Haul the Freight, Tie It Up in a Bow

### Unit Planning

that coordinates lesson plans into a long-term learning sequence

### The Sunday School Hour

made whole and focused around lifting up the Lord and His Word

### Spiritual Preparation

that allows the Lord to be the Teacher

and

### The "Long Look"

which patiently plants the good seeds and watches the Lord bring in the harvest.



# The Disciplers' Manner

The Discipler's Model grows out of a Christian view of leadership. The way we lead is an integral part of our teaching ministry. Whether we are a pastor, staff minister, or lay leader, we will be more effective in discipling God's people if we give attention to the teaching implications of our leadership style.

Further, if we wish to lead in a manner worthy of the Lord, we must understand how Jesus led and follow His example. In this chapter we examine leadership principles Jesus revealed as The Leader of the Twelve. Contemporary case studies, all true situations drawn from experiences in education ministry, illustrate the principles. While most of the cases focus on pastor or staff leadership situations, the lay leader/teacher will benefit from these principles as well.

## Divine Logos

When I think of Jesus, my first thoughts are Divine Logos, the Son of God, the Master Teacher, Lord. In some respects it is easy to see Jesus as, in the words of Alfred Ederhiem (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, [Oxford, 1886], Reprinted by Eerdmans, 1969), a "Benevolent Tyrant" -- and take that as our model. His words were sometimes harsh and biting as he denounced the indifferent (Mt 11:21). He called himself "Lord of the Sab-

bath" (Mt 12:8, NIV) and equated himself with God (Jn 20:30). He drove the money-changers out of the temple with a whip (Mt 21:12). He taught in such a radical manner that people were "amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Mt 7:28-29, NIV).

---

**He used His power  
not to rule  
but to serve His Father and  
minister to people.**

---

He demonstrated divine power through his ability to heal "all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics" (Mt 4:24, NIV). He fed the multitudes of listeners on at least two occasions with small amounts of food (Mt 14:15ff; 15:38ff). He taught spiritual truth with power and clarity (Mt 13:54). Jesus was, and is, One Who has authority and power. But it is so fascinating to watch how he used that power!

## Human Leader

But Jesus was also Human Leader as he walked this earth. He led men and women in a way that released them to become all they

were intended to be. He chose twelve un-schooled men and in three years had molded them into the leaders of his Church. He drew them together into a spiritual Family -- a 'team' -- and ignited them with a passion for God's Kingdom. Jesus' favorite title for himself was "Son of Man." While he was strong in much of his teaching, he was a Serving Leader. He used his power, not to rule, but to serve his Father and minister to people as he announced the coming of the Kingdom of God.

tions Jesus took as he led the twelve will provide insight into principles of leading that is both effective and Christian, "for he knew what was in man" (Jn 2:25, NIV). No other person in history has so perfectly meshed leading and serving, power and love, integrity and forgiveness, the rod and the staff!! Twelve principles are organized in nine sections with fourteen case studies. With sensitive awareness we tread on sacred ground, let's look closely at the principles surrounding how Jesus led the twelve.

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**No other person in history  
has so perfectly meshed  
leading and serving,  
power and love,  
integrity and forgiveness,  
the rod and the staff.**

---

The impact of his leadership and teaching transformed history and continues to reshape men and nations. Surely a study of the ac-

## 1. THE INDIVIDUAL IS IMPORTANT

At a time when power politics was the norm, enforced through the military might of Rome, Jesus exalted the worth and dignity of the individual. He loved persons. He ministered to them one by one, despite their social rank. Think how he spoke with the Samaritan woman, or how he praised the faith of the centurion, or how he accepted those hated tax collectors Matthew and Zacchaeus! One soul is worth more than the whole world (Mt 16:26).



Crowds surrounded Jesus on every side. They wanted him to be their King. They wanted the Teacher to protect them and feed them and heal them and, most of all, to free them from the Roman Yoke. But He did not change to please the crowds. He was interested in more than mere numbers. He ministered to persons at their particular point of need.

## Principle One

*The discipling minister places importance on the worth of individuals. He sees people, not as mere groups, but as persons of worth.*

### George

Ever since George arrived at First Church six months ago he had heard complaints about Mrs. E's Sunday School teaching. Some of the ladies in her class had made a point of telling George that they received very little from the Bible study hour. George had noticed that she never attended workers' meetings, and she had not come to the special teacher training seminar he had offered several weeks before. One member told him, "in confidence", that Mrs. E literally dominates the entire Sunday School hour. "No one can say a word because she does all the talking!" Another mentioned that all class activities are planned by her. George checked the records and found that the class had changed little in years.

But George has also noticed that Mrs. E writes notes to her members when they are absent for a couple of weeks. She visits her members from time to time --especially if they are ill or have some problem. She calls them on the phone periodically. The class

enjoys this contact from her.

But the weak teaching on Sunday morning is a problem. One member says she's looking at other churches and will change membership "unless someone does something!!" George knows who that "someone" is!

### Alternatives.

What should George do? What would YOU do in light of our first principle? Let's look at two extreme approaches.

**Confrontation.** George believes he must make a firm stand in this situation. The members of the class want good Bible study and his job is to provide it. The ladies of the class are upset about the situation and appropriate action is needed. It is clear from the record that there has been no numerical growth in the class. There is also indirect evidence that the class has not grown much spiritually either. George could decide to confront Mrs. E with the problem and ask her to resign as teacher of this class. He could then enlist and train someone else to do a more effective job in Bible teaching. He thinks, "She has other interests in the church which will balance the loss of this responsibility. And, there may be some who disagree with my actions, but I cannot neglect my duty to improve the Sunday School program."

**Hands-Off.** George believes he should back away from the problem give the situation time. The more formal name for this approach is laissez-faire [lah-zay fayr]. George knows that this problem is a long-standing one. The situation is deeply rooted in the church and is not likely to go away quickly. He does not want to hurt the feelings of Mrs. E. She has taught this class many years and loves 'her' members. He will not

do anything about the situation and see what happens. Maybe he'll get an opportunity to do something about this later. He thinks, "There may be some in the church who think I'm weak and indecisive," but his concern for Mrs. E outweighs his fear of gossip.

**Situation Analysis.** George's problem really has two parts. The first part of the problem focuses on Mrs. E and her worth as a church member, teacher, and child of God. Whatever action he takes, he needs to consider her sense of worth and dignity as a person. Her ego is tied to the ladies' class and the activities they share. Forcing her to give this up would remove an important part of her life -- no matter how many other activities and responsibilities she has. Mrs. E deserves to be treated with respect.

The second part of George's problem focuses on the spiritual needs of the class members. They are not receiving the benefits of good Bible study. But, they are being ministered to. The concern of Mrs. E shines through every visit and call. Even her worst critics appreciate her warm concern for the members. Her contacts make up a large part of their sense of belonging in the class. Scenario one ignores the first part of the problem, scenario two the second part. Here are some suggestions to consider:

Do not arbitrarily remove Mrs. E from the class. Give yourself time to pray and consider the best approach to the problem.

Begin to build rapport with Mrs. E. Since she doesn't yet come to teachers' meetings, do this in other contexts: fellowships at church, talks in the hallways, visits. As you do this, find out how she feels about the class and her teaching.

Listen carefully to the complaints made about Mrs. E. by her class members. Show a sincere interest in the problem but also remind the complainer --gently-- about all Mrs. E does for the class. Class members often take for granted the positive things teachers and leaders do.

Plan alternative Bible study times, such as Church Training, weekday studies, and so forth. Be sure to invite the complainers to these special Bible study times. If their complaint really centers on Bible study, this provides other options for them.

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**These steps minister to the worth and dignity of each person involved and establishes a positive atmosphere in which the problem can be solved.**

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As opportunity permits, share suggestions with Mrs. E to help her improve her teaching. This might be done in response to a question from her, or by way of a general handout to all teachers. If these suggestions are effective and helpful to her, you may be able to draw her into more formal training sessions.

These steps minister to the worth and dignity of each person involved and establishes a positive atmosphere in which the problem can be solved. Mrs. E is helped and supported. Class members are given other opportunities to study the Bible. And the Silent Majority of the class, who have said

nothing about this, aren't disrupted by a change in teachers they didn't want.

*George Revisited.* But George didn't do this. He called Mrs. E into his office the next Sunday and asked her to resign. She left his office in tears and went directly to her class. There she shared the conversation with exaggerated emotion. She and half the class decided to leave the church that week. A few of the class members dropped out of church altogether. Several, including two of the most active complainers in the class, remained in the church and criticized George for his "impulsive" action and lack of sensitivity for "our" teacher. The whole unpleasant scene was kept alive in the imagination of many through rumor and counter-rumor until George left for another church ten months after he had arrived.

As "program leader" George felt he had the support of his job description, the members of Mrs. E's class, and the church. There may have come a time in working with Mrs. E that George would have had an opportunity to replace her. But he did not have it here, nor did he have the relational base with her or her class to replace her as he did. George failed to balance concern for the program with concern for individuals.

## 2. RELATIONSHIP IS IMPORTANT

Jesus was no existentialist: each person a law unto himself. While individuals were important, relationship among individuals was central. God created us to be with Him and with each other. When sin entered the world, it separated us from Him and isolated us from each other. Relationship is the central pillar of the Disciplers' Model be-

cause it is the central pillar of the church. Remember how Jesus condensed the Law and the Prophets into two statements of relationship?

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

and

**Love your neighbor as yourself.**

(Mt 22:37,39, NIV)

The heart of the Kingdom lives in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of relationship. The whole of scripture underscores the importance of togetherness. Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in his answer to the scribe. Jesus taught that His family, His "blood kin," consists of those who obey the will of the Father (Mt 12:46-50).

## Power or Relationship?

Yet in every human organization there is a hierarchy of position and power. Moses discovered the necessity of hierarchical delegation when he was overwhelmed by details (Ex 18:13-27). There are leaders and followers, employers and employees, directors and workers. The world places importance on the influential, the powerful, the wealthy. But look what Jesus told his disciples!

The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be great. (Mt 23:11-12, NIV)

Jesus is Lord. He is Teacher. Leader. Servant. Friend (Jn 15:15). All of us who name the name of Jesus serve Him as Sovereign. We teach in order to obey Him. We lead in order to follow Him. We minister according to His example. Then how should we lead? Or teach? Or minister? Jesus answers:



You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you!** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mt 20:25-28, NIV)

The greatest leaders in the Kingdom are those who give themselves away, in terms of time, talent, and resources, as a ransom for others. The only valid hierarchy in Christ's Kingdom is the hierarchy of serving others.

Service builds relationship. A dangerous misconception seminary graduates can carry to their first church is thinking their degree gives them both the authority and the ability to lead. My experience was that my degree was more a hindrance than a help in the beginning. Folks look on educated beginners with suspicion. There is the distinct possibility of knowledge without wisdom, shine without substance. This natural resistance can frustrate the best efforts of the enthusiastic young minister.

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**The message of service  
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and success-oriented ministry.**

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Give people time. As relationships develop, your education will be a great asset to you. But you need to build bridges to people first. These bridges are built through sacrificial service. Jesus set the example for servanthood. He washed the feet of the disciples (Jn 13:2-15) and prepared them breakfast on the

beach (Jn 21:12-14). He served them in many ways through their three years together. His supreme sacrifice was His willingness to bear in His body, as **Leader**, the sins of His followers, and of the whole world.

The message is drowned out in the drumbeat of me-first religion and success-oriented ministry. But the message is clear: service in Jesus' name, rendered out of sincere gratitude for what Christ has done, is the only route to fulfilled living. Service is the way to a life of influence for Christ's Kingdom, for "whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it" (Mk 8:35, NIV). Mutual service among the individuals of a congregation draws the Church Family together. The discipling leader enhances the growth of relationships through service.

## Principle Two

*The discipling minister  
builds koinonia  
among individuals.*

The key to this cohesiveness is leading members to relate to God as Father and to church as Family.

### Frank

When Frank first arrived at his new church, he was appalled by the lack of communication among the workers in the Sunday School. It seemed that each department operated as if it were isolated from the Sunday-School-as-a-whole. Classes hesitated to intermingle at department fellowships. This problem of communication and sharing had deeper implications: teachers were not making plans for Sunday School with department directors. Each teacher did "what was right in his own eyes" in his class. There seemed to be little regard for the department as a whole,

or other classes within the department. As a result of this, team spirit among Sunday School workers had long since vanished. The Sunday School had lost its dynamic, its unified direction and its true purpose.

**Situation Analysis.** The law of diminishing returns lies at the heart of this problem. The primary goal of many teachers is to “cover the lesson” on Sunday morning. Meeting this goal does require a definite amount of study time. Most teachers are good about setting aside ample time to “prepare their lesson.” But activities beyond this, like meeting with other teachers and the director, preparing a variety of approaches, visiting with members, result **in what appears to be** smaller returns on the additional time expended. Volunteer teachers in our Sunday School organization have many demands on their time. Unless they can be led to see the importance of departmental planning to themselves as well as their classes, they will drift away from it. Why? Because they can still ‘cover the lesson’ when they don’t do these things!

This situation, while understandable, suggests a problem in the Bible study program. Fellowship is restricted to “my class” or “my department.” This, in turn, limits the quality and quantity of personal life experiences that can deepen Biblical understanding. Isolated teachers cannot profit from the ideas and activities used by others. Classroom learning is separate from department activities and the Sunday School hour becomes disjointed. “Family” within each department suffers.

In some way Frank must motivate Sunday School leaders to embrace the larger aspects of Bible study. He needs to encourage and expand positive relationships among teachers, directors and general officers. These re-

lationships create a spirit of team work essential for communicating the Word of God to all ages.

**Frank Revisited.** Frank began meeting with key leaders. Some of these meetings were at church: after worship, before Sunday School, during a time of fellowship. Other times he met in places and at times that were most convenient for them: at lunch, during coffee breaks, in their homes. As he strengthened his relationships with these leaders, he shared his vision of the “Sunday School team.” He encouraged leaders to promote a spirit of team work in their department meetings. The Sunday School Council initiated an annual banquet for all teachers and directors to reinforce their sense of belonging to an important ministry of the church. From time to time he led spiritual retreats for Sunday School workers to build relationships Godward and manward. Through these and other efforts he strengthened team spirit among Sunday School leaders throughout the organization.

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**The church is reaping  
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Frank built bridges to people through general meetings and personal conversations. He provided a model for building bridges from leader to leader. He motivated leaders by his own example to take their tasks more seriously. Success has been gradual but consistent, and the changes are rooted in the lives of the people he’s touched.

With little fanfare Frank gradually improved team coordination within the Sunday School. Isolated classes were drawn into the larger scope of the total Sunday School effort. Classes and departments began doing more planning together. After two years, the process is not complete, but the emotional tones of "Family" are evident throughout the organization. The church is reaping a variety of benefits from a more dedicated, related and organized Bible teaching staff.

### 3. JESUS PRACTICED HUMILITY

Despite His obvious power and authority, Jesus discarded the tinsel trappings of powerful people. He shunned pomp. He possessed a dynamic humility. He taught us to serve others, but not for the public recognition this service brings. The best Kingdom service is hidden service.

Jesus said,

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen of them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have already received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be done in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Mt 6:1-4, NIV).

Jesus' actions, as well as His teaching, reflected humility. Upon healing two blind men, He "warned them sternly, 'See that no

one knows about this.'" (Mt 9:30, NIV) After His transfiguration Jesus told Peter, James and John, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (Mt 17:9, NIV). Again Jesus shows radical humility when He restored two men who were possessed by demons [Note: Edershiem writes, "the demonized, who is specially singled out by St. Mark and St. Luke, as well as a less prominent companion (Matthew 8:28), came forth to meet Jesus." Vol I, p. 607.] He cast the demons into a herd of swine which were owned communally by a nearby town. They immediately ran down a steep embankment into the lake and drowned. The townspeople were so angry over their loss --and so afraid of the power of Jesus-- they demanded that He leave immediately. Without apparent personal defense of any kind "Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town" (Mt 9:1, NIV). How many times have I vainly tried to explain the 'rightness' of my actions when confronted by disgruntled church members?

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**Despite His obvious authority,  
Jesus discarded  
the tinsel trappings  
of powerful people.**

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The dynamic humility of Jesus was neither self-depreciation nor self-glory. He did not kick the dirt apologetically when He was praised. He did not discount His abilities. Nor did He brag about his abilities or power or wise interpretation of Old Testament scripture. Self-depreciation questions God's creative wisdom and will. Self-glory presumes upon one's own goodness and ability. Both attitudes hurt the minister's ability

to build relationships. Self-glory makes one proud and insensitive. Self-depreciation makes one hypersensitive and critical.

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**The dynamic humility of Jesus  
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Christian humility grows from a balanced and realistic appraisal of one's strengths and weaknesses. The effective minister is aware of his abilities and uses them to further the Kingdom of Christ. He is also aware of his weaknesses and applies God's power and promises to decrease their harm. By cultivating a proper mental attitude of humility the minister is freed from insensitivity (the result of self glory) and defensiveness (the result of self depreciation). This proper attitude undergirds his conscious efforts of building relationships with those he leads.

### Principle Three

*The discipling minister  
holds power and humility  
in tension.  
This produces a  
dynamic servant-leader style.*

A discipling minister has learned not to manipulate people by spectacular programs that spotlight him. He sees the long term benefits of a gradual process of equipping others. The discipling minister uses his influence to further the Kingdom of Christ rather than

gain public recognition or build a personal kingdom.

### Don

Don has served First Church as pastor for ten years. Each year he attends a workshop for single staff pastors. He never fails to bring home at least one "sure-fire" program that will set his church on the road to growth again. This year is no different. He stands before the congregation after the morning message on "being do-ers of the Word" to promote his latest idea: "If you will join with us faithfully in this program, we can actually double our (budget, Sunday School attendance, Church Training enrollment, mission action participation, education space, etc.). Next Sunday we'll provide a free meal to all who will help us in this effort. I want to see YOU next Sunday afternoon."

The congregation has heard this "success if only" sermon before. They've heard it so often that few really listen to what he says. Next Sunday the faithful few sit down to eat together. There seems to be little joy or excitement in what they are doing. They have the uncomfortable feeling that they are being used to forward a program that will produce little change or growth. Yet they come out of a sense of duty. They will do their best but their efforts already have the earmarks of failure.

Don is satisfied that he is doing the best he can. He has made the effort to bring back programs that have worked in other churches. "If the ideas don't work here, then it must mean that the people aren't committed to the Lord and His work. Maybe we need a new program in commitment!! We could really turn this church around if everyone would just **commit themselves** to (whatever the current program is)!!"



**Situation Analysis**

Don has little rapport with members in his congregation. Years of hyperbole and oversell have garbled communication lines to church members. The problem may be rooted in Don's concept of leadership. He sees himself as "the leader," but in the doing of it he becomes a manipulator. Don is afraid of what people might say if he gave them the chance. He has few friends in the congregation. He uses "programs" as a buffer between himself and the congregation and, in the process, as an excuse for failure. He uses the formal power of his pastoral position to badger people into participation. He does not understand that Christian leadership flows most freely through the informal power of service to others.

**Larry**

Larry is loved by many and respected by most of the people in his congregation. He gives the appearance of a "natural" leader with obvious skills in working with people. Actually he's worked quite hard to develop listening skills and sensitivity toward others.

Larry uses ideas as seeds that he plants in the minds of people in the congregation. Larry uses some of the same programs Don uses, but he adapts them and translates them with the help of lay leaders to fit the needs and resources of the congregation. He and the leaders dream together for the organizations under their supervision. Programs and plans that grow from these dreams possess the seed of Larry and the enthusiasm and support of the church.

Overt recognition is directed to the lay leaders in charge of the various church ministries, rather than to Larry. But plans are made

and implemented. The seeds germinate and grow. The results of this type of ministry are blooming ministries producing spiritual fruit in the lives of leaders as well as members.

Larry possesses a reservoir of informal power with people because of the gentle manner in which he deals with problems and personnel. Larry has the kind of influence that Don, the "leader," will never possess. Why? Because when Don begins to gain this kind of influence, he uses it to manipulate his congregation into some new program under his leadership. This is what "success" means to Don. Larry uses his influence to serve others more effectively. Don desires the spotlight at center stage and the applause of the crowd, but it seldom comes. Larry works best behind the scenes, enabling others to perform at the peak of their potential.

The discipling minister forsakes the pedestal and moves among the people as servant-leader. By doing this he forgoes political power but gathers for himself dynamic spiritual influence.

## 4. JESUS MET PEOPLE'S NEEDS

Jesus was quick to help people in need. One day He was teaching on the subject of fasting. Suddenly, servants of Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, interrupted Jesus' teaching. Jairus' daughter was ill, and the servants had come to summon Jesus. Jesus broke off His teaching session and went with him immediately (Mt 9:18-19). On the way to the religious leader's home He was interrupted by a "woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years" (Mt 9:20), making her ceremonially unclean (Lv 15:19-27) and a social outcast among her people. Jesus gives



no evidence of irritation at these interruptions. The Father is in control! Jesus stopped to help the lady. Then He continued on the Jairus' house and brought his daughter back to life. The interruptions of our routine are often the best opportunities for ministry.

Jesus was moved with compassion as He considered the masses of people (Mt 9:36; 14:14; 23:37). He did not condemn them for their lack of faith. Rather He strengthened what little faith they had, and in so doing He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench." (Is 42:3; Mt 12:20, NIV).

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### The interruptions of our routine are often the best opportunities for Christ-centered ministry.

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One example of this faith-strengthening quality is found in His conversation with the Syro-phoenician woman. He recognized her faith and granted her request (Mt 15:23-28). Jesus' harsh words to the woman are explained in the fact that she was a pagan who could not understand Jesus' messianic mission beyond His power to heal. Edershiem writes, "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." He could not yield to her request without first teaching her the real meaning of Messiah. Her response (v. 27) spoke of her understanding. "Heathenism may be like the dogs, when compared with the children's place and privileges; but He is their Master still, and they are under His table; and when He breaks the bread there is enough and to

spare for them." In responding in this manner, she is no longer under the table but had "sat down at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and was partaker of the children's bread" (Vol II, 37-42).

Jesus' openness to children further illustrates His concern for people. "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Mt 9:14, NIV)

The many recorded healings of Jesus point to His compassion for the needs of people. He cleansed a leper (Mt 8:2ff), healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14ff), healed a paralytic (Mt 9:1ff), restored sight to two blind men (Mt 9:27ff), and healed "every kind of disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Mt 9:35, NIV) He healed a man's hand on the Sabbath and showed through this act that mercy is always appropriate (Mt 12:9ff). He healed an epileptic (Mt 7:15, NIV) and restored the severed ear of a temple guard during His arrest (Lk 22:51). So much did Jesus do in meeting people's needs that if "every one of them were written down. . . even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (Jn 21:25, NIV)

Repeatedly we find Jesus using His power and authority to serve the Father and meet people's needs. He did not exalt Himself with His authority, though He was tempted to do just that at both the beginning and the end of His earthly ministry. Edershiem comments on the beginning, when Jesus was taken to the pinnacle of the Temple by Satan:

"In the Priests' Court below the morning sacrifice has been offered. The massive

Temple gates are slowly opening, and the blasts of the priests' silver trumpets is summoning Israel to a new day by their appearing before the Lord. Now then let Him descend, Heaven-borne, into the midst of priests and people. What shouts of acclamation would greet His appearance! What homage of worship would be His. The goal can at once be reached, and that at the head of believing Israel. . .but not the Divine Goal, nor in God's way. . .

"And thus once more Jesus is not only not overcome, but He overcomes by absolute submission to the will of God" (Vol I, p. 304).

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**Jesus did not exalt Himself  
with His authority,  
even though He was tempted  
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and the end  
of His earthly ministry.**

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And again, at the end, the temptation to save Himself confronts Him, on the cross. They challenged Him. "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe him." (Matt 27:42) Here the leaders echo Satan's suggestion at the Temple wall. What more proof of His Messiahship could Jesus render than to come down off the cross? But again this route was not God's. Jesus' road to glory led through death. For the needs of people.

Jesus met the needs of people in life and in death. He used His power and authority to

that end. He continues to do so today. The discipling minister is more concerned about his flock than his own career. He serves people because in serving others he serves Christ.

## Principle Four

*The discipling minister  
responds to the  
needs of people.  
He maintains priorities  
in ministry  
that are person-centered.*

### Jack

Jack had a problem with the Discipleship Training program of his church. He had only been at his new church a few weeks when he realized that Discipleship Training was not what it should be. Attendance was low. He knew that before he accepted the call to the church. But he was beginning to see that the attendance problem was only a symptom of deeper problems. He could find little enthusiasm for leader training efforts in the church. It was not that training was unnecessary: he found that the teachers, committee chairmen, deacons, as well as other leaders, needed further training in their area of ministry. New members were coming into the church without a structured introduction to its ministries, doctrines, or operations.

Mr. G. had been elected director of the Discipleship Training program back in Training Union days twenty years before. Under his leadership the program flourished until about three years ago. Since then, Mr. G. has resisted attempts to change the program in format, content, or direction.

Jack knows that Church Training falls directly in his staff responsibilities, but he's

not sure what to do here. He knows that Mr. G. is a kind man. He is respected by most members of the congregation. Yet for some reason he has stymied proposed changes that might improve the church's training efforts -- at least in the last three years.

### *Alternatives.*

Let's look at four possible scenarios for solving Jack's problem.

**Confrontation.** Jack develops a list of problems related to Church Training and meets with Mr. G. to review them. Jack also thinks of several changes that need to be made soon. In the meeting, Mr. G. becomes increasingly defensive as Jack directly attacks his program, and indirectly attacks his leadership. Mr. G. resists the suggested changes and insists that the program remain as it is.

**Laissez-faire.** This is Jack's first church position. He is twenty years younger than Mr. G. He hesitates to meet with Mr. G. because he's not sure what to say or how to say it. It would be nice for Mr. G. to step down voluntarily, but Jack isn't even sure how to suggest such an idea to him. Besides, he has no way of knowing how this kind of change so soon would affect the church -- and this makes him apprehensive. While a few members have complained about the lack of a good training program in the church, most seem to accept the program as it is. Jack drifts along with Mr. G. without providing much guidance at all. As time passes, he discovers a tensing sensation in the pit of his stomach each time he sees Mr. G. Feelings of inadequacy, and later failure, begin to develop.

**Take-the-bull-by-the-horns.** Without consulting with Mr. G., Jack implements the changes himself. He enlists new teachers and orders new materials. He publicizes the "new

improved Discipleship Training program" through newsletter articles and by pulpit announcements. He does not invite an open conflict by calling a meeting, nor does he let the matter drift along aimlessly. He is the church's minister of education and acts aggressively on that basis by bypassing Mr. G. altogether.

**Meeting-needs-of-individuals.** Jack calls Mr. G. for a lunch appointment at his office. After discussing mutual interests of family and hobbies, Jack asks Mr. G. about the early years of the Church Training program. "Since arriving here I've heard several people say that Church Training attendance used to be higher. The church seemed more enthusiastic about classes. What do you think is the problem now?" Mr. G. shares some of the highlights of past training events. "Everything was going very well until several years ago when we called a new minister of education. He forced some changes on the program that nearly killed it, and then left for another church. I've nurtured the thing back to what it is now, but I know we could be doing a lot more!" Jack detects a feeling he had not detected before.

Mr. G. has both a deep concern for church training and a lingering hurt brought on by an old conflict. As they continue to share, they become more open: Jack is listening to and understanding the needs of his Church Training director. Mr. G.'s confidence in Jack is growing. Continuing conversation allows new ideas to be shared and discussed. Jack undergirds the ideas of Mr. G. and suggests alternatives. The two are on their way to improving the Church Training program.

### *Situation Analysis*

Jack loses in scenario one. Even if he wins the battle with Mr. G. over program changes, he will most likely lose the "war" of continu-

ing church ministry. The relationship he has begun with Mr. G. will be vaporized in the heat of embarrassment and anger. Jack's solution may be a good one but this will do little to alleviate the feelings of bitterness and distrust on both sides for a long time.

Jack only delays the solution in scenario two. This approach is frustrating to the minister, the organization and the whole church. Jack finds himself trapped between job description and Church Training ineffectiveness. He will become an emotional time bomb. Unless he can take some affirmative action toward a solution to the problem, the tension may cause him to explode eventually -- at home, where it's "safe," or at other leaders in the church. Or, he may simply burn himself out under a load of tension he cannot resolve.

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**"If you can't solve a problem quickly, bypass it. The end justifies the means. The task is more important than one's relationship with church leaders. Get the job done!"**

*But of course this isn't the example Jesus gave us.*

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Scenario three repudiates the servant role of the minister and clings to the "can-do" leader role. It's the American Way! If you can't solve a problem quickly, bypass it. The end justifies the means. The task is more important than one's relationship with church leaders.

Get the job done! But of course this isn't the example Jesus gave us. He met the needs of individuals and in so doing brought in the Kingdom. When Judas the betrayer approached Him in the Garden, He called him "friend." Jack's actions in scenario three paint Mr. G. as a problem, not a friend. Yet Mr. G. is far less damaging to Jack than Judas was to Jesus.

In scenario four we see Jack treating Mr. G. as an individual with gifts and experience and hurts. He is interested in the program, but first interested in the program leader. Behind most "people problems" are unmet needs. Mr. G.'s unmet need was a lingering hurt from a previous minister. Once this was discovered and worked through, the problem of "program" fell of its own weight. This is a large part of the minister's task, which is helping people discover, and unlock, hidden problems. We do this so that they can become effective in Kingdom service.

## 5. JESUS SUPPORTED HIS FOLLOWERS

Jesus did not use his disciples to make a name for Himself, nor exploit them to establish His program. He gave Himself for them. He supported them and strengthened them. He grew them through practical teaching and daily experience to the place they were able to sense the dynamic of His kingdom. For Jesus, people are the ends, not the means, of his kingdom. The Kingdom is more process than product: making disciples and growing them into the image of Christ. How we do this is the very heart of Chapters One and Two.

Jesus supported His disciples in many ways.



Matthew recorded for us the detailed instructions Jesus gave before sending the twelve on their first evangelistic campaign (Mt 10). He did not send the twelve out to do His work so He could rest. He did not stop at supervising the work of others. When He had sent them out, "he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee" (Mt 11:1, NIV). He led by example and shared in the work. His actions reinforced the sharp contrast between His kingdom and the religious establishment. He said,

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see. . .they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplace and to have men call them "Rabbi." (Mt 23:2-7, NIV)

**Jesus gave His disciples a different model:** Do not bind heavy burdens on people in the name of the Kingdom but serve the King by washing feet and binding up wounds.

Jesus' support permeated the group. Their sense of freedom in His presence is one evidence of this personal support. They freely chose to follow Jesus (Mt 4:18-22; 9:9) even when the requirements were harsh (Mt 8:18-22 and Mt 10:16-23). The rich young ruler was sincere in his behavior and attitude (running and kneeling), reverent in addressing Jesus ("Teacher"), upright in his lifestyle ("All these I have kept") and religious in his question ("What must I do to inherit eternal life"?). Yet he freely chose not to follow Jesus -- **and**

**Jesus allowed him that choice!** No guilt trip. No pressure. No 'one more next Sabbath!' Jesus let him go.

Beyond freedom of choice to follow Jesus we find personal freedom in the relationships of the disciples. They clearly enjoyed the freedom to speak their minds, even if at times their words betrayed a lack of humility. When Mary of Bethany poured precious ointment over Jesus' head, the disciples were "indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked. 'This perfume could have been sold at a higher price and the money given to the poor'" (Mt 26:8-9, NIV). Peter's rebuke of Jesus (Mt 16:21-22) and the request for heavenly position by James and John (Mk 10:35) affirms the freedom of expression enjoyed by those closest to the Master. Had Jesus been an autocratic ruler, His disciples would have been less free in their speech and behavior.

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No guilt trip. No pressure.  
Jesus let him go.**

**How often I've heard it said,  
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Here we see the wrong means  
tied to the wrong end.**

---

Two of the disciples provide a vivid contrast in their response to the loving leadership and support of Jesus. As Judas approached



Jesus to betray Him in the Garden, Jesus called him “friend” (Mt 26:50, NIV) and accepted his kiss of greeting. Peter denied knowing Jesus, though he had bragged earlier of his devotion (Mt 26:69-75). Both betrayed their Leader. Judas had never really understood Who his Leader was and in desperation hanged himself (Mt 27:3-5). Peter lived to experience forgiveness and a recommissioning to Kingdom service (“Feed my sheep” Jn 21:17).

This example of Jesus as Servant-Leader burned so deeply into Peter’s soul that nearly forty years later this rugged fisherman would write to church leaders, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers. . . **not lording it over those entrusted to you**” (1 Pe 5:2a,3, NIV). How often have I heard it said that “fast growing churches require autocratic pastors.” Here we see the wrong goal tied to wrong methods. From these ideas come three principles.

## Principle Five

*The discipling minister supports his followers. He does not use them merely to accomplish his programs but nurtures them into the service of the Kingdom.*

The leader protects and strengthens the followers. He teaches and loves them. He gives his own life, in terms of time, talent, emotion, and energy, for their benefit. He is willing to work as a member of the team. He multiplies his ministry by delegating specific responsibilities to organization leaders.

### Bill

Bill had given his life to the Lord and to the ministry. Now he could only shake his head in disbelief as he surveyed the wreckage of

his situation. His wife had left him suddenly and he was bewildered. She claimed he was more married to his “job” than to her. He had given little attention to her or the children. But the ministry is more than a job! It’s a calling!! His primary responsibility was to his call, his work, his church! Or so he had thought. Surely the Lord had not intended his ministry to replace his marriage.

But that wasn’t the end of his problems. He began to reflect on the progress the church had made under his leadership the past four years. He could note few significant gains. The church had not developed a reservoir of leaders as he had hoped. He was still carrying much of the essential work of the organizations of the church. He attended all committee meetings and approved all their decisions. He **personally** handled problems in the educational organizations. This was the only way he knew to “serve people.”

### Situation Analysis

Bill had become a bottleneck to those under his charge. His share of the workload became greater the longer he stayed at the church. His workdays became longer and his family time was torn away. Bill could not delegate. He had difficulty trusting the leaders of his organizations to carry out their assigned tasks without his own personal supervision.

He had not only destroyed his own home life. He had developed an attitude of passivity in the church. Members of the church had not developed skills of leadership. Bill served as a “do-er” more than an “enabler.” He now faced the bitter consequences of that misunderstanding on two fronts: at home and at church.

**Control vs. Delegation.** What will you

do to relieve the tension between ministerial control and delegation to lay leaders? In what specific ways will you encourage initiative and freedom in the members of your congregation? How will you balance home and church responsibilities? Here are some areas to consider:

**Delegation is essential.** It allows leaders to use their own talents for God's Kingdom. It releases creative forces in the leaders of the church. It multiplies the time of the staff minister.

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**Church leaders ignore this in churches where congregational government has been replaced by an autocratic pastor and/or staff who "proclaim God's will" and demand church obedience.**

**This flies in the face of our historic congregational polity that holds that the congregation, under the pastor's leadership, through prayer, can discern the will of God better than any one person.**

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**Supervision is not autocratic control.** If a committee or the congregation does not accept your position on a given issue, this does not mean you have failed. The good

leader helps the group see all sides of the issue and come to the position which is best for the church. This may not be the minister's preference. Church leaders ignore this principle in churches where congregational government has been replaced by an autocratic pastor and/or staff who "proclaim God's will" and demand church obedience. This flies in the face of our historic congregational polity that holds that the congregation, under the leadership of the pastor, through prayer, can discern the will of God better than any one person.

**Leadership training is essential** for church life and growth. The processes of delegation and supervision provide "hands-on" experiences for leaders. The minister who spends time today training leaders is laying the foundation for a stronger church tomorrow.

**Initiative grows as freedom grows.** Proper delegation and supervision are activities of freedom and trust. The minister who balances these permits church members to grow in their own initiative in ministry. There is no grace without freedom. Suspicion, fear and distrust repress creativity and initiative. "The leaders will do the thinking. You simply do what we say." This is religious totalitarianism.

**Distributing tasks relieves tension** between church and home. Tasks are performed by an ever-widening number of church members. Time can be spent at home with one's spouse and children. Remember, God instituted the home long before the Church.

## Principle Six

*The discipling minister fights the tendency to become self-centered and self-important.*

“Creeping Pharisaism” is a continuing danger to ministers. Its temptation to bind burdens upon people through rigid rules, human hierarchy, and arbitrary structure is subtle and pervasive.

### Henry

Henry is an effective minister of education because he knows he has come to his present position through God’s leading and sustaining. He is serving in a church larger than he had dreamed possible a few years ago. He is a man of simple beginnings. He had diligently sought God’s will for his life, and step by step he had been led through experiences that prepared him for this place of service. Like Nehemiah, he knows God’s hand is upon him. That knowledge humbles him.

It is, therefore, rather easy for Henry to be a serving leader. He is grateful for his opportunities to minister. He is open to the suggestions and opinions of others. He does not lock his sense of self-worth into the programs he designs. This allows him to listen clearly to constructive criticism and accept the good that is in it. He is easy to talk with because he gives the appearance of being comfortable in his work. He is also easy to agree with and easy to follow.

Because of Henry’s own spiritual growth, he encourages lay leaders to dream and pray and plan and work as the Lord leads them. There are few problems in this delegation because communication channels are open. His knowledge that God’s hand is on his ministry does not make Henry arrogant. On the contrary, that knowledge makes him want

all the more to serve others so that they too might discover the joy of ministry.

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**Proper delegation and supervision are activities of freedom and trust.**

**There is no grace without freedom. Suspicion, fear and distrust repress creativity and initiative.**

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Some fellow ministers cannot understand why Henry has so much influence over the lives of lay leaders and church members. But Henry simply applies Jesus’ teaching in his everyday responsibilities. “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mt 20:26-27, NIV). The power resting on Henry does not change his leadership style from servant to ruler. He consciously places himself in the position of servant. The result is increasing cooperation and loyalty from those he serves. He leads as he earns the right through service. Henry is a man of dynamic humility, active servanthood, and powerful leadership in Jesus’ name.

## Principle Seven

*The discipling minister builds an atmosphere of freedom and trust among his followers.*

The discipling minister is sure enough of himself to be able to accept praise or criti-

cism. He is not thin-skinned or easily threatened. Such a leader encourages frank, open discussion with church leaders. The easy exchange of ideas helps him develop a realistic view of the church's mission, the groups' tasks, and the role of each lay leader. However, such freedom makes the leader vulnerable to attack by disgruntled church members. It is also fervently avoided by leaders who prefer to control the actions of others. But Jesus demonstrated the effectiveness of freedom in training leaders.

### Leroy

Leroy left the meeting of the Sunday School Council feeling very good. He had worked hard on his proposal for a new organizational structure. He gathered as much information as he could find from other churches and ministers. He organized his findings into a professional presentation that had left the Council speechless. With little comment or discussion they voted approval for the organizational change. Leroy felt great relief to see the Council's response to his leadership. The sense of accomplishment warmed him as he drove home.

Meanwhile several of the Council members had gathered at a local cafe for a round of coffee. "Why didn't you speak up in the meeting if you're so opposed to the idea?!" It was not **the idea** that bothered two of the Council members but the way it was presented. "What good would it have done to question Brother Leroy? It would only make him think we're not committed to improving the Sunday School -- he almost said as much tonight." There were still many unanswered questions. How will these changes to be made? When will they to be presented to the church? Who will implement them and be responsible for them? None of these questions had been asked at the meeting. "I used

to feel I was doing something important for the Lord through my Sunday School work, but I'm not doing anything now. This just may be my last year on the Council. I want to be more than a "rubber stamp".

Leroy had showered and was getting into bed. The glow from his recent success made him warm and drowsy. As he fell into an easy sleep, he could not foresee the problems he would soon face -- problems that were building momentum across town.

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**The discipling minister  
leads out,  
but not too far ahead  
of his flock.**

**He nurtures the flock  
but does not stagnate  
in playing it safe.**

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### *Situation Analysis*

Leroy had not brought his Sunday School leaders into the process of developing the proposed change. He had not built an atmosphere in the Council sessions that permitted an open exchange of ideas and options. The vote on this night, without debate or dissent, did **not** show the true level of acceptance of Leroy's leadership. Rather it reflected a sense of **apathy and indifference**. This is the death-knell of teamwork and koinonia. Leroy had won his battle by default, but the long term prospects of peace are soon to be dashed against the realities of resignations and withdrawal.

The discipling minister lives in the tension between 'too fast' and 'too slow'. He leads



out, but he does not run too far ahead of his flock. He nurtures, but does not stagnate in playing it safe. Where this balance falls depends on your particular congregation and your own particular style. But long-term effectiveness will belong to the one who seeks the proper balance.

## 6. THE DISCIPLES WERE ORGANIZED

Jesus' love for individuals and His desire for "agape" relationship (Mt 22:37,39) drew the disciples into a cohesive group. His tenderness for the disciples shines through His prayer in Gethsemane (Jn 17:6-19).

### The Twelve Divided

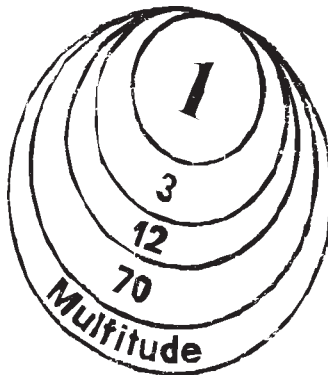
It appears that the disciples were organized into smaller groups, each group having its respective leader. These lists present the disciples in stable groups of four. The **first group** consisted of Simon Peter, James, John and Andrew. Peter is always listed first. The **second group** consisted of Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas. Philip is always listed first in this second group. The **third group** consisted of James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus (Luke calls him Judas, the son of James), Simon the Zealot and Judas Ischariot. James is listed first in this grouping. (See Mt 10:2-4, Mk 3:16-19, Lk 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13)

### Special Attention to Three

Of these twelve, Jesus gave special attention to Peter, James and John. Every Gospel lists these three in the top four positions.

They were present with Jesus when he healed the daughter of Jairus, ruler of the synagogue. The other disciples apparently remained outside (Mk 5:37-38). These three witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus while the others remained at the foot of the mountain (Mt 17:1-9). These three were asked to accompany Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane and there to watch and pray with Him, while the others remained just inside the gate (Mt 26:36-38). It is interesting to me that all three of them overcame short tempers and large egos as they were loved by Christ and as they loved Him -- the brash fisherman and the "sons of thunder." It was not the anni-

hilation of their egos but the reigning in of their egos, for Christ, that made the difference in their lives. These three made significant contributions to the spread of the Gospel around their world. Peter evangelized the Jews, James pastored the church in Jerusalem until his martyrdom and John pastored in Ephesus. Their letters of encouragement to the churches strengthened the faith of millions in Jesus Christ, and as part of our New Testament, continue to do so.



### The Special Status of Peter

Then further, Jesus concentrated his teaching and leading most directly on one of the three: Simon. He gave him the new name of Petros ("the rock") which symbolized what he would become (Mt 16:18). He allowed Peter to do an adventuresome thing and fail (walking on water. See Mt 14:29-33). He rebuked Peter when he resorted to violence (Jn 18:10-11). And, as we've noted already, we see the climax of Jesus' earthly nurture and training of Peter on the beach as He forgives



and recommissions Peter to Kingdom service. Notice the progression. As the group gets smaller, the relationships grow deeper.

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**The group, thus  
organized, trained and led,  
marched out to  
turn their world upside-down  
with the Gospel.**

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### From Many to One

Jesus taught the multitudes. From these He chose 70 to send out witnessing. From these 70 He chose 12 for special instruction. Of the 12 He chose 3 for intensive training. And of these three, He concentrated on Peter. The group was One. It was a Body of several members fitted together with Christ as Head. The group, thus organized, trained and led, marched out to turn their world upside-down with the Gospel.

### Principle Eight

*The discipling minister  
organizes his ministry  
to give attention,  
support and training  
to people who are willing  
and ready to learn.*

The discipling minister serves the crowd by equipping the few who are ready to learn. He knows he cannot do everything himself. He therefore multiplies his effectiveness by ministering to people through people.

### Virginia and Joan

Virginia made it a rule in her work as minis-

ter of education to avoid favoritism. She had seen what "favorites" could do to destroy the sense of community in a church. She stressed ministry (training, planning, and such) in large group settings. She avoided personal conferences. She turned down most invitations to dinner parties and social events (unless they were church-wide) for fear some might suspect she was playing favorites with one group or another. Virginia was lonely but considered this part of her ministry.

Joan made many people feel they were her "favorite." She provided special help to anyone who asked for it. She met with leaders and workers as her time permitted. She used her gifts of enthusiasm, motivation, and delegation to inspire the leaders and workers in her many areas of responsibility. She was frequently in the homes of church members and developed friendships with people of all ages. Joan shared both responsibility and authority with leaders of her organizations. Plans were built out of the synthesis of minister and leaders. Joan relied on the leaders to share their excitement with workers under their supervision. She was a leader of leaders and teacher of teachers. She reached out to every member of the church, but gave particular attention to those who carried on major educational programs. She was loved by those she worked with most closely, and respected by the membership at large. Her ministry was multiplied again and again as her ideas permeated the education programs.

Virginia has changed churches three times in five years. She has been unable to effect any long-term change in those churches because she has failed to build rapport with those leading church programs.

Joan has served in the same church for six years. She has been nourished by the rela-

tionships she has developed. She has made significant contributions to the church as a whole and to many individuals. She has developed strong friendships and built open channels of communication to every level of leadership -- formal and informal. She is able to evaluate the progress of educational programs in a natural, friendly way. Her work is really just beginning and she's looking forward to the next six years in the same church Family.

### *Situation Analysis.*

Virginia tries to minister to everyone "equally." She was afraid to give special attention to individuals. Without the required relational bridges between herself and lay leaders, she is unable to make any lasting progress. Stagnation of church programs and personal loneliness take their toll. The result of this attitude has been frequent moves from church to church. Searching for the "ideal" situation in which to serve, she carries her most critical problem with her wherever she goes.

While being open to all, Joan focuses her attention on those most willing to learn. She multiplies her efforts as these learners become effective leaders. Just as Jesus focused increasing attention on the twelve and the three and the one, so Joan increases her influence by organizing her ministry. From time to time she is criticized for her "obvious favoritism." But her response is always the same: "Are you interested in joining our training group? Wonderful! We'd love to have you!" And another learner is added to the list of those on their way to more effective service.

## 7. JESUS' AUTHORITY TO LEAD

The major source of Jesus' authority was His total dependence on the Father (Jn 5:17-19). A second source of authority lay in Jesus' profound and intimate knowledge of scripture. This knowledge is displayed prominently in the Gospels as a weapon against Satan's attacks (Mt 4:4,7,10), in His condensation of the Law and the Prophets (Mt 22:37,39), and in His fulfillment of its letter and spirit (Lk 4:16-21). These two sources of authority allowed Him to be consistent in His dealings with others.

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**Our lifestyle  
is to be seasoned with salt  
--pungent and powerful--  
but it is to be filled with grace,  
with self-giving love  
for those we lead.**

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Jesus promised rewards to those who left behind their old ways to follow Him (Mk 10:29-30) and stressed the need for rest (Mk 16:31). Above all else, Jesus saturated everything He did with agape love. He commanded all who call Him Lord to live in this way. "My command is this: 'Love each other as I have loved you.'" (Jn 15:12, NIV) We love others based on their need rather than on our feelings. Our lifestyle is to be seasoned with salt --pungent and powerful-- but it is to be filled with grace, with self-giving love for those we lead. Three principles are drawn from these ideas.

## Principle Nine

*The discipling minister is firm in his conviction concerning the Written Word, and his own personal relationship with the Living Word.*

This conviction provides strength for daily living and daily leading. However, he does not confuse strong convictions with a dominating attitude toward others.

### John

John has been minister of education in his church for seven months now. Summer is approaching. He has been told that the church traditionally moves the Royal Ambassador program from Wednesday night to Saturday morning during the summer months. This is done to allow the boys and their parents to participate in the city softball league that plays all its games on Wednesday evenings.



John disagrees with this policy. He believes it shows a distortion of values in the congregation. He feels he must end this practice to provide a better model of commitment in the church.

### Alternatives.

The question is how best to make the change. Let's again look at some polar options.

**Confrontation.** John stands firm in his convictions and announces that the R.A. program will not be moved to Saturday mornings this summer. He was called to improve the educational programs of the church and this is a good place to start. John is afraid that too much flexibility at the beginning of his ministry may cause problems later. It is better to stand firm at the beginning to let people know that he is serious about his work. Members who disagree with his position are "obviously spiritually immature." He is willing to weather the storm that will follow his decision. He believes that things will eventually return to normal and the boy's program will have the priority it deserves.

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**Dominating others with an  
"I'm the leader,  
You're the follower" attitude  
reduces long-term influence**

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**Laissez-faire.** John does nothing. This has been a policy in the church for a long time and he doesn't want to "rock his new boat." He will work with the Saturday R.A. program and strengthen it all he can during the summer. As his Wednesday duties permit, he may even attend a few of the games to cheer on "his boys." He wants to build

bridges, not walls. **The Tight Rope.** John does not demand that the policy of the church be changed. He is an enabler, not a ruler. He begins to build open communication channels with R.A. leaders and parents. This approach may mean another summer of Saturday R.A.'s, but he hopes to influence these leaders toward change of the policy the following year --if this is determined to provide a real gain for the church and the community..

#### *Situation Analysis.*

The danger of scenario one is its disregard for relationship. John may survive this situation (particularly if his pastor is in support of his action), but things might not go as well when he confronts another problem the same way. We lead as examples to the flock, says Peter, not as lords. Trust level is critical to constructive ministry. Dominating others with an "I'm the leader -- you're the follower" attitude reduces trust level and, in turn, long-term influence.

The danger of scenario two is its lack of leadership. John appears more concerned about himself than he is about the boys or the church's witness. As we have noted before, laissez-faire leadership eventually leads to mediocrity. The danger of scenario three is the apparent lack of progress. John is doing something, but it may not seem so to the congregation at large. This approach requires more time than direct confrontation. Though John is laying the foundation for meaningful change, his reputation may deteriorate with those who want to see fast action.

What would you do in this situation? Which scenario is most appealing to you?

## Principle Ten

*The discipling minister has a fluent [articulate, well-versed] understanding of the Bible, and seeks to make decisions in light of that understanding.*

He uses its principles in everyday situations. His knowledge of the Bible is not a static collection of stories and facts. It is living knowledge -- objective, subjective, behavioral -- that expresses itself in transformed living. This living knowledge allows him to solve problems and make decisions in line with spiritual truth.

### Steve

Steve was confused. God had called him to this church. He had been trained in educational programming and teaching skills. His goals were clear: improve the church's educational programs and increase participation in these programs.

His problems were like the Red Sea. He prayed that they would part, but they plagued him all the more. His leaders lacked interest in training programs. Like Moses and Elijah he had pointed them to God as the Great Motivator. Yet they remained apathetic. Like Paul he called the leaders to action. They seemed to shun him. The actions of the heroes of the Bible were so clear and the results seemed so immediate. Why didn't God answer **his** prayers?!

#### *Situation Analysis.*

Steve's knowledge of the Bible is broad and shallow. He knows a lot of Bible stories. He has an abundance of conviction about the Scripture. But he does not have a fluent understanding of the depth of truth shining from its pages. He has not developed biblical wisdom by properly applying scripture in "the now."

The discipling minister studies the Bible, not to build around him a fortress of information with which to defend his positions. He studies to learn what God has said. Not in bits and pieces. But as a whole. His living knowledge does not lift him out of the real world to some vague place of otherness. It helps him fuse the realities of the material and spiritual worlds together. He is sensitive to real world problems and spiritual solutions.

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Not in bits and pieces.  
But as a whole.**

---

Rethink Steve's situation. What will you do to avoid his example? What are you doing to develop an approach to Bible study that will make you more biblical in our actions and lifestyle?

## Principle Eleven

*The discipling minister sees himself  
as a perpetual learner.*

The discipling minister, as a perpetual learner, views his own spiritual status as "in process." This dynamic spirituality produces fruit in his life and work as he surrenders

daily to the lordship of Christ. He lives on the cutting edge of faith.

### Roger

Roger has become calloused. He has served two churches in the past eight years and found his work, inevitably, becoming less satisfying, more demanding, and more frustrating year by year. Demands from organization leaders, fellow staff members and home have drained him. He feels as if he has no more to give. The spark that burned so brightly through seminary and the early years of ministry is gone. The discovery of flaws inherent in people -- all people, including himself! -- struck a blow from which he has never fully recovered. The innocent optimism with which he entered vocational church work has turned to sour pessimism. He feels he is at a dead end with no way to turn.

### *Situation Analysis*

Roger approaches his work more as a technician than an artist. He sees his work as mechanics. It is little wonder that he became depressed when he learned that the machinery was unreliable. His preoccupation with program details overshadowed his devotional time. He slipped from the cutting edge of faith and love to the trailing flap of past experiences and former plans. He lost touch with the Lord as he spent increasing amounts of time and energy wrestling with job description and budget requests.

Roger is no longer a learner. He has closed himself to channels of spiritual refreshment that are necessary for maintaining dynamic leadership.

Consider your devotional style. It is nurturing you each day? Is it a rigid habit or a flexible retreat? Does it meet you spontan-



eously as you go about your tasks or mechanically as part of the day's routine? Giving yourself for their benefit of others for

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**I might succeed as a technician of church programs. But I will eventually burn out unless I avail myself of life-long learning opportunities.**

---

long periods of time is possible only by continuous renewal through prayer and devotional Bible study. I might succeed as a technician of church programs. But I will have difficulty performing quality ministry and may eventually burn out unless I consciously open myself to lifelong learning and growth.

## **8. JESUS KNEW NO FAILURE**

Jesus' ministry included a multitude of people who followed Him and listened to Him. They wanted Him to be their King (Jn 6:14). Who better could throw off the Roman yoke and reestablish David's kingdom than the One Who could heal diseases and infirmities, feed thousands with a small lunch, and speak with unrivalled authority? But Jesus rejected their call. This was not God's path for Him (Jn 6:15). From that point until His death we see -- with human eyes -- His downward plunge into failure. He was attacked by the educated and religious. He was rejected by the masses. He did not "fit" their notions about God's plan. Even His own disciples deserted Him in the end. Turned over to pagan authorities, He was

tried, scourged, and crucified. In dying He hung on rough nails driven into raw wood between two criminals. No one seemed to understand Him or the Gospel He had proclaimed for three years. WHAT A FAILURE!

But wait! The story isn't finished. Jesus did not measure success by the masses, or religious leaders, or disciples! He measured His mission's success by His Father's will for His life (Jn 5:30, 36-40; 6:38; 8:28-29). So the only way He could ultimately fail was by acting outside that will to attempt to reach spiritual objectives by human means.

We noted Jesus' triumph in three major tests: the temptations in the Wilderness, the prayer-struggle in Gethsemane, and the taunts of the crowd at Calvary. Each time Jesus weighed the evidence and found nothing more important than doing the Father's will. On one arm of the balance lies rejection, persecution, abandonment and the agonies of an unjust and cruel death. On the other lies the resurrection! There was no failure in the life of our Leader! There was only success as He faithfully carried out God's will.

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**The only way Jesus could ultimately fail was by acting outside the Father's will to attempt to reach spiritual objectives by human means.**

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We would lead more confidently and consistently if we could focus more on God's will for our ministry and focus less on the inevitable criticism, misunderstanding, confron-

tation, and miscommunication that occurs when people work together in a common cause. We pray for sensitivity to the "still small voice" that leads us. On the other hand, we should guard ourselves against the danger of mistaking **emotional** or **social** or **political** pressure as "God's will." Jesus knew the Father's will precisely. We struggle by faith to know even part of His will for us (I Cor 13:12). Therefore I must exercise great care lest I mistake my own personal feelings (or ego needs, or materialistic desires) or pressure from leaders or members in the church for the will of God.

Further, we have the promise that, though we will inevitably fail in some aspect of our work (for all . . . fall short of the glory of God), He can work all things together for our collective good (Rm 8:28). The events of my life are like beads on a string. I tend to look at them one at a time. This one's good. This one's not so good. The good events lift me up and the bad events tend to depress me. But when I look at the entire string by faith, I can see how all the beads together produce a beneficial mosaic of life.

The resurrection gives us hope if we will but receive it. Not only hope for the future in heaven, but hope for daily living right here and now. Whether we face unjust criticism or gossip that undermines reputation, or outright opposition, God can resurrect us to His service -- just as Jesus did with Peter. He can give us greater resources, more influence, and a deeper understanding of Christian leadership if we will trust in and cling to Him day by day.

## Principle Twelve

*The discipling minister views failure redemptively.*

When failure finds meaning it is no longer failure. The discipler retains active hope even when he fails because he knows and follows the Risen Christ.

### Fred

Fred had made an error in judgement and it had already cost him several nights sleep. He had acted too quickly, without sufficient knowledge of the facts, and without meeting personally with the parties involved. Now a powerful group within the church were crusading against his actions. What made him feel worse was knowing that he HAD made a mistake. And further -- though he had tried to make amends -- he knew the sting of the incident would haunt his ministry for a long time. His leadership had been compromised because some members would hesitate to trust him as fully as they had before.

Should he remain at this church to minister as best he can and overcome, in time, the bitterness and prejudice now leveled at him? Or should he seek another place of service and carry with him the hard-learned lessons that will fashion him into a more effective and loving minister?

What would YOU do? Whatever decision Fred makes, he is confident that the grace of the Risen Christ will ultimately bring good out of his failure. The death of Jesus on the cross was seen by disciples, Roman soldiers, and Jewish leaders as His life's final chapter, the ultimate failure. But it was only Prologue to the greatest success story in history.

We all face failure from time to time. But in Christ, the resurrection always comes -- if we will but wait. Remember the difference between Peter and Judas? One waited and was forgiven. In that we can place our hope

and confidence.

## 9. REFLECTIONS FROM PETER

In the years following Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, churches were established throughout the known world. Problems concerning church organization and government began to rise when it became apparent that Jesus would not return immediately.

No disciple spent more time with Jesus -- nor received more personal attention from Jesus -- than Peter. In writing guidelines to church pastors, Peter records his perceptions of the major elements of Jesus' leadership style. He makes the following key points in his first letter.

### The Church is the Body of Christ

"...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (I Pe 2:9, NIV). It is not a religious hierarchy whose power resides in the "clergy."

### The Christian leader nurtures the church.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers -- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve" (I Peter 5:2, NIV). The Christian leader is a shepherd, not a hired hand. Jesus clarified the difference:

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because

## The Christian Leader:

- ✓ is a shepherd, not a hired hand
- ✓ is an example, not a lord
- ✓ is humble, not proud
- ✓ depends on God
- ✓ is in control of himself
- ✓ faithfully stands



he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (John 10:11-1, NIV). The Christian leader is a shepherd, not a hired hand.

### The Christian leader is an example

"Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3, NIV). The Christian leader is an example, not a religious ruler.

### The Christian leader is humble toward others

"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (I Peter 5:5b, NIV). The Christian leader is humble, not arrogant.

### The Christian leader is humble before God

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (I Peter 5:6). The Christian leader is not self-centered. He does not rebel against or resist experiences in life, but accepts God's hand upon him.

### The Christian leader depends on God

...for strength as he leads each day. "Cast all

your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (I Peter 5:6, NIV).

### The Christian leader is in control of himself

"Be self-controlled and alert" (I Peter 5:8a, NIV). He is aware of his environment and the circumstances surrounding his ministry as he leads. He is firmly in touch with reality.

### The Christian leader faithfully stands

...resisting the evil that attempts to deter him from accomplishing his task. "Resist [Satan], standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of sufferings" (I Peter 5:8, NIV).

The discipling minister resists the world's models of leadership that tout arbitrary power and material success. These models produce religious rulers who use training and experience to dominate God's people for personal goals. Jesus' example shows us the possibility (indeed, the necessity) of servant leading.

## *In Summary...*

### **We are called as program leaders**

We are called to serve by a church that assumes we possess sufficient knowledge, training, and leadership ability to improve their ministries. Our training in seminary provides materials, patterns and ideas which we use to strengthen the work of this church. We are expected to be "experts" in our chosen field -- or at least expected to be willing to develop that expertise as we serve. We are called to lead. It is a calling that implies a position out ahead of those we lead.

### **We are called as servants**

We are called to serve by a church that assumes we possess sufficient spiritual maturity and relational skills to help individuals grow in Christ. We are expected to treat each person as an individual with unique gifts and minister to their needs as they live in a hostile world. We are called to minister. It is a calling that implies sensitivity and caring and giving.

### **The Tension. . .**

We are pulled by these two roles -- first one way and then the other. We may find ourselves conflicting with individuals when we attempt to improve a program. We may become so benevolent toward individuals that organizations lose their capacity to function and accomplish little for the Lord. It is in this tension that we live and work -- we cannot escape it if we are to be effective.

### **. . .is Resolved in Christ!**

Paul wrote "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Col 1:28-29, NIV).

We work with people, not titles on organization charts. We love them and serve them, minister to their needs and help them discover and use their gifts.

We serve as examples of what we desire to see in them. We teach as we want them to teach. We lead as we want them to lead. We build relationships in Jesus' name. We provide opportunities for leaders to share their joys and frustrations naturally -- in their homes, on retreats, or in informal meetings.

## THE DISCIPLER'S MODEL

The disciplers' model presents the content areas of my education ministry. The **manner** by which I lead God's people is as much a part of my teaching ministry as the words I speak. The disciplers' model is my guide to leading leaders, teaching teachers, and ministering to ministers. I try to lead by example. I attempt to train disciplers by discipling them.

Form follows substance. Task follows relationship. Leading follows serving. Numerical growth follows spiritual growth.

The focus is on the gold, silver, and precious stones of walking with Christ, in His yoke.

The focus is on producing fruit, not leaves. May God bless you as you absorb the disciplers' model and use it in your everyday ministry. Open yourself to Him and to those you lead in Jesus' name. Lead as you teach, and teach as you lead. Work toward balance as a leader-servant.

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There are  
no  
established patterns  
to follow.  
The fabric  
of the minister's work  
is woven each day  
from the threads unique  
to the  
congregation  
and  
his own personality.

We are called to give away  
our lives as ransoms  
for those we lead.

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*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee:  
bind them about thy neck;  
write them on the table of your heart:*

*So shalt thou find favor and  
good understanding  
in the sight of God and man.  
(Proverbs 3:3-4)*

*May God bless you on your journey!*