



John Wesley Taylor V

TEACHING THE BIBLE CLASS



Paul wrote to Timothy, who was serving as a teacher¹ and spiritual leader in Ephesus: “God has breathed life into all Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a servant of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing” (NIRV).²

Within this framework, Ellen White wrote: “Teachers should constantly seek for improved methods. The teaching of the Bible should have our freshest thought, our best methods, and our most earnest effort.”³

What strategies can teachers utilize to make Bible classes⁴ more effective and enjoyable? Here are some ideas to try:

Tell. Don’t just read. Teaching is most effective when it comes from the heart. Before teaching the lesson, look over the major points to be addressed, and try to keep these in mind. Then tell the story or present

the topic in your own words. The result will be much more interesting for your students; and its effect on their lives, more lasting.

Listen. Don't always talk. As teachers, we are usually quite good at talking. But we need to be even better listeners. So when teaching the Bible class, remember that communication with students must be a two-way interaction. While there will be many wonderful opportunities to share your own ideas and concepts, it is also important to encourage students to share their own experiences, questions, and concerns. Engage them in the conversation. Be open to their ideas and opinions.

Ask thought-provoking questions. Many times, we tend to ask only factual questions, such as: How many days did the Israelites march around Jericho? What happened to Lot's wife? Which three disciples witnessed the Transfiguration? While a few factual questions may be appropriate from time to time, it is more important to ask your students questions that will stimulate deep thinking and personal insight. Here are some examples:

- Why do you think that Jesus sent out His disciples two by two?
- What are some ways in which you could share God's love with others?
- How would you reply if someone urged you to smoke?
- What is the first thing you will want to do when you arrive in heaven?

Discuss issues. The Bible class, above all others, should be made relevant to the student's life. One way in which this can be accomplished is through a candid discussion of real-life issues and problems that the students face, and which are related to the unit that they are studying. Another way is to explore together a topic's importance and meaning—its potential application, implications, and ramifications. Be careful, however, not to monopolize the discus-

sion. Rather, encourage students to think through the issue or problem, and to express their own insights, feelings, and convictions.

Organize small-group activities.

A good way to encourage students to become actively involved in the Bible class is to plan activities in which they will work together in small groups, perhaps of around three to five students. The groups should be given a specific task and a time limit (such as: five minutes to come up with three reasons why the disciples wanted Jesus to be an earthly king, or 20 minutes to produce a time chart of the lives of the patriarchs before the Flood). During this time, circulate among the

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During this time, circulate among the groups, providing encouragement, feedback, and recognition. After engaging in the activity, the groups should report back to the class and share their ideas, insights, or products.

groups, providing encouragement, feedback, and recognition. After engaging in the activity, the groups should report back to the class and share their ideas, insights, or products. Perhaps it would be well to note that these activities should be structured in a cooperative, supportive way, thus minimizing rivalry and unhealthy competition.

Illustrate using examples. A new concept is better understood if examples and illustrations are provided. Furthermore, the learning experience itself becomes more enjoyable. So take a moment before teaching a les-

son to think of an example that illustrates the point to be made. These illustrations may be based on stories that you have heard or read, on an historical incident or current new item, or on your own life and experiences. It is also appropriate, from time to time, to ask your students to share relevant examples from their lives, perhaps an answer to prayer or an experience that they may have had similar to that of the Bible character they are studying.

Utilize visual supports. Students remember things better when they can see them as well as hear them. Jesus, of course, recognized this fact and frequently employed visual lessons—a coin, a lily, a farmer, a fig tree, and a little child, for example. As each lesson is taught, try to incorporate some visual aspects.⁵ This may be in the form of a picture, a map, or an actual object, such as a stone or a net. It may also include the effective use of the board—to draw a diagram, to jot down key words, or to show the relationship between concepts. So think creatively and visualize!

Orchestrate role-play. Students can learn important skills and gain deeper insights through role-play. In this strategy, briefly describe a Bible story or a real-life situation. Then select certain students for specific roles, while other students serve as the observers. As there is not a set script, the students must come up with their own words and reactions. After the role-play, discuss the enactment, endeavoring to identify important insights gained.

Maximize use of music. Hymns and songs, related to the topics under consideration, are powerful means of impressing God's truth on the minds of students. So, sing often. On occasion, ask your students to share a favorite song with the rest of the class or with others beyond your classroom. Music can also be used to help your students memorize verses from the Bible. This is, in fact, one of the best ways to commit Scripture to

memory. If you do not know a song for an important biblical passage, perhaps you or one of your students can create one!

Promote outreach activities. Regardless of the particular unit or topic, it is important for students to reach out to others through witnessing and acts of selfless service. Assign your students specific outreach projects related to the topic they are studying. This may be as simple as asking each student to find a way to make someone happy, or it may involve a long-term project, such as beautifying a part of your town. In any case, the students should bring back a report to the class as to their experience and what they have learned. Better yet, you can also be a part of the project, so it becomes a shared experience.

There are, of course, other teaching strategies, such as problem-solving, demonstrations, brainstorming, and case studies, among others, which can be useful tools to help your students learn. The important thing is for teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies. Even the most interesting approach will lose its effectiveness if used every day. So, expand your repertoire of teaching strategies. Add to your collection of instructional tools. Venture out and discover a new horizon!

Ultimately, however, there is one strategy that is more effective than any other: Your own life. The model is simply the most powerful method. Your lifestyle, your attributes, your actions—all of these convey a powerful message, one that speaks to your students about God much more eloquently than words alone. So how can you best represent Jesus? By His Spirit filling your life. Then you will be what you want your students to become. Teaching a religion course is indeed a high calling, but He who calls you will also enable. Through His grace, you will be a channel of His truth and love. ✍

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 1 Timothy 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 2:2, 15.
2. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NIV. The Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version. Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998 by International Bible Society. The term *servant* rather than *man* is used by the NIV. The Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society.
3. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 186.
4. The term "Bible class" refers to a course taken by all students that focuses on the study of the Bible. In reality, this course might perhaps be better designated as a "religion class," given that all courses should be founded upon God's Word, with a biblical worldview permeating each unit and topic. As Ellen White observes, "The Bible must be made the foundation for all study" (*Fundamentals of Christian Education* [Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing, 1923], 451).
5. Writing to her son, Edson, who was teaching the children of recently liberated slaves in the Southern states, Ellen White stated: "Edson, your method of instructing from pictures for the Southern school is an excellent idea. These pictures can be got up as cheaply as possible. You might talk till you were weary to get ideas into the heads of the . . . children, but give them a similitude, an object, and the lesson becomes stamped upon the mind never to be forgotten" (Letter 136a, 1898, 9). On another occasion, in the context of teaching the Bible, Ellen White wrote, "The use of object lessons, blackboards, maps, and pictures, will be an aid in explaining these lessons, and fixing them in the memory" (*Education*, 186).