

## IS THE LESSON APPROPRIATE?

**We all talk a lot about excellence but few of us know how to attain it. Author Stewart applies three evaluative questions by which any good Bible lesson may be examined.**

Never before have I experienced such disappointment in a speaker! Although I was attending a meeting which usually supplied interesting and informative teachers, this lecturer surprised me by rambling on for close to two hours. He presented a boring, ill-prepared monologue that caused even well-intentioned listeners to experience difficulty maintaining attention. Most of the audience fidgeted, a few dared to doze, and one person even walked out. What a disaster!

How did this speaker fail? The foundation of effective teaching lies in careful assessment. Although the speaker did choose a topic of interest to most of his hearers, from that point on he failed. Unfortunately, he neglected to grab and keep his listeners' attention. Since proper assessment provides only the groundwork for effective teaching, we must travel one step further. We must develop and build a structure of excellent teaching habits that will help us prepare appropriate, interesting, and motivating lessons.

How can we do this? In our attempt to provide our students with excellent Biblical teaching, wisdom dictates a periodic reevaluation of our teaching methods. Spend the next few moments comparing your current style of preparation with three important areas which can help us ensure outstanding, relevant teaching.

First, we must check to ensure that our teaching is appropriate to **the needs which we have assessed**. For example, when a dentist diagnoses a tooth cavity, he then makes a recommendation. If, instead of suggesting a filling, he offered the suggestion that we brush our teeth after every meal, we would question his advice. Although his counsel holds truth, his idea would not provide an appropriate solution to the problem of a painful cavity.

In the same way, once we know the needs of our students, we must choose to teach material that will provide appropriate help. We could prepare and present the most eloquent and exciting lesson, but if our students can't relate to the message that we set forth, our efforts are wasted. If, while teaching young teens, we become aware of their dating struggles, address this precise issue rather than skirting it. If our second-graders wonder what happens to people after they die, provide them with answers geared to their level of understanding. No matter what age group we teach, we must convey to our students that God, through the Scriptures, provides appropriate answers to their questions and struggles.

## WILL THE LESSON HOLD ATTENTION?

Secondly, we must evaluate our teaching against the standard of **interest to our hearers**. Even when we choose a topic appropriate to the needs of our audience, we must still work hard to attract their attention. Let's consider several steps which can help us do this.

The first step in holding the attention of our students lies in **adequate preparation** (I Peter 3:15). Just as an electrician prepares for his job by studying electrical

wiring, or a physician by studying medicine, so we must prepare to teach by studying God's Word. Regardless of whether we teach three-year-olds or senior citizens; whether we speak for five minutes or forty-five, we must study our subject matter intently. Our students will base their concepts of God on the information that we present. We must prepare by studying!

**In our attempt to provide our students with excellent Biblical teaching, wisdom dictates a periodical re-evaluation of our teaching methods.**

Once we have researched our material, we must organize it in a logical, understandable fashion. Because most people cannot absorb a great amount of information in a short period of time, we will teach most effectively when we limit the lesson to several key points. Better that our students hear and remember two or three main ideas, than hear and forget nine or ten! Clear lesson organization is essential.

As we continue our careful preparation, we must look for ways to convey the lesson in an exciting way. One effective method lies in the skillful use of illustrations. Christ provided us with an outstanding demonstration of this as He chose commonplace examples to illustrate spiritual truths in ways His listeners could understand. To keep the attention of our students, we must highlight our main points with pertinent illustrations or stories. As we choose such anecdotes, we do well to remember that our students hold a natural curiosity about us personally. Often we can derive the most effective illustrations from situations in our own lives.

The second aspect of holding the attention of our students depends on

# EXCELLENCE:

**practicing our delivery.** Few things distract the attention of an audience more than ineffective presentation. To teach well, we must practice the lesson. How can we do this?

Graceful delivery grows out of familiarity with the material. A helpful method lies in memorizing only the key points of the lesson along with the essential facts of any appropriate illustrations. Rather than committing every word to memory, knowing the main points will help reduce dependence on our notes, thus providing us with the freedom to speak in a normal manner. This holds true for every age group. Even small children sense when their teacher is ill-prepared and poorly practiced.

Once we feel confident about the key points of the lesson, we should strive for relaxed delivery, which grows from practice and experience. Delivering a talk out loud in front of a friend provides an excellent method of practice. We can gain from another person's evaluation as we try for good posture, easy gestures and proper eye contact, all signs of a well prepared delivery. If no one will volunteer as a substitute audience, a mirror and a cassette recorder can serve as an adequate alternate.

Once we know that the lesson is appropriate to our class and will hold their attention, we are ready to compare our teaching against the third important standard.

**WILL THE LESSON  
MOTIVATE OUR LISTENERS  
TO APPLY IT?**

The goal of Biblical teaching lies in application, not knowledge. People have not really learned a Biblical truth until they apply it to their own lives. Christ reminded us of this when He criticized the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His

day, for knowing the Law without applying it to their lives (Matthew 23:3). In our desire to teach excellently, we must motivate our audience to action and to apply truth.

Various methods, both direct and indirect, can help us nourish application. We have alluded already to one indirect method of encouraging application, that of using relevant illustrations. When we highlight the lesson with examples which our students will understand, we help them consider the importance of application. For example, if we want to teach honesty to a class of third graders, we might choose a story about telling the truth to our parents. However, if we had a college aged group in mind, we might better illustrate this principle by speaking about cheating during examinations.

---

**No matter what age group we teach, we must convey to our students that God, through the Scriptures, provides appropriate answers to their questions and struggles.**

---

A more direct technique which we can employ to motivate application lies in providing our students with situations they might confront. Based on our previous assessment of their needs, we could design plausible circumstances which they might encounter. Then we would divide a class of adults or mature teens into pairs or small groups to discuss the relevant application of Biblical truths. With children, we might devise a skit or role-play in which we would encourage them to act out a godly response to difficult situations. In so doing, we force our hearers to think about how to relate Scriptural truths to life's every day situations.

As teachers who desire excellence, we must never neglect the importance of

helping our students apply the Scriptures to their lives. Through our own creativity, we can find unlimited avenues by which we can encourage our students to ponder the personal application of Biblical principles in every situation they may face.

What can happen when a speaker incorporates these suggestions into her teaching style? Let me recount one example. Several years ago my husband and I were honored to provide accommodations for the keynote speaker at our church's annual missions conference. Although already an accomplished speaker, this man spent several hours each day in preparation. He asked us specific details about his audience so that his message would be appropriate to their needs. He worked hard to give his message anecdotes to which this particular audience could relate. He utilized methods that would help his listeners to apply the truths about which he spoke. As a result, God used this speaker's words to cause one of our best friends to make plans for missionary service!

Colossians 3:23 reminds us that "whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." With that enjoiner as our impetus, how can we help but pursue excellence in teaching? Every time we seek to bring appropriate, interesting and motivational lessons to our classrooms, we will move one step closer to our goal. \_\_\_\_\_ CET

Jeanette Stewart is a registered nurse and Christian writer who makes her home in Durham, North Carolina.



by Jeanette Stewart

# Goal of Effective Teaching