# Put It in Writing

## How Writing Can Help Students Learn and Apply Bible Truths

*by Ronald G. Davis*

Written words stand stark and demanding on the page. When they are personalized, they call for attention and response. That is the nature of God's written Word: "O child, I love you. I want the very best for you—for eternity! Obey me." All the words that his Spirit moved men to write are to that end.

Paul's letters are just such written, Spirit-inspired words—"able to make you wise for salvation . . . useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15, 16). Words spoken orally carry all the power and authority of the one who speaks; words in print carry that plus the permanence that allows pondering and personalizing. God "spoke to our ancestors" long ago (Hebrews 1:1), and he also had his words secured in print. Through the written Word of God, we know the mind of God—his love and grace, his holiness and judgment.

## Three Opportunities

Adult teachers will want to take advantage of this phenomenon in instructing their learners. The mind of the learner heard in speech is important; the mind of the learner seen in print adds one more dimension to the teaching-learning bond. The perceptive teacher will examine every lesson text closely for an opportunity for learners to put pen to paper.

Three ingredients of the successful lesson offer an opportunity to have the learners write something: first, helping them see exactly what the text says; second, helping them understand what the text means; and third, helping them put God's truth to work in daily living. So get your adults to "Put It in Writing."

## What Does It Say?

One easy way to get started is to have the class create a simple "test" based on the lesson text. Assign each member a verse of the text (or two verses, or two students to a verse) and ask that he write a true-false statement that can be answered by his assigned verse(s).

Colossians 1:15-29 will serve as an example text. Look at sample possibilities from verses 15 and 16 alone. Verse 15: "In a certain sense, Jesus is the firstborn of/over all creation" (true); "Jesus is obviously lower than God for he is 'the image of the invisible God' and 'the firstborn of every creature'" (false). Verse 16: "Jesus was an active, full participant in creation" (true); "Every element of creation can be viewed by the human eye" (false); "Creation was not only *by* Jesus but *for* Jesus" (true).

When they are finished, each student can stand randomly and read his or her statement, anticipating that others will respond with "true" or "false" or with the relevant verse number. Or collect all the statements, shuffle them, and then give the "test" to the entire class. (The latter approach may remove some of the intimidation that certain members may have about speaking in class.)

An even simpler approach to a text is to ask class members to characterize a text by its key words or key ideas. An index card is large enough to use for this kind of activity. Tell each student to select three or four words that best characterize a particular lesson text and its ideas.

Ephesians 4:1-16 will serve well as an example. The fact that the text includes a number of repeated words and a dominant theme lends itself to such an activity. Ask the class write down three words that characterize the text. When they have finished, ask the class to send their lists around the room simultaneously—establish a "circular" pattern for the passing—and after all lists have circulated, ask the group to identify the "most common" words and the "most uncommon" words. (You may find an idea that is not clear or obvious to some members; stop and ask the one who made the suggestion to explain his or her choice.) Some words that you might expect to be "common" from Ephesians 4 include *one, unity, Christ, love, gifts,* and *maturity;* some words that might appear but are unlikely to be as prevalent are *teaching, body,* and *measure.* The similarities and differences in such lists will provide an excellent overview of the contents and emphases of many texts.

## What Does It Mean?

Once a student sees what a text says, the next step of his study must be to obtain its true and proper meaning. The revelation of Scripture is, by God's design, clear and concise. With most texts, the expectations of God are obvious

(sometimes uncomfortably so). But because the historical setting of the Bible was "far away and long ago," because the words were originally penned in languages other than English, and because both scholars and the unlettered have sometimes distorted their intent, every text must be examined with the question, "What does this mean?" The teacher should examine every lesson text to anticipate how it might appear unclear and how to help the learner adjust the lens of his mind to bring the "image" into focus.

Paraphrasing thoughts is a helpful approach to clarifying and understanding them. Ask students to prepare paraphrases of part or all of a given lesson text. (A bonus is that such paraphrases may indicate certain students have serious misunderstandings of the text and provide occasion for correction.)

As the teacher, you may need to give examples to get your class started in the practice of paraphrasing. Philemon provides a worthy text for such an activity. Verse 22 includes Paul's final request before his closing greetings; his words might be paraphrased as follows: "Philemon, I know you've been praying for me to be free to come and visit—get a room ready!"

Once again, assign a verse (or pairs of verses that contain a single thought) to each class member. Simply say, "Put this in your own words." Some may choose to place the message in a contemporary setting; others will personalize it. Allow them that freedom. Challenge all of your students to attempt to capture the emotion—the heart—of the assigned text.

Final products of this assignment can be collected, in verse order, and then read consecutively as listeners compare their efforts with the Bible text. Or you could shuffle the paraphrases and read them randomly, asking your students to match each paraphrase with the corresponding Bible verse.

## How Do I Put This Truth to Work?

Most adults "know" all sorts of truths that often have no real impact on their lives. The adult teacher's ultimate goal is that no Bible truth is left in the mind of his learners without being "translated" into godly behavior.

Many lessons lend themselves to application through writing personal notes of encouragement and edification. Occasionally the adult learner needs to write a commitment statement for his own edification, which can then serve as a daily challenge to right thinking, speaking, and living.

For example, give your class a completion statement to finish as a challenge for the coming days. Suggest that they keep this with them or display it prominently as a regular reminder. For a lesson from Philippians 2 you might have the learners complete and carry this statement: "Lord, in lowliness of mind, this week I will esteem _____ better than myself, and I will demonstrate

that by._._._." (See Philippians 2:3.) For a lesson from Philippians 4, try, "Lord, I'm exhausted by my anxiety over _____; I turn this matter over to you." (See Philippians 4:6.) For a lesson from Ephesians 2 dare the class to affirm, "Lord, I know that I have been 'created in Christ Jesus to do good works'; therefore, I will . . ." (See Ephesians 2:10.)

However, the more significant writing that a student can do in putting truth to work is that which he does for another: to build up a sister or brother in Christ or to offer Christ's good news to one who is suffocating under the pile of the world's (and the devil's) bad news.

To every adult with a living parent, the words from Ephesians 5 and 6 are timely. The simple reminder, "Honor your father and mother" (6:2), and the earlier command to "follow God's example . . . as dearly loved children" (5:1) should strike a responsive chord. What parent would not be honored to receive a loving note, a phone call, a gift, or a visit from an adult daughter or son? The adult teacher should provide the incentive (even the stationery and postage if need be) for this activity.

Finally, for every adult student and every adult teacher, there is surely that friend or acquaintance who needs the good news of Christ. Another way to put truth to work is by giving it the opportunity to work in someone else!