

Ready, Aim, Teach

The Importance of Lesson Aims in Teaching

by Jonathan Underwood

Do you ever wonder whether you are doing any good as the teacher of your class? Does it ever seem you are just passing time in class instead of accomplishing anything meaningful? If so, perhaps you need to take a second look at the lesson aims (also called learning goals) in your lesson. In the *Standard Lesson Commentary* and *Standard Lesson Quarterly* teacher books, these aims are carefully crafted to get you started on the right path and to keep you focused on your goal. (If your curriculum does not spell out the lesson aims, then it's important that you, the teacher, take time to identify your own goals for each lesson.)

Where Are You Going?

Someone has said, "If you don't know where you are going, then any road will take you there." To know which is the right road, or the right way, one must know where he or she wants to be. The same is true in teaching. Unless you have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish by the end of the class session—where you want your students to be, if you please—then there is no way to know just what you ought to spend your time doing in the class session.

What is your goal in teaching? Surely it is more than providing sixty minutes worth of diversion; you're not just filling time. And you're not just trying to cover a particular portion of Scripture. No, you want more. You want your students to know something they may not have known before they came into your classroom. More than that, you want them to understand the truths and principles of Scripture that the lesson text presents.

Finally, you want the students to apply to their lives those things they have come to know and understand. For these reasons, the editors of the *Standard Lesson Commentary/Quarterly* spend much time in formulating the lesson aims that appear in each lesson.

The Content Aim: "What Does the Text Say?"

There are three aims for every lesson. The first is a *content* aim. This aim addresses the issue of what facts the student should know as a result of having

participated in the study of the assigned lesson text. Verbs like *recount*, *tell*, and *identify* will frequently introduce such aims. Knowledge of Bible content is foundational.

The Concept Aim: “What does the text mean?”

The second aim might be called a *concept* aim. This goal probes beneath the surface of the material to find the timeless principles underlying the facts reported in the Scripture text.

This aim takes the learner beyond the knowledge of facts toward understanding. This is a necessary link to bring the historical truth about events of centuries gone by to relevance to learners in our own day. Verbs like *relate*, *compare*, and *explain* will be more common in introducing these aims.

The Conduct Aim: “What does the text demand of me?”

The third aim is what we might call a *conduct* aim. This is the goal that addresses the issue of application: How will the students’ conduct change as a result of participating in this study? Such aims may challenge the learner to make a commitment or to suggest a specific action that he or she can take in the coming week.

Putting It Together

So, are any of the three aims more important than the other two? Or are all three equally important? What you as the teacher choose to stress depends on the nature of the lesson you’re teaching.

The concept aims are especially important, for example, in studying the historical narratives in Scripture. It is not enough to know the facts about the story of David’s killing the giant Goliath. We must also understand the principles of faith and courage that moved David to action. Only then can we move on from the content aim, knowing the facts, to the conduct aim: applying this lesson to how we face the giants in our own lives. In some passages, especially in the epistles, the content may be more exposition than narration, more conceptual than historical. In these cases we may find that to know the content of the passage is almost the same as knowing the concept.

Thus, starting your lesson preparation with a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish is vital! Knowing where you want to end up will determine which aim or aims you will stress.