

Know How to Teach

by Guy Leavitt

At the close of a summer camp seminar on teaching, a teacher replied with one word to the question, “What will you do first to improve the work of the Sunday school when you return home?” The reply was, “Resign.” The teacher was joking of course, but his joke had significance. Although it sounded as if he were discouraged, the truth is that his attitude held real promise. The teacher who realizes his inadequacy is prepared to keep on learning and improving. He has learned that teaching is difficult. Being a real Christian, he is challenged to make an important investment of time and effort in order to learn to teach.

What is teaching? Webster says that it is imparting knowledge or skill, giving instruction. Teaching in the Sunday school is more than these. Teaching in the Sunday school affects and influences the heart, the soul, the whole life of the individual, as well as informing the mind. The Sunday school teacher is more than an instructor. He is also a coach, a counselor, and an advisor. Instructing the pupil in the knowledge of the Bible, motivating and coaching him in applying its principles to his life is a good description of the Sunday school teacher’s function.

You Have Some Excellent Help

If the above definition and job description of the Sunday school teacher seems awesome, don’t be alarmed. You have some excellent help for learning how to teach. This help is found in the Standard Lesson™ curriculum and resources. The writers and editors of these publications are specialists in teaching as well as in Bible and theology. They will provide you with practical rules and guidelines to teaching. In the lesson helps that they provide for your use, you will find every lesson presented in such a way that in studying it, you also study the best way to teach it to your particular age group. All you need to know about teaching, therefore, is that it is important, that there are a few fundamental rules for success, and that you must follow these rules if you would succeed.

“Teachers are born, not made.” Do you believe this is true? *It isn't*. Good teachers achieve their success by study and hard work. True, some possess in a greater degree than others those traits that are desirable in a teacher, but that is only one factor in success. You have native ability to teach. Everyone has. How successful you are depends upon your desire to develop your abilities to the maximum degree.

This Is the Key to Success

“The desire to succeed” is the key to success. If a teacher considers himself a success already, he is mistaken. Whatever success he has had in the past is in the past, and he must begin each new lesson preparation with an eager anticipation that *this* lesson will be a successful lesson. Such desire will drive the teacher to extensive preparation.

Teaching is a specialized function. It has been defined as helping the pupil to learn. Someone has said, “If the pupil does not learn then you have not taught.” Applied to the Sunday school teacher, this is inadequate. Of the Sunday school teacher we must say, “If your pupil does not learn and does not live what he has learned, you have not taught.” It is not enough for your pupil to learn that God condemns stealing as a sin; you must help him build such a strong Christian character that he will refuse to steal. He will determine that honesty is to be a guiding principle in all of life.

Paul clarifies the teaching process in Colossians 1:9, 10, in which he points out the total teaching/learning experience. It begins with learning the facts (“be filled with the knowledge of his will”), proceeds to understanding the use and significance of those facts (“in all wisdom and understanding”), goes on to using that information in one’s Christian walk (“that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing”), and completes the cycle with service (“being fruitful in every good work”). Teaching is incomplete unless it includes all of these important elements.

As a sincere Christian, consecrated to the Lord’s work, you want to coach your pupils in a way that will enable them to grow as Christians, to live strong, true, Christian lives. How do you do it? There are some rules to help.

Nine Rules of Teaching

Rule No. 1 is to know what is to be taught. When you go before your class, do you know exactly what you hope to accomplish? From a full mind (you have read extensively) and a clear understanding (you have meditated and prayed much until you have come to a clear understanding of what you intend to accomplish), you are now ready (you have carefully outlined your lesson and

your purpose). This applies to all teachers, whether to toddlers or adults. The teacher must know what is to be taught before he can teach.

Rule No. 2 is to know what changes you are seeking in your pupils' behavior. Do you want them to know some facts? That is a worthwhile goal. Perhaps you want to change an attitude. That is commendable. Even more significantly, you may want the pupil to respond with some change in behavior. That is essential. But you must decide before you begin why you are teaching this lesson. What is your goal?

Rule No.3 is to gain and keep the attention of the pupil upon the lesson. Note the last three words, *upon the lesson*. To gain and keep the attention is not enough. This attention must be centered on the lesson, on what you hope to accomplish.

Rule No.4 is to use words, terms, illustrations, and methods understood in the same way by pupil and teacher. The apostle Paul has some instruction for us in this regard: "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air" (1 Corinthians 14:9). How often do you hear a speaker use an illustration that is entirely unrelated to the experience and understanding of the audience? Note how Jesus used illustrations from material at hand: the sower, the flower in the field, the barren fig tree. A good suggestion here is that the teacher try to weed out of his teaching vocabulary any terms with which the pupils are not familiar.

Rule No.5 is to lead the pupil from the known to the unknown. A good example of the use of this rule is seen when Jesus reappeared to his disciples (pupils or learners) after his resurrection. They had known him, they remembered what he had said, and they had been horrified by his death. His resurrection had found them bewildered. Read Luke 24:44-48, and note verse 45: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Perhaps then you can understand why they who had been so fearful became at once so bold that they faced death unafraid. Such a change in the character of a pupil can come only when he is led by single, easy, and natural steps from what he says he knows to what the teacher wants him to learn. As his counselor, the teacher leads the student from where he is in the Christian life to further understanding and growth.

Rule No.6 is to stimulate the pupil's own mind to action. This is easy when teaching children. Their eager minds are easily stimulated—they are almost too

ready for action! But with older pupils it is different. Most people simply do not like to think. Thinking is hard work for them. Yet, unless they can be made to think, they will not learn. If they are stimulated to thought, if they participate mentally in the lesson, they find it much more interesting. If you do not stimulate the pupil to the point that he participates in the study and applies the teachings to his own life or his own situation, you have failed.

Rule No.7 is to actively involve the pupils in the learning process. A good rule of thumb is never to tell the pupils what they can find out for themselves in the time allotted. Choose appropriate learning activities that involve the pupils.

Rule No. 8 is to require the pupil to reproduce in thought the lesson he is learning. How can you require the pupil to reproduce the lesson in thought? In Rule No. 6 we learned that the successful teacher stimulates the pupil's own mind to action. In this rule, we learn that this action of the pupil's mind must be centered about the lesson. This rule means that you are to teach the pupil so effectively that he can review the lesson afterward and tell what it means to him. He can do this, of course, only if Rule No.6 has been first obeyed, getting the pupil to think. But getting him to think is not enough. He must think about the lesson. He must be able to reproduce it in thought. In public school the teacher can tell whether he or she has obeyed Rule No.8 by giving a test, requiring the pupils to reproduce what they have learned. In Sunday school such tests are not common. The teacher's cue lies in the interest shown by the pupil and by obvious progress in his knowledge and in his behavior.

Rule No.9 is to repeat, review, and otherwise reproduce the lesson, deepening its impression with new thought, linking it with added meanings, finding new applications, correcting any false views and completing the true. The Bible tells us of God's plan for us. In our teaching we must constantly review that plan, deepening with new thought the impression it makes upon the pupil. We must link it with added meaning to the pupil as he advances in his Christian living. This will help him correct false views he may encounter along the way, and establish his understanding of the true gospel. When this is accomplished, the pupil will not only obey it fully in his own life, but will want to help carry out the Lord's assignment to all Christians; that is, to teach the gospel to everyone, everywhere in the world.

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