

Something More

Imagery and Incompletions

by Ronald G. Davis

Teachers and learners alike have much to anticipate in the study of God's Word. The most important teacher tip for any teacher may be: "Get excited, and show it!" That's always true, but it seems even more on point when dealing with a study of the resurrection or the return of Christ. What could be more exciting?

As usual, the teaching ideas need to reflect in some way the basic content. Sometimes you can reflect that content in very tangible ways. Simple objects can take on deep, emotional significance as life is lived, and waiting for completion and fulfillment creates excitement when the anticipated outcome is good.

Special Things

Through the Bible revelation, God uses simple things as "thought provokers" for his people. Imagine Noah and his sons, after the flood, seeing a rainbow without recalling the stormy days afloat on a covered, dead world and without rejoicing in God's grand promise (see Genesis 9:12-17). Imagine Peter, at the end of his life, seeing (or hearing) a rooster without remembering his dark and ugly sin of denying he knew Jesus (see Matthew 26:33-35, 69-75). Every dawn would spur Peter to say, "Never again, Lord."

Consider the significant objects in the following texts from the final week leading to the death and resurrection of Christ:

Matthew 26:1-25—A container of rich anointing perfume becomes a memorial to the woman who poured it out on Jesus' head; thirty silver coins becomes a sign of infamy forever. You can offer attendees a "squirt" of (fragrance-free—for the hypersensitive) hand lotion as they arrive, or give each one a shiny dime as he or she leaves. Either offers a relational reminder for this week's study. The lotion given as members arrive and the coin given as they

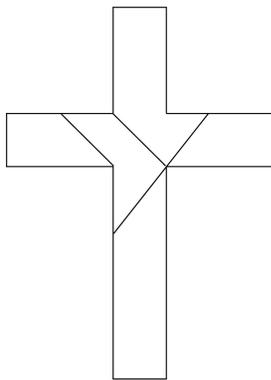
leave will represent the correct sequence of the events.

Luke 22:1-23—The simplest elements of the Passover meal take on the most profound meaning granted to any element of God’s creation: the unleavened bread is Christ’s body of death; the pure juice of the vine is Jesus’ blood poured out at Calvary for sins. Simply having a cup or tray of juice and a plate of bread present as learners arrive will immediately foreshadow the study.

Matthew 26:36-50—A sign of deepest love (a kiss) becomes a stigma of despicable treachery. Handing out a chocolate kiss (or if your class would appreciate the symbolism, a pair of candy wax lips) to each member would be a useful reminder of lesson truths.

Mark 14:53—15:15—Having all the accoutrements of judicial power does not ensure justice will be done. Few things represent the courtroom better than a judicial gavel. The sound of wood on wood has the sound of finality and authority. A judge’s robe, if one can be obtained, may carry the symbolism as well.

John 19:16-37—The cruel and unusual Roman execution technique of crucifixion yields an image worn with pride and honor by many Christians. For each learner have an envelope containing the pieces of a tangram-like puzzle made from a cut-out cross that has been further cut into three to five pieces (see sample below). Ask the group to assemble their pieces into a recognizable shape. Read 1 Corinthians 1:23, “We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” Note that to many the cross is a puzzle, but to God it is both power and wisdom.



Matthew 28—Something empty (Jesus’ tomb) fills the world for all time with endless hope. For each class member have a small, unadorned empty box. (If necessary, visit a packaging, shipping store where small [jewelry-sized] boxes can be bought inexpensively.) Put one on each seat before students arrive. Curiosity will drive many to open their boxes, discovering that they are empty.

When some moan or joke about disappointment, note that, “Some empty things terminate hope; one empty thing gives hope!”

God is the Master of the symbolic. From the mark on Cain (Genesis 4:15) to the beautiful stones of the wall of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10, 19, 20), God provides the imagery that catches the eye and fills the mind. The wise teacher will attempt to do the same.

Expecting Completion

A predictably successful way to stimulate initial thinking as learners arrive for class is simply to display a completion statement. Few can read a partial, incomplete statement without mentally finishing it.

Consider the following statements, based on the following texts:

Isaiah 56—One place where I love to go to pray is . . .

Jeremiah 7—The most unusual good-luck charm I’ve ever heard of was . . .

Mark 11—I have a hard time thinking about Jesus’ being angry because . . .

Jeremiah 23—My favorite name for Christ is . . .

John 19—When I think of how Jesus was treated up to and including his crucifixion, I . . .

Hosea 6—When it rains in the spring, I want to . . .

Luke 24—I was never more surprised than when . . .

Isaiah 53—When I think of a lamb, I . . .

If your class has available a marker board or chalkboard, displaying “pieces” of words is sure to get a learner response. Writing key words from a lesson text and then erasing top halves or bottom halves or simply “swirling” an eraser through the words will have the viewers “filling in the blanks.” (Be certain not to erase too much.) Consider some of the following words for the same lesson texts as above:

Isaiah 56—Sabbath, sacrifices, prayer.

Jeremiah 7—Den, robbers, house.

Mark 11—Temple, tables, sellers.

Jeremiah 23—Branch, king, righteous.

John 19—Pilate, purple, mocking.

Hosea 6—Return, rain, revival.

Luke 24—Stone, tomb, women.

Isaiah 53—Despised, pierced, wounds.

What’s Missing?

A similar effect can be achieved with a “What’s Missing?” activity. This can be accomplished in a verbal activity in which statements are correct, and yet

there is a key word or words missing. The challenge for the learner is to supply a missing word or words that maintain the truth of the statement in keeping with the context. Present the statements and say, “Each of these sentences is true. What word or words can be added to each that keep them true? What word or words will reflect today’s lesson text?”

For example, for 1 Thessalonians 1, one could give the following statements (offered here with possible missing word in brackets): “Before Paul preached to the Thessalonians, they were [idol] worshipers” (1:9); or “Paul told the Thessalonians he was remembering their work [of faith] and labor [of love] and endurance [of hope]” (1:3).

For 1 Thessalonians 4, you could use the following statements: “When the Lord returns from Heaven, the dead [in Christ] will rise first” (4:16); or “Christians who are alive on the earth when the Lord comes will meet him [in the air]” (4:17).

Jigsaw Puzzles

Consider writing, in large print from edge to edge, a key verse from a lesson or a key truth on a piece of poster board. Cut the poster into twelve to sixteen approximately equal pieces in a jigsaw puzzle form. Hand out the pieces randomly as members arrive. At the appropriate point in your time of study, invite those who hold pieces to come to the front and stick their pieces on the wall or board (masking tape or Plasti-Tak should work) and arrange them correctly as they do. If you have an artistic class member, you might ask her or him to draw a relevant image on poster board and do the same as with the verses/ideas.