

Standard LESSON™

Your Seven Days

Taking Advantage of All the Time Available for Lesson Preparation

by Brent C. Amato

You must teach on Sunday morning, but you've waited until Saturday night to begin preparing your lesson. Now time is short, and you're stuck on something. "I had seven days," you say to yourself. "Why did I put off preparing?" Does this sound like you?

An Issue of Stewardship

Teaching, like other activities of life, is an opportunity to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are to be good stewards of how we use the gift of teaching, as we are to be good stewards of all our spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10). Each of us will give an account to the master teacher for each lesson that we teach (2 Corinthians 5:10). When that time comes, I want to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful" (Matthew 25:21). I am sobered to know that teachers are held to a higher standard (see James 3:1).

All this makes me ponder what I will do with the time between lessons. When do I start preparing for the next Bible lesson that I am to teach? What does good stewardship say about my seven days?

An Issue of Diligence

As Timothy was urged to be diligent in his ministry (1 Timothy 4:15), we are to exercise diligence in preparing our lessons. Will we make the most of every preparation opportunity (Ephesians 5:15, 16)? Will our preparation time include diligent prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? Will our preparation include intensive study of and meditation on God's Word (Psalm 1:1, 2; 119:15)? Will we prepare so that our learners will end up with a clear understanding of the truths of the lesson (Nehemiah 8:8)? Will we prepare in such a diligent way that we will not speak hastily during the lesson (Proverbs 29:20)? What will we do with our seven days?

An Issue of Quality

We live in a culture of instant gratification and quick fixes. The quicker we get one thing done, the quicker we can move on to something else. Witness the popularity of microwave ovens and fast-food restaurants. This mind-set can leak over into our approach to lesson preparation if we're not careful.

Think about the difference. Would you rather eat a prepackaged frozen dinner that has been zapped quickly in a microwave oven or a dish that has simmered all day in a slow cooker? Aren't frozen dinners and fast food admittedly inferior, popular only because of our crowded schedules? When you gather for Thanksgiving dinner, when you have a special guest for dinner, when everything has to be "just right," what kind of meal do you serve? How much

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time goes into its preparation? Don't your learners deserve that same kind of attention as you prepare the spiritual food that you will serve on Sunday morning?

An Issue of Percolation

Starting your preparation on Sunday afternoon for the following Sunday morning's lesson results in a process I call "percolating the lesson." Starting preparation on Sunday afternoon will result in an awareness of things going on around you. Over seven days you will be watching and listening for God to drop insights, large and small. Lessons are refined and improved over time. New ideas occur; material is focused, changed, even discarded; creativity blossoms!

So Sunday afternoon is not too early to begin! You may spend only a few minutes on Sunday, just long enough to read the lesson text along with its background text and to jot down a couple of ideas that come to mind. Then take time to pray about the upcoming lesson. That is something you'll want to do each day. *If you do nothing more than pray every day about your lesson, you will improve your teaching!*

On Monday through Saturday, take a few minutes each day to add to the lesson. Research the historical background. Explore a commentary or two. Some commentaries are great with the exegesis; others are excellent devotional commentaries. Use both kinds if you can. Think about the kinds of resources you will need; plan ahead to have them available. Notice what's leading the news every night; how does your lesson text speak to the issues of the day? And pray each day about the lesson, about the students who will be participating, and about your own spiritual growth. If you find just 30-45 minutes each day, Monday through Saturday, you will have added three to more than four hours to your initial time spent on Sunday preparing for your lesson. And you didn't have to cram that into 10-2 Saturday night!

Using Ready-made Curriculum

"But I use a curriculum that does all that stuff for me!" you may protest. I don't have to do all that research and study; my lesson commentary has it all there for me already. That's a good start, but every lesson needs to become your own lesson. Here are some easy ideas for how to do that.

Begin on Sunday the same as above. During the week, be sure to read the Scriptures suggested in your lesson commentary for daily Bible reading. If you are following the Uniform Series, these readings have been carefully selected to prepare you for the upcoming lesson. Expand on what your lesson commentary has with independent research. Adapt the discussion questions and the learning activities to suit your own students and their particular situation. Pay attention to the news and connect the lesson with what's happening in real time. (Most dated curriculum is produced months—if not years—ahead of the dates the lessons are used. Making the lessons timely is on you!) And pray every day for God to use your preparation and presentation to make the impact he desires in the lives of your students.

We all know that a Saturday night or a Sunday morning sometimes "blows up" in a teacher's face because of the unexpected stuff of life. A Saturday night emergency can easily rob you of time to prepare your lesson! Starting to prepare sooner rather than later is a wonderful hedge against such challenges.

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When I come home from church each Sunday, I have three options: (1) take a nap, (2) watch sports on TV, or (3) spend a few minutes on next week's lesson. Seven days. How will I spend them?