Teaching the Bored

Part 1 in a Series of Problem Student Tips

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We are called by God to teach his people (2 Timothy 2:2, 24). Each student in your class is precious in his sight, each a gift from him. Your students are the reason for and the object of your teaching ministry. No students, no need for a teacher!

“But you don’t know some of my students!” you might say. Admit it: in a weaker moment, haven’t you contemplated how much easier, exciting, and rewarding teaching would be if you could select your own students? Haven’t you wished from time to time that certain students wouldn’t show up?

But “problem students” come with the teaching turf. In our mind’s eye, we can almost see each problem student marching into our classroom with a big sign hanging around his or her neck proclaiming one of four identities: *the bored, the barrier, the boss,* and *the bomber.* We may wish they wouldn’t come, but they must be taught!

Four Types, One Imperative

Pray for these students. Pray for them by name. Intercessory prayer is commanded frequently in the New Testament (Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Hebrews 13:18). What could happen if you started praying daily this week for them?

Pray for these students what you should pray for all your students: that the Word of God you teach will accomplish what God desires in them (Isaiah 55:11) and pierce them to the depths of their soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12). But your prayers on behalf of these students should also be as specific as possible. Pray about the cause of their problem behavior. What is causing them to be bored? Why do they feel they need so much attention? What is causing their resistance? Pray that God will deal with the issues in their lives that are creating problems. And pray that you will be sensitive to their needs ands respond appropriately.

God is in the business of redemption, and that includes students in Bible study classes. To accomplish the goal of redemption, he first must get the attention of his children! Intercessory prayer is vital for connecting these students with our awesome God, who is the antidote for all that cuts against your teaching.

One Focus, Three Strategies

For this chapter, we’ll focus on *the bored* and deal with the other three in subsequent chapters. For whatever reason, you aren’t connecting with *the bored.* It appears that they wish they were somewhere else. Although physically present, they are absent mentally, emotionally, and—most important—spiritually. Let’s consider three ways to make progress with your bored students.

*First, shift into a higher gear.* Vary your teaching methods; this will keep you out of “teaching ruts” that can fuel boredom. Your bored student may have a learning style that is different from your teaching style. Deliberately force yourself to use more variety.

Bored students typically feel Sunday school is for them. Perhaps they are there because their spouse insists on it. Or they bring their children and have “nothing better to do” during the Sunday school hour. Let your bored students know they do belong in your class. Make frequent eye contact with them. Give them special attention. Ask them questions. Ask them to do some research (“homework”) in preparation for your next class. Show that you care for them and are not bored in teaching them.

*Second, probe for passion.* Take every opportunity to engage your bored students in conversation. Cultivate a relationship with them outside the classroom. In so doing, you may discover some of their passions, which you can build into your teaching as an antidote to their boredom.

*Third, don’t beat up either “the bored” or yourself.* Once you have done what you can to improve your teaching and to engage the bored student, accept the fact that there will be some students in your class who would rather be somewhere else on a given day. The fact that some students are bored doesn’t necessarily mean that you are a bad teacher. Realizing these facts will reduce the pressure to be “the perfect teacher” and reduce your frustration toward “the imperfect student.” Keep teaching in spite of them.

I can’t wait for my next class! I hope my bored students show up. What about you?