

LESSON TWO

If you want to stir up a mountain of resistance, make a genuine push to change “the way we have always done it.” You will meet (by way of suggestion and not limitation):

- leaders who do not want to participate in training;
- preachers who do not want to be “hands on” with Bible Study;
- members who do not want their class moved;
- members who think that evangelism is the job of the staff;
- members who do not want their class “split”; and
- teachers who will not agree to a list of standards.

There is often universal resistance to the very practices that are common in churches with growing Sunday schools.

One list of “WHY SOME SUNDAY SCHOOLS DO NOT GROW” makes the following suggestions:

- A total lack of intention.
- A lack of leadership.
- An absence of skills.
- Poorly equipped leaders and teachers.
- An assumption that Sunday School is outdated or irrelevant.

Another list contained “MYTHS ABOUT SUNDAY SCHOOL GROWTH:

- We would grow if we had a better curriculum.
- We would grow if we had more staff.
- We would grow if we were more innovative.
- We would grow if we were located elsewhere.
- We would grow if we have more resources.

It is not difficult to come up with a list of “what’s wrong.” What is difficult is having the courage and the determination to do something about it. What we are engaged in this quarter is not a complete solution, but it is a foundational and essential step if we are to move in the right direction. It is not right (stated positively, it is wrong) to insist upon Bible Study attendance and pressure folks to attend if those of us who teach are not doing all that we can to make each class something special. Keep in mind that every week a teacher is occupying a substantial amount of time. For instance, 30 persons in a class of 45 minutes equals 22.5 person hours of time. How can one who loves the God of Heaven, who loves His Holy Word, and who loves those in the class do no more than reading a few pages in a “little book” and claim to be prepared to teach? I picked up one of the “little books” used here. It had the prerequisite 13 lessons. Obviously the author did not take into account that, like us, a congregation may lose at least one class per quarter where continuity and full coverage are not considered as important as a guest speaker. (That may well be true when the “little book – one quarter per class” rules the day. Of course, if more time were given to study a book of the Bible it would make no difference.) It had 128 pages with 15 of them dedicated to matters other than the lessons. Divide the remaining 113 pages by 13 and each lesson averages roughly 8.7 pages per class. If all pages are

crammed into 12 classes it averages roughly 9.4 pages. Preparation? Doing the best we can? Striving to build up the faith and contribute to the spiritual growth of the class? Providing something other than pabulum? Hardly.

Hopefully and prayerfully, this class will help us take a step forward.

What is Teaching

Cecil May, Dean of the V. P. Black School of Bible at Faulkner University wrote:

An old saw says, “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.” Then someone asked, “What about those who can’t teach?” The answer given was, “They teach teachers.

As a longtime teacher of preachers, I reject that characterization.

An altogether different view is reflected in this quotation:

Years ago, after a celebrated international career on the stage, the world-famous violinist Jascha Heifetz became a Professor of Music at UCLA. When someone asked him why he had left the glamour of performing to become a teacher, Heifetz answered, ‘Violin playing is a perishable art. It must be passed on; otherwise it is lost.’

Then he went on to say,

‘I remember my old violin professor in Russia. He said if I worked hard enough, someday I would be good enough to teach.’

Preaching and Bible teaching are also “perishable arts.” That is not to say no one can learn them primarily on their own; some obviously have. But there are those who do them well, those who do them better, and those who do them superbly. All of us can learn from each other, and those with the greatest knowledge and skills are the best from whom to learn. Better yet if they have successful ministry experience behind them!

In Christ’s kingdom it is the local church, led by its elders and preachers, where the work of Christ is primarily done. To be able to teach preachers is a wonderful place of service, a valuable talent and a useful skill. We who do that are blessed beyond measure to have that privilege. But our work has value only to the extent that the students we teach perform their work well in local churches in their respective communities.

Two tasks of the teachers or preachers are to ensure they know the Word and they have the ability to continue to grow in knowledge and the practice of righteousness.

‘I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth’ (3 John 1:4).

How is “teaching” defined? Our English word derives from the Old English *tācan*, and is related to Old Saxon *tēkan*, which meant “to show how to do.” “Teach” in the New Testament is the translation of “διδάσκω.” Thayer defines it as “*to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses.*” Louw & Nida define it as “to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting — ‘to teach, teaching.’” “Teach” and its variants are important words in the New Testament as shown in this table:

WORD	NUMBER OF TIMES USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
teach	105
teacher	57
teachers	13
teaches	13
teaching	89
teachings	3

In the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as a teacher more than by any other title. Teaching was more common than preaching in the early church. While John the Baptist was a preacher, Christ was a teacher. Sixty out of ninety times that Jesus was addressed, He was called “teacher.” And He commissioned His followers to teach as well as to preach (Matt. 28:19–20). While the words for “preaching” are found about 150 times in Scripture, those for “teaching” are mentioned about 250 times. The early church saw the vital importance of continually teaching its members from the Word of God. The Greek word most often given to Christ, as an educational title, is *didaskalos*. This word is translated “teacher” or “master” and is found more than forty times in the Gospels. Most frequently in the King James Version of the Bible, *didaskalos* is translated “master” rather than “teacher” because at the time of translation the word *master* was understood to mean “schoolmaster.”

- Jesus’ disciples referred to Him as teacher or master (Mark 4:38).
- The scribes and Pharisees referred to Him in this way (John 3:2).
- Jesus identified Himself by the term (Mark 14:14).

Other Bible passages also point out the priority of teaching in the ministry of Christ (Matt. 4:23; 5:2; 7:29).

Rabbi is another title associated with the word *teacher* and is used to refer to Christ. This word is also sometimes translated “master” and, as a Jewish title, designated one as able to teach with the authority of Moses, possessing authority to interpret the law. Nicodemus and the disciples of John the Baptist called Jesus “Rabbi” (John 1:38; 3:2).

Rabboni (John 20:16), a similar but even more intensively educational and relational title, was used by Mary Magdalene when He appeared to her after the Resurrection.

Christ taught in a variety of situations: *one-on-one* teaching (personal interaction, John 4:1–42); *small group* learning (the disciples alone with Christ, Luke 22:14–38); *large groups* of people (the multitudes heard Him, Matt. 23:1–39). Believers today are responsible to continue the Lord’s teaching ministry in all situations. The fourth part of the great commission given to the disciples is “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). This is the most unglamorous and the most neglected part of the commission. This part of the commission will not fit into adding machines. It is difficult to put this part of the commission into statistical reports. We can report how many people have been baptized and how many have placed membership, but it is

difficult to report the results of Bible Study in terms of statistics. And if a ministry cannot be reported in statistics, many congregations neglect it. It is hard to boast without statistics, leading some to conclude that if you can't count it, it is "no count." Furthermore, the disinterest in teaching is also seen in the fact that teaching is generally a thankless task. It involves a great deal of work and with few people being interested in being taught, not many folk want to get involved in the task of teaching.