

LESSON FIVE

Tools For The Teacher

Years ago I decided that I could do a lot of things I had never done before if I just had the proper tool tools. It was probably made partly in desperation because I had absolutely no experience in what I was about to undertake and I had no exposure to any experience on the part of any of my greater family – certainly not from my father. That is not to disparage my father – he was one of the best men I ever knew. In fact, he was the best man I ever knew. My mother believed to his dying day that his cutting grass for widows in the Texas summer heat contributed to his death just six months short of their 50th anniversary. On the other hand, he hardly knew which end of the hammer to hold. On one occasion while my mother was visiting in Houston, my father decided to fix the light over the kitchen sink. When mother returned, he proudly displayed his successful venture into the realm of home repair. Mother was pleased, but she asked him if he had remembered to turn off the electricity before he began. His sheepish look told her that his success had been a shocking experience.

With that background let me get back to my story. We were living in Lubbock and after we had been there a while decided that we needed another bedroom. We couldn't afford to add on to the house or pay a professional

to do what we had decided to do – convert half of our attached garage into a bedroom. Off I went to the hardware store (Home Depot and Lowes did not exist.) and came home with power saws and power drills and hammers and screwdrivers and anything else that I could imagine I might need. The lumber was ordered. The work was done. It was Eric’s room until we moved. By the time we moved to Houston I had enough courage to convert half of our garage into a playroom with air conditioning. I actually wired the entire operation, tied it into the main power box, and did not get shocked. Of course, by that time I had a woodworking shop in the other half. Jessalyn still has a piece of furniture I made, including making the decorative trim. Now all of that has been long gone, but it did prove to me that I can do a lot of things if I am willing to buy the equipment, acquire instruction books on “how to,” obtain the proper tools, and “have at it.” I still stand amazed in the presence of some of the things that I can do around the house.

I have said all of that to say this – To be able to teach Bible Study you must have the correct tools. One could have the best of attitudes, the best of intentions, and an undying love for Christ and His Word, but absent the proper tools and the proper amount and types of tools will never be able to succeed as a teacher of the Bible.

That may sound harsh, but would you take your car to a mechanic who had only one wrench? Would you pay full tuition to enroll your child in a university where the freshmen were taught by the sophomores who had read the book once and sat through the course? Would you go to a doctor who had no equipment in his office but a stethoscope? In you would do none of these things, then why would you consider yourself to have sufficient tools to teach a Bible Study class when you have only one little book beyond the Bible? True, the Bible is the basic tool and it is the final authority, but the well rounded, efficient teacher will obtain other helpful books that will broaden knowledge, deepen understanding, and better equip the teacher to apply the eternal Word to an ever changing and increasingly complex society. Churches should be building a good library for their teachers and members, but the teacher should be building a personal library at home.

Why then do teachers not have more tools?

- They are expensive.
- Members of the church do not write them.
- They may contain error and I might not be able to recognize it and respond to it.

- I don't have the time to read a bunch of books in class preparation.

Whoever wrote the little book has already done the research and saved me the time.

- I have access to the church library and it even has a computer Bible program.

There is just enough validity to some of these objections to deceive us into believing that we can succeed as a one-tool mechanic or a stethoscope-only doctor.

What then shall we say? It is true that religious libraries can be expensive. Mine has cost thousands of dollars and it is still growing. However, I have learned to keep the cost as low as possible. A number of years ago I learned of *Christian Book Distributors* (CBD). It has great discounts on books. For example, a set of *The Pulpit Commentary* that they claim retails for \$1,000 is priced in the August-September Members Newsletter (Catalog) at \$179.99 (\$169.99 for members. The last time I signed up for membership it was \$5.00 annually. Other examples: *History of the Jewish People in the time of Jesus Christ* (5 vols., 29.99 [27.99]); *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, Updated Edition (10 vols., Member price \$69.99). You can also order online at Christianbook.com and by phone, 1-800-CHRISTIAN.

Members of the church wrote none of the books mentioned above. Thus teachers must be on constant alert to be certain that what they use from the books is scriptural. The problem comes when the one using a book does not have sufficient biblical grounding to recognize error when it appears. The obvious solution is that inability to recognize error disqualifies one from teaching. Additionally, even books written by members of the Lord's body can contain error. One's guard cannot be let down just because the author is a member of the church of Christ. Many do not know that Alexander Campbell was a post-millennialist. He published a paper called *The Millennial Harbinger*, but one who refuses to read his writings for that reason makes a huge mistake. The only real solution is for teachers to have a fundamental knowledge of the Bible's teaching because one who refuses to use other sources is robbing both himself and the class members. One who thinks he can learn nothing from the writings of others is arrogant beyond belief. The same can be said of those who believe that they can learn nothing from books written by brethren. More than a few who have gone off to theological schools have become so impressed by human wisdom that they have abandoned the wisdom of God. It may be that they were never rooted and grounded either in love or in the Word. It is more likely that they just did not want to appear unintelligent to those who impressed them with

worldly wisdom. They made the mistake of thinking that because they did not know the answer (and probably did not search for the answer), that there was no answer.

Time is precious and it must be prioritized since no one has time to do everything. How do you find time to read and absorb all of this material and organize it for class? The temptation is to let someone else do the work.

The author of the little book has already read the books and taken the time to write out the lesson. I have time to read it and retype it so that it looks like my work product. You need to ask yourself some questions. 1) Was it

prepared with your class in mind so that it could be applied to them and their lives? No. A microwaved frozen dinner can never replace a good

homemade meal. 2) Is your class worth the time and trouble that it takes to do it right? If not, do you really think you ought to be teaching? 3) Don't

you always have time to do something that you really want to do? Most certainly. If you answered "no," you deceived yourself. You may shout,

"That's not true. I went to work when I wanted to play golf." That may be a

true statement, but what you are saying is that your job and the support of your family meant more to you than a round of golf. In other words, you

prioritized your wants and obligations and golf did not come out at the top of the list. I know that's true. When Millie and I went to Ireland for our 50th

Anniversary I really wanted to play some of their golf courses. I actually thought about it, but never mentioned it to Millie. Fortunately for me, I married the right girl and one day, without even a hint from me, she said, “You can take your golf clubs if you want to.” As much as I wanted to and as much as I would have loved it, it didn’t take me long to prioritize. In fact, I had already done so before the offer. This was our time together, and my being on the golf course would not contribute to that purpose. More than playing Ballybunion (one of Ireland’s finest courses), I wanted a 51st Anniversary. (By the way, it worked and on September 3rd we had our 56th Anniversary!!!! You may want to express your sympathy to her.) This is a long way to say that we always have time or make time to do that which we really want to do. This is a good time to remember the qualities of a good teacher. Failure to make the time to properly prepare the lesson is a disqualification.

Finally, access to the church library is good if it has a sufficient number of the right books. Our library has not been sufficiently cared for since Dick Huddleston’s death. Even if that were not the case, a church library can never replace a personal library that is always at hand. Time is lost driving back and forth to the building, not to mention that when you arrive you find that the books you want have already been checked out and

somebody failed to fill out the card telling you who it was. The computer program cannot be taken home. Moreover, the nature of the few resources it has are useless for class preparation. While the library has some good materials, it is not of much use to a teacher who is working and who doesn't have a key to the building, much less to the offices where the library is. Of course, the books can be checked out for only two weeks at a time, although an exception would likely be made for teachers. Of course, that would take the books out of the library if a member of the class wanted to study for class. Bottom line is that there is no substitute for a home library of good resources to use in preparation of lessons.