

LESSON ELEVEN

PREPARATION OF THE LESSON, cont'd

CREATING THE TEACHER'S FILES

First, the teacher is always ready to record the product of the creative spark. He may carry a small notebook, a 3x5 card, a small recorder, or a smart phone, but whatever device he chooses, he doesn't let a moment pass before he records the thought, perhaps adding other thoughts when he can. Then, without fail, the lesson idea finds its way into a filing system where it awaits its selection. A filing system not only preserves ideas that would otherwise be forgotten, it provides time for ideas to mature and grow. The filing system may range from a loosely organized alphabetized-by-subject filing of the 3x5 cards or others scraps of paper on which thoughts have been hastily scribbled, to a sophisticated computer data base, but the important factor is that there is some system of meaningful recall that makes the information useful.

Second, the teacher plans his lessons in advance. The pressure of the last minute strangles creation. Last minute preparation is no more likely to produce well balanced nutritional lessons than a housewife can produce well balanced nutritional meals by going into the pantry at 5:30 and staring blankly at its contents trying to find something that she can have on the table by 6:00. Last minute preparation is most apt to wind up feeding those who are hungering after righteousness with spiritual junk food! Advance planning eliminates the arduous time spent searching for a subject. It reduces the likelihood of teaching on the same subject. Late preparation gives birth to repetition because it is easier for the teacher to deal with his pet peeve or favorite subject than with what the class needs to hear. It has been said that a businessman who fails to plan plans to fail. Is it any different for the teacher?

Third, advance planning provides time for the lesson to ripen and mature. Events observed, papers, magazines, and books read provide information and illustrations that enliven a lesson just as spices enliven a gourmet dish. The observant teacher will find more material accidentally while the lesson is "in the oven" than he will on purpose when time is short and preparation is forced. Thus, he will be less likely to regurgitate stale thoughts from old lessons or lesson outline books.

Fourth, advance planning provides time for the teacher to carefully consider his approach to his subject. Is his approach designed to demonstrate his cleverness or to help his hearers? The greatness of a lesson comes not from the cleverness of the idea behind it, but from its ability to “strengthen . . . the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees” (Isa. 35:3) of the hearers.

Finally, advance planning enables the teacher to announce his subjects in advance. Knowing the subjects enables the class to be alert to comments, questions and needs of neighbors and to invite their neighbors when the lesson subject and the neighbor’s interests coincide.

Sunday is over; the lesson has been taught; there’s no time for rest; it’s time to begin again. What shall I teach on next Sunday? No problem. I’ve been planning it for weeks.

MATERIAL GATHERED, HOW DO YOU PROCEED?

Let’s assume that the curriculum has been determined, the subject or Bible book has been assigned, and it is time to begin preparation. The first task is to prepare the curriculum.

Curriculum is important. It includes determining the aims and goals of the teacher, the materials to be used, how to approach the material in a manner that will “fit” the lives of the class members, the emphasis to be put on which parts of the material to be covered, and other related issues.

QUESTIONS¹ TO ASK AS YOU PREPARE TO TEACH A LESSON

1. What does the scripture passage say? Reduce it to a single sentence and put it in your own words.
2. What are the present conditions (world, locally, the church, and the class) to which this lesson might apply?

¹ This list of questions is illustrative, not exhaustive.

3. What are the needs of my class that might be met through this lesson, and how can I make them conscious of their needs?
4. What is to be the specific aim (or aims) of this lesson? Aims must be determined in terms of pupil needs and stated in terms of pupil changes.
 - a. Develop a consciousness of the presence of God, and of our accountability to Him.
 - b. Instill deep and abounding faith in Jesus and His mission.
 - c. Foster an appreciation of the desires of God being for our good.
 - d. Promote a desire to participate actively in the work of the church.
 - e. Encourage the formation of a pattern of behavior that will grant true happiness.

Notice that teaching them God's word is not in the list. God's word must always be the tool used to accomplish the aim. If God's word is not taught not a single one of the listed aims can be achieved.
5. What main points shall I emphasize? These will be largely determined by the answers to the first four questions.
6. How shall I reinforce and illustrate each of these points?
7. What issues shall I raise for class discussion and at what points in the lesson?

Once these and other questions have been answered, the method of the lesson must be determined. While this indirectly deals with the presentation

of the lesson, it is considered as part of the preparation of the lesson since it is a decision that must be made prior to the physical presentation. There are at least 6 methods of presentation. Other names may be used to describe them, but every class has a mode of presentation. If it is not determined in advance and its execution made a part of the preparation, the method will always be number one.

1. HAPHAZARD. The teacher determines the mode in class while the lesson is being taught. It results from no planning, insufficient planning, the incompetence of the teacher, or the indifference of the teacher.

2. FORMAL. Using acrostics is an example. The lesson is organized around central points that use a series of words with the same initial letter. Formal modes should be used with care. They are predetermined molds that content may not fit without stretching or compressing. It is easy for such formality to give no heed to the needs of the class. It can be more concerned with imposing subject matter while ignoring opportunities to create initiatives on the part of the class or to help the class develop thinking.

3. CHRONOLOGICAL. The point of emphasis may be content, not method. On the other hand, this method may be demanded when the order of events, the relationship between them, the manner in which some grow out of others is important to understand. It can be enlarged on by illustration and application. Relations of events remote in time cannot be made clear even to adults without special effort of the part of teachers.

4. LOGICAL. The content is fitted together in the way best suited to logical interrelationships. It is perhaps best used when the class is already familiar with the content. This vision of the total cannot be seen by one entering areas that are new to him. The general and the abstract have no meaning except in terms of the particular and the concrete.

5. PSYCHOLOGICAL. Follow the order determined by the way in which the pupil learns most easily and naturally. It means that the content must be 1) adapted to the learner's experience and ability, 2) appeal strongly to the learner's interests, and 3) be related to the learner's present life and conduct.

6. SOCRATIC. The Socratic method contains many of the attributes of all of these. It is the method mostly used in law school. It is based on questions and answers with the questions being asked by the teacher. When the student gives an answer, the teacher challenges the answer with another question that is designed to lead the student to the correct answer. The

system not only teaches the law, but just as importantly, it teaches the student how to think logically about and through the law. It is perhaps the most difficult method for the teacher because it requires forethought about the questions that will be asked and the responses that will be given. Additionally, it is not a method that can be neatly packaged into three or six months. Often the teacher's purpose is not to cover all of the material. The purpose is to teach the student to think about the particular area of the law. I still recall the property course I had in the first year of law school. Most first year classes lasted the entire nine months of the school year and the grade was determined by one test at the end of the year. The book for the course was some 950 pages long. The professor covered only about 50 pages in the first 8^{1/2} months. The last 900 were covered in two weeks and the announcement was made that the examination would cover the entire book! I used this method to teach the book of Job and it took a little over a year to teach it. The class learned the content of Job, the meaning of the content, and the application of the content. Just as important, they learned something about how to think their way through the Bible in their private study. This result is not accomplished by asking questions such as, "What is the name of the sweet singer of Israel," or "In what city was Jesus born," or "Where is Mars Hill." Class participation is not filling in the blanks in questions, the answers to which most have known since childhood. Such questions teach nothing either about the Bible or how to think about the Bible. At best they are a test of long-term memory. At worst they are a waste of precious time.

This method enables the teacher to keep the class on the subject, assuming the teacher has and maintains control of the class. There are some who always want to bring up questions or give answers that are not relevant to the subject under discussion and hinder accomplishing the purpose of the class. In fact, they may bring up subjects that the teacher considered and purposely excluded because they did in fact distract from what the teacher was trying to accomplish. When that happens the teacher's answer can draw the wanderer back into the fold. A prepared teacher should never let the control of the class slip away by entertaining irrelevant matters to take precious time away from the lesson at hand. That is not to say that the teacher covers every aspect of every subject of every class. It is to say that the teacher knows what he is trying to accomplish and side-trips, mostly by one who has made no preparation for the class and who certainly does not know the teacher's purpose, most often take things off course. Keep in mind that there is a limitation of time and that not everything can be or needs to be covered to reach the desired goal.

The teacher must use the method that is most comfortable. A teacher who tries to copy a “favorite teacher” will at best be unnatural. The teacher must always be himself. Failure to do so is soon recognized by the class and the class may conclude that the teacher is a fake. More about that in the next lesson that will deal with the presentation of that which has been prepared.