
Tips for Better Bible Teaching

By Gordon Kainer

It has been said that Michelangelo, when asked what method he used for sculpturing Moses, replied, "It's quite simple. You just take a chunk of marble and chop away everything that doesn't look like Moses." Of course, chopping away "everything that doesn't look like Moses" presupposes that one has a correct idea of what Moses may have looked like.

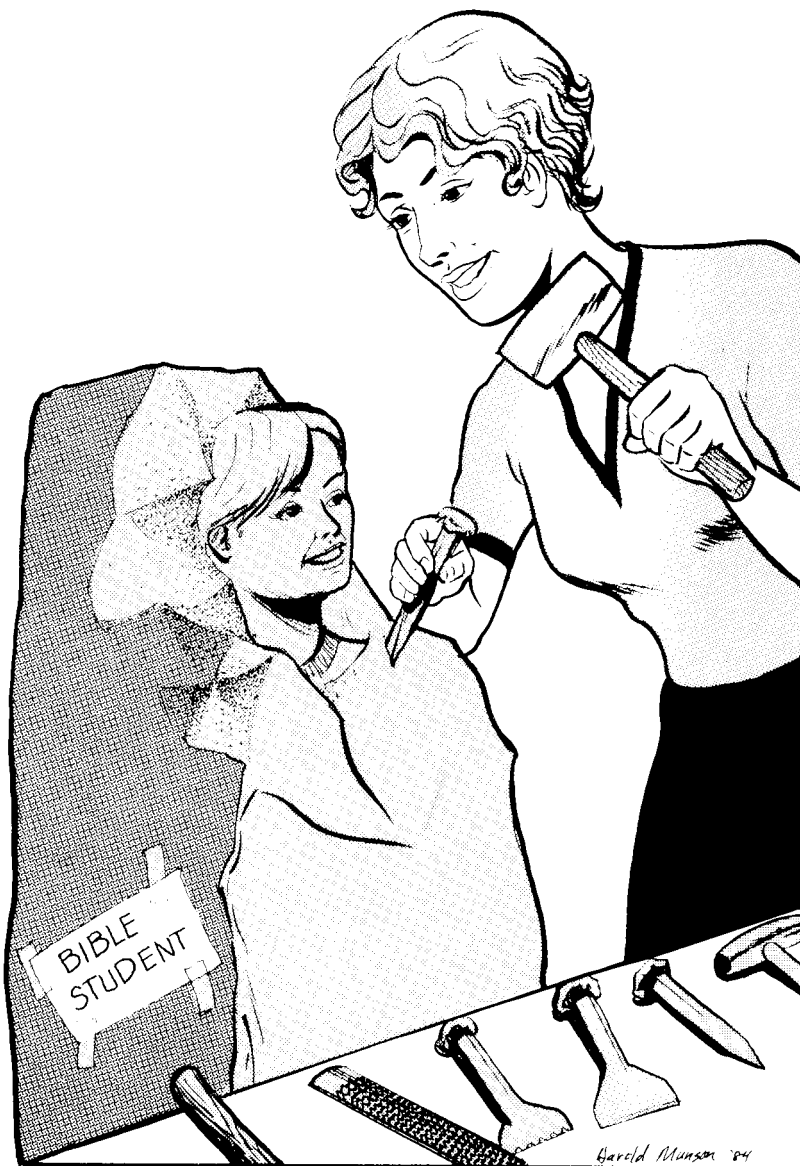
Bible Teacher
Loma Linda Academy
Loma Linda, California

This rather unpretentious response by the renowned sculptor points out an important principle in Bible teaching. A good teacher will always be in the "hewing process" and what he adds, deletes, or changes is not only determined by practical experiences but also by his views of what constitutes the model or pattern. Chopping away life-long habits, discarding familiar lesson plans, or exchanging traditional methods for something new and innovative can be very exciting for some, while rather

painful for others. Undoubtedly, the ones who suffer the most anguish are those who surmise that successful teaching is the result of quick and easy schemes and solutions. God's Word, however, does offer some simple guidelines for effective Bible teaching. In this article I have chosen to focus on three of them.

Recognize Opportunities

The one thing that made Jesus such an effective teacher was His ability to recognize and take



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advantage of opportunities to communicate love and truth in whatever circumstances He found Himself. His desire to be of service *when needed* is clearly portrayed in the gospels. His declaration, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Matt. 20:28), was not geared to certain prescribed hours or a particular schedule. Christ's most rewarding experiences and His most teachable moments did not occur in formal situations but in casual mingling with people.

One of Christ's most beautiful discourses regarding the gift of eternal life was spoken to a woman at a country well. His parables were often spoken to the guests at a social gathering or while eating a meal with His friends. Some of His most stirring messages were given while visiting in someone's home, sitting in a boat, or walking through a grainfield or down some village street. Jesus was a master at using real-life situations as a primary teaching tool.

Make Students Feel Important

The kind of relationships and encounters teachers have outside the classroom will determine to a great degree the success they have within the classroom. Since students often come for help at inconvenient times and at unexpected places, it is imperative that teachers be attentive and responsive to their needs. When they come to you, stop whatever you are doing and look them directly in the eyes. Give them your undivided attention. To say, "Go ahead. I can still hear you while I'm correcting these papers," is *never* acceptable. Make it obvious that what they are saying to you is important. Christ's example makes it very clear that many of the greatest blessings in the teaching ministry occur during interrup-

tions rather than in the course of formal instruction.

Asking Questions

One of the most effective methods of teaching is the careful and discriminating use of questions. Asking questions is a dynamic technique that stimulates pupils to actively engage in the learning process. One author has stated that the skillful question is half of knowledge.

A close examination of the gospels reveals numerous occasions when Jesus began a discussion, introduced a parable, or started a private conversation with a question. When He was confronted with a difficult issue or a personal problem, He usually did not reply with an eloquent answer, but instead involved the person in discovering his own solution by asking a question. The gospels record more than 100 questions asked by Jesus. "Did you read what David did?" "Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to to good?" "Who can forgive sins?" "Who is the greatest?" Through the use of questions Jesus sought to lead His hearers into a teachable frame of mind.

It might be profitable for the Bible teacher to spend more time devising questions, rather than simply preparing right answers. Questions should be designed not merely to create an atmosphere of doubt, but should direct the student in the process of discovering possible answers or solving a particular problem.

Questions can fulfill a large number of important objectives. For example, they can do the following:

1. Ignite the student's imagination. "What would happen if we would . . ."
2. Clarify what the student has said. "Could you give me an exam-

ple of what you just said?"

3. Determine the consequences of what the student has said. "If we did what you suggested, what would happen?"

4. Discover the purpose for the student's action or statement. "What are you trying to accomplish when you . . .?"

5. Trace the origin of an idea. "Where do you think that idea got started?"

6. Apply the student's belief or statement. "What happens if a person believes or does that?"

7. Discern the worthwhileness of what the student has suggested. "Why do you think it will work?"

8. Point out the limitations of what has been expressed. "Would your idea still apply if . . .?"

9. Uncover more data relative to the student's belief. "Could you explain more fully what you mean?"

10. Evaluate alternatives rejected by the student. "Why did you reject the other viewpoint?"

11. Check for inconsistencies. "Does this agree with what you said about . . .?"

12. Pinpoint the basis for the idea or conclusion. "How did you arrive at that conclusion?"

13. Challenge the continuing validity of the student's idea. "Do you think what you have heard is always true?"

14. Ascertain what factors were involved in the student's acceptance of the idea. "What was it that made you think or believe that way?"

15. Seek for the length of time an idea has been held. "How long have you felt this way?"

Lead Students to Think

We have been counseled that "teachers should lead students to think, and . . . inquiry must be awakened" (*Testimonies for the*
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mary purpose is to bring your students closer to God. As a teacher, you have the wonderful privilege of equating the joy of activity with the joy that comes from knowing and loving our wonderful Creator. With God's help, lead and encourage your students to accept the challenge of becoming physically educated. []

Guidelines for Parent-Teacher Conferences

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that the teacher is always aware that he or she is responsible for seeing that the conference moves toward some specific goal.⁸ A teacher may do very little of the talking, but it is important that he or she remember to move the topic of the conversation back to the main purpose without appearing to be rushing the conference.

Conclusion

A successful conclusion to a conference is essential, or the entire process will be another frustrating experience for both the teacher and the parent. If a teacher has good listening skills, he or she has been providing feedback to the parent during the course of the conference, and this will make the conference conclusion easier for both the parent and the teacher. "The sandwich technique" can be helpful in ending a conference on a positive note. A teacher brings up the student's deficiencies and problems only after praising the student at the beginning of the conference, and then points out some other praiseworthy attributes of the student near the end of the conference. The important point to remember is that, to be effective, this approach must be handled tactfully and sincerely.⁹ The conclusion culminates the meeting,

with the teacher pinpointing major areas of discussion and outlining mutually agreed actions which will follow the meeting.

Each of the guidelines for a teacher-parent conference complements the other. Conducting a conference is an art form, and a teacher who practices these guidelines will be able to enhance his or her ability to conduct a conference. Through practice will come assurance that teacher-parent conferences will become less painful and much more profitable for parent, students, and teachers. It is worth the effort. The gains in psychic satisfaction may prove to be immeasurable. []

FOOTNOTES

¹ Gertrude McPherson, *Small Town Teacher* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 130.

² Mary E. Bredemeir and Harry C. Bredemeir, *Social Forces in Education* (Sherman Oaks, Calif.: Alfred Publishers Co., Inc., 1978), pp. 276-277.

³ N. Miller and P. Zimbardo, "Motives for Fear-Induced Affiliation: Emotional Comparison or Interpersonal Similarity?" *Journal of Personality* 34 (1966):481-503.

⁴ John Kord Lagemann, "The Delicate Art of Asking Questions," in *Word Power* ed. Editors of *Reader's Digest* (New York: Berkley Books, 1980), pp. 157-158.

⁵ Ron Zembe, "Picture This: Using Mental Imagery to Enhance Learning," *Training*.

⁶ Timothy C. Brock, "Communicator-Recipient Similarity and Decision Change," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (June, 1965), pp. 650-654.

⁷ Lon Albee, *Job Hunting After Forty* (New York: Arco Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 76-77.

⁸ Charles R. Gruner, Cal M. Logue, Dwight L. Freshley, and Richard C. Huseman, *Speech Communication in Society* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1972), pp. 270-271.

⁹ Howard Bloomethal, *Promoting Your Cause* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1974), p. 25.

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Church, vol. 6, p. 154). Every effort should be made to ask questions that reflect all cognitive levels

and are adapted to the individual differences and needs of the class. Questions should be chosen keeping in mind the various levels of spiritual maturity of the students. Questions can be designed with specific students in mind but directed toward others. Sufficient time should be allowed for the students to think through their answers. Surveys indicate that most teachers allow, on the average, less than one second before requiring an answer. Practice waiting at least five seconds before you call for a response or answer your own question.

System and Order

The Bible teacher can feel assured that he or she need never be alone in the process of communicating God's Word in the classroom. God has made available the Holy Spirit, apart from which there can be no true understanding or effective sharing of spiritual truths. However, Christ's declaration that the Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things" and "guide you into all truth" (John 14:26; 16:13) is a *conditional* promise. The presence and work of the divine Teacher can be hindered or limited by the attitude of the teacher, his or her methods of teaching, as well as classroom conditions, atmosphere, and decorum.

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul discusses the issue of spiritual gifts, and in conclusion, identifies the kind of environment that must be provided in order for the Holy Spirit to operate most efficiently. Note the apostle's words: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

In describing God's organization of the camp of Israel, Ellen White states:

God is a God of order. Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and thorough discipline mark the

movements of the angelic host. Success can only attend order and harmonious action. God requires order and system in His work now no less than in the days of Israel. All who are working for Him are to labor intelligently, not in a careless, haphazard manner. He would have His work done with faith and exactness, that He may place the seal of His approval upon it.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 376.

Again she admonishes, "Order is heaven's first law" (*Counsels on Health*, p. 101). For many a teacher, however, it is his or her first and greatest failure. Teachers need to organize and list their major goals, tasks, and responsibilities at the start of each school term. Specific deadlines should be indicated and placed on a planning calendar. At the beginning of each week, the teacher should review and update the calendar and make a more detailed list of appointments and deadlines for that week. Priorities should be established for each day, with the most important items completed first.

Sources for Materials

Bible teachers are always in need of new and better teaching aids and resource materials. Here are some sources of materials that I have found very helpful in my teaching ministry.

The Daily Walk
Walk Thru the Bible
Ministries
Box 80587
Atlanta, Georgia 30366

The *Daily Walk* is a program for reading the Bible through in one year. For the subscription price of \$15 a year, you will receive a monthly copy of the *Daily Walk* reading guide. This attractive booklet contains devotional thoughts, historical background, Biblical insights, thought-provoking quotations, and chapter summaries for each day's reading. This is an excellent program for daily Bible study and devotions, as well as Biblical background and spiri-

tual insights.

Dawson McAllister Youth Manuals
Roper Press, Inc.
915 Dragon
Dallas, Texas 75207

This company offers a wide variety of Bible study aids and resources. Their *Discussion Manual for Student Relationships*, volumes 1-3 and the *Discussion Manual for Student Discipleship*, volumes 1 and 2, are very good for both elementary and secondary students. Teacher manuals and 78 overhead transparencies are also available. Student manuals cost \$7.95; teacher manuals \$5.95, and a set of transparencies costs \$39.95.

Mutual Aids
1953½ Hillhurst Ave.
Los Angeles, California 90027

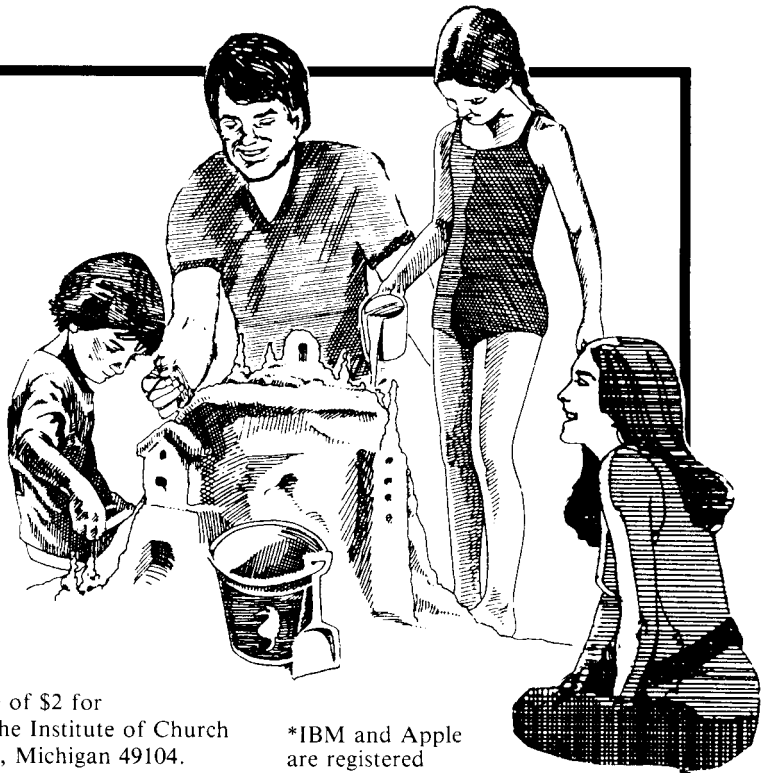
This company is a good source of bulletin board materials. They offer a wide variety of precut letters at reasonable prices. Ask for a copy of their catalog.

Building for the Future

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We know it, too. That's why Renaissance Software Products developed BIBLE WORD GAMES, a refreshing way to reinforce over 400 Bible names and places. BIBLE WORD GAMES is a set of four computer games (Bible Memory, Bible Word Challenge, Bible Anagrams, and Bible Search) with three levels of difficulty. Ideal for educational or home use.

The BIBLE WORD GAMES software is available on diskette for IBM* and Apple.* The IBM version can be used with monochrome or color monitors and costs \$29.95. The Apple version is \$22.95. There is a charge of \$2 for shipping and handling. You may order from the Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104. Please include payment with your order.



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Alt Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 400
Green Bay, Wisconsin 54305

This company offers Bible study aids and Bible crossword puzzles. □

Turning a School Around

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They have to face the constituency every day. With a boarding school it's different. The people are 'out there.' The board members are not as immediately accountable."

Restructuring the Principal's Duties

The most significant change in staffing came with a reorganization of the relationship between the academy and the elementary school. For many years the elementary school had been governed by its own principal. Acting on the advice of union and conference educational directors, the board asked Aastrup to assume direct responsibility for the elementary school in addition to running the academy and keeping the whole operation solvent.

The strain was too much, and during that first tense summer he offered his resignation. The board, however, was determined to keep him and persuaded him to stay with an offer that was to significantly change the course of financial management and the role of the principal at the school. By establishing a separate finance committee, they relieved him of all direct responsibility for bill collections and the major financial operation of the school.

Aastrup believes that the new organizational structure should become a pattern for Adventist education. "The concept that the principal is also the business manager is dead," he says flatly. He notes that while there had always been a finance committee

on the board, it operated on the basic assumption that the buck stopped at the principal's desk. Now the buck stops at the committee table instead.

The men at that committee table are: James Segar, chairman of the business administration department at Atlantic Union College; Ariel Schmidt, owner and manager of Atlantic Graphics Press; Aastrup, the principal; and Clark, who became school-board chairman in the summer of 1981 after the major reorganization was accomplished. Together they collect all accounts, validate semester exam permits, approve all special payment plans and make all major financial recommendations to the board. Day-to-day business matters are handled by an accountant at the school.

The arrangement has worked remarkably well. Pastor Osborne, never one to mince words, says bluntly: "What made this work is that the board actually turned it over to businessmen to operate. Our church is run in many cases by 'bleeding heart ministers,' and I'm as soft as the rest of them. I know nothing about business. Just because someone is a wonderful, godly person doesn't mean the church isn't going to go in the hole."

Getting Tough on Tuition Collection

The committee assumed authority at the beginning of the 1981-1982 school year, and immediately adopted a simple but firm policy expecting prompt payment of school accounts. "The first semester was really tough," says Clark. "People didn't believe we would stick to our guns. We reaffirmed the standard policy that no student could take semester exams while owing a back bill. Nobody believed us." At least, not at first. How-

ever, during a three-day period at the close of the semester the school collected \$106,000.

The money came in, according to board members, because the constituents had confidence that the new, streamlined program was strong and workable. Says one: "Parents believed in the quality of the education their children were receiving. They believed the product was worth paying for."

"As a church we have not educated the people to see that paying tuition is a priority item in their budgets," says Clark. "Our committee has taken the position, with very little flexibility, that any person who can pay *must* pay. The school is not and cannot be the financier. That is not our function, and we do not have that capacity. What we are saying is that if you can afford a new snowmobile you can afford tuition, and tuition comes first."

Osborne sings a similar tune: "People came to the school wringing their hands saying, 'We had to pay the doctor and we have to pay the electric company.' And we said, 'Yes, and you have to pay us too.' It's incredible to me that people think church institutions are somehow different than any other commitment for which they have given their word."

When any student's account gets more than 30 days behind, the family is contacted by letter. If there is no progress, one of the finance committee members visits the family in person. If no satisfactory arrangement is made, the student will be dropped.

Helping Students With Finances

It sounds tough—hard-nosed—and committee members readily acknowledge that it is. However, they also note that in the three years of this strong policy only four students have been dropped