

TEACHING TEENAGERS

Matthew 13:1-3.

- A. The best way for any disciple to learn how to teach is to stand on that sandy shore with the rest of this multitude and watch the Master.
 - 1. The Bible not only reveals *what* Jesus taught, it also tells us *how* He taught. If we will stop and pay attention, we can learn so much from Jesus that will make us more effective as we try to teach others.
 - 2. One of the things that is really striking about His teaching is the way He used many different methods to get His message across. He did not approach everyone in exactly the same way, but instead adjusted His approach to fit the circumstances and the needs of the people He was trying to reach. We see this here in Matthew.
 - a. Here in chapter 13 He uses parables, stories drawn from common life experiences (farmer, shepherds, etc.), to communicate deeper, spiritual truths they needed to see.
 - b. In chapter 16 while teaching His disciples, He adjusts His approach and teaches with questions (i.e. "who do people say that Son of Man is?").
 - c. In chapter 19 we find Him engaging the Pharisees in debate over a controversial issue of that day.
 - 3. But watching Jesus do this, watching the different ways He approached these teaching opportunities, should teach us something.
 - a. It should remind us that there is not just ONE right way to approach people. There is more than one right teaching method.
 - b. If we are to be effective in teaching others, we must learn to do what our Lord did. We must learn to adjust our approach and our methods so they fit the needs of the unique audience we are trying to reach.
- B. After all, we go into every teaching opportunity with some basic desires.
 - 1. We go in with the desire to teach the truth.
 - a. If we don't get that right, nothing else matters, **Rom. 1:16; John 8:31-32, Gal. 1:6-9.**
 - b. But just getting up and saying what is right is not our only desire.
 - 2. All of us would like to see that truth take root in the hearts of those who hear it, **Col. 1:9; James 1:21.**
 - 3. We would also like to see folks genuinely changed by the message. Our desire is to see them go out and live differently because of that truth they have learned, **Col. 1:9-10.**
 - 4. Now obviously we don't have complete control over all of that.

- a. ` I can control whether or not I teach the truth. But receiving the truth and applying it is really up to the listener. However teachers are not irrelevant to that part of the process.
 - b. For example, we can make truth easier to receive by teaching in a way that is plain and easy to understand.
 - c. We can help with application by making our teaching relevant and motivational.
5. But to accomplish these important objectives, we must learn to adjust our methods to fit the needs of the audience we are trying to reach. In this session I want us to apply that principle to one of the special groups we work with in local churches – teenagers.
- C. I've been encouraged by the renewed interest in the Bible class program that I find in many churches. As long as parents don't use these classes as a substitute for their work at home, I think this is a good thing.
- 1. However, even with all this renewed interest, it seems that teenage classes are often overlooked.
 - a. You can see the neglect just by looking at the rooms, i.e. blank walls; the only visual aid is a set of yellowing maps on a tripod in the corner.
 - b. Even more important are the complaints associated with our teen classes.
 - 1) Teachers are often reluctant to work with this group and struggle when they do.
 - 2) Students are often bored, unmotivated and disruptive.
 - 3) Elders are often forced to endure the complaints that come from all sides, i.e. teachers, students and parents.
 - 2. It is tragic that our classes with this age group are not more effective.
 - a. This is a vital age as students prepare to leave home and set out on their own.
 - b. While parents are the ones responsible to prepare them for these important life events, we would like for our Bible class programs to make a meaningful contribution to that effort.
 - 3. Why is it that are teen classes sometimes don't work very well and what can we do about it? I can't answer that question as an expert, but I would like to share some things we've learned working with teens.

2 BASIC PROBLEMS

When we ask teenagers what it is about their Bible classes that just does not work, two answers come back over and over again.

- A. First, and most frequently, students complain that teachers lecture too much.
1. I think there is a reason lecturing becomes a problem at this age.
 - a. An important transition takes place in most Bible class programs right around the time students become teenagers. This is the time that most churches switch from female to male teachers.
 - b. This change usually means that students go from classes with lots of visuals, role-playing, interactive games and exercises that reinforce the lessons, to a style of teaching typical modeled after adult classes (i.e. 80-90% lecture by the teacher with little participation).
 - c. This happens because many men learn their teaching model by sitting in adult classes.
 2. The problem is that this method does not work well with teens.
 - a. Lecturing causes teens to disengage from the class so that almost nothing gets through.
 - b. Teenagers want to talk in their Bible classes. I know that's hard from some teachers to believe because they have struggled to get their group to say anything. But it really is true.
 - c. What they need is for someone to get things going.
 3. Having discussions rather than lecture does not compromise learning. Class discussions can become very powerful teaching moments.
 - a. Those who speak are forced to think through what they believe and put it into words.
 - b. Those who listen are forced to weigh the different positions stated and decide what they think.
 - c. Students can be questioned by others about their convictions and forced to defend them.
 - d. Questions can be asked and answered.
 - e. Students have an opportunity to learn, not just from the teacher, but from each other.
 4. I try to make it a rule to do 50% of the talking or less when I teach teens (Learning Scale).

Point: When working with teens, we need to discover teaching methods that will help us generate class discussion.

- B. The second complaint we hear most often from teens is that the material being studied is not relevant to their lives.
1. Teens have to know why they are studying this material; why is it relevant to their lives.

- a. If they don't see the relevance, if they are not continually reminded of it, they will not tune in.
 - b. I recently found my class uninterested in our discussion of how to study the Bible. After reminding them of why this was so important, their interest was renewed.
2. Demonstrating relevance does not mean we must change subjects.
 - a. When teens complain about relevance, we are often tempted to start studying "dating" or "drinking" with them because the relevance of these subjects is easier to see.
 - b. However, it is equally important for our teens to understand the institutional issues, evidences, denominational teachings. But, the relevance of these is not so easy for a teenager to see.
 - c. The answer is not to change subjects, but to change methods.

Point: When working with teens, we need to discover teaching methods that help us continually reinforce the relevance of the topic.

9 TEACHING METHODS FOR TEENAGERS

With that in mind, let me take the rest of our time to talk about some specific teaching methods to use with teenagers. Samples of these methods are provided in the seminar handout (Teaching Teenagers II, Effective Methods).

A. Method #1: Participation Exercises

1. Because students seem to learn better when they get involved, we like to do exercises, especially at the start of class, to warm things up and get the students talking.
 - a. One way we do this is to create exercises that require input from everyone.
 - b. Listing questions are an effective way to do this. Pose a question to the class that requires everyone to share an answer. Go around the room and ask everyone to share an answer as you construct a list on the board.
 - c. For examples, see seminar handout, page 3.
2. If the goal is to get every student involved, it is important to use "safe" questions for an exercise like this.
 - a. These are questions that focus on the student's opinion and carry a low risk of a wrong answer.

- b. For example, when we study the Sermon on the Mount, students are asked to share that part of the sermon sticks out most in their minds. The only way to get that one wrong is to cite something that was not in the sermon.
- c. These kinds of questions help students to feel more comfortable joining the discussion.

B. Method #2: Group Projects

1. Another way to generate involvement and discussion is to divide the class into small teams and give the students projects to complete.
 - a. We might give the teams a passage to read and analyze, a difficult question to wrestle with and debate, or a list to construct.
 - b. They work on the project for a while and then share their findings with the class.
 - c. See examples on page 4 of the seminar handout.
2. There are many advantages to small group work.
 - a. It gets all of the students talking and participating.
 - b. It draws out the more shy students who are nervous about speaking up in front of the whole class.
 - c. It also forces the students to think through an issue or question for themselves. This is when the best learning take place.

C. Method #3: Scenarios & Case Studies

1. Scenarios are stories, like the parables, to which teenagers can relate and are designed to spark discussion.
 - a. This has been one of the most important tools we have discovered in our studies with teens.
 - b. They demonstrate how God's word relates to "real life" situations.
 - c. We can talk about principles all day long, but until we put those principles into real situations and see how the students respond, we can't be sure the message got across to them.
 - d. See examples on page 5 of the seminar handouts.
2. Scenarios are also useful tools for demonstrating the relevance of any subject, i.e. with instrumental music, create a situation where a teen gets hit with this question.
3. Two words of warning:
 - a. First, make sure the scenarios are true to life (things that really happen).

- b. Second, they need to involve situations that are difficult to resolve. This is very important if you want to spark discussion.

D. Method #4: Conviction Questions

1. Conviction questions are questions that have at least two right answers, depending on how you look at them. They are designed to create disagreement and force students to think through what they believe and defend their convictions.
2. For example, in a lesson on modesty we asked the students whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement:

"God really cares about my physical appearance."

- a. The answer to the question can be "Yes" or "No" depending on how you look at it.
- b. If you are thinking about modest dress, then God certainly does care about my physical appearance.
- c. If you take this to mean that God cares more about beautiful people than the "not so beautiful," then the answer is "no."
3. What is valuable is the discussion that these kinds of questions spark.
 - a. Students are forced to interpret the question for themselves, decide on their convictions, and then defend them in the class discussion.
 - b. More examples can be found on page 6 of the seminar handout.

E. Method #5: The Most Important Question: "Why"

1. This is perhaps the most important question we need to be asking our teenagers.
 - a. Those who have been around a while know the "right" answers they are supposed to give in Bible class and can "parrot" them whenever they are called upon.
 - b. What we need to know is what these teens really think deep down in their heart. We need to know about those doubts and uncertainties that they are not always willing to express.
2. Instead of just accepting the right answer from your students, ask them to tell you "why" they gave that answer.
 - a. For example, when a student says he believes the Bible is God's inspired word, ask him to explain why he believes that.
 - b. Ask him to cite some evidence to back up his answer.
 - c. At that point we may discover what he really believes.

- d. This question can be effectively used with any subject and any material.
- e. See the example on page 7 of the seminar handout.
- 3. One additional note, it is important to create a class environment where students feel comfortable giving the wrong answer.
 - a. We need to know what they are really thinking, even if it's wrong, so that we can teach them the truth.
 - b. They need to know that they can express an opinion that is wrong and won't get "pounced" on.

F. Method #6: Role Playing

- 1. This is something we usually do with young children, but there are times when it can really be an effective tool with teens.
 - a. We have used role playing at times to help prepare our students for challenging situations they would face.
 - b. We wanted them to know exactly what to do and say at a difficult moment.
 - c. Role playing enables them to face that challenge in a safe place.
- 2. For example, when we taught our students about evangelism, we actually role played a Bible study. See page 8 of the seminar handout.
 - a. One student played the role of a lost soul and another played a role of a friend who was sharing the gospel with him.
 - b. The assignment was to give a basic presentation of the gospel message, explaining to this "lost soul" how to be saved from sin.
 - c. It was a tough assignment and our students struggled with it. But they learned a lot from it. It gave them a chance to make some mistakes and learn to do this work better, before a soul was on the line.

G. Method #7: Multi-tasking

- 1. Multi-tasking involves using one class to accomplish a couple of different purposes.
 - a. For example, we used our study of the prophets as a time to teach our students how to study the Bible. See page 9 of the seminar handout.
 - b. Assignments required students to spend some time using Bible dictionaries, concordances and commentaries.
 - c. As the students were learning about the prophets, they were also developing some good Bible study skills and becoming more familiar with some important research tools.

2. We did a similar combination when we used our Acts Class to teach students how to reach the lost.

H. Method #8: Devil's Advocate

1. Sometimes the reason students don't see the relevance of a subject is because they've never been challenged on that subject.
 - a. We have a hard time with some of our students convincing them of the need to study evolution or inspiration. This is a struggle they believe God created the world and the Bible is inspired, and have never had their faith challenged.
2. One way to demonstrate relevance is for the teacher to play the role of devil's advocate and challenge their faith on these issues. See examples on page 10 of the seminar handout.
 - a. When we studied the inspiration of the Bible, the teacher would periodically play the role of critic and raise some of the arguments against the Bible that critics are making today. Students were forced to defend what they believed.
 - b. When we studied denominational doctrines, the teacher handed out index cards with a false doctrine briefly stated (Men are saved by faith alone). Students were made to answer the doctrine, while the teacher responded with the arguments used by those who defend these doctrines. Many of our teens went away from this exercise feeling a bit unprepared to defend their faith. It made them more eager to study these false doctrines.
3. One warning: Always be sure the "devil's" arguments are thoroughly answered by the time you get done. Don't leave kids hanging.

I. Method #9: Challenges

1. I believe our teenagers are capable of far greater things than we sometimes realize.
2. When our teens studied the prophets, we challenged them to write a brief research paper on one of the prophets. See page 11 of the seminar handout.
 - a. It was an opportunity to try out their new research skills.
 - b. We allowed them to do a lot of the work in class so that we could help them with the process.
 - c. Although it was tough at first, the students ultimately enjoyed the assignment and learned a great deal from it.
3. When we talked about how to study the Bible, our high school students wrote a brief commentary on one of the New Testament Epistles. See page 11 of the seminar handout.

4. Don't be afraid to challenge the students to take on some difficult assignments that stretch their minds.
 - a. Their teachers at school do it all the time.
 - b. Why not challenge them when it comes to the most important material they are studying.

Conclusion:

Like our Lord, the Master Teacher, we must learn to adjust our methods to fit the needs of our audience. If we'll do this with our teens, I think we will be much more successful in our efforts to instill God's word.