



SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT

How to Teach the Bible

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Learning and Teaching

Introduction & Goals

Teaching demands our best effort. We want the information we teach to be accurate. We want the classroom experiences to be interesting, compelling, and engaging. In fact, it's easy to become so consumed with what we do when we teach that we forget where the real focus of teaching is. We may put so much emphasis on what is happening *behind* the teacher's desk that we lose sight of what's happening *in front* of the teacher's desk.

So this isn't a lesson about teaching, because teaching isn't about teaching just as cooking isn't about cooking. We cook so people can eat nourishing, tasty food. Cooking, as an end in itself, loses the point of cooking. Likewise, teaching as an end in itself loses the point of teaching. Teaching is about learning. Learning is the end and teaching is the means to that end. In fact, the Hebrews of the Old Testament got it right. The word for *teach* in the Hebrew Bible is the causative form (*hiphil*) of the verb *to learn*. So in Hebrew, the verb *to teach* literally means "to cause to learn." The only reason to teach is to assist others in their process of learning.

Effective teaching begins with defining what we want the student to learn. We can make no intelligent decision about what to do as teachers until we clearly describe what the students should be able to do after they have learned. That's why this supplemental content is more about learning than it is about teaching.

Goals. By the end of this section, you should be able to . . .

1. Give a simple definition of learning.
2. Explain various parts of the learning definition.
3. Explain the relationship between learning and teaching.
4. Name and describe six levels of learning.
5. Explain why we use learning levels.

Goal 1 – Give a simple definition of learning.

There are many definitions of learning because we learn many different things in many different ways. In this lesson we will use a general definition that reduces learning to its basic elements:

Learning is change in an organism resulting from meaningful interaction with its environment.

Before moving on, listen to or read that definition a few times. There are a number of important theories related to learning, and we have reduced a complex process to very simple terms. But even this simple definition needs some examination. You may memorize this definition, but definitions we don't understand aren't very helpful even if we can quote them. Because it's important that we mean the same thing when we discuss learning, let's unpack this definition and look at its parts.

Goal 2 – Discuss four key concepts in the definition of learning.

There are four concepts that help us understand what this definition of learning actually means.

- I. *Change.* Students expect to be different in some way after they have “learned” something. The change may be in their knowledge, their skill, and/or their attitude. But if they are the same after we have taught our lesson as they were before we taught our lesson, our students haven't learned.
- II. *Resulting from.* People change as they age. But we don't attribute those changes to any learning experience. To say we have “learned,” we must connect the change with some activity that contributed to that change.
- III. *Meaningful Interaction.* These words suggest that the learners are somehow engaged with the stimuli that contributed to the learning. They made conscious, informed, and intentional choices to change, and they can attribute that change to their interaction with a stimulus. David Kolb, a respected learning theorist, tells us that learning requires two elements. First we encounter an experience. Something happens to us. Learning occurs when we transform experience into knowledge by reflecting on it—or by asking questions about what that experience means. As we try to make sense of an experience, we force our minds to construct meaning or knowledge about that experience. So merely having an encounter does not equal learning. Only when we meaningfully interact with an experience do we “learn” from it.
- IV. *Environment.* We learn from all sorts of stimuli. We learn about hot stoves, for instance, in a quick and simple way. In any planned, formal learning situation there are numerous stimuli that contribute to learning—some intentional and some unintentional; some productive, some counterproductive. As we will see later, teachers must give a great deal of attention to the learning environment.

Goal 3 – Explain the relationship between learning and teaching.

We have all learned things through our own experience without the aid of a teacher. But in a planned learning/teaching environment we (hopefully) enhance the students' learning by adding a teacher. So how is learning different with a teacher than it is without a teacher?

Teaching occurs when change results from meaningful interaction with an environment especially prepared by one (a teacher) for another (a student).

Whether it's formal education in a diploma- or degree-granting school or it's nonformal education in a Bible-study class at church, home, or elsewhere, all teacher-guided education is based on the idea that one person can create experiences that can contribute to another person's learning. Our task as teachers is to decide what experiences will most predictably and effectively contribute to our students' learning.

Goal 4 – List and explain the meaning of six learning levels.

A. What Is a Learning Level?

A learning level is a degree of intensity or sophistication with which one is able to deal with newly acquired knowledge or skill. Benjamin Bloom has broken learning into six levels of sophistication. Any of us who passed a course in physical science can claim that we “learned” physics. But very few would say we learned physics at the same level Stephen Hawking did. It's important to clarify what we mean when we say that our sixth grade students will “learn” how to present the gospel message to their friends and, at a different level, they will “learn” to present the gospel message to their friends when they are in high school. How do we explain the difference between a “good” explanation of the gospel by a sixth grader and a “good” explanation of the gospel by a high school sophomore?

B. Why Do We Use Learning Levels?

Teachers want their students to learn but aren't always precise about what they mean when they use the term “learn.” To say students only need to “sort of learn” this, but they need to “really learn” that doesn't help the students or the teacher know what successful learning looks like. We know we want our fifth grade Sunday school students to “really learn” how to receive Jesus as their Savior but feel they only need to “sort of learn” about different views of Jesus's return and the millennium. But how can we explain how those “learnings” differ? To add more precision to the idea that a student should “sort of learn” or “really learn” something, we use Benjamin Bloom's learning levels to help clarify what we mean when we say, “learn.”

The Cognitive Process Dimension	The Knowledge Dimension			
	Factual The basic elements a student must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it.	Conceptual The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together.	Procedural How to do something, methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods.	Metacognitive Knowledge of cognition in general as well as awareness and knowledge of one's own cognition.
Remember Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory.	Remember + Factual List primary and secondary colors.	Remember + Conceptual Recognize symptoms of exhaustion.	Remember + Procedural Recall how to perform CPR.	Remember + Metacognitive Identify strategies for retaining information.
Understand Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written and graphic communication.	Understand + Factual Summarize features of a new product.	Understand + Conceptual Classify adhesives by toxicity.	Understand + Procedural Clarify assembly instructions.	Understand + Metacognitive Predict one's response to culture shock.
Apply Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation.	Apply + Factual Respond to frequently asked questions.	Apply + Conceptual Provide advice to novices.	Apply + Procedural Carry out pH tests of water samples.	Apply + Metacognitive Use techniques that match one's strengths.
Analyze Break material into constituent parts and determine how parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose.	Analyze + Factual Select the most complete list of activities.	Analyze + Conceptual Differentiate high and low culture.	Analyze + Procedural Integrate compliance with regulations.	Analyze + Metacognitive Deconstruct one's biases.
Evaluate Make judgments based on criteria and standards.	Evaluate + Factual Check for consistency among sources.	Evaluate + Conceptual Determine relevance of results.	Evaluate + Procedural Judge efficiency of sampling techniques.	Evaluate + Metacognitive Reflect on one's progress.
Create Put elements together to form a coherent whole; reorganize into a new pattern or structure.	Create + Factual Generate a log of daily activities.	Create + Conceptual Assemble a team of experts.	Create + Procedural Design efficient project workflow.	Create + Metacognitive Create a learning portfolio.

Similarly, when we teach Romans 12:1-2 in our Bible-study classes, we want to help students learn how to “not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by renewing their mind.” But unless we define how well or how thoroughly we want our students to learn those concepts, we may add more confusion than clarity. We need language to explain how sophisticated our students’ understanding of terms like “conform” and “world” and “transformed” and “mind” have to be. Will we spend as much time defining the word “world” as we do exploring how to be transformed or how to have our minds renewed? Precisely what we plan to actually do when we

“teach” Romans 12:1-2 will be determined by what we believe our students need to “really know” and “sort of know” from that passage. There are some things in our Bible lessons that students will have to learn more thoroughly than they learn others.

We also use learning levels when we teach the same passages to different age groups. When teaching a Bible passage to third graders and then teaching the same passage to adults, we usually aim at different, levels of sophistication. When we decide just how those two lessons on the same passage are different we are using what Bloom calls learning levels.

There are some articles online that provide more help than we can squeeze into this single introductory lesson on learning. You can “learn” more about learning by having some meaningful interaction with that online environment. One especially helpful resource on using Bloom’s Taxonomy is found at: <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/effective-teaching-practices/revised-blooms-taxonomy>.

- I. *Remembering.* The first and most basic learning level is called “Remembering.” To perform at this level of learning, students memorize material and demonstrate their competence by retrieving and reproducing it either verbally or in writing. A learning goal may be stated as, “Name the book, chapter, and verse where Jesus’s Great Commission is stated.” Or “Recite the Great Commission word for word without any prompts.”
- II. *Understanding.* Bloom says that the second level of learning is “Understanding.” At this level students must comprehend the meaning of the material they are “learning.” Some students may be able to recite the Great Commission from Matthew 28 but have no idea what the Great Commission means. Most teachers want their students to do more than parrot back phrases or verses they don’t understand. It’s important that they achieve the “Remembering” level of learning, but usually we want to move our students beyond that level. So in addition to having students memorize Matthew 28:18, we would take time in our lesson (or a subsequent lesson if need be) to help them learn what the words they memorized actually mean. Learning goals at the Understanding level might include, “Describe what a ‘disciple’ is.” And, “Explain how, ‘to observe’ all that Jesus commanded.”
- III. *Applying.* In the next level of learning we are teaching students how to “Apply” what they have learned. The apostle James warned us against the danger of being hearers of the Word and not doers who deceive ourselves. So in addition to reciting definitions of verses and explaining important concepts in those passages, we want students to apply them. Getting students to this level usually takes additional time and practice. Sometimes teachers are so concerned about learning levels 1 and 2 that they don’t build learning level 3 goals into their lesson plans.

Because application is so important, it may mean that some of our lessons should actually be a series of lessons. We may need to spend an additional session or two on a concept like the Great Commission so we can move our students to the level where

they are applying what they have learned. Learning goals at the Application level may include, “Students will develop a deeper, more personal relationship with Jesus by reading the Bible and praying at least four times each week.” Or, “Students will schedule a weekly Bible study time to identify and implement specific ways to obey what Jesus taught His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).”

- IV. *Analyzing.* In learning level four, students learn how to break material they’re studying down into component parts and explain its organizational structure. In Bible study this involves describing relationships between chapters and verses, and between people, actions, places, and times described in the passages being studied. Lessons 2 and 3 of this course unpack this level of learning in detail. Learning goals at the Analysis level may include, “Explain the relationship between ‘Disciple,’ ‘Baptize,’ and ‘Teach’ and how they combine to define Jesus’s intention in the Great Commission.” Or “Create a grammatical analysis of Matthew 28:16-20.”
- V. *Evaluating.* Level five teaches students how to judge the value or appropriateness of material for a given purpose and explain their judgments. They learn to use the Bible to evaluate their own behavior, and it becomes the criterion by which they evaluate the validity of truth claims made about their Christian beliefs. In Ephesians 4 Paul encourages us to stop being “blown here and there by every wind of doctrine.” When students understand the passages we teach at Bloom’s learning level 5, they can use them to evaluate their life and their beliefs. Learning goals at the Evaluation level may include, “When given a recorded explanation of the Great Commission, (a) identify at least one error in it; (b) name two of its strengths; (c) explain both using course material to justify your decisions.” Or, “After reading Matthew 28:16-20 evaluate your own commitment to being one of Jesus’s disciples.”
- VI. *Creating.* At level 6 students understand the passage well enough to create lessons on them that they can teach to others. This is what Lessons 3 through 6 are designed to help students in this course achieve. When someone has moved to level 6, they can use what they have learned when they share their faith, counsel a hurting or confused friend, or devise answers to their own questions about life. Learning goals at the Creating level may include, “Outline an article you would write explaining Jesus’s Great Commission.” And “Prepare a 10-minute presentation explaining to a high school class how to live as a modern-day disciple of Jesus.”

The following table presents a brief introduction to Benjamin Bloom’s learning levels and will enable us to start using them. In some Bible studies or Sunday school classes, we will only have time to take students through Bloom’s first three levels. But if we expand the teaching process and devote more time and/or sessions to the passages we teach, we can, with some additional reading and practice, help students move to these higher levels of learning described in levels 4 through 6.

Bloom's Learning Level	Activity: Demonstrate ability to . . .	Illustration of the Learning Outcome: Student Can . . .
NOTE. Learning levels 1 to 3 should be included when we teach any passage in any Bible study or Sunday school class.		
Remembering	Memorize and retrieve previously learned material.	I. Name the book, chapter, and verse where the Great Commission is stated. II. Recite the Great Commission from memory.
Understanding	Grasp the meaning of material.	I. Describe what a "disciple" is. II. Explain the meaning of "to observe."
Applying	Use material in new and concrete situations.	I. Cultivate a deeper, more personal relationship with Jesus by reading the Bible devotionally and praying at least four times a week. II. Study the Bible to learn how to implement, "All that He taught His disciples" (Matthew 28:18-20) in your daily life.
NOTE: Levels 4 to 6 are more advanced and require more time for students to learn. They should be <i>considered</i> for any passage or group. But some passages for some groups may not need to include all six learning levels.		
Analyzing	Break material down into component parts and explain its organizational structure.	I. Explain the relationship between "disciple," "baptize," and "teach" and how they combine to define Jesus's intention in the Great Commission. II. Create a grammatical analysis of Matthew 28:16-20.
Evaluating	Judge the value of material for a given purpose and explain your judgments citing specific criteria.	I. When given a recorded explanation of the Great Commission, (a) identify at least one error in it; (b) name two of its strengths; (c) explain both using course material to justify your decisions. II. After reading Matthew 28:16-20 "evaluate your own commitment to being one of Jesus's disciples."
Creating	Relate parts to form a new whole.	I. Outline an article you would write explaining Jesus's Great Commission. II. Prepare a 10-minute presentation explaining to a high school class how to live as a modern-day disciple of Jesus.

Goal 5 – Explain four reasons why we use learning levels.

1. Learning levels help the teacher select information and learning experiences that tightly focus on what students need to “learn” to achieve the lesson’s goals and avoid distracting content and activities.
2. Learning levels help teachers define and write clear learning goals.
3. Learning levels give students a clear understanding of what they must do and how well they must do it to demonstrate that they have “learned” something at the appropriate level.
4. Learning levels help students experience the joy of success when they demonstrate achievement or define what they must still do to achieve the learning outcome.

Conclusion

Students’ learning is what teaching is all about. The temptation to ask, “What do I want to teach?” is strong, but it is never the place to begin designing a Bible study session. We always begin with what the Bible passage intends for us to learn. Then we ask how thoroughly the students we are going to teach need to learn that passage in order to apply it. Only then can we intentionally decide what to teach in our lessons and how to teach it.

Clarify Our Learning Goals

Introduction & Goals

Our role as Bible teachers is to help others learn more about God by studying His Word. That is a noble challenge and we tread on sacred ground when we accept it. But preparing a Bible study session can be a daunting task. After we have completed our own study of a passage, we may be overwhelmed with all of the Who's, the What's, the How's, and the Why's of the passage that stare back at us from our notes. How do we begin to shape all that information into a coherent teaching/learning session?

Goals. By the end of this section you should be able to . . .

1. Explain why we use learning goals.
2. Define “learning goal.”
3. Describe two potential sources of learning goals for those who teach the Bible.
4. Describe three essential characteristics of a well-written learning goal.
5. Write learning goals that direct your teaching/learning activities.

Why We Use Learning Goals

Since the focus of our teaching is other people's learning, the first question that confronts us as teachers is, “Learn . . . *What*”? Out of all the information and ideas contained in a passage of Scripture, what should we focus on in a single lesson, or in some cases even a series of lessons? Addressing that question before we delve into the process of outlining our lesson is crucial, because when we identify our learning goals we can . . .

- *Focus on what content to include.* Trying to teach everything in a Bible passage may result in teaching nothing very well.
- *Focus our teaching strategy and methods.* We intentionally select lecture, discussion groups, problem-solving exercises, and other methods because of what they contribute to achieving our stated goals.
- *Help students focus their attention.* Students learn best when they can zero in on the knowledge, attitudes, and life applications that are stated in the learning goals.
- *Provide a way for students and teacher to enjoy a “successful” learning experience.* If

teacher and students know what students are attempting to learn in a session, both can evaluate whether or not they learned it.

Here we will discover how to identify and clearly state what we want students to learn. Until we have clearly painted the bull's eye of our learning target, it's impossible to hit it with effective teaching.

Because it's essential for the teacher and students to clarify the intended goals of instruction and for both to value those goals enough to aggressively pursue them, it's important for the teacher to state those goals in a clear, unambiguous manner. Until this is done, it is impossible to design effective learning/teaching experiences.

Let's go through that statement again. Pause and reflect on each of its parts:

Because . . .

- It's essential for the teacher and students to clarify the intended goals of instruction;
- And for both to value those goals enough to aggressively pursue them;

Then . . .

- It's important for the teacher to state those goals in a clear, unambiguous manner.
- Until this is done, it is impossible to design effective learning/teaching experiences.

So the purpose of this lesson is to learn how to define and state the intended goals of our instruction so we increase the probability that the people we teach will actually learn what we want them to learn.

What Is a Learning Goal?

A learning goal describes what the *learner* should be able to do at the end of instruction. It's important to note that learning goals do not describe what the *teacher* will do. Learning goals describe what the *learner* will do. Read the goals for this lesson and note that each of them focuses on the learner's behavior.

Sources of Learning Goals for Bible Teachers

We identify learning goals for a lesson in a number of ways. We can select goals because of a need that is surfaced by collaboration with students. Whenever possible it's a good idea for teachers to involve students in the process of identifying what they will learn together.

These goals also emerge out of a teacher's observation of students' needs. If, for instance, we want

students to learn how to live as Jesus’s disciples, then we select Bible passages that teach about discipleship.

There are many topics like love, commitment, social justice, ethics, etc. that need to be addressed from Scripture, and we have the privilege of teaching people what God says on those crucial topics. In those cases, the needs we identify determine the Bible passages we choose to teach. As Bible teachers our primary resource for addressing these needs is Scripture. If we choose other resources, it’s important to explain that we no longer claim to be speaking for God. It is okay and even important to use other resources in our teaching, but it is important to clarify when we claim our source of authority is God’s Word and when it isn’t.

More often than not, however, we begin our preparation of a Bible lesson with a Bible passage and not a topic we want to teach. If, for instance, our class or Bible study is surveying the Old Testament Prophets and the next book we study is Amos or Jonah, our learning goals are presented to us in what those authors wrote. God had a purpose in mind when He inspired those writers to communicate a message. Our learning goals when we teach those passages are to help students understand and pursue God’s purpose as stated in a passage.

There is a reason why we discussed how to study a Bible passage in Lesson 2 before we discussed how to write learning goals in this supplement. And that’s because we can’t define our Bible study lesson’s goals until we have defined the goals the Holy Spirit wove into the Bible passage we plan to teach. Whether we have selected a passage because it addresses a topic we want our students to deal with, or we select a passage because it’s in a Bible book we’re studying, the goals of the lesson must emerge from the passage we teach.

What Bible Teachers Actually Teach

When we study a Bible passage, it’s important to identify the author’s goal for writing that passage. So our goal would never be “to teach 2 Timothy 3:16-17,” or “to teach 1 Corinthians 13.” Our goal would always be to help students do what the Holy Spirit intended us to do when He inspired authors to write those passages. The Bible passage’s goals become our lesson goals. So it’s important to see that this supplement in our course depends heavily on Lesson 2. In Lesson 2 we identify the Bible passage’s goal. In this supplement we learn how to state that goal in a way that helps us construct and teach effective Bible lessons.

Three Essential Characteristics of a Well-Written Learning Goal

Effective learning goals must be stated in a specific way. Poorly stated goals can actually become a hindrance to effective learning because they confuse rather than clarify what students should be trying to learn. So let's look at three criteria for a well-written learning goal.

1. *A well-written learning goal is precise and observable.*

A learning goal must describe something students can observe themselves doing. Students and teachers can only identify how successfully they have accomplished a learning goal if they can see or hear students doing what the goal said they should do to demonstrate successful learning.

We choose observable activities to describe what students will *do* to demonstrate learning. If our goal states "Students will *learn* about the Great Commission," how will students demonstrate that they have learned? What does that look like? There is no way to measure if or how well they have achieved that goal. How will the teacher determine if their students "learned" the Great Commission or if they need more instruction on it? When we ask students if they *learned* about the Great Commission, what kind of answer can they give except "yes," "no," or "I think so"? Neither teacher nor student can identify a reasonable answer to that question.

So instead of our goal stating that students will "learn" something, we have to determine what they will do to demonstrate that they have learned it. To do that we use verbs in our goal statements that name an observable behavior. The following table illustrates the difference between verbs that don't work well in our learning goals and some alternative verbs that do work.

Instead of using unobservable terms like:	Use observable, precise terms like:
To know, to appreciate, to really appreciate, to enjoy, to internalize, to be sanctified, to believe, to have faith, to be well rounded, to grasp the significance of	To write, to recite, to define, to identify, to list, to explain, to describe, to build, to operate, to solve, to state their commitment, to state agreement or disagreement with

Note how the learning goals below use precise, observable verbs to describe what students will do to demonstrate their learning.

By the end of our lesson on Matthew 28:18-20 students will be able to ...

- I. *Quote* Matthew 28:18-20 verbatim from the NIV Bible.
- II. *Define* the word *disciple* in their own words in a manner that corresponds to the definition given in class.
- III. *Explain* two characteristics of a disciple Jesus gave in the Great Commission.

- IV. *State* two specific differences discussed in the lesson between a disciple and a non-disciple.
- V. *Describe* their specific action plan to live this week as one of Jesus’s disciples.

Notice that each goal statement includes a verb that both teacher and student can observe the student doing. As a result, the students understand where they have and have not learned what they were supposed to learn. And, in addition, the teacher can identify where review and/or additional information is required to help students achieve each goal. The goals clearly state things students can do and celebrate their success or cannot do and identify points that need further study.

Note also that in this illustration we addressed the first three of Bloom’s learning levels. Before you read on, see if you can identify which of Bloom’s learning levels (see #1 above) each goal addresses.

- Goals 1 & 2 are “Knowledge” goals.
- Goals 3 & 4 are “Comprehension” goals
- Goal 5 is an “Application” goal.

An “Analysis” goal could be,

“Students will explain the relationship between the clause, ‘All authority has been given to me’” and the command to ‘go and make disciples.’”

An “Evaluation” goal could be,

“Students will read two written explanations of the Great Commission, choose which they believe is more accurate, and explain their choice.”

A “Creating” goal could be,

“Students will prepare and present a two-minute explanation of any concept in the Great Commission and present it to another student in class.”

2. *A well-written learning goal is “sized” to the learners’ characteristics and needs.*

It is essential that our goals be appropriate to our learners’ ages and abilities. If you teach your lesson to third graders will they be able to achieve the goal(s) as stated? If you teach a lesson on the same passage to a high school youth group will those students be unchallenged by it or will you have to rewrite your goals? We state our goals so they fit our students’ ability to learn.

Second, does the goal fit our learners’ life situations? Does this goal prepare them to use what they learn in their daily life situation, or will it sound irrelevant and boring? Will people ever actually do what the goal states? People are rarely motivated to learn things they know they will never use.

Third, can you accomplish this goal in the amount of time you have available, or do you have to settle for a more limited goal? Or, conversely, is your goal so limited that you can accomplish it in much less time than you have available?

Fourth, do you have the expertise and knowledge to teach the goal as stated, or do you need more time to prepare? Should you invite a guest teacher who can help your students achieve this goal as stated? Should you reduce the goal to one you can accomplish?

3. *A well-written learning goal is student-centered.*

In Lesson 3 we will describe what teachers can do to help students achieve the learning goals. But we can't decide what we are going to do as teachers until we have clearly defined what we want students to do. When writing learning goals, we do not use terms like "to lecture, to design, to lead a discussion, to give an illustration," etc. We write those statements when we decide what we must do to help students achieve the learning goals we write.

Writing Learning Goals Is an Interactive Process.

This supplement on writing clearly stated learning goals is designed to get us started in the process. But most teachers find that we have to write and rewrite our goals to refine them. Writing goals and designing our lessons is an interactive process. After we study our Bible passage, we write a first draft of our goals. Then, as we design a lesson that will guide the teaching/learning process, we discover additional ideas about what we want to do with our lesson. We find that some goals are too large while others are too small; or that we have too many or too few goals. So we go back and restate our goals to fit what we discover we can actually do in the time available for our lesson.

On the other hand, we may find that we have to change parts of our lesson so we can accomplish certain goals that we aren't willing to change. This interactive process between our lesson goals and our lesson design helps both our goals become more relevant and precise and our lesson content more focused on exactly what we want students to learn from the passage.

Conclusion

The Bible's teachings are too important for our students to miss. If our lessons confuse rather than clarify precisely what God says in a passage, we have not served Him or our students well. So we carefully study our passage and identify what God wants us to learn from it. Then we state those facts, feelings, and principles as clearly and unambiguously as we can in the form of learning goals.

Preparing and Teaching the Passage's Content

Introduction & Goals

This supplement discusses how we help students understand the Bible passages we study together. Not much can—or should—happen in a Bible study until students clearly know what the Bible passage we are studying actually means. While not the culminating or end goal of Bible teaching, it is an essential means to that culminating goal. As we have stated previously, Bible knowledge must lead to application. Response to what God teaches in Scripture is the ultimate goal. But that response must be to what a Bible text actually teaches and not a response to what someone erroneously believes it teaches.

In this lesson we will discuss two approaches to teaching a Bible passage's content . . .

- Using prepared material
- Designing our own lessons

Goals. By the end of this supplement, you should be able to:

- I. Describe ways to use prepared materials to help teach a Bible study.
- II. Name and explain three ways we can be distracted from focusing on the Bible in our studies.
- III. Describe and use a teaching approach that keeps the Bible as the lesson's focus.

Teaching from Prepared Study Material

Some teachers find it helpful to use prepared curriculum to help them teach their Bible studies. There are a number of online options that help us learn the Bible's content. ChristianUniversity.org has created a wide array of online courses that faithfully teach the Bible. While these courses help individuals study the Bible online, they also provide a terrific resource for people who want to teach a group Bible study or Sunday school class. These online courses can help teachers prepare by providing helpful material on any Bible book they want to teach.

These courses can also be used to help teach a Bible study. We can encourage our students to take the Bible course online and then lead a discussion on each of the course's lessons.

If we and our students are studying a ChristianUniversity.org Bible course online,

- We can ask students to study the online lesson on their own and complete the Listening Guide for the lesson, if available. Students then come to the Bible study session with their own knowledge of a passage. We can provide additional details and lead students in a discussion of the material and relevant applications.
- Another approach we can use is to show all or portions of a lesson in class. We can pause the lesson and interact with the questions contained in the Listening/Leader's Guides. Students can do this in smaller groups and then come together for a general discussion, or you can lead the whole group in a discussion.
- Most ChristianUniversity.org courses include a Group Discussion Guide that provides sample questions for use in our study groups. So there are a variety of ways we can profitably use the ChristianUniversity.org courses to help us prepare for and lead effective Bible studies.

When we use prepared Bible-study materials, it is still essential that we thoroughly study the passage we plan to teach. Our own study of a passage is essential for a number of reasons. First, it gives the Holy Spirit time to minister to us from the passage and enables us to share how God is using the passage's truths in our own life. It increases our confidence as teachers because we are thoroughly familiar with the passage when we teach it. In Lesson 2 we provided a brief introduction to Bible-study methods and mentioned additional courses that will sharpen our Bible-study skills. It is impossible to overemphasize how important it is that we study our passage before we attempt to teach it, even when we are using prepared materials.

How Do We Prepare Our Own Bible Lessons?

After we have studied our passage, we may want to design our own approach to teaching it, and there are various ways to do so. This supplement will address one method that teaches students to personally discover what a passage means and, in the process, teach and model Bible study skills.

A Word About Lectures. Before we explore ways to help students participate in a discussion-oriented, interactive approach to group Bible-study, it's important to consider the role of lectures in learning. Some teachers use lectures exclusively or extensively to help students understand a Bible passage. The teacher explains what the Bible passage means, and students take notes and refer to them later for further learning. Well-conceived and properly used lectures can contribute to student learning. In this lesson we will suggest some direction on when and how to use brief lectures when we teach the Bible. But the lesson will focus more on interactive learning where the teacher guides students as they discover what a Bible passage means.

Potential Dangers When Involving Students in the Process of Teaching

When we prepare a Bible-study session, we should include teaching strategies that are most apt to increase students' understanding of the passage we study. In this course we stress three crucial elements that help students learn.

- *Student Involvement.* When we encourage students to participate, we allow them to personally engage with the Bible's content.
- *Support Material.* We use stories, illustrations, statistical data, and other material to help us explain, clarify, verify and support what a passage means.
- *Application.* We help students accurately and intelligently define ways the Bible passage can be applied to their everyday lives.

These teaching strategies are important. But as important as they are—and in fact because they are so important—they can potentially hijack the lesson's main purpose. Teachers can be so focused on any of these teaching methods that we fail to teach the Bible passage's meaning. The Bible's content can become a secondary factor.

- We may get so involved in *learning activities* that students forget what the activities are supposed to help them learn. Our session reduces itself to a series of fun activities.
- We may become so fascinated by our *illustrations and scientific data* that they become the center of our teaching and the Bible passage is pushed to the periphery. The material that was supposed to provide evidence for the biblical truth actually becomes the authoritative “proof” itself. The lesson so focuses on the supporting data that the Bible passage only illustrates what our scientific data “proves.” The Bible study becomes a science or history lesson.
- The *application* is so compelling and/or complicated that it becomes the focus of the lesson, and we fail to adequately teach the Bible passage that is the basis for the application.

How Can We Keep the Bible Passage as the Lesson's Core?

The most effective way to help students understand a Bible passage is to “study” it together. In Lesson 2 we explored Bible-study methods and discussed the three steps of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. We organized the observation step into Macro-Observation and Micro-Observation. In this supplement we will discuss ways we can use our Bible-study sessions to guide students through

their own discovery of what's in a passage. When students observe, interpret, and discover applications on their own, their confidence in what it means and their commitment to live by it grows.

Using Macro-Observation to Teach the Bible

In a discovery approach to teaching a Bible-study, we actually take students through a Bible-study process that is much like the one we presented in Lesson 2 of this course. We almost repeat with our students the process we used when we studied the passage on our own.

First, we set the stage for the passage we plan to teach by taking our students through a brief Macro-Study of the book that contains the passage. And it's important to begin by addressing "Beginners' Questions." When we first started studying our passage, we came to it with macro-observation questions. But by the time we complete our Macro study of the passage, we usually are interested in the more esoteric micro-observation questions and may forget about or become bored with these simple beginners' questions. But when we teach the passage, our students are asking the same questions we did when we first read the passage. If we fail to answer beginner's questions, our students may never engage the passage we want to teach.

So before we delve into any Bible passage we must first build a frame around that passage. When we explore the passage itself with our students, we help them paint an accurate picture of what that passage means. But before we can paint an accurate picture, we first have to build a frame to contain the picture. The frame around any given *passage* in a *Bible book* is the Bible book itself. No passage can make sense apart from its context.

You will recall from Lesson 2 that in Macro-Observation we ask six questions of the Bible *book*. Teachers usually have to present most of this information in a Bible study because our students don't know it; nor do they have the study tools to find it. It's crucial to give a brief, pointed lecture to give students the book's background information.

So the first step in teaching a Bible study is to help our students build the frame around the passage we want to teach. To do so:

- We "locate" the Bible *book* chronologically and geographically by telling students when the book was written and where the writer and recipients were when it was written.
- When possible, we bring the writer and the readers to life for our students by introducing them as real people living in a real historical and cultural setting.
- We explain the major issues or questions the *book* was written to address. It's often a good idea at this point to discuss with students how those questions and issues look today in their lives.
- We set the passage we plan to study into the flow of the book's purpose by explaining

where it fits into the book's outline. Remember to "place" the passage in the book by finding the book's outline in a Study Bible or Bible commentary. Then briefly explain what role the passage we're studying plays in fulfilling the author's purpose.

Using Micro-Observation to Teach a Bible Passage

After we have built the frame, we help our students paint the picture our passage portrays. To do so:

- Read the Bible passage we are going to study with the students. If it's a longer passage than we have time to read entirely, we can summarize it by reading key verses that move the passage's theme forward. But it's important to acquaint students with the whole passage before we begin a micro-observation of its details.
- Now begin to paint the picture of the Bible passage we are going to study. Using the Micro-Observation material we prepared (Lesson 2), we ask the students to find answers to the six observation questions. There is a variety of ways to do this and different passages lend themselves to different methods.
 - ◇ We can use small groups where students investigate the passage and find many of the answers themselves and then come together as a whole group to share and discuss answers the students discovered.
 - ◇ In passages where the answers are more difficult to find, we can provide more direction as we guide the whole group in discovering the answers. We can explain the process we're using as we explore the text so students are expanding their own Bible-study skills.
 - ◇ We can judge how easily the students will be able to find answers during the lesson by how easily (or not) we found them during our own study of the passage.
- There is no rigid order of working through the six observation questions. It is better to let the passage's content and emphases guide the order in which we explore the questions. But introducing the passage's characters and activities is most often a good place to begin.
- Explore and answer the "Who" question.
 - ◇ Ask students to identify all the characters and ask who each person is and what we know about them from the verses they read. You will likely need to add more information about some or all of the characters in brief lectures.
 - ◇ Ask students what they think each significant person was like. How was the person's life situation like and unlike our lives today?
 - ◇ When you are doing your own study to prepare for teaching the lesson, write down

questions that you asked about the characters in the text as a guide to what's important for students to investigate.

- ◇ Ask someone to share with the class how they would describe this person to a friend.
- ◇ Ask students what role this person plays in the book (if relevant) and in the passage you are studying.
 - Add any information you found in your own study that isn't obvious from the verses.
- ◇ Repeat the process for each person of significance named in the passage.
- ◇ Discuss relationships between persons where those relationships are relevant.
- “What” actions are named in your passage?
 - ◇ List and describe “what” characters in the passage are doing, or are being told to do or not do.
 - ◇ List and discuss any actions that may raise questions or are in any way interesting or significant to the passage's meaning. As much as possible, involve students in discovering the actions and their meaning and their contribution to understanding the text's major idea.
 - Some actions found in the text are technical or theological (terms like justified, sanctified, disciple, baptize, regenerate, etc.). Some terms are familiar terms, but are used in technical or theological ways in the passage (like save(d), witness, believe, etc.). If, in your own study, you had to find the meaning of these actions, or if you think your students won't know their meaning, be prepared to define, explain, and illustrate their meaning.
- “What” objects or animals are significant to the text's meaning?
 - ◇ Be prepared to explain any that your students won't recognize.
 - ◇ Be prepared to discuss any that may be strange or confusing.
 - ◇ Before explaining, ask students what they think terms mean as a way to force them to think and to introduce discussion. The more our “lectures” are responses to specific questions the students ask, the more effective they are.
- Identify any “Where” questions. Explore locations that are named in the text and be prepared to discuss or explain them. If possible use a map—even a crudely drawn one—to help students gain perspective of distance, location, etc. of places mentioned in your text.

- ◇ In addition to geographic locations, be prepared to discuss places mentioned in the text like the temple, tabernacle, wilderness, etc. This takes preparation time, but describing things like what a house was like in biblical times or giving students a sense of how awesome (literally) the Jerusalem temple was or what Babylon represented to Judah's citizens in Jeremiah's time brings life to your lesson.
- Discuss any "How" questions with students. Some of the biblical texts we teach contain commands or suggestions that our students won't know how to do. How, for instance, do we make disciples? How do we pray without ceasing? How do we worship? Your own study will, once again, lead you to these unknown or confusing points. If we consistently ignore actions biblical texts say are important or essential, we actually educate our students to ignore them.
- "Why" questions open worlds of discussion. Some of them can take us down difficult paths and need to be used judiciously. Even well-trained and experienced Bible teachers need to use an honest and forthright, "I don't know why" at the appropriate time. On the other hand, a wise use of this magic question can stimulate students to think deeply about crucial matters.

Combining Discussion, Exploration, and Lecture for Powerful Teaching

Many teachers are fond of lecturing and can do it effectively. But even the best lecturers must be careful not to overdo it. Most of us should go through the six questions above and limit lectures to defining, explaining, and/or describing points under the observation questions that our students want and need to know. But keeping students engaged by guiding *them* in the process of discovering the answers to the "Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why" questions as we study the biblical text together is a powerful way to teach.

After giving students the opportunity to observe the text and discover the important details, we can begin to put the data we have discovered together into a coherent picture and interpret what the passage means. We can do this *with* the students by asking them to offer suggestions, or we may decide to do the summary ourselves as teachers. But regardless of how we do it, we must move to the next phase of the lesson where we put all these details we have discovered into a sensible interpretation of the passage. Remember, an interpretation is just a simple, straightforward answer to the question, "What does this passage mean?"

It is important to get students involved in discovering what's in the text we are studying. Not all passages have the same amount of information on all six of the observation questions. Some texts focus on people, and so the "Who" question is the major point of our lesson. Other passages contain actions that will consume a bulk of our lesson's time to explain. The point is that, while we should be aware of all six observation questions in any lesson we teach, it is equally important to realize that not all six questions are of equal importance in every lesson we teach. Our role as teachers is to identify which question or questions the biblical writer focused on and work with the writer to help our students identify the main ideas in our text and focus their attention there.

Conclusion

Application of the passages we study is a must. But it is usually futile to suggest applications when they are based on inadequate understanding of the text. Helping students engage the text more thoroughly creates the conviction that will sustain applications in the pressures of life's realities.