

GROWING TOWARD *Spiritual* MATURITY

HANDOUT B

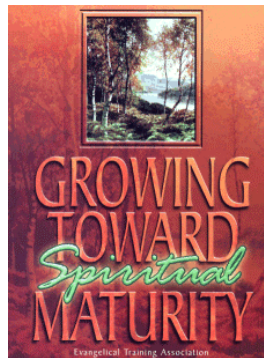
Teaching Others

Chapter 9 of *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*

By Gary C. Newton

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One of the best ways to learn something is to learn it well enough to teach it to someone else. Growing up skiing in Canada gave me a head start over other college students when it came to winter sports. I was asked to teach skiing classes my freshman year. I thought I was pretty good at flying down the hills myself, but it was a different story when it came to teaching a bunch of scared neophytes to do it. I discovered that the best way to learn the fundamentals of skiing is to teach others.



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This principle is even truer when teaching other people how to know and apply God's Word. In fact, for those who truly have the gift of teaching, the process of teaching itself actually energizes them to get closer to God and to dig more into His Word.

What Is the Gift of Teaching?

The gift of teaching is the supernatural ability to communicate God's Word in a way that motivates people to understand it within the context of their lives and obey its principles. The goal for teaching comes directly from the Great Commission where it is stated as one of the three ways we are to fulfill the command, to make disciples; "*Teaching* them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). In this verse there are two phrases that give insight into what Jesus meant. The first phrase "teaching them to obey" gives us the main focus of our teaching. The direct object of "teaching" is not the "Word" but rather "to obey." Teaching people to obey God's Word is much more complex than teaching mere content. Jesus was never satisfied with teaching for the transmission of knowledge with no effect on behavior. Truly knowing God and His Word affects a person's whole life.

The second phrase in this text "everything I have commanded you" answers the question about "what" the learners are to obey. Yet to put these two phrases out of order is to miss the whole point of what it means to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Certainly God's Word is important to Jesus. In fact, Jesus, by both His use of Scripture and His teaching about Scripture, shows that He was a diligent student of the Word. Jesus never taught that the study of Scripture was an end in itself. In fact, He condemned the religious leaders for believing that

salvation came through the actual study of Scripture (John 5:39-40). His disciples not only know His Word but they obey it (Matt. 7:24; Luke 11:28).

“Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). Practicing the truth is a prerequisite for teaching the truth. Obedience is learned by imitation, not legislation.

Different Types of Teaching

Good teachers come in all shapes and sizes: single parents who faithfully bring up their children to obey the Word, boys’ club leaders who maintain a relationship with their guys long into their adult years, Sunday school teachers who take the time to do fun activities with their students, small Bible study group leaders who skillfully build a sense of community with their members, or a men’s group leader who faithfully helps his group get the victory over addictive behaviors.

In Deuteronomy 6:5-9, we discover three types of teaching commonly found in the home: modeling, formal, and informal teaching. A fourth type is nonformal teaching (often used by Jesus).

Modeling

If we expect others to follow our values, we must be passionate about what we teach. Moses was keenly aware of this principle when he began his instruction to the Hebrew parents with the challenge recorded in Deuteronomy 6:5-6. Modeling suggests that one of the best ways to affect the behavior of others is to passionately live the values you want to teach in front of your students.

Formal

When Moses tells parents to “impress” God’s commandments upon their children (Deut. 6:7), he wants them to continually reinforce the laws of God in the hearts and minds of their children. This process would imply a more formal teaching strategy in the home that would systematically and intentionally help children to learn the laws of God. This relates to the intentional teaching opportunities that we have today in the home, school, or church.

Informal

The third type of teaching alluded to in the Deuteronomy text relates to what educators call informal teaching. As the text illustrates (v. 7-9), informal teaching is instruction that is initiated by the circumstances and situations of an informal setting. It is unplanned and part of the natural environment. Educators often explain informal teaching as taking advantage of the teachable moments that arise in everyday life. In a Christian context this implies looking for opportunities to engage the learner in reflecting, questioning, and discussing issues. It concerns helping the student discover or reinforce biblical principles.

Nonformal

Although not cited in the above passage, another important type of teaching was used by Jesus—nonformal teaching. This process is similar to informal in that it happens within the informal living environment. It is different than informal because it is planned and intentional.

Because it combines the strengths of these two types of teaching, it can be an effective way to intentionally accomplish specific goals within an informal context. It allows for more student participation and interaction with more opportunity for application as well. Gifted teachers offer a variety of approaches to meet student's needs. A church or other institution is wise to develop people at their different levels of Christian maturity.

Learning from Jesus the Teacher

In the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as a teacher more than by any other title. The Greek word most often given to Christ, as an educational title, is *didaskalos*. This word is translated "teacher" or "master" and is found more than 40 times in the Gospels. Most frequently in the King James Version of the Bible, *didaskalos* is translated "master" rather than "teacher" because, at the time of translation, the word *master* was understood to mean *schoolmaster*.

- Jesus' disciples refer to Him as teacher or master (Mark 4:38).
- The scribes and Pharisees referred to Him in this way (John 3:2).
- Jesus identified Himself by the term (Mark 14:14).

Other Bible passages also point out the priority of teaching in the ministry of Christ (Matt. 4:23; 5:2; 7:29).

Rabbi is another title associated with the word teacher and used to refer to Christ. This word is also sometimes translated "master" and, as a Jewish title, designated one as able to teach with the authority of Moses possessing authority to interpret the law. Nicodemus and the disciples of John the Baptist called Jesus "Rabbi" (John 1:38; 3:2). "Rabboni" (John 20:16), a similar but even more intensively educational and relational title, was used by Mary Magdalene when He appeared to her after the resurrection.

Christ taught in a variety of situations: *one on one* teaching (personal interaction, John 4:1-42); *small group* learning (the disciples alone with Christ, Luke 22:14-38); *large groups* of people (the multitudes heard Him, Matt. 23:1-39). Believers today are responsible to continue the Lord's teaching ministry in all situations.

Principles of Effective Teaching

Principles of effective teaching must be based on what actually helps people to grow and develop into maturity in Jesus Christ. The source for six principles must be God's Word. Many of these principles are based upon what we have already discussed in Chapter 1.

Effective teaching helps people to grow more like Christ and focuses on these six principles:

1. Knowing God
2. Knowing God's Word
3. Knowing how people learn
4. Applying truth to the whole person
5. Helping people to obey the Word
6. Balancing support and challenge

Knowing God

For a teacher to teach and students to learn, each must be properly connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ. Obviously a teacher must model such to motivate others to follow. The teacher, however, must also challenge and train students in how to develop their own relationship with Christ. The optimal learning environment is one in which both the students and the teacher are passionately seeking to know and follow Christ. Everything possible must encourage this team effort.

Knowing God's Word

Regardless of the teaching style used, the focus of a learning experience must be God's Word. The teacher must set the example by maintaining a regular habit of studying God's Word daily. In this way a teacher will be spiritually prepared to utilize teaching opportunities ranging from the brief teachable moments of informal settings to impromptu questions in a formal classroom.

Knowing How People Learn

It does not matter how entertaining a teacher is; if students do not learn the experience is of little value within the kingdom of God. Teachers must take the time to get to know their students personally to identify how they learn best. Teaching methods are then carefully chosen with the developmental needs of students and educational goals in mind.

Applying Truth to the Whole Person

Spiritual growth and development applies to every aspect of people's lives. A good church or Christian education program should balance goals and plan for needs including the physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual areas. Spiritual goals need to be integrated into each of these areas of growth to help students apply God's truth to the whole person.

Helping People to Obey the Word

The task of the Christian teacher would be fairly simple if our goal was simply to help people understand God's Word. Our commission, however, goes far beyond acquiring knowledge and changing immediate behavior. We must teach people to *obey* God's Word. This requires higher thinking skills, more time, more prayer, more spiritual energy, and a greater commitment to follow up from the teacher. It demands the teacher be aware of how the students apply the principles learned.

Balancing Support and Challenge

When we look at the seemingly impossible challenges of the cost of discipleship in Scripture, we realize the only way we can even attempt to move toward the goal of Christ-likeness is because of Christ's love. He balanced His challenge with His support in giving us so many gifts of His grace: the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the encouragement of the body of Christ, the gift of unconditional forgiveness, His precious promises, and the final promise to be with us always (Matt 28:20). By focusing on these principles, effective teaching helps others to grow more like Christ.

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Summary

Teaching, for the Christian, is a unique privilege that may take different forms: formal, informal, nonformal, and modeling. The focus of Christian teaching should be changed lives. It takes all types of teachers to be instrumental in helping the variety of people in the body of Christ to grow.

Jesus is one of the best examples of a teacher in all of history. As we follow Christ as our example as “the Teacher,” we will not only challenge our students to Christ-likeness but also show them warmth and grace when they fall short.

For Further Discussion

1. How can teaching God’s Word help us to grow spiritually?
2. What are some of the signs that a person has the gift of teaching?
3. Name some ways that all believers are teachers as they live and witness in the world.
4. How did Jesus stand out as a teacher?
5. What styles of teaching do you learn best under?

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