

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Procedure

WE HAVE observed that the preparation of the lesson involves much more than a study of the Scripture passages that are to be considered the following Sunday. Success in the presentation of the lesson in reality depends upon three steps in preparation.

1. Training of the teacher.

In an early chapter stress was laid upon the preparation of the teacher for his task. Even the reception of a certificate or a diploma does not permanently qualify him for his work. The fact is, one cannot be a teacher unless he is a learner. When a teacher ceases to be a learner, he ceases to be a teacher. If he studies he will inspire others to study. Pupils prefer to drink from running brooks and not stagnant pools. It is incumbent upon the teacher constantly to tap new reservoirs of teaching material and teaching methods.

2. Assembling of lesson material.

This we know is a perennial task. In his vast field of research, the teacher

“Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

His selections will be guided and governed by the needs of his pupils as they are manifested from week to week in his close intercourse and acquaintance with them.

3. Organizing the lesson material.

This we have observed is a specific preparation for a designated lesson, simplified in scope and multiplied in efficiency through relationship to preceding steps. This final stage of preparation, which will be approached with confidence if not with anticipation because of the earlier effort that has been put forth, will likewise determine whether the teaching of the lesson is to be drudgery or joy. For the well-trained and carefully prepared teacher, conducting the lesson is really a simple and satisfactory procedure. Adequate time and thought given to planning the work leaves the teacher to work the plan.

The teacher who has put into practice the principles we have been considering will come to realize that the success of their application depends largely on many seemingly insignificant details, which are of great importance.

Before we consider the presentation of the lesson to the class, it would be well to review the seven laws of teaching which were studied. All of these principles, with the possible exception of the first, are applicable to the class period. They will need to be observed if success is to attend our efforts.

The lesson period itself may be considered under four successive steps:

I. APPROACHING THE LESSON

The first few minutes of a battle have decided the issue frequently. Upon the opening of the lesson often hinges success or failure. Upon the spirit and method of the attack rest the results that follow. The most carefully laid plans may avail nothing because of failure in the attack. Before any reference whatever is made to the lesson, it is well to observe that the first concern is the attitude and interest of the pupils.

1. Welcome pupils.

The campaign to win the attention and interest of the pupils begins the moment they reach class. If the teacher is in his place five to ten minutes before the opening of the session, there will be time for a personal greeting as each member of the class arrives. A tardy teacher is at a disadvantage. Aside from the realization that at the very start he is on the defensive, he is not in position to give the individual welcome to each pupil. Furthermore, the pupil's response to his reception is important in that it will be an index to his personal attitude to the lesson period and what the teacher may expect from him in the way of attention.

2. Contact with class.

The average boy as he comes to class is not thinking of what will be taught. How then may a right attitude on the part of the pupil be secured? By entering into his interests sufficiently to win his confidence and attention, so that he may be easily led to the lesson plane. If the pupil does not "attend with interest to the lesson to be learned," it is useless to proceed. Arousing real interest is the only successful method of overcoming inattention and preventing disorder.

a. Topic of the day.

The teacher may successfully solicit attention by referring to some recent event familiar to most of the class. With older pupils who read the newspapers, there will be a wide field of interest; but with younger children, some happening in their school or play life will probably strike an immediate response.

Teachers, who make it a point to be closely informed, if not associated with the weekday activities of the pupils, will have no difficulty at this point.

b. Story.

With younger pupils a story will frequently serve to arouse and sustain attention, and with little children a picture or an object will gain immediate response through the eye-gate.

Dr. McKinney suggests that the lesson period begin with an illustration drawn from the everyday experience of the pupil, "to attract his attention, on the one hand, and to impress the truth which the teacher wishes to leave in his mind, on the other hand" (McKinney, *Practical Pedagogy in the Sunday School*, p. 81).

c. Reports of assignments.

Pupils are always interested in their own activities, and unless the home work they have prepared has a definite place in the later development of the lesson, it would be well to start out with a report of their assignments. Unless they are recognized and commended in this work, little can be expected of the pupils outside of class; if the first attention of the class can be directed to it, its significance and importance will be emphasized.

II. OPENING THE LESSON

Having gained the pupils' attention, the next problem is to hold it. First of all, before proceeding with the lesson, let us remember that attention cannot be maintained without interest, and interest is never sustained in a subject which the mind does not grasp. It is essential that we start with familiar ground, remembering the new can be comprehended only in terms of the old.

1. Contact with lesson.

Before introducing the lesson of the day, it would be well to:

a. Relate it to previous lessons.

The lesson of the day is but a chapter in a complete revelation that God has given, and a close relationship to all preceding chapters is vital if the interest of the pupil is to be sustained and his understanding furthered. The Bible tells a human story that has a beginning and an ending, and it means much for the pupil to know just what place the lesson has in that story.

b. Relate it to the last lesson.

The pupils will probably have a better memory of the last lesson than of previous study, so it can be dwelt upon a little more fully, especially that portion which most vitally associates it with the day's lesson. We never gain time by omitting a review. More real progress can be made in twenty minutes after five minutes has been spent making a point of contact, than in a half hour's effort to comprehend an unconnected lesson. Perhaps the chief requirement is that the teacher vary the ways in which he conducts a review so as to avoid the listlessness that comes from knowing what to expect.

2. Announce subject.

This should not be a formal statement that the topic of the lesson is so and so, which soon becomes monotonous, but rather what interesting information will be disclosed today in the light of what was learned the previous week. Unfortunately, those who prepare our lesson topics do not always take the pupil's interest into consideration; therefore the teacher should make the topic of the lesson attract as much attention as the headlines of a newspaper.

3. Announce object.

There is difference of opinion whether it is wise for the teacher to disclose his aim at the beginning. Often an application can be made more effectively if the pupil is not warned in advance. On the other hand, the object of temperance, missionary, or other lessons that have been placed in the curriculum for a specific purpose, can be announced in advance.

4. Announce outline.

If the teacher is not likely to follow his outline, it would be a mistake to reveal it, but on the other hand, like the lead in a newspaper item, there is value in presenting a leading thought in an opening paragraph to arouse interest in what is to follow.

III. DEVELOPING THE LESSON

“Well begun is half done.” Having completely won the interest and attention of the pupil, and having successfully introduced him to the lesson, the teacher has but to proceed with his preparation. The rule is to develop the outline of the lesson by methods chosen through examination, illustration, and application of the teaching material. The actual teaching of the lesson will show far better than any suggestions how far the preparation has been of value, and how far the method is the one best for present use. Many things must be kept in mind as the teacher proceeds with the lesson, but most of all he must ever remember that “one does not actually teach unless he causes someone to know something which he has not known,” and that the real test of a teacher's work is not what he says, but what his pupils remember.

Therefore he must constantly:

1. Stimulate thought.

For this purpose the question will be found to be the most valuable weapon, and the teacher who develops the lesson by a series of thought-provoking inquiries will never fail to accomplish his purpose.

Information should not be imparted without asking for it again in some form. Some information, of course, must be given, but good teaching requires that the pupil's mind be constantly tested to see if he is alert and if he has actually profited by what has been told him.

It is well to remember that if questions are to be employed effectively and extensively, progress will be slow, and the same amount of ground cannot be covered as if the story-telling or lecture method were used to present the material. Time is required to give pupils an opportunity to think, but until they think, all the instruction imparted has little value.

If one teaches entirely through the use of questions, it is essential that his outline be kept well in mind. The pupils should recognize the pathway of thought as the lesson is developed, and should realize that they are making definite progress despite the questioning process. It is a good plan after the first fact of the outline has been developed through questions, to briefly sum up the results of the class work in positive form, and then proceed to the next, and so on to the end. Most illustrations, unless familiar, will have to be introduced by direct statement, but the teacher can always ask the class to suggest some application of the lesson truth before offering his own.

2. Reproduce thought.

Since what the pupil expresses is most likely to be remembered, it is fully as important that he be encouraged to reproduce his thoughts as that he be stimulated to think.

As Miss Plummer notes:

“In all teaching it is well to use regularly the ‘*telling back*’ plan. Adults greatly profit by this method; with children it is essential. Never tell your class what you can induce them to tell you. Here is a common mistake. The teacher should use all his powers of diplomacy in getting a pupil to put into words that which his mind grasps. It is worth infinitely more to a pupil to tell some truth, even in a broken, bungling way, than to have you tell it beautifully and eloquently. When he can tell it, he knows it. He may hear you tell it many times without knowing it. Trying to tell it helps him to know it (Plummer, *The Soul-Winning Teacher*, p. 77).

But beyond the reproduction of the facts of the lesson - and this is the starting point - the teacher should strive to have the pupil express himself - give his interpretation and his application of the lesson. It is this great failure of the teaching ministry that has led modern educators to promote experience-centered lessons. However, it should not be necessary for any one to abandon truth and cease to make it central in instruction in order that pupils may do their own thinking.

Pupils can be trained to base their experience on biblical truth. Expressional activities should be introduced in the Beginners department and continued thereafter during the years the child is in Sunday school. Only lessons that contain expressional activities should be admitted in the curriculum. With this constant emphasis on the application, as well as the acquisition, of knowledge, especially in the early years, pupils will come actually to expect the teacher to stand aside so that they can participate in the lesson.

IV. CLOSING THE LESSON

The lesson should not be ended abruptly or without a fitting conclusion. As careful consideration needs to be given to the finish as to the start. From three to five minutes need to be reserved for this purpose.

1. Recapitulation.

Perhaps the outline, if fully followed, will suggest the best summary of the lesson.

If the questions of the pupils or the trend of class discussion have not made it possible to adhere closely to the outline, the teacher in any event, should sum up the net results of the class period. What are the fundamental facts brought out in the discussion of which the pupils should be reminded?

And with the recapitulation of the lesson facts will be associated the important truths that have been introduced. What important lesson will the pupil carry with him? What final application should be made? The lesson has been taught; has Christ been revealed as the Saviour of sinners? If not, could a more practical application be made in conclusion?

2. The next lesson.

Before the class is dismissed, the teacher will want to give some thought to the next lesson.

a. Arouse interest.

The teacher not only desires the class to return the following Sunday, but to come back with expectation. By some startling statement or striking question, curiosity and interest can be aroused in what will be taken up the next week.

As a writer by a fascinating conclusion leads his readers to look forward to the next chapter of a serial story, so a teacher should strive to finish the day's portion of "the most interesting story in the world" with such a climactic ending that the entire class will look forward to the next Sunday's installment.

b. Make assignments.

These should already have been selected during the preparation of the lesson, but the animated way in which the part is assigned to the individual pupil will determine the interest and enthusiasm with which he will enter upon his task.

QUESTIONS

1. Upon what three steps in preparation does the success of the lesson depend?
2. What are the four successive steps to be followed in the presentation of the lesson?
3. Suggest three ways in which the teacher may make a point of contact with the class.
4. What four steps are to be taken in opening the lesson?
5. Why is it necessary to relate the lesson to previous lessons as well as to the last lesson?
6. Discuss the wisdom of announcing the object of the lesson.
7. State the rule for the development of the lesson.
8. What allowance must be made if questions are used to stimulate thought?

9. How many questions be used to stimulate thought without departing from the outline?
10. What attention should be given to the reproduction of thought?
11. Make some suggestions for the recapitulation of the lesson.
12. What two considerations should be given to the next lesson?

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