

Chapter 6

MAKING THE TEAM A WINNER

Part 2: Methods

A pitcher's job is to keep the opponent's batters from scoring. Ideally, he will throw a variety of pitches with such accuracy that he will keep the batters from even reaching base. He will try to deceive them with a curve ball, blow a fast ball by them, or throw a low slider with the hope that, at best, they will hit the ball on the ground for a forced out. The success of his team will depend, in part, on how well he uses the variety of pitches available to him.

Similarly, the Christian teacher plays well when he/she uses a variety of instructional strategies. The educator's task is to instill specific Biblical truths so that students can make personal application and grow in wisdom and knowledge. In order to accomplish this task the teacher may pitch a discussion question, use a role play, or assign a research project. There are scores of methods available to teachers. Success in the lives of students will depend in part on how well teachers use the variety of methods available to them.

Why do teachers' manuals suggest so many different methods? Can't students just study the Bible?

People are different from each other. Some prefer to read the account of an event, while others like to see the movie. Some people are very musical, but others "can't carry a tune in a bucket." Some like to work with their hands, while others would rather buy something ready made.

Using a mixture of teaching methods is not a trick for spicing up a Sunday School lesson. It is an intentional strategy to maximize learning by accommodating to student differences. The goal of teaching is to pass on all things that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, it is important to make the best use of each student's way to learn.

Offering a variety of instructional methods also encourages over learning, or mastery. At the beginning of class a teacher may tell a Bible story with the help of visuals, followed by an activity page. A short quiz can serve as another teaching vehicle, especially when self-corrected. The words of a song might next be used, followed by the drawing a poster, both designed to reinforce the message. The teacher's final summary, perhaps on Power Point, along with a review of the memory verse will give final impact to the lesson.

A variety of teaching methods reinforces the Bible lesson several ways during the hour. These changes of pace also accommodate student attention span. Mastery learning takes place best when a combination of instructional methods all reinforce a Bible truth.

I realize that a variety of activities aids in learning, but doesn't constant change distract from the learning process?

A lack of variation in methodology is deadly. A continuous change of the methods is also distracting to students. Variety in methodology captivates interest, but a new method does not need to be introduced every five minutes.

Over the course of a year teachers may try thirty or more methods. Some will feel comfortable; others will feel forced. Teachers will eventually settle down to a dozen or so methods that work best for them and for their learners. With this variety they can make the necessary changes of pace in the classroom to insure interest, yet at the same time use methods repetitively enough to minimize distraction to the learners.

How can I encourage teachers to use a variety of methods?

Program team meetings are the best place to encourage new ideas. Most published curricula give a step-by-step description of what should take place in each session. The writers of the curriculum usually try to vary the activities that they recommend. If teachers simply follow the lesson plans from the publisher, they will be varying their methods.

Some programs, however, do not provide detailed lesson plans. Also, occasions do arise when all the methods suggested in a curriculum seem inappropriate. Teachers can substitute an alternate method, but they should be able to demonstrate to the program leader that their method would be more productive than the one published in the material.

At the program team meeting the leader does not have to single-handedly convince a reluctant teacher to try new approaches to learning. Other teachers present at the meeting who practice different methods can also encourage the worker. Their attitudes at the planning session have a modeling effect. They can also open their classrooms for a hesitant teacher to observe a typical session.

Our teachers need to realize that just as they wouldn't enjoy a turkey sandwich three times a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, so, too, their students wouldn't enjoy an ongoing monologue week after week. It has been said that variety is the spice of life. Program leaders need to help teachers get past the inertia that keeps them from providing that spice to their classes.

What are the best methods for teaching preschool children?

Care must be given when speaking of "best" methods. A method is good when it is comfortable to the teacher and when it helps the learners. If a teacher is uncomfortable with a method, or if that medium does not communicate effectively with the learners, the method might be good but not good for that teaching-learning situation.

Young children are active; they are curious; they are excited about investigating and manipulating their ever expanding world. For this reason *learning centers* are effective with preschoolers. Many activities can be incorporated into the learning center approach. For example, if the lesson theme is God's creation, wooden puzzles of animals or nature can be used at a table. A tripod magnifying glass can be set on the floor in another area of the room to study leaves, rocks or pine cones. Another table can host a coloring project, while at a fourth center children can work with play dough. The selection of activities used in the learning centers should follow the suggestions in the teacher's manual, or be determined by the teaching team at their monthly meeting. The learning center approach allows students to move among the centers. Since the same Bible theme is designed into all the activities, children are prepared for the Bible story regardless of in which centers they chose to participate.

Guided conversation is an important technique for working with young children. For example, housekeeping can be ordinary play or Christian instruction. The difference is in what the teacher says while student is involved in the activity. When a child presses his hand in some clay, for example, the teacher may suggest that another child also make a hand print. Since the hand prints will be slightly different, the teacher can observe: "Do you notice how your hand, Tom, is different from Carrie's hand? Isn't it neat how God made each one of us special!" At the puzzle table a child may have just completed putting all the pieces of a chicken in their proper place. That in itself offers the child a sense of accomplishment, but an insightful teacher can take the activity one step further by asking, "Kevin, do you ever eat eggs? Do you like milk? God gives us eggs from chickens (teacher points to chicken), and He gives us milk from cows (pointing to cow). Let's pray right now and thank God for all the good food he gives us."

Music is another vehicle for communicating Bible truth. Some of the methods include songs, rhymes with finger plays, or the use of rhythm instruments. Many adults vividly remember their days grinding the sand paper blocks, clanging the cymbals, or hitting the triangle bell (my favorite!). A piano or guitar can be used for accompaniment, or songs can be burned on a CD. Perhaps the best type of music, however, is the

spontaneous song led by a teacher sensitive to what is happening in the class.

Storytelling is intriguing to young children. In fact, notice how even adults are more attentive as the pastor illustrates with a story than when he gives a prolonged exposition. Stories can be told using the figures provided in resource kits, but they can also be told on a whiteboard. Some children like sitting in a small group to hear a story, others like to thumb through a picture book by themselves. Some teachers speak through puppets, while others like to use video graphics. All these methods lend themselves well to communicating Bible truth.

What are some good methods for teaching elementary age kids ?

Elementary age children can also benefit from some of the methods mentioned above, however, their older age gives them a greater sophistication, a longer attention span, and a boredom with things that are too trite.

Role playing is a good example to illustrate the difference. In the preschool department, a story could be acted out with the aid of “people posters.” Fabric is glued to cardboard figures to make them look like Bible characters. As the children slip their heads and arms through appropriate holes, they are ready to relive the story of the disciples following Jesus. Now, while people posters might be embarrassing to many 2nd and 3rd graders, the role play method can still work if the scene is appropriate. For example, it is not too hard to find three boys to act out a disagreement at a ball game. In response to two fellows arguing, a peacemaker could intervene, illustrating the attitude and behavior taught in the Sunday School lesson.

Another good technique for children is the combination of *story telling* with *investigative Bible study*. As children’s reading skills develop, they can become more involved in the Bible lesson. A teacher may question: “How did David feel when he heard Goliath insulting God? What do we learn from verse 26?” The teacher’s presentation and the student’s investigations combine to make this technique challenging for children.

Bible games and *Bible learning activities* are also fun ways for children to learn. While Bible games are useful for teaching (i.e., Bible Trivia, Bible Challenge, etc.), teachers can create their own games with questions drawn from the lesson or unit of study for Bible Jeopardy, Bible Millionaire or Bible Tic-Tac-Toe.

In a similar fashion, Bible learning activities can also be tailored to the content of a lesson. Key words of a verse can be hidden in a page of letters. Each word of a memory verse can be placed on 3 x 5 index cards and then given to a student or small group to unscramble. An increasing number of churches are placing computer labs into their children’s facilities. A host of interactive games, research projects and lessons are possible for instruction through this medium.

Many children enjoy *art projects*. A Bible scene can be reconstructed in a diorama using a shoebox, dirt, sand, rocks, and pipe cleaners for figures. First graders may enjoy sponge painting, soap painting or vegetable printing. Older children may prefer papier-mâché, mosaics or cartooning.

As children's vocabularies increase, *creative writing* assignments can be used to enhance learning. Children can write a paragraph summarizing a Bible account, or write a short letter to a real or imaginary friend about one aspect of the Bible lesson.

Children enjoy discovery and appreciate variety. Many creative methods are available to teachers who work with first through sixth graders.

Which methods will involve teenagers without making them self-conscious?

Adolescents are both children and adults. Sometimes we are bothered by their immaturity, yet on other occasions we are amazed at their insights or the way they assume responsibility. Acceptance is very important to teens. Peer pressure is ever present among junior and senior highs. A variety of methods can be used with teens, but care should be given not to embarrass any individual, or to allow a group's contribution to be ridiculed.

Young people prefer *interaction methods* over a lecture. When a group first comes together, the teacher may need to initiate the interaction through a question and answer format. Perhaps an *agree/disagree question* might be asked, allowing students to share why they made their particular choice. As group members become comfortable with one another, however, good questions will elicit discussion among the students themselves.

The *problem-solving* method, especially when it is used in small groups, also engages students in the learning process, too. In this method group members suggest solutions to a problem, and then assess their alternatives. After selecting their best solution, each group reports its findings to the whole class. *Case studies* and *inductive Bible studies* can also be assigned to small groups with each group sharing their results.

The *research and report* method is likewise profitable for students. Whether the assignment is given to an individual or to a team, the research and report method adds minutes and hours to the learning session through the students' out-of-class preparation. For example, students may be assigned the project surveying friends at school as to what they believe is important in life. Or they may be assigned into study teams to research what the Bible says about various topics.

The research and report method does not exempt the teacher from serving as the catalyst for learning. During the week the teacher should call his students to encourage them with their projects. These out-of-class methods, along with the many in-class methods suggested in a teacher's manual, help students learn in relevant ways the timeless truths of Scripture.

Without getting into childish activities, how can teachers include adults in the learning process?

Most adults attend Sunday School by choice. Some may participate because of the desire of their spouse or because they want to demonstrate a good example to their children. But if an adult does not enjoy his/her Bible class, he/she will usually stop attending. While some adults have learned to be passive in the teaching process, good instructional methodology can help them take responsibility for their learning.

Because of the poor quality of many lectures, some people believe that the lecture method should be abandoned. However, the *lecture* method is a sound means of instruction. A lecture can communicate a large amount of material in a relatively short period of time. Combined with other methods and supported with illustrations and visuals, this method can be especially effective. It is important for teachers using this method to remember, however, that they are not primarily teaching content—they are teaching students. The subject must be communicated with good eye contact and learner involvement.

It is generally agreed that the most effective method for teaching adults is *discussion*. As friends meet together in a home, it is natural for everyone to share in the conversation. The question and answer method centers the dialogue between the teacher and pupil whereas the discussion method permits the communication to move among all of the class members. Circular seating enhances discussion, and where a group is large, semi-circular seating is better than straight rows. A combination of mini-lectures and discussion provides a good balance of impression and expression.

Small groups in the form of dyads, triads or larger groups can be used for break out sessions during the hour. Assignments for these groups should be well thought out by the leader. Instructions to the group may be listed on a sheet of paper or shown on a screen. After the small group has completed its study, a spokesperson from the group might report their findings to the whole class.

The same information presented in a lecture can be discovered in a small group. The advantage of the small group, however, is that the students are more directly involved with the passage. In addition, class members will experience the by-product of fellowship (the developing of supportive relationships) which seldom occurs during a lecture.

In the *inductive Bible study* method the class is primarily concerned with three questions: “What does the text say?” “What does the text mean?” and “How does that apply to Christians living in the twenty-first century?” Too often people seek applications from a passage before studying the textual meaning. A study of the words in a particular Bible portion, and their grammatical relationship to one another, will produce an understanding of what has been said. Second, interpreting the text will become easier when we know the occasion of its writing and to whom the passage was addressed. The third step in the inductive method is the making of personal application.

Many other methods can also be used effectively with adults, just as there are scores of methods that can be used with children and teens. A chart of Selected Teaching Methods is given at the end of the chapter.

Summary

If a football team repeated the same play on every down, the opposition would soon stop that play, and probably throw the team for a loss. A good offensive team varies its plays. It uses passes and runs; traps and sweeps; the quick out and the bomb. The diversity of plays keeps the team moving; and when the plays are used in an effective combination, a score will result.

Using a combination of methods also enhances the teaching-learning process. Changes of pace in the classroom help learners become successful in their understanding of the Bible. As teachers vary their methodology, students will score in the game of mastery learning.

SELECTED TEACHING METHODS

Method	Preschool	Children	Youth	Adults
Agree-Disagree			X	X
Book Reports		X	X	X
Brainstorming		X	X	X
Buzz Groups			X	X
Case Studies			X	X
Whiteboard		X	X	X
Charts		X	X	X
Circle Response		X	X	X
Choral Reading		X	X	
Crayon Etching/Rubbing	X	X		
Creative Writing		X	X	
Debates			X	X
Dioramas	X	X		
Diary		X	X	
Discussion		X	X	X
Displays		X	X	X
Dramatization	X	X	X	X
DVDs and Videos	X	X	X	X
Field Trips	X	X	X	X
Flannel graph	X	X		
Friezes	X	X	X	
Inductive Study		X	X	X
Interview		X	X	X
Lecture			X	X
Maps		X	X	X
Memorization		X	X	X
Murals		X	X	
Neighbor Nudging			X	X
Object Lessons	X	X	X	X

Open End Stories		X	X	
Outlining			X	X
Painting (string, sponge)	X	X		
Pantomime		X	X	
Paper Bag Puppets	X			
Paraphrasing			X	X
People Posters	X			
Pictures	X	X		
Posters		X	X	
Problem solving		X	X	X
Projects		X	X	X
Puppets	X	X	X	
Puzzles	X	X		
Question and Answer		X	X	X
Question Box		X	X	X
Quiz		X	X	
Reports		X	X	X
Review	X	X	X	X
Role Playing	X	X	X	X
Singing	X	X	X	X
Sketches		X	X	X
Song Writing		X	X	X
Storytelling	X	X	X	X
Surveys		X	X	X
Testimonies		X	X	X
Time Line		X	X	
Word Associations		X	X	X
Writing a Prayer		X	X	X

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