

Fundamentals of Teaching

By Timothy Brown

Teaching today's child can be fun and adventuresome when done properly. It not only impacts the children, but does great things for you. How can that become a reality in your teaching situation?

For your teaching to have maximum impact you must center it on the Word of God. The more bible-centered your class is, the more effective it will be. Isaiah 55:11 emphasizes this point. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." God says when you give out his word; it will accomplish his purpose in the life of the hearer. The only way you can be sure to have God's blessing and power in your teaching is to make sure it is bible-centered.

A second key to maximize teaching is prayer. Throughout the scriptures, God makes it clear he works in direct answer to the prayers of his people. So, the more prayer in your planning and presentation, the more effective your class time will be.

People tend to pray as they start their preparation and think that's enough. I would challenge you to pray all through your preparation. Pray during your class using quick statements as you transition to a new activity. Pray after class asking God to use the teaching during the week.

In looking at teaching fundamentals, the question comes to mind, "What is teaching?" According to Webster's dictionary teaching means "To impart knowledge or practical skill." That's fine for secular teaching, but Christian teaching involves more.

Christian teaching is a process designed to bring about change in three areas: knowledge, skill, and behavior. You want to increase the student's knowledge of the word of God. They need to hear the Bible stories and learn its truths and principles. But to be effective, you have to go beyond imparting knowledge. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says that knowledge by itself puffs up or makes one proud.

A second thing to change is the student's skill. Skills related to reading, memorizing, and studying the bible for themselves, how to pray, how to communicate their faith, and so on. If you teach a child how to have a daily Quiet Time with God which becomes a consistent part of their life, you've given something to help them the rest of their life.

The third change effective teaching brings about is in behavior. As children learn the principles in God's word and practice them, a positive change in their behavior will result.

So how do we accomplish this? Well, let's start by looking at a Master Teacher and seek to follow his example and pattern. The greatest teacher of all time is the Lord Jesus Christ. His teaching consistently touched and changed lives. John records that even the officers of the Pharisees said "Never man spoke like this man."

In studying Jesus' teaching methods, he used a variety of styles tailor made for each setting. His methods included: storytelling, object lessons, lectures, sermons, questions, quoting scriptures, and using illustrations. He seldom answered a question directly, but used it as a teaching opportunity by answering the question with a question that revealed the heart and motive of the one asking. From Jesus, we learn the importance of varying our teaching style. The normal tendency is to use the same method each week in class, the one we're most comfortable with. The problem is the teaching becomes predictable and even boring. When you vary your teaching style each week you are less predictable and the children are more likely to come to class with an attitude of expectation. "What's going to happen today?"

As God, Jesus intimately knew who he was teaching and therefore knew the best method to use. One could argue we don't have that knowledge and could never accomplish that, but the truth is, if you know Jesus as your Savior, God lives in you and will give direction on what method to use.

What are some teaching styles you can incorporate that will add a greater impact?

Ask Thought-Provoking Questions

These are questions the children can't answer with a yes or no; they have to think in order to answer. "Do you love God?" is a general question with a yes or no answer that doesn't give any additional information since most children will answer yes. Rephrase it into a thought-provoking question like; "What is something you can do to show God that you love him?" They have to think before answering and their answer gives added insight to their lives and thinking process.

You'll be surprised at the insight God gives children into his word. My brother was reading the story of Moses at the burning bush to his children one night and came to where God told Moses to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. My brother knew children think literally, so he explained that holy doesn't mean full of holes like Swiss cheese, but that it was special because God was there. His oldest son thought for a moment and said we have a Holy Bible, but for some people, their Bible is full of holes because they only take the parts they like and toss the rest. That's insight God gave to an eight year old child.

Don't be afraid to ask hard questions. Kids love to solve puzzles and if you ask them a hard question, you can almost see the wheels spinning in their mind as they work on an answer. Even if they can't answer it, their mind is focused where you want it and isn't drifting. If you have to give them the answer, it'll still impact them, because they've worked hard to try to figure it out.

Have Children Repeat

Another style is to teach an important point and ask the children to tell you what you just said in their own words. They can't simply repeat what you just said. This also makes them think and shows you how well you communicated your teaching. Beware though; sometimes what comes out of their mouth is quite a bit different from what you said.

Use Object Lessons.

The more senses involved in the learning process, the more effective the lesson. Jesus often used object lessons and my favorite one is in Matthew 18 where he sat a child on his lap and said unless you become like this child you can't enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

I've had teaching times where I was beginning to lose the attention of the class and all I did was pick up an object and suddenly it was back. They wanted to know what I was going to do and what it had to do with the lesson. Often there is an air of anticipation when I pick up an object to help illustrate a point. I've used stones, broken pieces of metal, golf balls, maps, watches, cordless drills, flashlights, CDs, and other everyday objects to teach eternal truths.

Involve the Children in the Lesson

When teaching a Bible lesson, I like to look for ways to involve the children. Once, when teaching about Elijah standing before King Ahab, I wanted to show the children what was really involved. In those days, you didn't just stand before the king by yourself. You were surrounded by soldiers and if the king was upset with you, he could have you killed on the spot. So I had one of the boys in the group be the king and had him sit in a chair. Six of the biggest children in the group became soldiers and stood in two rows facing each other and one of the smaller boys was Elijah who stood between the soldiers. Once set up, I shared the way things happened back then and taught that Elijah was trusting God with his life. God told Elijah to stand before the king knowing that the king hated Elijah and blamed him for the country's problems. Showing the story instead of just telling it gave extra insight on the true strength of Elijah's faith.

Use Visual Aids.

We live in a visual society and children learn best when they can see and hear something. Visual aids include flashcards, signs, PowerPoint™ presentations, video clips, word strips, visualized songs, overhead projector images, etc.

Buzz Groups

Prepare some thought-provoking questions that go with your lesson and divide the class into that many groups. Give each group a question and a set time to answer it. This adds a sense of urgency so they don't waste time. At the end of the time, someone from each group shares their answers.

Demonstration

If you are teaching a specific skill, have someone demonstrate it. In Junior Church, we did a series on sharing the story of how you began your relationship with God. Each week we had someone come in and share their story with the group as an example to follow.

Use Games and Activities

Once, when talking about obedience, we played a game of Simon Says with the group. We've used relay games to reinforce teaching on the importance of working together. Recently, I used a large checker game to teach five important truths. I wrote each one on a slip of paper and glued them to a large red checker. I wrote out the same truths and glued each one to a black checker. We played a matching game where one child would choose a red and a black checker and read what each one said. If it was a match, their team earned a point. If it wasn't, the checkers were placed back in their original spots. Each turn caused at least two truths to be read aloud and the children were concentrating so they could find them when it was their turn.

As you incorporate these styles into your teaching, make sure to include the two basic fundamentals: keep it Bible centered and covered with prayer. In fact, before choosing, ask God what style he wants you to use this week. He may impress one of the ones listed above or bring something different to your mind. As you present Bible centered classes, seeking to change knowledge, skill, and behavior, and use variety in your teaching style, you should notice positive changes in the children and in you.