

The Teacher and Teaching Methods of the Master

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28–29, ESV)

Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to

- List teaching methods of Jesus
- Give examples of the teaching methods of Jesus
- Incorporate the teaching methods of Jesus in their own lessons

Introduction

Jesus not only taught the Word of God, He was the Word of God (See John 1:1-14). He embodied the principles and practices He taught. “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2, ESV). Nicodemus had it nearly right. He thought Jesus was a teacher sent from God. He was that and much more.

He was God who came to teach. He was a teacher with a difference. Whether it was a crowd, a small group, or an individual, each would be amazed and “astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:29, ESV).

No wonder the title or word most frequently used to address or describe Jesus was “teacher.” “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.” (John 13:13, ESV). It was His primary activity as He walked on the earth. Both the title and the task aptly describe Him. He was a master at teaching. “Once again crowds gathered around him, and as usual he was teaching them” (Mark 10:1. NLT).

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Jesus presented His message far more in teaching than in preaching. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV). Note the emphasis on teaching and training in these verses so one can be in right standing, competent, and equipped for the task.

The Master Teacher Sets the Example

Jesus lived what He taught. In fact, Jesus was what He taught. Howard Hendricks says, “The effective teacher always teaches from the overflow of a full life” (1987, 17). “What He taught flowed out of who He was....Teaching naturally flowed from Jesus’ life. His words and actions reinforced each other with an authority that amazed His hearers. ‘What we are’ speaks more loudly than ‘what we say.’ Faith learning is more ‘caught from’ than ‘taught by’ a teacher” (Yount, 2008, 51).

“He is the only teacher who set a high standard of ethics and perfectly fulfilled it. Christ was the embodiment of what He taught....The Master taught profoundly by His life and example. He knew the power of modeling the truth and that inevitably His disciples would become like Himself” (Gangel, and Benson 1983, 68 - 69). His disciples became like Him in both their lifestyle and in their manner of teaching through example. Scripture amply confirms this. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NCV). “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9, ESV). “...But being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3, ESV). “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40, ESV). Truth is not possessed until it is practiced.

The Master Teacher and His Educational Persona

Jesus established rapport and a relationship with His students. His personal contact by being within reach and touch of His hearers enhanced the teacher-pupil relationship. He knew how to establish points of contact and was approachable. He demonstrated a unique understanding of His students and was sensitive to their needs. He was the Good Shepherd who knew His sheep (John 10:14). He noticed. He watched. His listeners had no difficulty discerning His care and interest in them.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you

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know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:47-49, ESV)

Jesus taught anywhere, everywhere, any time, and to anyone. He was not limited or restricted to the classroom. His environment became His classroom. He would use the occasion to teach a Scriptural truth or biblical principle. He was noted for using the surroundings as props for His teaching.

The Master Teacher and the Classroom

Jesus was ready, willing, and able to teach in any setting. Every occasion was an opportunity for learning. It is often a temptation to be content-centered rather than student-centered. While both are important, being student-centered is paramount. Jesus adapted His teaching to the type of students He encountered. "There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'" (John 4:7, ESV). "Jesus sought to take people as they were and to lead them where he wanted them to go" (England, 2002, 10).

Bible instructors need to be students of the Scripture (See 2 Timothy 2:15). But they also need to be students of those around them. Jesus, Paul, and others like Philip knew where their audience was and started to teach from there. They wisely and smoothly moved from the abstract to the concrete.

"So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.... And the eunuch said to Philip, 'About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:30-31; 34-36, ESV).

The Master Teacher and General Teaching Methods

Today, we would say Jesus was "down to earth." He taught in such a way that would be sensitive, simple, and sensible. He used the familiar to teach the unfamiliar; the old as a launching pad to teach something new. In this way He would add to their understanding and open their eyes to new truth. He would move them easily from the known to the

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unknown. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28, ESV).

He made strategic use of repetition to reinforce what He was teaching. He re-emphasized, re-explained, repeated, refocused, and rephrased until students were able to grasp what He was teaching. What gets repeated gets remembered. Repetition builds memory.

Jesus was a pro at using visual aids and word pictures to enhance His teaching. Such tools would impress the lesson vividly in their minds. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16, ESV). Jesus used object lessons. Consider how He used water to communicate biblical worship to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. He used the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son to illustrate the value of a lost soul.

He was not limited to the lecture method of instruction. Yet, He did not avoid it altogether either He would utilize activity methods and discovery learning to encourage students to become participators rather than spectators in their own learning and personal, spiritual development. This forced them to take an active rather a passive approach in their education.

The students mind needs to be active. Jesus encouraged active learning. "Jesus Himself was the constant 'Visual Aid' to His pupils. In Him they saw personified the 'abundant life' He proclaimed. The use of questions and various forms of activity methods further proved Jesus Himself to be the Master Teacher of His time, and 'His time' extends to the present day" (Wilson, 1974, 155).

The Master Teacher and Questions

Jesus not only answered questions, He also asked them. "Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?" (Matthew 12:29, ESV). He used questions to arouse student interest and to check comprehension. "And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:21, ESV). Sometimes His questions were rhetorical and did not require an answer. He used this methodology to impress and persuade. He wanted to make a statement rather than merely elicit a verbal response. He emphasized a point in a non-combative way. "And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said,

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‘Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation’” (Mark 8:12, ESV).

Jesus used questions to invoke personal application: “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ (Matthew 16:13-16, ESV). He consistently used questions to inspire change and spiritual growth. “And they went and woke him, saying, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing.’ And he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’ Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm” (Matthew 8:25-27, ESV).

The Master Teacher and On-Location Learning

Teaching through discipleship was a common educational method or pattern. Jesus practiced it and Paul followed it. Jesus and apostles like Paul used involvement and participation with excellence. Jesus, Paul, and others used in-service on-the-job training techniques to effectively teach students. The teaching was timely and could be quickly put to use. They understood life lived out in community was an unlimited environment for learning. Jesus traveled with his twelve disciples while Paul took along trainees like Timothy, Titus, and Silas on his missionary journeys.

The Master Teacher and Simplicity

Jesus illustrated “simplicity of motive, simplicity of method, and simplicity in the message. No one ever had to urge the Master Teacher to get to the point—it was always crystal clear” (The Method of the Master, accessed 7/23/2015). “Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Corinthians 3:12, KJV). “And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5, NLT). Jesus’ authority and confidence came from Scripture.

The Master Teacher and Parables

About a third of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels took the form of parables. The use of parables—often associated with Jesus—was a common genre used by rabbis and in oriental

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literature. It is a short story with a moral lesson. They illustrated His message, brought fresh understanding, and awakened interest.

“Parables are stories used to illustrate a central truth...and were drawn from familiar life situations....Parables gave concrete expression to abstract principles....They were wonderful aids to the memories of the learners. Perhaps, that was why the Gospel writers remembered, and why we remember, Jesus’ teaching in parables more than the other forms He used” (Reed, and Prevost 1993, 65).

Using parables and stories is certainly applicable in teaching young people today. Many process information with the narrative images.

“He used parables because they required higher levels of critical thinking (i. e., more than the simple acquisition of facts) from His disciples and those who came to challenge Him. Parables revealed biblical truths and values through the medium of stories. These stories remained fixed in the mind of the listener and were more easily recalled” (Anthony, and Benson 2003, 100).

Jesus varied His teaching approach according to the circumstances. He was a master at capturing interest. He told stories and parables within the comprehension and intellectual capacity of His hearers. It was almost the rule and not the exception. For example, classical stories are the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. Many have heard these and most remember them. Why? Because they are stories and stories are remembered. Human interest stories are remembered most because they cause one to identify with what is being told.

One study shows stories are remembered up to twenty-times more than facts alone. “Studies show that if you share a story, people are often more likely to be persuaded. And when data and story are used together, audiences are moved both intellectually and emotionally. When telling a story, you take the listener on a journey, moving them from one perspective to another....” (Aaker, accessed 8/1/2015).

Stories are effective teaching tools that can be told and retold. A story ‘provides simulation (knowledge about how to act) and inspiration (motivation to act). Note that both benefits, simulation and motivation, are geared to generating action” (Heath and Heath, 2008, 206). Knowledge becomes more life-like through stories.

The Master Teacher and Short Sayings

Proverbs are short and simple sentences that are drawn from life's long experiences. They are intended to shape behavior. Proverbs can be found throughout the Gospels. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matthew 19:30, ESV). "...Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35, ESV).

The Master Teacher and Life Transformation

Jesus opened the eyes and ears of His students through the methods He utilized.

"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?' ...When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'" (Luke 24:13-17; 30-33, ESV).

Lives are transformed when learning is applied. Learning leads to change. Often we unlearn the old, accept new ideas and knowledge bringing about change and transformation, and then we relearn as we apply this new learning in practical ways. Those that listened to Jesus were privileged to have an active role in the learning process. This was much different than the passive learning pattern and practices of the time which consisted mostly of rote learning.

The Master Teacher and Those that Followed

When Jesus ascended into heaven His disciples who had been with Him continued to follow His example in their own teaching. There are far more references to teaching than preaching throughout the New Testament. Preaching often is the proclamation of the gospel. Teaching is declaring the whole counsel of God to the lost and then lifestyle instruction to the found.

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The Church was established with a strong emphasis on teaching: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship” (Acts 2:42, ESV). “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42, ESV). The Acts of the Apostles ends with Paul “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31, ESV).

The first order of priority for the apostles was their teaching ministry (Acts 6:2). The teaching ministry is amply highlighted in 1 Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:7; and Ephesians 4:11. Leadership should be the backbone of the teaching ministry of the local church. Leaders were “apt to teach” (KJV) and “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24, ESV). They understood teaching to be a pivotal way of transmitting the truth to the next generation. “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2, ESV).

A Master Teacher and Reasoning

Paul would enter the synagogue and ‘reason’ or “dialogue” with those in attendance. There was a two-way flow of communication that took place. There was an interactive discussion going on. “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (Acts 17:2-3, ESV). “So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17-18, ESV). People learn faster and retain more when they are encouraged to personally participate in the learning process. Paul utilized debate and discussion to facilitate this.

“And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:8-10, ESV).

A Master Teacher and Teaching

The Book of Romans comprised sixteen chapters and provides insight into Paul's teaching style. In chapters 1 - 8 one can discern the logical development of ideas. He builds a strong case for each and draws logical conclusions. In chapters 9 - 11 Paul uses personal references and examples. His readers and listeners would have been able to identify with each. He uses questions in the book that encourage deep thinking encouraging learners to make discoveries on their own. He also quotes Scriptures as his authority. We use the Bible to teach the Bible. In chapters 12 - 16 Paul highlights practical applications. He explains how correct doctrine and truth plays out in real-life situations. His teaching was about everyday life. People usually learn best what they can use best.

Conclusion

The teaching methods Jesus used are applicable for all people, for all ages, for all time, and in all places. "The one constant in the field of education is that of change, and the Scriptures constitute the one educational handbook that will not change or go out of style. Its principles are eternal" (Gangel, and Benson 1983, 65).

"The discussion of New Testament principles of education was predicated on the premise that those principles were of eternal value and would not be rendered obsolete. As those principles are of permanent quality, so are the moral needs of the twentieth-century people when compared with those of people of the first century...The Scriptures are a seedbed of enduring educational principles..." (Gangel, and Benson 1983, 73).

"The methods of Jesus are not irrelevant....The superlative greatness of Jesus among all others is the timelessness of His approach. If it was true in the first century, as His contemporaries acknowledged, that no one taught as authoritatively as He, it is no less true today. Truth carries its own authority" (Guthrie 1975, 36). Jesus was the source of truth (John 14:6).

Following Jesus' example and standard of excellence in teaching methods will yield comparable results for teachers today. Likewise, studying and following the methods utilized by the leaders of the first century church will harvest results in the twenty-first century church as well. While methods change, from time to time, and from place to place, principles remain the same.

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The Teacher and Teaching Methods of the Master
Lesson in Review

Name: _____

Nation: _____ Date: _____

1. What title or word was most frequently used to address or describe Jesus?

2. Howard Hendricks stated, "The effective teacher always teaches from the of

_____."

3. What did Jesus establish with His students? Why?

4. To what did Jesus adapt His teaching style? Why?

5. Describe Jesus' teaching style.

6. Wilson said that Jesus was a constant _____ to His pupils.

7. Cite two reasons Jesus used questions.

A. _____

B. _____

8. Jesus, Paul, and others used _____ to effectively teach students.

9. What is a parable?

10. Why did Jesus use parables?

11. People learn faster and retain more when they are encouraged to _____

12. When are lives transformed?

13. Cite five different teaching methods that Jesus used.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____

14. What is your preferred method of teaching? Why?
