

Devotions for Busy Teachers

Neville Pollard

NEW HOPE INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION

DEVOTIONS FOR BUSY TEACHERS

**Teaching from Jesus' Perspective
Devotions for Christian School Teachers**

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Teaching from Jesus' Perspective

Devotions for Christian School Teachers

Neville Pollard

Former Principal Christian Community High School Regents Park NSW Australia

Dedication

To Maryanne Frisken who encouraged me to continue with this project

Introduction

This small book contains fifty seven devotions designed to encourage you to teach from a Christian perspective. They are designed for group discussion but can equally be used individually. They can also be used as topics for full school staff meetings.

Each topic contains five sections designed to occupy a fifteen to twenty minute segment:

A short Bible reading.

A small written section designed to draw themes from the passages relevant to Christian education.

Questions for discussion

Prayer.

The personal reflection section is designed to encourage teachers to further meditate on the passage in their own time.

It is my prayer that these devotions will challenge you not only to live a transformed life in Christ but to be passionate about teaching from a Christian perspective.

1 Making Our Message Relevant

Reading: John 1: 1 – 3; 14

In verse 1 John describes Jesus as the 'Logos' or 'Word.' To the Hebrews this word was special, for as well as carrying the normal meaning of communication, it spoke of 'action' or 'event.' In Genesis 1, for example, God 'spoke' (the Word) and the world was created. John used this term to proclaim that Jesus was 'God's Word' sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God. The Greek speaking population were also familiar with the term 'Logos;' to them it stood for 'the Mind' or 'Reason' of God. They saw the universe as initially being full of chaos; it was the 'Logos' that brought the universe to order. If John had commenced his Gospel by using a distinctive Hebrew word only, such as 'Messiah,' the Greek speaking peoples would not have understood because such a notion was foreign to them. By using 'Logos' he was able to make the gospel relevant to both cultures.

Your school may have students who know nothing about the Bible because they come from different cultural and religious backgrounds or perhaps because their parents or guardians have never introduced their children to the living God. The challenge for you is to make Bible stories, in general, and the way of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in particular, relevant to each and every one of the students in your class.

I remember once being invited out to lunch with some people who worshipped in a different denomination. During the meal they talked about a doctrine that I had never heard before and, as a result, became well and truly confused by their discussions. I wonder whether that is the way some of our children react to hearing us talk about Jesus.

Group Discussion

1. How might you talk to your class about the need to be born again if you have a number of students who have never been to church or whose family backgrounds are based on other faiths?
2. How can you find out whether the students in your class really understand the message you are trying to present about the Bible? Remember a student may gain 100% in a test which may show they have a good memory but not a deep understanding of God which comes from the heart.

Personal Reflection

1. Do you know the general spiritual state of each child in your class?
2. Do you have a biblical studies program in your school? Think about whether it really meets the needs of your students.
3. Do you carefully prepare Biblical Studies lessons or do you rely on a work book or your own memory to get you through the lesson?

Prayer

Pray, by name, for every student in you class that they will have a greater understanding of the Bible and get to know Jesus in a personal way.

Ask God to help you to be a better communicator of the Christian faith.

Pray before you commence each Biblical Studies lesson.

2 Jesus Needs People Like Philip

Reading John 1:43 – 49

A number of Bible teachers believe that Philip may have been, by nature, a little disadvantaged (educationally backward) or reserved in nature. He is the only disciple that Jesus personally found (verse 43) and when He later asked him about feeding the five thousand Philip's answer seems a little naïve (John 6:5-7). When a number of Greeks came to him requesting an interview with Jesus he went and told Andrew first and then together made the Master aware (John 12: 22). Finally, after observing much of Jesus' life and work, he asked the question, *'Lord show us the Father and that will be enough for us;'* to which Jesus replied, *'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?'*

It is comforting that Jesus didn't gather a team of highly intelligent people to be disciples but rather chose ordinary simple men, like Philip, who was able to get alongside Nathaniel and encourage him to join the team (verse 45). Later he led an Ethiopian eunuch to baptism and faith in Christ (Acts 8:26f).

The late Maryanne Frisken supported, her husband, Bob faithfully over many years while he pioneered the work of Christian Community Schooling and, later, New Hope International. At the launch of the 'Maryanne Mercy Fund' she was described as, 'an extraordinary ordinary person,' an apt description for a person who served God faithfully behind the scenes.

Group Discussion

How can children who are disadvantaged be encouraged to recognise that they are useful to the Kingdom of God?

Relate any personal experiences how you have helped disadvantaged children to use their abilities for God's Glory.

Personal Reflection

1. Focus on the struggling children in your class or school. Consider how you might be able to put into practice ideas given in Question 1 above?
2. How many 'extraordinary ordinary people' do you know?

Prayer

Pray for the 'Philips' in your class or school. Pray that they will not be discouraged. Pray that they will recognise their gifts and abilities and, like Philip, be able to use them for the Kingdom of God.

3 The Gospel in a Nutshell

John 3: 1 – 9, 16

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, had heard Jesus preaching this 'new' doctrine and he wanted to come and find out more. He recognises Jesus as a teacher by his courteous introduction and use of the word 'Rabbi'.

Jesus uses a teaching skill by going from what Nicodemus knew to what he didn't know by starting with the story of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness, a story he would have known very well (Numbers 21: 4 – 9). From this story Jesus was able to lead Nicodemus to a simple understanding of the gospel by linking the story of the snake on the pole to the future death of Jesus on the cross. This was achieved in about 25 words in John 3:16, probably the most well known verse in the Bible.

Notice also how even a learned man like Nicodemus had difficulty understanding the concept of 'new birth' (verse 4). We do too! Brian McLaren is helpful here:

Born anew or born again, like eternal life is another frequently misunderstood phrase, one that many people make equivalent to saying a prayer at the end of a booklet or tract, or having an emotional experience at the end of a church service. ... But it is clear that Jesus isn't talking about a religious experience ... Jesus is saying, "Nicodemus, you're a Pharisee. You're a respected teacher yourself. But if you are coming to me hoping to experience the extraordinary life to the full [eternal life] I've been teaching about you are going to have to go back to the very beginning. You are going to have to become like a baby all over again and unlearn everything you are so sure of, so you can be retaught."¹

Surely that is one of the challenges for Christian schools!

The way children come to know Jesus can be likened to crossing a bridge. On the far side a child will generally embrace the faith of their parents, grandparents, teachers or peers. Once over the bridge they accept the message of salvation as their own. For some children crossing the bridge is easy and hardly noticeable, for others long and difficult with many false starts. Sadly others never reach the other side.

I recently came across a list of stages of new birth developed by Paul Hazelden. Although it is very general it can help us understand the stages that a person might go through in the process of becoming a Christian:

1. No God framework
2. Experience of emptiness
3. God framework
4. Vague awareness and belief in God
5. Wondering if God can be known
6. Awareness of Jesus guiding
7. Interested in Jesus
8. Experience of Christian love
9. Awareness of the basic facts of the gospel
10. Awareness of personal need
11. Grasp the implications of the gospel
12. Challenged to respond personally

¹ McLaren, Brian D. 2006. 'The Secret message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything.' Thomas Nelson. Nashville. p38.

13. Repentance and faith

Then comes

1. Holy Spirit and baptism
2. Functioning member of local church
3. Continuing growth in character, lifestyle and service

Group Discussion

1. What did Jesus mean when he told Nicodemus he had to be 'born again?'
2. What illustrations could you use with your class to illustrate being born again?
3. How can the analogy of crossing a bridge be helpful in understanding the steps in a student coming to personal faith in Christ?
4. Why do you think people have difficulty comprehending the notion of salvation?

Personal Reflection

1. Have you come to a personal faith in Jesus?
2. Reflect on how you can help children in your class 'cross the bridge' more easily.
3. Consider how you can make John 3:16 relevant to your class.

Prayer

Pray for the students in your class/school who you suspect are having difficulty 'crossing the bridge.'

4 The Power of the Question

Reading: John 4: 7 – 13

Jews despised Samaritans because they were considered unclean. They were descendants of Israelites who had survived the destruction of the Northern Kingdom back in 722BC (2 Kings 17: 23 – 40) but had inter married with heathens relocated by Assyria to neutralise the possibility of uprising. It was, therefore, usual for Jews to take the three day trip around the Samarian border rather than taking a short cut and have to come in contact with them.

Jesus '*had to go*' through Samaria (verse 4) to engage an outcast woman who, for some reason, had to draw water in the middle of the day to avoid her peers. It was customary for women to draw water in the late afternoon to avoid the excessive heat; in the process drawing water became a time of social interaction and community building. It was also highly uncommon for a man to engage a woman in conversation as Jesus did.

A simple question, '*Will you give me a drink?*' not only led to the woman's conversion but many of the townsfolk as well (verses 39 – 42). It also gave Jesus the opportunity to affirm His Messiahship (verses 25 – 26). Note, however, that Jesus' question required more than a 'Yes' or 'No' answer which would, almost certainly, have led the conversation nowhere.

Group Discussion

1. You are on playground and you see a child sitting by himself/herself looking downcast; how could you engage them in conversation? The question 'Is there a problem?' or 'Are you all right?' will probably not take the encounter very far.
2. How can you engage a child in a discussion about salvation through the use of questions? You might like to role play this activity.

Personal Reflection

1. Could you use questioning techniques in your classroom to better assist student learning? Practice using 'open ended' questions.
2. Invite one of your peers into your classroom to observe how you use questioning techniques.

Prayer

Pray that you will be a more effective communicator in all areas of your teaching.

5 Teaching Is Tough Going

Reading: John 5: 7 – 12

The man had been lying by the Pool of Bethesda for thirty eight years. He had no one to place him in the pool when the water stirred.

Why did Jesus heal him on the Sabbath? Why didn't He come back another day and heal him? After all the man had been immobile for thirty eight years and was not likely to move anywhere soon! Healing the man on another day could possibly have avoided considerable friction and disputation with the Jews that dogged Jesus' teaching for the rest of His earthly ministry?

This teaching strategy was unfortunately necessary; despite tough going Jesus was able to confront the Jews with teaching about His Lordship of the Sabbath and who He was – The Son of God (verses 16 – 47). Sadly, however, most refused to accept His message because of bigotry and preconceived ideas.

James Hilton's comments are worth sharing in this context:

If I had a child who wanted to be a teacher, I would bid him God-speed, as if he was going to a war. For indeed the war against prejudice, greed and ignorance is eternal, and those who dedicate themselves to it give their lives no less because they may live to see some fraction of the battle won².

Group Discussion

1. In what other ways does the Bible portray Jesus' teaching ministry as difficult?
2. Do you find teaching difficult? Do identify with Hilton's comments? Share your struggles and difficulties with others.
3. How can students be helped who do not seem to want to change?

Personal Reflection

Don't dwell excessively on the difficult and tough times. Think about the experiences when you have encouraged students and lessons have gone well. When things are difficult, however, don't hesitate to ask for help before things become too overwhelming.

Prayer

Pray for those on your staff who are finding teaching tough going; pray for those students who, like the Pharisees, don't seem to want to accept the teachings of Jesus.

² 'Look What We Found: Wit and Wisdom from the Braille Scrapbook of Peter Sumner.' Christian Blind Mission International. P400.

6 The Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5: 16 - 26

Paul compares two worldviews; a life controlled by the sinful nature and a life controlled by the Spirit. These two are always in conflict because it is impossible to live for ourselves and serve God at the same time.

If we follow our earthly nature we will, almost certainly, display some of the hallmarks of the sinful nature listed in verses 19 to 21, but if we allow the Holy Spirit to control us we will bear the Fruit of the Spirit listed in verses 22 and 23.

If you compare the acts of the sinful nature with the Fruit of the Spirit you will notice that the former destroy relationships with others; promoting conflict and dissention but the Fruit of the Spirit promote community and love for one another.

To be effective Christian teachers we need to display the fruit of the Spirit in our lives; by displaying them we will be role models of how Jesus expects humankind to live.

Education is more than gaining some kind of credential (certificate) but is concerned with growing to maturity in Jesus Christ. Consider this quote:

(Schools) must help students to understand that they are God's people who live for his glory, and to teach them how to live not just as individuals but as his people and to fulfil his purposes on earth³.

We cannot achieve this aim unless God's Spirit comes alongside us to help.

Group Discussion

1. How might a teacher display such fruit as 'joy,' 'patience,' 'goodness' with a group of students who are very restless and difficult to control?
2. Discuss the meaning of as many of the fruit as you can in the time you have remaining.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on the fruit which the Spirit produces in your life. Are there any acts of the 'sinful nature' that you need to deal with?

Prayer

Ask the Lord to help you better display the Fruit of the Spirit in your school. Pray that God will help you deal with any sinful 'weeds' in your life.

³ Introduction to Christian teaching. Effective Teaching Series 1. New Hope International. p17.

7 The Work of God's Spirit⁴

John 14: 15 – 19 & 26

Many Christian teachers inadvertently forget about God's Spirit, or push Him to one side, during their work of teaching. A study of the Bible will, however, demonstrate the importance of inviting God's Spirit to dwell in your classroom.

The Holy Spirit can assist teachers (and other Christians) in the following ways:

- leads and changes Christians so that they bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25);
- guides Christians into all truth (John 16:13);
- gives special gifts for ministry such as knowledge and discernment (1 Corinthians 12:6-11);
- assists believers in their prayer life (Romans 8:26-27).
- gives spiritual insight (1 Corinthians 12:8, 10); A person once came into my office at school; I could see that they were very distressed and seemed to want help. I asked a few simple questions that did not seem to give any hint of the problem. Then I believe the Holy Spirit led me to ask a question, which seemed to come from no where, but had the effect of exposing the person's point of need.
- creates the desire to minister (2 Timothy 1:6-7);
- gives the ability to communicate effectively (2 Timothy 2:24);
- gradually remakes Christians, both teachers and students, 'from the inside out'. As Christians open themselves to the working of God's Spirit He restores the fullness of the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18);
- works to grow fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) in the lives of Christians who depend upon him;
- helps Christians to understand the Scriptures), and,
- gives them spiritual sight (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Look up each of the above verses as you work through the section.

The Holy Spirit is active in the lives of students too as He:

- Brings spiritual birth, vision and receptivity, a new spirituality and motivation to study spiritual things.
- Convicts and guides about areas in their lives that need attention,
- Gives them a desire for service which will affect choice of career paths, attitudes to study and school work in general.

When teachers realise that teaching is essentially a spiritual process they will rely more on the Holy Spirit to touch the lives of students in ways that are not humanly possible.

Group Discussion

1. What does it mean that teaching is essentially a spiritual process?

⁴ The writer acknowledges that this devotion is based on: Lecture 2. The Holy Spirit and the Teacher. Introduction to Christian teaching. Effective Teaching Series 1. New Hope International. pp 16 - 20

2. What can we learn about the work of the Spirit in relation to teaching from John 14: 15 – 19 & 26?

Personal Reflection

1. Meditate for a few minutes on what you know about the Holy Spirit and what He has done in your life.
2. Reflect on Luke 11: 11 – 13.

Prayer

Ask God to give you a fresh portion of His Spirit. Invite Him to make His home in your classroom as well as in your own life.

8 The Mind of Christ

Philippians 2: 5 – 8

No matter where we teach curriculum documents will expect students to achieve certain standards. These can variously be called outcomes, standards, bands, aims or objectives. A student who achieved most curriculum outcomes would be considered well educated for their age.

But there is a higher level of outcomes, beyond those required by the curriculum that we should be aspiring to both in our lives and the lives of our students. These verses illustrate the standard for a person living out the mind of Christ. They reveal Christ as a man who walked this earth enduring the same weaknesses and temptations that we do. They centre on a deliberate decision of Jesus to, '*make himself nothing*' (verse 7) and to '*humble himself*' (verse 8.) To 'make a person nothing' means to deprive them of their rightful place. This voluntary act led Jesus to leave His position with God, become a servant by taking on human likeness with all of its limitations, finally dying on a cross of shame.

It is worth noting that living out the mind of Christ is something that is done within a community. The RSV emphasises this by translating the first part of verse five, '*Have this mind among yourselves...*'

The unmistakeable fruit of embracing the mind of Christ is submission and humility. This is a worthy outcome to be aspiring to.

Group Discussion

1. Give examples from other parts of the gospels to show how Jesus displayed servant qualities?
2. Describe a school where the practice of servanthood and humility was the norm rather than the exception?
3. How can both students and staff be encouraged to develop the gift of servanthood?
4. How does your school community rate on the criteria of servanthood and humility?

Personal Reflection

Examine your own practice of humility. Identify areas in your teaching where you have not practised the mind of Christ.

Prayer

Pray frequently that you might better show the mind of Christ.

9 Biblical Examples of Living Out the Mind of Christ

Philippians 2:21 – 27

Many Bible commentators have wondered why Paul incorporated these personal cameos of Timothy and Epaphroditus straight after writing such a lofty description of Jesus.

The answer is, in fact, quite simple; Paul uses these two godly men as examples of people who lived out the mind of Christ. Timothy demonstrated the mind of Christ by:

- His genuine care for other Christians,
- His devotion to the Lord Jesus,
- His acceptance of second place after Paul, and,
- His willingness to be a slave if it meant spreading the gospel.

Epaphroditus was obedient to his church community in looking after Paul's needs despite physical illness and homesickness.

In addition, this passage also demonstrates that Paul also lived his life from this same perspective:

- Paul was willing to allow the Lord to order his life (verses 17 - 18 & 24).
- He willingly served his Lord, and,
- He obeyed the Lord Jesus.

Group Discussion

1. What practical advice about living out the mind of Christ comes from Philippians 2: 14 – 18?
2. Imagine Timothy was a teacher today who displayed the mind of Christ at his school; what might Paul have written about him in that context?

Personal Reflection

Review the answers to Questions 1 & 2 above in the context of your own life.

Prayer

Pray for all the staff of your school that they might demonstrate actions flowing from the mind of Christ.

10 Made In the Image of God

Genesis 1:26 – 31

Human beings were the only creatures to be made in The 'image of God.' The word 'image' is used figuratively here since God does not have human form. Colossians 1: 15 tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God so through reading about Him we can gain an insight into God's character.

When created, human beings received some of God's nature, though when sin entered the world, the image became marred but not totally destroyed.

Being made in God's image includes possessing such attributes as personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice, creativity and the capacity to have fellowship with our Maker. Larry Crabb suggests four other attributes that you might like to reflect on⁵:

1. **the ability to have deep longings:** Jesus wept over Jerusalem Matthew 23:37. The students in our class have been created to desire a deep relationship with their Maker
2. **to evaluate:** God evaluated His creation and concluded it was 'good.' Do you encourage children to evaluate both actions and quality of work?
3. **to actively choose:** God chose to make the world. Do you help children to make desirable choices?
4. **experience emotion:** Jesus wept! Our children need to experience a loving caring environment if they are to grow more like Christ.

The children in our classes are also made in the image of God and that means they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Group Discussion

1. How will the knowledge that your pupils are also made in God's image affect the way you teach and relate to them?
2. How can children be taught to understand that they are made in God's image?
3. How can you be more effective in helping students to develop the attributes Larry Crabb has suggested?

Personal Reflection

How do you rate yourself as God's image bearer? What areas in your life do you need to work on?

Prayer

Pray that you may be a more effective image bearer. Pray for students in your class that they might better reflect God's image.

⁵ Introduction to Christian Teaching. Effective Teaching Series 1. New Hope International. p89f.

11 Mankind's Commission

Genesis 1:26 – 31

Genesis 1:28 is often called the 'Cultural' or 'Creation Mandate.' It represents the conditions under which God handed over the world to mankind. His instructions were to 'subdue and have dominion' over creation or, to put it another way, to conquer and rule the earth. This is not an injunction to exploit and damage for that would dishonour the Creator who made everything 'good' (verse 31). Rather mankind is to be a faithful servant over God's world to look after it and, in so doing, enjoy the fruits of his labours as well as bring Glory to God.

Fulfilling this mandate involves a serious study of the intricate processes and patterns built into the world (the sciences) and then putting what is learned into practice (the technologies). But God did not leave us with a textbook which contained all the knowledge necessary to complete this task. Rather He gave us gifts and abilities so that we could discover truth about His world and then pass it onto succeeding generations. When looked at from this perspective education becomes a sacred task in working hand in hand with God to further His creative work. How blessed we are as Christian teachers!

A man centred view sees education as a means of gaining personal power over others through such avenues as building up wealth and increasing influence. A God centred view gives Glory to the Creator and an appreciation that we are His humble servants. A God centred view also treats God's creation with care and respect and encourages the use of resources to serve others.

Group Discussion

1. Talk about a lesson you are going to teach today; how will you present a Christian perspective in that lesson? What do you aim to teach about God and about your fellow man?
2. Does your school's curriculum reflect the cultural mandate? What areas need to be reviewed?

Personal Reflection

Does your class see a God centred perspective reflected in your lessons? Think how you can better teach from a Christian perspective.

Prayer

Pray that God will reveal insights to you about teaching from a God centred perspective.

12 Preserving Relationships

Matthew 18: 15 – 20

The Bible prizes community very highly and that includes relationships between parents, students and staff in our schools. So the injunction in Matthew 18 encourages us to repair misunderstandings as soon as possible after a problem occurs.

Although this passage is primarily written as a way of restoring relationships in a church context there is, nevertheless, some good advice for any situation where relationships have become fractured.

Here are some general principles from this passage:

1. Always go to the other person with a positive attitude that the matter can be resolved; don't go with a view of winning the argument. Pray for meekness to solve the problem. Be honest with each other (Ephesians 4: 15).
2. Keep the matter private; at least in the initial stages. Gossiping to others about the situation usually only exacerbates resolution and forces people to take sides.
3. If the problem still hasn't been resolved ask for help from others; perhaps someone who is mutually respected by both parties (Proverbs 27:6).
4. Be willing to accept arbitration if the matter can't be resolved.
5. Ask each other for forgiveness (Matthew 18:21 – 35). Pray together and recognise that God is there to help (Matthew 18:20).

Group Discussion

1. Ask the group to share their experiences with restoring relationships. Have you had success helping to restore relationships between students?
2. How was the problem of neglect dealt with in Acts 6? Are there any parallels here with schools?
3. What can be learnt from 1 Corinthians. 5; 2 Thessalonians. 3:6–16; 2 Timothy. 2:23–26; Titus 3:10?

Personal Reflection

The pamphlet, 'Peacemaking Principles' produced by Peacewise⁶ states that there are three ways people deal with conflict: Escaping (Peace Faking), True Peacemaking and Peace Breaking (Attack Responses). Which one of these responses do you tend to use in a conflict situation? Is there anyone you need to talk to about restoring relationships? Pray that God will help you to desire true peace making rather than the other two destructive modes.

Prayer

1. Pray for any parents, students or staff members who may be having difficulty restoring relationships.
2. Pray for yourself if you know that you need to get right with someone.

⁶ www.peacewise.org.au

13 The Purpose of Education

Proverbs 1: 2 – 7

This passage outlines the purpose for which the Book of Proverbs was written but in an educational context it can just as easily outline the purpose of Christian education.

Re read the passage; refer to the meaning of the key words and phrases below as you read⁷:

- **Wisdom** (verse 2): an all round education as expanded below
- **Discipline** (verse 2): correction
- **Understanding words of insight** (Verse 2): The ability to look into the heart of an issue and be able to discern the right choice to take at a particular time.
- **Prudent** (verse 3): conveys ideas like shrewdness, cunning and cleverness.
- **Knowledge** (Verse 4): knowing and doing what God requires and as consistently as possible.
- **Discretion** (verse 4): prudent planning
- **Learning** (verse 5): to grasp; comprehension of truth well enough to be able to teach it. There is a close link in Hebrew between the word 'to teach' and the word 'to learn.' 'You haven't taught if a child hasn't learnt!'
- **Guidance** (verse 5): counsel; being steered in the right course.
- **Fear** (verse 7): reverent obedience, worship, devotion, adoration. Radiates these characteristics to all of life.

Group Discussion

1. Define 'wisdom?'
2. What does it mean to teach?
3. What is Christian education?
4. Pick a subject to discuss eg Language or Mathematics: How can you bring out the purpose of Christian education through teaching that subject? Use the list above to help you.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on your ability as a teacher. How can you better achieve the purposes of education mentioned above?

Prayer

Pray for God's help to become a more effective teacher.

⁷ Hubbard, David. A. 1989. Proverbs: The Preacher's Commentary. Ogilvie, Lloyd J. General Editor. Thomas Nelson. Nashville.

14 Being Transformed as Living Sacrifices

Romans 11: 33 – 12:2

After the profound doxology of verses 33 – 36 there is really only one thing we can do; that is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. In the words of 'The Message:'

... God helping you: Take your everyday ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking around life and place it before God as an offering⁸.

The prevailing view amongst many Christians is that as long as we go to church and focus on God for at least part of one day of the week then the rest of the time we can live much the same as everyone else. Illustrations of the negative side of this kind of living might be giving no thought to others on the road, cheating on our tax returns or ripping others off in business deals.

Romans 12:1 teaches that we are God's image bearers 24/7, in every part of our lives. Following this line of reasoning every single thing we do should be an act of worship. This should be one of the key lessons we teach in a Christian school.

Offering our bodies as living sacrifices leads to a transformed life.

A simple review of these few verses might help the process to become clearer:

1. Why do we need to live a transformed life? Because of God's mercies.
2. How do we become transformed? By presenting all of our bodies as living sacrifices.
3. How does this occur? By not being conformed to the world, renewing our mind.
4. What is the result? Know what God's will is.
5. What is an outward sign of this? Love for tohers, worked out in positive relationships and community building (verses 3 – 21).

Group Discussion

1. What are 'God's mercies' mentioned alluded to in verse 1?
2. What strategies can be used in a Christian school to teach that our lives must be 'living sacrifices 24/7?'
3. How van out mind be renewed?

Personal reflection

1. Write a poem reflecting verses 33 – 36 in your own words.
2. What areas in your life do you need to present as a 'living sacrifice?'

Prayer

Ask God to help you live your Christian life 24/7.

⁸ Peterson, Eugene. H. The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. NavPress 2005. p.1557.

15 Developing a Christian Worldview

Romans 8: 5 – 8; 12:1 – 3;

The alternate translation of Proverbs 23:7 in the NIV margin note is, 'as a man thinks within himself so he is. This is another way of saying that our mind (or what we think) determines who we are.

The way we think from 'the big picture' perspective is called 'our worldview.' There are really as many worldviews as there are people but a useful teaching tool is to divide them into four groups: the 'no God view' (atheism or agnosticism); the 'I am god' view (transcendentalism), the other gods view (eg Hinduism) or the God of the Bible view (Theism). Everyone's worldview, therefore, can be related back to faith or belief.

I once prepared a submission on teacher training for a government department that was not initially accepted because, in the words of the reviewer, it was too religious.' But what the reviewer did not understand was that he too had made a faith statement in arriving at that conclusion.

The following quote from William Steig's 'Yellow and Pink', a delightfully whimsical picture book for children; can help in clarifying the concept of worldview. In it two wooden figures wake up to find themselves lying on an old newspaper in the hot sun. One figure is painted yellow the other pink.

Who is this Guy?

Suddenly Yellow gets up and asks, 'Do you know what we are doing here?'

'No,' replies Pink, 'I don't even remember getting here.'

Pink surveys their well formed features and concludes, 'Someone must have made us.'

Yellow disagrees. 'I say that we are an accident,' and he outlines a hypothetical scenario of how it might have happened. A branch might have fallen off a tree and fallen onto a sharp rock, splitting one end of the branch into two legs. Then the wind might have sent it tumbling down a hill until it was chipped and shaped. Perhaps a flash of lightning struck it in such a way as to splinter the wood into arms and fingers. Eyes might have been formed by woodpeckers boring in the wood.

'With enough time, a thousand, a million, two and a half million years, lots of unusual things could happen,' says Yellow. 'Why not us?'

The two figures argue back and forth.

In the end the discussion is cut off by the appearance of a man coming out of a nearby house. He strolls over to the marionettes, picks them up and checks their paint. 'Nice and dry,' he comments, and tucking them under his arm he heads back towards the house/

'Peering out from under the man's arm Yellow whispers in Pink's ear, 'Who is this guy?'⁹

Group Discussion

1. What kinds of life experiences can affect development of a person's worldview perspective?
2. Is it possible to change someone's worldview? How?
3. How can we encourage children to live the way of the Spirit (Romans 8: 5 – 8)?

⁹ Steig, William. 1984. Yellow and Pink. New York. Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Personal Reflection

Imagine you are a child in your class; what worldview perspective are you being taught?

Prayer

Pray for students in your class by name that they will be transformed by the renewing of their mind.

16 What Is Love?

Romans 12: 9 – 16

Love is an outworking of the Christian Mind; it is not unexpected, therefore, that Paul includes teaching on love with the challenge to be transformed (Romans 12: 1 – 2).

‘Love is the circulatory system of the living spiritual body of believers which enables all members to function in a healthy harmonious way’). Love is action, relationship; much more than a warm fuzzy feeling.

In this passage Paul describes a number of ‘love actions’ designed to nurture the spiritual community; they include:

1. Displaying brotherly love (verse 10).
2. Giving preference to others (verse 10).
3. Serving the Lord diligently (verse 11). This could be translated, ‘serving the times’ or making the most of opportunities that present themselves¹⁰.
4. Being strong in times of difficulty (verse 12). Note that praying for others when they are going through hard times is an outworking of love.
5. Being hospitable (verse 13). Hospitality is more than preparation of food it is actually a grace of spending time with people.

Schools should be places where students are nurtured to grow in all areas of their lives – not just in the academic alone. A loving caring learning community is an essential ingredient of the growth process.

Group Discussion

1. What ‘love actions’ are mentioned in verses 14 – 16?
2. For each of the signs of love in verses 10 – 16 give an example of their outworking in the school context.
3. How does your school rate in dispensing ‘love actions?’

Personal Reflection

Is love evident in your classroom? What areas do you need to work on?

Prayer

Since we cannot do these things in our own strength; ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

¹⁰ Briscoe, D Stuart. 1982. ‘The preachers’ Commentary: Romans. Thomas Nelson. Nashville. P225.

17 The Word of God Teaches Us

Psalm 119: 33 – 40

In the previous section, verses 25 – 32, the psalmist prays for revival and renewal (read this section).

The psalmist then prays in verses 33 – 40 that revival will transform into actions. For this to happen he must appropriate this teaching into his inmost heart (verse 34). There are a number of areas mentioned in which the psalmist desired to grow:

1. Obedience (verse 33).
2. Understanding (verse 34). Teaching is more than learning something off by heart; there must be assimilation into the mind so that facts translate to understanding. Understanding will lead to obedience.
3. Know God's ways (verse 35). Then he will find fulfilment and inner joy.
4. Shun selfish gain (verse 36).
5. To be kept from idolatry – worthless things (verse 37).
6. A healthy fear of God (verse 38). Note that the psalmist describes himself as God's servant.
7. Take away inconsistencies in behaviour (verse 39).
8. For greater renewal and heart for God (verse 40).

We see here that renewal promotes a passion for growth which in turn leads to prayer for greater renewal. Perhaps we could call the 'The Cycle of Christian Growth!' Wouldn't it be great if our students could understand this?

Group Discussion

1. How can we encourage 'The Cycle of Growth' in ourselves, our students?
2. How can we promote a longing for God's Word within ourselves and our students?
3. How can teaching become understanding?

Personal Reflection

1. How do you rate when you compare yourself against the statements, 1 – 8, above?
2. Are you seeking personal growth and renewal? What areas of your life do you need to bring under God's subjection?

Prayer

Pray the prayer of the psalmist (verses 33 – 40).

18 Seeking God's Will

1 Samuel 30: 7 - 10

David and his men came back to Ziklag (verses 1 – 7) to find that a raiding party of Amalekites had taken all their wives and children captive. It would have been understandable if David, perhaps in a fit of anger, had immediately gone off with his men in an attempt to rescue them.

But instead he called Abiathar, the priest; to seek the Lord about what should be done. He is encouraged to go after them. Verses 11 – 30 tell us that David was successful in recapturing both his own loved ones and those of his men.

How different David's behaviour was to that of Saul, who instead of seeking God's guidance, visited the Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28) only to be told that Israel would be handed over to the Philistines. Alexander Maclaren makes a pertinent point:

If you want to keep Christ very near you , and to feel Him near you, the way to do so is no mere cultivation of religious emotion or saturating your mind with religious books and thoughts though these have their place; but on the dusty road of life doing His will and keeping His commandments¹¹.

When God called me into Christian schooling He put me through a period of great restlessness, sleeplessness and turmoil that only abated when I yielded to His call on my life. Many teachers, towards the end of each year, have a special time of prayer to seek God's will for their ministry in the coming school year. I would encourage that process.

To be an effective and vibrant Christian teacher you need to know that you are resting in the will of God and are where He wants you to be. When we are not in God's will our Christian witness usually does not reach its full potential

Do you seek God's will before you make a decision or do you rely on your own strength?

Group Discussion

1. How can we know we are doing the will of God?
2. Share personal testimonies about how God has led you?
3. What decisions does your school need to make in the future? It may be appointment of new staff; preparation of the budget or how to discipline a difficult student? How is the school seeking to make a decision on these matters?

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on God's will for your life and for your school.
2. Are you presently in the will of God?

Prayer

Make a commitment to pray for the Lord's leading in your own life and the life of the school. Pray for the things the group mentioned in the discussion time.

Lay before The Lord any personal decisions that you have to make in the near future.

¹¹ 'Look What We Found: Wit and Wisdom from the Braille Scrapbook of Peter Sumner.' Christian Blind Mission International. p434.

19 The God of Creation

Romans 5:12 – 14

If we are going to be effective teachers in a Christian school we must affirm that God created the physical world and all that is in it. We must allow this fact to permeate our teaching in all subjects if we are going to teach God's truth and not lead students astray through secular teaching that is false.

Many teachers have trouble reconciling the biblical account of the creation of the world, related in the Book of Genesis, with what they have been taught in secular universities or text books. The main issue seems to be whether the world came into being over a long period of time through the process of unguided evolution or whether the world came into being by a creative, purposeful, act of God. Some people argue that these two ideas can be reconciled by believing in what is known as 'Progressive Creation.'

If we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God then we need to consider these few verses in Romans as a once and for all proof of creation over evolution.

We are told three times in this passage that death did not come into the world until after Adam sinned, therefore, the world could not have evolved, or come into being through 'Progressive Creation,' because that would have presupposed death (survival of the fittest) that would have had to occur over millions of years before man entered the world's stage.

Group Discussion

3. Why do we need to teach Creation if we are to be effective teachers in a Christian school? Consider the moral and ethical implications of this question.
4. Why have evolutionary ideas taken such a stronghold over human thinking?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on whether you unconsciously ever teach from an evolutionary viewpoint.

Prayer

Pray that God will guide your teaching so that you always present the truth.

20 Pastors and Teachers

Ephesians 4:11 – 13

The words 'pastor' and 'teacher' are linked in the Greek. In the context of this passage Paul was probably referring to gifted people who ministered to settled congregations rather than itinerant preachers who moved from place to place. As 'settled' ministers they needed to demonstrate two distinctive gifts to their local church – the gift of teaching and the gift of pasturing, or caring.

Linking 'pastor' and 'teacher' has implications for Christian teachers in our generation because it reminds us that our role is not only to teach information but, to 'pastor' which means to be a 'shepherd' and 'guide' to the students we teach.

A pastor teacher will be a gifted instructor who will help all students to learn. In addition, they will be good pastors concerned for their children's welfare. This will include providing a classroom environment where all members care for each other and recognise that they are made in God's image.

Harro Van Beummelen's comments are helpful here:

First Peter 2:9 makes clear that God calls teachers, like all believers, to be priests [pastor teachers]. As such we foster a loving and caring learning community in our classrooms. We accept all students for who they are (not that we always condone what they do). Prayfully, we try to heal broken relationships. Our own repentance and surrender to Christ enable us to intercede in broken relationships. We listen carefully to the students involved and confront them in order to bring about healing... We help students to develop specific skills to deal with frustration and conflict. Sometimes we may have to confess our own mistakes to the class, asking forgiveness and forgiving those who have offended us. As priests we are ambassadors of Christ. We experience and demonstrate His reconciling love¹²

Group Discussion

1. Discuss other ways in which a teacher can be a 'shepherd' as well as a teacher?
2. List behaviours which can hinder relationships between teacher and pupil.

Personal Reflection

Write down the headings 'Qualities that Enhance a 'Pastor Teacher' on one side of a page. On the other put the heading 'Qualities that Hinder a 'Pastor Teacher.' Fill in each column after reflecting on your teaching style.

Prayer

Pray that God will give you the gift to be a 'pastor teacher' in greater measure. In your prayer reflect on the Personal Reflection exercise above.

¹² Van Brummelen, Harro. 2009. 'Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Teaching and learning.' 3rd edition. Purposeful Design Publications. Colorado Springs. p40.

21 The Good Shepherd

John 10: 11 – 16

Jesus teaches here that He is the 'Good Shepherd.' We can, however, look at this parable in the context of leaders who are called to protect and nurture God's 'flock.' We are 'under shepherds,' or assistants, who follow the Master's example who 'know' their sheep and their 'sheep' know them. Like the shepherd of old they watch over their sheep daily; nurturing, feeding and protecting them. The under shepherd knows the weak sheep that need special help and encouragement and those sheep that don't need so much looking after. They are also prepared to give their life if for their sheep if necessary.

Then there are the 'hirelings' who allow the 'wolves' to catch the sheep and scatter them. They have been given positions of responsibility but don't take the role seriously. To use the vernacular; they are probably only in it for the money!

I have vivid memories teaching with 'hirelings' in my early years; teachers who arrived at school at the last minute; consistently sat in front of their classes while students completed endless exercises from textbooks; when they weren't doing this the strategy changed to 'chalk and talk.' These teachers were generally the first to leave each afternoon. Their treatment of students was often arbitrary and condescending. What a contrast they made with teacher shepherds who genuinely nurtured their students.

Shepherd imagery is used in many parts of the Bible; read what Ezekiel 34: 2 – 6 says about the 'shepherds' of his time.

There is a real challenge for Christian teachers in these passages.

Group Discussion

1. Give examples of 'shepherd' and the 'hireling' teachers from your own experience.
2. In what way can teachers, 'lay down their lives for their sheep?'

Personal Reflection

Meditate on this parable; are you an 'under shepherd' or a 'hireling?'

Prayer

Pray for a new commitment to be an 'under shepherd' to your students.

22 The Purpose of Pastor Teachers and Others

Ephesians 4:11 – 13

Although Ephesians 4: 11 - 13 is written to the church there are, nevertheless, insights we can gain into the purpose and practice of Christian schooling. A Christian school perspective from this passage might be summarised as follows:

First: God has given special gifts to committed Christian pastor/teachers to be involved in the ministry of Christian schooling. The gift of evangelism will also be important in a Christian school (verse 11).

Second: the purpose of education is to prepare students for service so that they can make a difference for Jesus within the school, their local church and wider community including overseas. There is the encouragement to build up each student in a loving caring classroom community so that each one can know that as they are made in the image of God they are together brothers and sisters in Christ. This passage teaches that community is built up when each member serves the other just like all the parts of our body work together to bring life (verse 12).

Third: The goal is to become Christ like. That children might grow to become the people God wants them to be; what a fantastic aim for a school! There is the encouragement for teachers to help students to grow in Christ to be more like Him in all aspects of their lives; that's the meaning of Christian maturity. Maturity will come through teaching Bible knowledge; giving children opportunity to serve others and observe their teachers living their lives as committed and growing Christians (verse 13).

God's Holy Spirit must be given opportunity to work within the classroom to mould and shape student's lives to assist these goals being achieved. God's Spirit:

- Regenerates people (John 3: 5 -6; Romans 8:11,
- Guides and comforts Christians (John 14:16),
- Convicts of sin (John 16:8),
- Inspires the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16),
- Helps Christians to understand the scriptures as they read them (1 Corinthians 2: 10,
- Gives believers faith (1 Corinthians 2:14; 12: 3 – 9; 2 Corinthians 4: 13,
- Intercedes to the Father on their behalf and prays for them (Romans 8: 26 – 27),
- Changes the nature of people and creates fruit in their life (Galatians 5: 22 – 23¹³).

Group Discussion

1. How do you rate your school in achieving the goals in Ephesians 4: 11 - 13?
2. Brainstorm new ideas to help develop Christian maturity that you may like to try implementing in your school.
3. What opportunity does God's Holy Spirit have to work in your classroom?

¹³ Introduction to Christian Teaching. Effective Teaching Series 1. New Hope International. Instruction Manual.p18

Personal Reflection

Think about your own walk with Jesus; are you seeking to grow in Christian maturity too?

Prayer

Pray that God will help you grow more like Him each day. Ask Him to show you areas that require special growth.

23 Evidence of Christian Maturity

Ephesians 4: 14 – 16

Many countries have embraced an education system that assumes students are competent when have achieved outcomes prescribed by the curriculum. In Ephesians 4: 14 - 16 Paul gives us three 'outcomes,' or signs of Christian maturity, to strive towards with the help of God's Spirit.

First, maturity is the ability to stand firm against false teaching (verse 14). Many people simply equate wrong teaching with well known cults; unfortunately teaching that is not Christian is much more sinister than that, sometimes even appearing in curriculum documents. Teachers must have minds focused on Jesus Christ that can recognise teaching that is contrary to biblical principles and be able to lead students to the truth.

One special area of concern is the view of truth taken by the curriculum. There is emphasis now on making **right choices** in decision making but the trouble is students are not encouraged to link choice with 'truth.' That's the problem with the curriculum's notion that students must be free to make their own individual choices and our role as teachers is to give all the options

Second, maturity is being able to accept the truth in love (verse 15). This is the heart of a Christian approach to discipline. If discipline is not administered in love much harm can be done to the student. Love without discipline leads to anarchy; discipline without love leads to fear and rebelliousness.

Thirdly maturity is cooperation and working together just like all the parts of a healthy body (verse 16). As members of a 'body' joined to Christ, who is the Head, we encourage, help and relate each other which leads to the whole body growing more like Christ.

Many years ago the school that I was at gave Christian maturity awards at the annual Presentation Evening. Both staff and prefects helped to determine the worthy recipients. One particular year determining the award became so difficult that we decided in future to give school service awards instead. The problem was that staff equated Christian maturity with students who studied hard, always completed homework and were always well behaved in class. The prefects, on the other hand, had a totally different criterion; they saw Christian maturity reflected in a student who was empathetic and relational and helped their peers in times of need. I think the prefects had a much better understanding of Christian maturity, don't you?

Group Discussion

1. Give examples of teaching within the curriculum that you have to follow which is not Christian. How did you address the problem with your students?
2. How do you teach 'decision making?'
3. What is meant by the statement, 'Love is the circulatory system of the 'body'? Note: love unites; selfishness divides.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on your own maturity as a Christian. Read and meditate on Ephesians 4.

Prayer

Pray for growth in areas of your own life that demonstrates immaturity as a Christian.

24 The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World

Matthew 5: 1 – 12

This summary of different attitudes to living by Augsburg¹⁴ is worth considering carefully:

In summary of this review of the Beatitudes we see, as Dr Richard C Halverson says, that 'the way of the Kingdom of God is antithetical (opposite) to the way of our contemporary culture.' God says 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' but we say blessed are the achievers. God says, 'Blessed are those who mourn,' but we say blessed are the self fulfilled. God says, 'Blessed are the meek,' but we say blessed are the powerful. Jesus says, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,' but we say blessed are the unrestrained. Jesus says, 'Blessed are the merciful,' but we say blessed are the manipulators. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the Pure in Heart,' but we say blessed are the uninhibited. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' but we say blessed are the strong. Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake,' but we say blessed are the expedient. Jesus said we are blessed when persecuted for His sake, 'but we say blessed are the aggressors. Jesus challenges the very selfishness that determines so much of our social behaviour.

I once asked staff to brainstorm the difference between the Kingdom of God and The Kingdom of Man. They came up with a similar set of ideas:

Kingdom of God	Kingdom of Man
God is the centre of the universe	After The Fall man becomes the centre of the universe
Life giving culture	Culture of death
Love - agape	Lust, eroticism
Pleasure	Debauchery, addiction
Freedom	Licence, independence
Relationship	Obsession – beauty or ugliness
Self control	Being in control
Material possessions	Status symbols
Worship God	Worship idols of our own making
Immortality in heaven	Immortality on earth – tombs, family history
Creativity – to reflect the image of God	Creativity – to reflect the image of sinful man
Communication – building up	Communication – tearing down

Group Discussion

1. What is the main theme of The Beatitudes?
2. What can we do to change students' attitudes towards the Kingdom of God?
3. Can you think of any other differences between the Kingdom of Heaven' and the Kingdom of this world?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on your own attitudes and behaviours; what areas of your life are you still living in the kingdom if this world?

¹⁴ Augsburg, Myron S. 1982. The Preacher's Commentary: Matthew. Thomas Nelson. Nashville. p62 – 3.

Prayer

Pray that God will change your attitudes and behaviour by letting the Spirit of God work in your life.

25 The Scourge of Legalism

Matthew 5:17 – 20

To live as a functioning community we need rules to live by, however, one of the biggest traps Christian teachers can fall into is the attitude that 'rules' are sacrosanct must be obeyed and, if they are not, then there must be pre determined penalty for the offender. Those teachers see only 'black and white' in their dealings with students. Perhaps they gain this attitude through reading verse 19.

I vividly remember one Sunday night service where the speaker asked the congregation to write down all the characteristics of the Pharisees. Well we really went to town and in no time had filled a white board with our answers. After letting this exercise run for a few minutes he stopped and quietly asked the question, 'well what similarities are there here with your local church?' We had to unfortunately admit that the similarities were quite astonishing. Would you come to the same conclusion if you completed this exercise in respect of your school?

Christ fulfilled all the demands of the Law through living a sinless life (Romans 10:4). Therefore He has set us free from the Law of sin and death (Romans 6: 12 – 23; 8:2) and we no longer have to focus on the righteousness of the Law (obeying every jot and tittle)

Instead we are to embrace the righteousness of Christ which comes through faith (Romans 3: 21 – 31) rather than the Law. If you have time, also look up Romans 10:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3: 9. The righteousness of the Pharisees is outward and showy; the righteousness of Christ works inwardly cleansing our hearts and minds through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Rather than be legalistic, which may turn students away from becoming Christians, let the righteousness that comes from Christ be displayed in your life (Philippians 1:11; Ephesians 4: 24).

The Law still does have value in showing us that we are sinners and need to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

A teacher became angry about the amount of talking occurring in his classroom; 'the next person who talks will be placed on detention,' he snapped. A couple of minutes later he observed a girl speaking to her neighbour at the back of the class. After writing her name on the board for lunchtime detention a timid girl came up to the teacher's desk and told him that her friend had warned her that a bee had settled on her collar.

Group Discussion

1. How can you have a non legalistic school but still have good discipline?
2. How can we encourage students to stop seeking to win Jesus' approval by trying to be good?

Personal Reflection

How legalistic a teacher are you?

Prayer

Pray that you might show the love of Jesus to your students.

26 Children Obey Your Parents (and Teachers)

Ephesians 6:1 – 3

Sometimes teachers feel that they have to bribe students to make them behave in class. These verses give four reasons why it should be natural for children to obey their parents, and by inference, their teachers:

First: it is through obedience that relationships are developed and maintained. Paul emphasises this principle in Ephesians 5:21 when he said, 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.'

Second: it is right to obey (verse 1). Obedience is part of God's divine order in creation. Even young animals are taught by their parents to obey. There are certain actions God built into His creation that are 'right' and obedience of parents is one of them.

Third: obedience is commanded. In the fifth commandment God says to honour your father and your mother. These requirements of the Law are met when we live according to God's Spirit (Romans 8:1 – 4).

Fourth: Because it brings blessing (verse 3). Sadly this does not mean that every child who obeys their parents and teachers will live a long life. What it does mean is that obedience of parents may reduce many of the risks in growing up. It can refer to a better quality of life for children who obey. Obedience may also serve to extend the culture of the land.

Classroom obedience can be encouraged through promotion of a caring learning community, modeling obedience to our students and being consistent in our expectations of behaviour.

I once Googled the word 'obedience' to find out what current thinking was on this subject; there were literally hundreds of sites for obedience schools for dogs but not one on training children.

Group Discussion

1. What other helpful advice could be given to classroom teachers to help them develop student obedience?
2. How can we encourage children to obey from the heart and not because of the possibility of some outward reward?
3. Is it Ok to reward students who obey?

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4; how do you rate your ability to submit to others?
2. Look up the word 'obedience' (obey) in a Bible commentary. What importance does the Bible place on 'obedience?' Why?

Prayer

Pray for students in your class who struggle with obedience.

27 A Warning to Parents and Teachers

Ephesians 6: 1 – 4

Disciplining students is probably one of the most difficult processes for parents and teachers. In verse 4 Paul gives three directives for disciplining, two are positive, and one negative.

First the negative: fathers (and by inference) teachers are not to exasperate their children. This means that they are not to act unreasonably towards children or provoke them to anger.

Then follows two positives: Instead we are to bring children up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

To bring up a child means to nourish them. In the teaching context it is not enough to nourish by providing a warm room and a safe playground, important as that is, but we must nourish emotionally and spiritually in the spirit of love.

To train translates the Greek word, 'paideia' which means to correct or direct behaviour; to administer godly discipline (Hebrews 12:6). Discipline must be in love and not in anger; it must be fair and consistent.

To instruct ('nouthesia') means to share wise counsel with children. In the Book of Proverbs we have a good example of the type of wise words a father or teacher can give their children.

One day during my time as deputy principal I had to discipline one young lad for a fairly serious classroom misdemeanour. After the discipline process had been completed he shook my hand and said. 'My name is Michael (not his real name) and I want to say I deserved that; thank you for disciplining me!'

Well I never had that happen again, either before or after that day, but at least I know that Michael felt that the discipline given was fair and appropriate.

Group Discussion

1. Think of some ways teachers could exasperate children. Not being consistent in discipline, for example, could lead to exasperation.
2. What is the difference between disciplining in love and anger?
3. Does your school have a program of 'wise council' to pass onto children? If you haven't why not think about developing one.
4. How can your school help parents to train and instruct their children in a godly way?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on the way you discipline children. Do you discipline to train and encourage or to show you are boss?

Prayer

1. Ask God to help you train the children in your care the way Ephesians 6:4 requires.
 2. Ask God to help you develop a training program for your children if you do not have one.
-

28 The Wonder of Creation

Psalm 19: 1 – 6

The heavens declare God's perfection (verse 1). Day after day His creation is speaking out; not in audible words, but in witnessing to His awesome wisdom, power and creative genius (Romans 1:18 – 20).

The sun especially bears witnesses to God's Glory (verses 4c – 6); it rises like a bridegroom leaving his chamber on his wedding day and then runs like a champion around the arena. The Psalmist used these illustrations to debunk pagan beliefs about the sun.

If you teach a secular view of the origins of the world you make it more difficult for God to speak to students through the wonders of creation.

Kepler, the astronomer; was troubled by one of his friends who denied the existence of God and took the view that the universe came into existence by itself.

Kepler, in order to convince his friend, constructed a model of the sun with the planets going around it. When his friend came into the Observatory he wanted to know who had made it. When Kepler told him that no one had his friend looked at him and said, 'Nonsense!'

Kepler then replied, 'Friend, you say that this little toy could not make itself. It is but a weak imitation of this great universe which I understand you believe made itself'¹⁵!

Group Discussion

1. How can you help instil the excitement of God's creation in your students?
2. What can we learn from Romans 1:18 – 21?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on the following passages: Psalm 8; Psalm 29; Isaiah 40: 12 – 31; Colossians 1:15 – 20.

Prayer

Write out a prayer of praise and adoration to God on a theme of Creation. You also might like to complete this activity with your students.

¹⁵ Adapted from 'Look What We Found: Wit and Wisdom from the Braille Scrapbook of Peter Sumner.' Christian Blind Mission International. p104.

29 What is a Christian School

Matthew 9:14 – 17

What do you see as the important features of a Christian School?

I wonder how many of you thought that formal programs like the weekly chapel services and prayers at the beginning and end of the day were the hallmarks of a Christian School!

The disciples of John the Baptist came and asked Jesus why His disciples did not practice ritual fasting. Jesus told them that with His coming a new order had arrived, the bridegroom had come, it was no longer a time for fasting.

To illustrate the difference between the old and the new order Jesus used illustrations of patching a garment with unshrunk material and putting new wine into old wine skins.

A new order of schooling has been inaugurated that stresses academic excellence in the context of loving caring relationships between all members of the school community, commitment to Jesus twenty four hours each day and where students can sense freedom in Christ rather than the rituals of legalism.

Van Brummelen comments¹⁶:

... Christian schools must deliberately structure their whole program so that students become part of a Christian community that appreciates children for their unique gifts and contributions. Students must learn to cooperate, not just to compete for the sake of 'beating' someone else. Individual small group and large group activities must be balanced so that students experience their talents being used to contribute to the community in different ways.

Group Discussion

1. Jesus likens the Kingdom of heaven to a feast (Matthew 22:2 cf Isaiah 25:6). How can you make your school seem like a 'feast' to your children?
2. How does your school compare with the comments of Van Brummelen above?
3. If you have a weekly chapel service talk about how it is conducted; how do you think students feel about attending; do they sense a ritual or a freedom to worship God?

Personal Reflection

Jesus came to bring spiritual wholeness not to simply patch things up (verses 16 & 17).

Prayer

Pray that students in your school will sense freedom and not feel bound by legalism.

¹⁶ Van Brummelen, Harro. 1988. Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Learning and Teaching. Welch Publishing. Burlington. p13.

30 Be Holy Because I Am Holy

Leviticus 19:1 – 4; Judges 2: 10 - 11

In one simple sentence, 'Be Holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy;' God told us how we were required to live. Notice that Moses had to pass this on to the entire assembly – it was a message for everyone not just leaders (Leviticus 19:1) and for all time; not just a legal requirement of the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:15).

Then, later, we read that a generation grew up who practised all kinds of evil because they did not know God (Judges 2: 11). This terrible state of affairs occurred because there had been neglect in teaching God's ways.

As a Christian teacher you have a responsibility to teach the younger generation the ways of God, that means an education based on the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). It means that you too will need to be versed in what the Bible says and be able to live that way as an example to your students.

When God said to be Holy because He was Holy He was saying that His character was to be the standard for all truth and morality. That was God's original intention clearly set out in Genesis 2. Then the serpent came along and said that Adam and Eve would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3: 4 – 5), if ate the fruit. There was an element of truth in this for when Adam and Eve ate it fruit they usurped God's position and made their own rules. God intended truth to be objective so that humanity could live by one set of standards. Through disobedience Adam and Eve introduced subjective truth but it is impossible to live in a community where everyone decides what is right and wrong. Christian schools have a wonderful opportunity to reverse this situation.

Group Discussion

1. Look at Leviticus 19; how do the requirements of this chapter strengthen relationships between people?
2. Do the attitudes and behaviour of the staff and students of your school reflect the character of God? How might this be improved?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on 1 Peter 1:13 – 24.

Prayer

Pray that both you and your school may always reflect the character of God.

31 The Relationship between a Teacher and His/Her Students

Matthew 10: 24 – 26

Jesus' statement that a disciple is not above his teacher or a servant above his master was stated in the context of suffering. As Jesus, the Head of the house, was misinterpreted and persecuted for the message He brought so His disciples, the members of the household, could expect the same treatment. Jesus must have seen this teaching as important for He quoted it on at least three other occasions, Luke 6:40; John 13:16 and 15:20.

If we consider these principles in a wider context we can learn valuable insights about the relationship between a student and his teacher. Luke 6: 40 is especially helpful: *A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.*

Teachers are more than dispensers of facts, a good teacher builds up positive relationships with his/her pupils and shares his/her character with them, often unconsciously. As pupil and teacher 'walk the road together' students begin to model the character of their teacher and if they are together long enough the student can actually become like their teacher. Teachers, therefore, have a tremendous responsibility to model truth and display the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 3:22). No wonder James gave teachers a stern warning when he said, *'No many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because we know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.'*

Teachers will make many mistakes along the way and sometimes actions will not have a positive influence on students. When this happens it is important to be gracious and apologise for what has happened. Secular educators will argue that apologies are a sign of weakness. A Christian teacher will disagree; an apology models humility that will gain respect from class members.

Group Discussion

1. Sometimes students try to be above their teachers. Many classrooms today have become battle grounds where students try to exert their authority. Why does this occur?
2. How can we help a teacher in that situation?
3. How can you model the life of Jesus when a student is openly defiant and rude to you?

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on Hebrews 12: 2 – 4.
2. Jesus clearly understood the importance of the 'hidden curriculum.' What kind of model do you are you presenting to your students?

Prayer

Pray that God will assist you to be a better teacher. Pray for other staff members in your school especially those who may be having some difficulty being a model tot heir students.

32 Overcoming Discouragement

Matthew 10: 27 – 31

Have you ever felt that it is too hard teaching in a Christian school? Perhaps you feel that way because teaching from a Christian perspective does not come easy. Or you may be feeling that you are not being a good enough role model. Perhaps your supervisor has recently had to 'speak the truth in love' about some issue relating to your efficiency as a teacher.

If you are feeling like quitting then let today's reading be an encouragement to you:

First, if you know that God has called you to teach in a Christian school then quitting is not an option. The message the disciples had received from the Lord privately (in the dark or whispered), they were to proclaim publicly without fear (speak in the daylight or proclaim from the [flat] housetops),¹⁷

Second, Jesus was concerned for the disciples and aware of their circumstances. He illustrates this concern by being aware of the death of a sparrow which is worth so little. Two sparrows were sold for a penny which was a Greek copper coin worth about 1/16 of a Roman *denarius*, a day's wages). God the Father even knows the number of hairs on our head (verse 30)!

Third, verse 28 is both encouragement and warning; you should not be concerned about fearing the Devil but the wrath of God who can destroy both the body and soul in hell. So know God's will for your life and do what He says!

A discouraged minister once dreamed that he was standing on top of a great granite rock, trying to break it with a pickaxe. Hour after hour we worked on with no result. At last he said, "It is useless, I will stop."

Suddenly a man stood by him and asked, "Were you not allotted this task? And if so, why are you going to abandon it?"

"My work is in vain, I can make no impression on the granite," was the minister's reply.

Then the stranger solemnly replied, "That is nothing to you; your duty is to pick, whether the rock yields or no. The work is yours, the results are in other hands; work on."

In his dream the minister saw himself setting out anew on his labour, and at his first blow the rock flew into hundreds of pieces.

The devil, according to legend, once advertised his tools for sale at a public auction. When the prospective buyers assembled, there was one oddly shaped tool that was labeled, "Not for sale." Asked to explain why this was, the devil answered. "I can spare other tools but I cannot spare this one. It is the most useful implement that I have. It is called discouragement, and with it I can work my way into hearts otherwise inaccessible. When I get this tool into a man's heart the way is open to plant anything there I might desire"¹⁸.

If you are discouraged then why not talk to someone about it!

¹⁷Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:43

¹⁸Paul Lee Tan. 1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*. Assurance Publishers. Rockville, Maryland. P338.

Group Discussion

1. How could you help a peer who is discouraged?
2. How do you know it is God's will for you to be at your present school?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on 2 Timothy 2:12; Matthew 10:28;

Prayer

Pray a prayer of commitment to be a more effective Christian teacher both for Jesus and the students in your class.

33 Dealing with the Tongue

Matthew 12:33 – 37

One of the main ways relationships are destroyed is by what people say to each other and the tone they use. We can all relate to occasions when we have tried to reconcile students over what began by a simple verbal exchange in the playground.

This passage is a follow up to Matthew 12:22 – 30, especially verse 24, where the Pharisees accuse Jesus of doing mighty works through the power of the devil.

Verses 33 - 37 outline principles which may guide in teaching about the power of the tongue:

1. Wholeness and integrity begin with the heart – the inner most part of our being. That is why it is important to allow God's Holy Spirit to keep working in our lives to keep our inner being focused on Him.
2. Words overflow from the heart. A heart which expresses the mind of Christ brings forth good words; an evil heart brings forth bad. Jesus says, *'for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks'* (verse 34b). Just as a tree is known by its fruit (verse 33) so we are known by the state of our heart.
3. We will either be justified or condemned before God on our words and our actions (verses 36 – 37). We will have to give account for the words we have used.

Finish by reading James 3: 3 - 12 and 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Group Discussion

1. What three illustrations are used to describe the tongue in James 3?
2. Why do each of these illustrations highlight 'smallness' and 'largeness'?
3. Suggest how you might present a lesson on the destructive nature of the tongue to students in your school.

Personal Reflection

1. What is the state of your heart? Is there anyone who you need to apologise and seek forgiveness from?
2. 'Careless words' in verse 36 can be translated, 'idle chatter and gossip.' How guilty are you in this area?

Prayer

Make this a time of confession when you seek forgiveness for inappropriate use of words. Pray for any healing of relationships in your school caused by these kinds of problems. Pray for a change of heart.

34 Jesus the Teacher

John 6: 1 – 15; 35 – 59 (longer reading)

John 6: 5 – 13; 35 – 40 (shorter passage)

Since Jesus was the master teacher it is useful to analyse His teaching style to encourage us to be better teachers. To do that exercise effectively we should read each of the four gospels. Some insights, however, can be gained from the story of the feeding of the multitude followed by Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life from John chapter 6. Here are some of His teaching techniques used at that time:

1. Concentrated on mentoring a small group of people – the disciples.
2. Motivated the disciples, verses 5 – 9 and the people, verses 32 – 34.
3. Effective use of questioning, verses 5 & 10.
4. Gave the disciples a problem to solve, verses 5 – 9.
5. Used practical demonstration, verses 5 – 13.
6. Involved the disciples in that demonstration, verses 10 – 13.
7. Used the lecture approach when necessary, verses 35 – 58.
8. Use of metaphor; verses 35. Jesus use of parables in other parts of the gospels shows that He was the Master of the Metaphor.
9. Use of hyperbole; verses 53 – 55. Wouldn't those comments be a talking point after the lecture?
10. Was not afraid to confront and discipline, verse 43.
11. Incorporated the people into His talk, for example, verse 49.
12. Challenged His hearers to make changes to their lives, verses 53 – 58.

Many have grappled with the question as to why Jesus used parables which tended to hide the meaning rather than make it obvious. McLaren gives a helpful answer:

Why did Jesus speak in parables? Why was he subtle, indirect, and secretive? Because his message wasn't merely aimed at conveying information. It sought to precipitate something more important, the spiritual transformation of the hearers. The form of a parable helps to shape a heart that is willing to enter an ongoing, interactive, persistent relationship of trust in the teacher. It beckons the hearer to explore new territory. It helps form a heart that is humble enough to admit it doesn't already understand and is thirsty enough to ask questions. In other words a parable renders its hearers not as experts, not as know-it-alls, not as scholars...but as children¹⁹.

Group Discussion

1. What other teaching techniques does Jesus use in the gospels?
2. Should we hide the meaning of our teaching as McLaren suggest Jesus did?

¹⁹ McLaren, Brian D. 2006. The Secret Message of Jesus. Op cit.. p46.

Personal Reflection

Use the list above, and others you gain from the above discussion, to personally evaluate your own teaching style.

Prayer

Ask God to show you ways by which you can be a better teacher.

35 Two Kinds of Wisdom

James 3: 13 – 18

Our world equates wisdom with knowledge and academic excellence. James highlights a wisdom that is concerned with behaviour and actions. He identifies two kinds of wisdom; wisdom from the devil (verse 15) and wisdom from heaven (or from God) (verse 17).

'Who is wise and understanding among you?' (verse 13)? The Greeks understood 'wisdom' as moral insight and skill in practical issues; whilst by 'understanding' they meant intellectual reasoning and appropriation of scientific knowledge. Well James said, if you are wise then show it, not by the number of degrees you have, but by practical action through conduct, conversation, deportment and manner of life.

One of the signs of devilish wisdom is 'ambition,' defined as a desire to put one's self forward, to be excessively occupied with personal advancement at the expense of others or having a fractious spirit that is unruly, cross and disagreeable. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, used the word 'ambition' to denote a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.

Wisdom from God is the very antithesis of this, being pure, peaceable and gentle, demonstrating the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22 - 23).

Christian teachers face a challenge; on the one hand, because they work in a school, they must encourage the pursuit of academic excellence. At the same time a Christian school must provide an environment where wisdom is worked out in a Christian context - through living in community, thinking and acting as Jesus did. Our biggest task, therefore, is to encourage academic excellence from this context and that has got a lot to do with changing the orientation of student's hearts.

Group Discussion

1. How does this passage define the difference between these two types of wisdom?
2. Suggest some strategies that can help students to gain a correct perspective on academic excellence?
3. How can we help a student who is academically excessively competitive?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on; Philippians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 10;

Prayer

Pray that your school will present a correct perspective on academic excellence.

36 Restoring God's Image

Romans 5: 12 – 19

The Bible in general and the Book of Romans more specifically, gives an excellent summary of the story of mankind:

1. **Mankind was created in the image of God:** Genesis 1:27. *'Being in God's image means that humans share, though imperfectly and finitely, in God's nature, that is, in His communicable attributes (life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice), and so have the capacity for spiritual fellowship with Him.'*²⁰
2. **Sin Marred mankind's image:** (Romans 5:12; 15 – 17). The entrance of sin was like the effect of a mirror being dropped - becoming cracked, smudged and distorted. When mankind looked through that mirror they saw a marred, misshapen, deformed and almost completely unrecognisable image from the one that was originally created.
3. **God sent Jesus Christ into the world to restore God's image:** (Romans 5: 13 – 19). This is God's wonderful message of salvation and reconciliation that Jesus Christ came into the world to die on a terrible cross to impart God's wonderful grace to those who seek forgiveness. Through salvation our image can be partially restored in this life and fully restored in the next.
4. **Restored People Must Reflect God's Image:** From Romans 12:3 onwards Paul gives practical information on how God's restored people should live. Notice the length he goes to stressing the importance of love both inside and outside the Christian community.

Group Discussion

1. Have some of the group share their own testimony to encourage others.
2. How does knowing that children are made in God's image change our attitude towards them?
3. What is your school doing to share with children that God's image can be restored in their lives?

Personal Reflection

1. What practical things do you need to do to make sure that you always display the image of God?
2. Reflect on Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49.

Prayer

1. Thank God that He sent Jesus Christ into the world to impart His wonderful grace.
2. Pray that you will always display God's image before the lives of the children you teach.

²⁰Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:29

37 Knowing the Truth

John 14: 6 -7

Truth is traditionally defined from an objective perspective; what is factual; actually happened or indisputable.

However, knowing objective truth about the Bible and especially about the life of Jesus will not make us free; getting 100% in a Bible knowledge test will not save us either.

We need to understand that truth is more than just a thinking process; Kel Willis comments:

For believers, then, there are two components of truth. There is truth in the absolute sense – objective reality, accepting, and believing the truth discovered in God's Word, the Bible. However, that objective truth must, in every sense, become subjective reality in each believer's life; it must become experiential in our everyday walk, touching every aspect of who we are and how we live and relate to one another²¹.

John 14: 6 says that Jesus is Truth. He created the world (Colossians 1:14 – 16) and part of the creative process involved building truth into every part of creation. To know truth then is more than just head knowledge; it must come from the heart and pervade all of our being.

That's what sets us free – free to grow in spiritual maturity, free to think and live Christianly as the truth of the gospel works out in our lives²².

Consider these pithy sayings about truth:

- Truth is what God says about a thing.
- Ye shall know the truth and truth shall make you free.
- Know the truth yourself if you want to teach the truth.
- There is no one fit search after truth which does not, first of all, begin to live the truth it knows.
- The greatest homage we can pay to truth is to live it.
- Seven years of silent inquiry are needed for a man to learn the truth, but fourteen in order to learn how to make it known to his fellow man.
- The best method of eradication of error is to publish and practice truth.
- Truth not translated into life is dead truth²³.

Group Discussion

1. What did Jesus mean when He said, 'I am the Truth?'
2. How can we help children to understand that truth comes from the 'heart' and not only from the 'head?'
3. Think about how you would prepare lesson material to help students understand biblical truth.

²¹ Willis, Kel. 1996. 'The Experience Trap.' CGM Publishing, Burwood. P. 71-2.

²² Ibid. p71

²³ Doan, Eleanor. 1960. Speaker's Sourcebook: 4000 Illustrations, Quotations and Helps for Public Speakers. Zondervan. Grand Rapids. p273 – 4.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on Ephesians 1: 15 – 23. How can you know Jesus better (verse 17)?

Prayer

Pray the above passage in your own words.

38 Moses Learns to Delegate

Exodus 18: 13 – 27 (longer reading)

Exodus 18: 13 – 18; 24 – 26 (shorter reading)

Moses is tired, overworked and stressed; people are coming from morning till evening to have him sort out their problems. Does that kind of scenario sound familiar to you?

Look at the way the problem was solved:

1. Moses listened to, and accepted advice; he even listened to his father in law Jethro!
2. Moses got his priorities right. He now focused on teaching the people God's laws.
3. Moses delegated some of the tasks of judging to godly men whilst he himself looked after the most difficult cases.

Many people feel that being a good leader involves personally making all the decisions and doing all the work. That is a recipe for disaster! Delegation not only takes the load off key people but gives others a feeling of responsibility, ownership of the task and an opportunity to develop and use individual gifts and abilities. Delegation is a win win situation all round!

If a key person leaves suddenly and the organisation continues almost as though nothing has happened then that is usually a sign of good leadership. It has been said that a one of the tasks of a good leader is to be progressively working themselves out of a job.

In 1988 Christian Community Schools Limited organised large bicentennial celebrations in Sydney which included a Thanksgiving Service at Homebush Bay for over 6,000 people, a trip to Old Sydney Town at Gosford for hundreds of students and a display on the Sydney Showground Arena where around 5,000 students demonstrated their faith in Christ. Hundreds of students came from all over Australia including Coolgardie Aboriginal Parent Controlled School near Kalgoorlie. How was such a celebration to be organised and executed? As I was appointed to head up the celebrations I discovered that the best way to get the job done was to delegate different sections of the organisation to different people and schools. So we had an organiser of accommodation, transport, 'Old Sydney Town' showground display and so on. It turned out to be a well organised week of celebration and praise with everyone working as a team and feeling some ownership in what they did. The whole week was a great time of celebration and encouragement to all.

Group Discussion

1. What important duties was Moses given (verse 20)? Why?
2. Without discussing personalities talk about the leadership structure of your school; draw a plan of your school's leadership structure. Discuss ways in which delegation might assist your school to function more efficiently.
3. How are events organised at your school? Does one person end up doing all the work? Think of ways to delegate when the next function is being organised.

Personal Reflection

1. Examine your own leadership skills; are there ways, even as a classroom teacher, that you could delegate some tasks to good students (for example training classroom helpers)?

Prayer

Pray for the leadership of your school

39 Qualifications for a Christian Teacher

1 Timothy 3: 1 – 10

There are no specific qualifications given in scripture for Christian classroom teachers. However, given that teachers have important leadership roles, often as part of the ministry of a church, it is not unreasonable to look at the qualifications for an 'overseer' in 1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7 for guidance.

1. To aspire to leadership is a noble or 'good' task (verse 1). Sometimes teachers have a poor perception of their role; this verse should serve as an encouragement that what you are doing is very important to the Kingdom of God.
2. A true leader sets an example to others (verse 2). Teaching is more than just instilling facts; students constantly observe their teachers and look to them as personal role models. Wouldn't it be appalling if a teacher's attitudes and behaviours caused a student to be led astray?
3. Verse 2 also emphasises the importance of being able to teach. Christian teachers (indeed all teachers) must aim to be the best possible practitioners of their craft.
4. As well Verse 2 mentions the need to be self controlled and temperate – very important traits for a Christian teacher.
5. Another challenge comes from verse 9, as an instruction to deacons; *They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.*

The Research Institute of America listed these requirements for those who train others: (1) Desire to teach (2) Knowledge of the subject (3) Ability to communicate (4) Patience (5) Sense of humour (6) Time to do a thorough job²⁴.

One of the greatest wonders is how the blind deaf girl, Helen Keller was able to take her place in classes at Radcliffe College at Harvard University and become a distinguished scholar. This had been possible through her faithful teacher, Miss Sullivan, who found her as a little girl unable to comprehend life around her and only able to make the simplest of signs to her family.

The teacher by patient persistence, using all sorts of objects, with infinite pains, taught the little girl sign language by touch and when once communication with the outside world was established education proceeded²⁵.

Group Discussion

1. What requirements did the Research Institute of America leave out?
2. Which of the traits in 1 Timothy 3: 1 – 10 are especially important for a Christian classroom teacher to consider?
3. Of all the traits mentioned which are not so necessary for a teacher?
4. Which traits in the above passage highlight the role of serving?
5. Should a new convert teach in a Christian school (verse 6)? What special help, if any, should be given to teachers who are new converts?

²⁴ Paul Lee Tan. 1979. Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations. Assurance Publishers. Rockville, Maryland. p1425.

²⁵ Paul Lee Tan. 1979. Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations. Assurance Publishers. Rockville, Maryland. p1427.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on 1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7; Titus 1: 7 – 9; Luke 6: 39 – 40, 43 and 44.

Prayer

Do you need to make a recommitment to teaching as a Christian? Then why not do that now?

40 The Danger of Syncretism

Reading: Hosea 2: 7b – 13

When the Children of Israel arrived in the Promised Land they needed to learn to grow crops. They had lived on manna for the last forty years but now that they had finally reached their destination they needed to become self sufficient.

Instead of relying on God they took Canaanite slaves which God forbade. They taught the Israelites to place little shrines in the midst of their crops so they might worship Baal to implore him to provide them with abundant crops. The Bible tells that even Gideon's father had a shrine (Judges 6: 25 – 26).

Much worse was to come; it wasn't too many years before God's people became involved in sacred prostitution at the hillside shrines (1 Kings 14:24; 1 Kings 15:12; 2 Kings 23:19); the idea being that to promote fertility you had to practise fertility yourself. This is a sad passage; God says: *She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her silver and gold – which they used for Baal* (verse 8).

The fact is that God is a jealous God who demands undivided attention from His people (Exodus 34:14). The Children of Israel had a belief in God but had allowed Baal worship to impinge on God's place. Syncretism, where we mix different beliefs together, doesn't only apply to the Children of Israel but teachers in a Christian school can also be guilty of it.

We fall into this trap when we use material that contains belief which is not Christian but do not challenge students about it. It's OK to use secular material in our classrooms providing it is used as a basis for challenging students to think Christianly (Romans 12: 1 – 2). This will prepare for senior school and university where students are often forced to comprehend material that is not Christian.

Our schools can also set up programs and structures which can take the place of God. This can happen when we place too much emphasis on things like sporting prowess, drama productions or academic excellence at the expense of devotion to God.

Group Discussion

1. What was God's attitude to syncretism in today's Bible passage?
2. How can a passion for sport in a Christian school not lead to syncretism.
3. Are there any programs within your school that are in danger of becoming syncretistic?
4. What secular material have you recently challenged in your classroom from a Christian perspective?

Personal Reflection

Examine your own life; are there things getting in the way of your devotion to God?

Prayer

Ask the Lord to deal with any issues in your life or the life of the school which might be getting in the way of God.

41 'Hesed'

Hosea 3: 1 – 5

In chapter 1 Hosea is instructed to take an adulterous woman, Gomer, as his wife (verse 2). Hosea obeys (verse 3).

In 2: 2 -13 we hear that the marriage failed. Gomer appears to go off with her lovers and appears to become a prostitute in the temple of Baal (verse 13).

In chapter 3 Hosea is instructed to reinstate Gomer as his wife. He buys her back for thirty shekels (including the cost of the grain) which was the recognised price for buying back a slave (Exodus 21:32). Notice the tenderness of Hosea's words to Gomer in verse 3.

Hosea lived out 'hesed' which is best translated in English as 'mercy' or 'loving-kindness.' 'Hesed' means going beyond what the covenant required, or practising unconditional love. Hosea illustrates this admirably by taking Gomer back as his wife when, because of her adultery, he could have had her stoned.

God showed 'hesed' to His chosen people. They deserved to die because they had forsaken Him in favour of worship of Baal. Read Hosea chapter 2 from this perspective. Not only did God show 'hesed' to His people at this time but it was also 'hesed' that led Him to send Jesus into the world to die for the sins of the world (John 3:16).

Sometimes we lose sight of 'hesed' in our schools by being so legalistic that our discipline policies and classroom practices do not give us room to show mercy.

I once had to discipline a boy called Bill (not his real name). He went up through the levels of discipline to the point where I actually suspended him twice. When he transgressed school rules again, instead of terminating his enrolment, I asked Bill to tell me why I shouldn't ask him to leave. He burst into tears and after composing himself explained a little more of his background to me. The result was that I gave him a further chance because I detected that he had a soft heart and really wanted to live for Jesus. I think that was practicing 'hesed.'

Group Discussion

1. Think of other instances in the Bible where 'hesed' was practiced. David's dealing with Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9) is a good example. It was normal practice for a king to remove all members of a previous household to avoid possibility of uprising.
2. Does your school's discipline policy allow for the practice of 'hesed?'
3. How can you know the state of a child's heart?

Personal Reflection

Think of someone you have recently disciplined. Was any opportunity given for 'hesed.'

Prayer

Ask the Lord for wisdom to discipline students.

Ask God to give you wisdom to know when it is right to exercise justice over compassion.

42 Truth, Love and Knowledge

Hosea 4: 1 – 3

Hosea lived and prophesied in Israel during the Divided Kingdom. He proclaimed God's message during the later years of Jeroboam II, a time of great prosperity (about 753–723BC). Hosea declared that things were going to get decidedly worse culminating in Israel's annihilation by the Assyrians which actually took place in 723BC.

In chapter 4, God brings a formal charge against the nation in which He explains what is wrong. The NKJV translates God's complaint as:

There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.

The NIV translates the same verse as:

There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land.

In the first passage we are told what is missing: truth, mercy (hesed) and knowledge of God. In the second passage the NIV, and many other translations, have interpreted them as virtues: faithfulness, love and acknowledgement of God.

Because truth, mercy and knowledge of God had been neglected the heart of man had become exceedingly sinful with consequences outlined in verses 2 & 3.

There must be more than a superficial understanding of truth, mercy and knowledge of God which, at best, can only lead to conformity. We must know God intimately. (Intimacy means proceeding from within or 'internal' whilst the word 'knowing' is used in Hebrew of the deep physical and spiritual relationship between a husband and a wife). It is only this relationship between us and God which can produce real faithfulness and love and acknowledgement of Him.

So with a deep relationship with God 'truth' becomes 'faithfulness; 'mercy' becomes 'love' and knowledge' becomes 'acknowledgement' of God.

I was encouraged to have a heart for Jesus by parents who took us ten miles to Sunday school and church each Sunday when money was very tight and the only method of transport was an old truck. My spiritual journey was enhanced by Eric who mentored me, one to one, as a teenager. Later encouragement came from a vibrant group of 'fired up' Christians at Wagga Teachers' College.

Group Discussion

1. What lessons are there in today's passage for the 21st century?
2. Share your own spiritual journeys.
3. How can we help students to develop an intimate knowledge of God and His plan of salvation as part of the ministry of a Christian school?

Personal Reflection

1. What is the state of your heart? Do you need to recommit your life to Jesus Christ?
2. What are you doing personally to foster '*truth or mercy or knowledge of God*' in your students?

Prayer

Spend time in prayer and meditation examining the state of your own heart. Pray for individual students in their spiritual journeys.

43 Our Longsuffering God

Hoses 2: 12 – 16

An examination of this passage will show two completely different attitudes of God towards His chosen people. The first half of the chapter, up to the end of verse 13, highlights God's justice towards a people who had forsaken Him for the worship of Baal. Spend a moment brainstorming all the things that God was going to do to His people. In verse 12, for example, God was going to ruin the vines and the fig trees.

What a change there is from verse 14 onwards. There is no more hint of justice but now God pours out His mercy.

The phrase 'and I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope' (verse 15b) needs a little explanation. This was where Joshua suffered a terrible defeat by the men of Ai because of the sinfulness of Achan (Joshua 7). The Israelites remembered this area as a place of hopelessness; God said it would become 'a door of hope.'

Notice also in verse 16 the change in relationship between God and His people; He will no longer be a master but a husband.

I am reminded of Peter (Matthew 18:21 – 22) who came to Jesus to find out how longsuffering he had to be. Was it all right if he only forgave a person up to seventy times? Peter was being generous here, for the traditional Rabbinic teaching was that an offended person needed to forgive a brother only three times²⁶. In saying that a person needed to be forgiven 490 times Jesus was emphasizing that no limits on forgiveness could be set.

Recently I visited another church. A young man in his mid twenties came and asked me did I remember him. I had to confess that I couldn't. When he identified himself he told me he recognized, in hindsight, that he had been rebellious at school but appreciated the fact that he had been given many chances because the staff believed in him. It was great to see that he had grown into a fine Christian.

Group Discussion

1. How does God use the metaphor of marriage in Hosea chapter 2 to illustrate His love for His people?
2. How do you respond to a staff member who says, 'You can't, however, just keep forgiving a child who constantly disrupts the class?'
3. What responsibility does a child (as well as an adult) have when they are forgiven?

Personal Reflection

1. How longsuffering are you? Pray for God to bless you with the gift of longsuffering.
2. Sometimes we unconsciously have the tendency to 'pick' on children who tend to be constantly naughty. Could you be guilty of this?

Prayer

Pray for the ability to be longsuffering and be able to forgive students 490 times.

²⁶Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:62

44 The Importance of Prayer

Luke 9: 28 - 36

I guess that if someone asked you if praying was important you would naturally agree because you wouldn't want people to think you were a 'bad' Christian.

But prayer really is important! Take a look at Luke's gospel and see what happened when Jesus prayed. In Luke 3:21-22 we read:

21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Then in Luke 6:12 Jesus prayed all night and then appointed the twelve disciples. Jesus shows here that is important to pray before big decisions are made. A couple of chapters further on (9:18- 21) we read that after Jesus prayed the eyes of the disciples were opened:

*18 Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"
19 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life
20 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Peter answered, "The Christ of God."
21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone."*

When Jesus prayed in Luke 9:28-29 amazing things happened; we call this the Transfiguration:

28 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

So what can we learn from this?

1. If it was important for Jesus, the Son of God, to pray, than it will be doubly important for us to do the same.
2. When Jesus prayed things happened.

We should not necessarily expect that similar great things as this will happen when we pray but we should not discount it. Can I suggest you read the biography of Rees Howells by Norman Grubb to learn about what God did through a man's prayers in more recent times; this book is a classic piece of Christian literature.

Rev Bob Frisken tells the story of the need for land in the early days of Christian Community High School, Regents Park. After much fervent prayer a lady, two doors from the school, came to the office one afternoon and said she would sell her land. This created a dilemma for Bob because without the house next door her land would be no use to the school. Believing that this was an answer to prayer the school agreed to buy her land. The same afternoon the owners of the house in between also agreed to sell. Now that is real answer to prayer!

Group Discussion

1. Recount other instances from the Bible where amazing things happened through the power of prayer.
2. Brainstorm a list of specific prayer points for your school. Write them up in the room where you have devotions. Cross each one off when that prayer has been answered.
3. Share with each other testimonies about how your specific prayers were answered.

Personal Reflection

1. How effective is your prayer life? Perhaps there is a greater need for you to pray specific prayers so that you can see when specific prayers have been answered.
2. Write your own prayer requests down; thank God when they have been answered and you can cross them off your list.

Prayer

Commence your prayer time with a Psalm of praise then pray for specific points such as the individual needs of each student in your class.

45 Can We See God at Work?

Psalm 19: 1 – 6

Isaiah 40:26:

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things.

God's people in Isaiah's time could not see God at work because their eyes were blinded. They were not blind in the sense that they couldn't physically see but they were blinded in the sense that they could not see things from God's perspective.

What happened was the people had completely neglected God; they had gone off and followed idols and as a result their minds could no longer recognise the greatness of God's creation.

If we are children of God we have a tremendous treasure in nature and we will realise that it is holy and sacred. We will see God reaching out to us in every wind that blows, every sunrise and sunset, every cloud in the sky, every flower that blossoms, every leaf that fades. If we will only begin to use our blinded thinking to visualise it²⁷.

Oswald Chambers says that the way we can see God at work in His world is to bring all our thinking under God's control. When our minds are focused fairly and squarely on God we see things differently. Romans 12:2 says that we are not to be conformed to the thinking of the sinful world but we are to be transformed by renewing or changing the way our minds think. Chambers continues:

If your ability to see God is blinded you will be powerless when faced with difficulties and will be forced to continue in darkness. If your power to see has been blinded don't look back on your own experiences but look to God, it is God you need. Go beyond yourself and away from the faces of your idols and away from everything that has been blinding your thinking. ... Deliberately turn your thoughts and your eyes to God.

When I first started teaching in Christian schools I didn't altogether understand this 'new' way of thinking. In the very early days of seeking to change my way of thinking (and teaching) when I came to an idea that I wasn't sure about I asked myself and my students a simple question; what view would Jesus take on this matter? A number of other strategies helped to continue this metamorphosis including; completing a tertiary course in Christian Education, reading thinkers such as CS Lewis, Francis Schaeffer and Chuk Colson and attending as many conferences on Christian Education as I could. That of course was in addition to my own personal Bible Study, prayer and church time.

Matthew 15:14 conveys a stern warning to all of us: *'Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind **lead the blind**, both will fall into a pit.'*

I hope you have a real passion to change your way of thinking!

²⁷ Chambers, Oswald: 'My Utmost for His Highest.' Updated edition edited by James Reimann. Discovery House Publishers. Grand Rapids. Devotion for 10th February.

Group Discussion

1. How are the heavens telling the Glory of God (Psalm 19:1)?
2. How can your school encourage staff and students to have a renewed mind?

Personal Reflection

1. Read and meditate on Colossians 1: 15 – 19.
2. How well are you teaching your class to see Jesus in His world? Do you feel you lack the ability to help your class in this vital area? Talk to someone who can help you start this wonderful journey? Spend quality time in prayer and Bible study.

Prayer

Ask God to open your eyes to see His world in its true perspective.

46 There is Nothing New Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 12: 9 - 14

The Book of Ecclesiastes shows us that the way we think in the twenty first century is little different to the time that the Preacher wrote 2,500 odd years ago. Whilst morning devotion is not a good time to explore really deep issues a few thoughts on the subject now may whet your appetite for further study.

Ecclesiastes presents many different worldview perspectives:

Chapter 1: The Mechanistic and Scientific View The world is just an endless cycle, *'Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises'* (v 4 & 5).

Chapter 2: The Hedonistic View The world is for the pursuit of pleasure. *'I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly...'* (v3a).

Chapter 3: The Existential View Making sense out of meaninglessness. *'What does a worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men'* (v9,10).

Chapter 4: The Capitalist View *'And I see that all labour and all achievement spring from a man's envy of his neighbour.. '* (4a).

Chapter 5: The 'Religious' View *'Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, stand in awe of God'* (v7). Read especially verses 1 - 7.

Chapter 6: The Materialist View *'A man may have a hundred children... yet no matter how long he lives if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial. I say that a still born child is better off...'* (v3).

Chapter 7: The Stoic View Take the middle path, avoid extremes. *'Do not be over righteous... Do not be over wicked...'* (v16a, 17a). Stoic mentality: *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting* (v2).

Chapter 8 – 11:8: The commonsense view of the world - a series of sayings which extol the virtue of being wise.

The one word which comes through in all of this is, 'meaninglessness.' This is the conclusion the Teacher reaches in 12:8.

Chapter 11:9 – 12: Life Lived under the Enthronement of God Read 12: 9 – 14. Rejoice in God's blueprint for life. Compare with the opposite of leaving God out (2:24; 3:22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7; 10:19).

One of the themes highlighted in the Book of Ecclesiastes is that we generally do not learn from those who have gone before us. The Teacher gives a way forward, 'Remember your Creator in the days of your youth... (12:1). If students come from godly homes and have teachers who teach from a Christian perspective they will be in the best possible position to remember their Creator through all of life and so make a difference to their world.

Have you thought about using the Book of Ecclesiastes in your teaching of senior classes? The whole Book could be used as a basis for teaching worldviews. The poem in 12: 1-6 is one of the most sublime ever written; use a commentary to understand the terms used.

Group Discussion

1. If The Teacher denounces so many worldviews as meaningless then what are the characteristics of a true Godly worldview?
2. Explore other ways of using The Book of Ecclesiastes in your teaching.

Personal Reflection

1. Read through Ecclesiastes using a modern translation.
2. Examine your own worldview perspective.

Prayer

Meditate on 12: 13 – 14. Ask God to help you live according to His pattern for life.

47 The Fear of the Lord

The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom,
And knowledge of the Holy One is Understanding.'

Proverbs 9:9 - 12

What two words come into your mind when you think about education? The words 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' are bound to come up sooner or later. Proverbs 9:10 tells us that wisdom and knowledge begin with God. Whilst we all say we agree with this how many of you are so passionate about it that it pervades all your teaching? If we are to be authentic Christian teachers then we have no option.

If God created the heavens and the earth then He cannot be left out of learning because He is everywhere and in everything – it is His world! Schools that leave God out of the equation are not teaching true knowledge and wisdom.

You might say, 'well that's all right but surely, Maths is Maths and English is English, no matter what school I teaches in.'

While there is an element of truth in this comment we must understand that it is the values and attitudes we bring to teaching English and Maths and all other subjects that is important. A school that does not honour God will teach Maths from the view that brainy people worked out all those complicated Maths formulas. For a Christian teacher Maths will be a way of finding out more about our wonderful Creator God and the complexity of the world He gave us to enjoy.

The same can be said for other subjects; English, for example, will be taught from the perspective that God is the perfect communicator and, because we are made in His image, we have been blessed with the ability to communicate.

History students will learn how God has revealed Himself through the events of the past and the consequences of mankind not living God's ways. Geography too is all about God's world and how well we are exercising stewardship over it.

To be authentic a Christian School must focus every subject on God our Creator. These verses in Proverbs tell us that when we do this true knowledge and wisdom ensue.

I remember the day Greg, our school captain, came into my office carrying a rather tatty paperback. It turned out to be a copy of 'Waiting for Alabrandi, the novel the class were studying. He had bookmarked quite a number of pages which he wanted to talk to me about. 'Why are we studying this book,' he gulped nervously, 'look at all these references to sex.'

I explained to him that it was not the province of a Christian school to protect students from all non Christian material; to do that would poorly prepare students for university. Then again I said that there were times when Christian schools have to protect students from completely unacceptable literature.

I went on to explain that Christian teachers need to help students work through difficult issues from a Christian perspective; studying novels is a good way to challenge non Christian values.

A weight seemingly fell from Greg's shoulders; with a smile he left the room relieved.

Group Discussion

1. Choose some other subjects like Business Studies, Vocational Education, Language other than English how would you teach these subjects from a Christian perspective?
2. Choose a well known story or historical event; how would you teach it to children from a Christian perspective?

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on the way you are going to teach your next unit of work; what Christian perspective are you going to present when teaching it?
2. Have you considered undertaking a course in Christian Education to help you become a more effective Christian Teacher? Courses are available through New Hope International.

Prayer

Ask God to give you a new insight into teaching from a Christian viewpoint.

48 S + T = B

Philippians 4: 4 – 9
Ephesians 4: 17 - 19

Wouldn't it be good if we could understand what affects children's behaviour? If we knew the answer then classroom behaviour would surely improve dramatically. The following simple equation may help:

SITUATION + THOUGHTS = BEHAVIOUR

This principle comes from Proverbs 23:7 which says, 'As a man thinks so he is' (NIV text note).

Sometimes it is possible to change the situation we find ourselves in, for example, studying for examinations will, hopefully improve grades and take some of the stress out of the ordeal. Leaving early for school can help us arrive for devotions on time. Sometimes, however, we have no control over our situation, for example, finding a road impassable or being caught in a traffic jam.

It is our attitude to uncontrollable things which determines our behaviour and that is where the Bible encourages us to set our minds on the things, which are of God and not on difficulties and problems. Romans 8: 5 - 8 sum this idea up nicely:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

It is important for our thoughts to be always directed towards God and His Word - the Bible. It is then that our behaviour will be right in God's sight and consequently we will be good witnesses in our community.

There are a number of ways in which we can be helped to think from a Christian perspective: having good Christian friends, meeting with God's people at church each week, reading a passage from the Bible and praying each day, reading other good books, focusing on others rather than ourselves.

In 2 Samuel 11 we find a sad example of this principle. King David should have been leading his soldiers in battle. Instead he is idling away time on the roof top of the palace. He sees Bathsheba in a state of undress and thoughts lead to a chain of unforgivable behaviour: Uriah and Bathsheba's marriage is violated, Uriah is killed and judgement is brought on David's household (2 Samuel 12:10).

Joseph's actions in respect of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39: 1 – 23) provide a positive outworking of this principle.

Group Discussion

1. Think of other biblical examples to illustrate this principle.
2. In what ways might teachers provide good 'situations' to help students improve behaviour?
3. How might you teach this principle to children?

Personal Reflection

How can you improve the 'situation' for students in my class?

Prayer

Pray for students who have behaviour problems in your school/class.

Note: In presenting the $S + T = B$ principle it is recognised that the causes of inappropriate student behaviour are often far more complex than this.

49 Two Cultures

Isaiah 5: 8 – 12; 20 – 24

Romans 13: 13 - 14

Group Discussion

1. Read through the passages from Isaiah above which describe the ungodly culture of his time. What similarities are there between the culture outlined in Isaiah's day and our culture?

McKenna makes these comments on Isaiah 28: 1 -22 which is equally relevant to Isaiah 5:

Neither cities nor civilisations die from external conquest without moral breakdown within the culture and among its leadership. Rome, for example, fell when the drunken orgies of mad emperors undermined the moral code and the legal system that had served as foundations for the empire. Alcohol and anarchy go hand in hand when the leaders lose their moral bearings, sense of direction and perspectives for wise decisions. In reading the moral qualities of a culture, the questions are asked, 'At what do we laugh?' 'At what do we weep?' and 'What do we reward?' Under the influence of alcohol, a person laughs at things which are not funny, weeps over things that are not important, and rewards things that are usually punished. If this moral distortion is elevated to leadership decisions involving the destiny of a nation or a civilisation, the garland of past glory will quickly become a fading flower²⁸.

Group Discussion

2. Briefly reflect on the three questions in the above paragraph (at what do we laugh; at what do we weep; at what do we reward?) in the context of the culture in which you live.

Christians have long struggled with what a truly Christian culture might look like outside of the Judean way of life of Jesus' day. This is a question we need to grapple with if we want to make our schools truly Christian. The Bible helps us by giving broad principles. Read Colossians 3: 11 – 17. Other passage you might like to reflect on later includes Galatians 5: 22, 23; 1 Corinthians 13: 4 -7; 1 Peter 3:4.

3. How well is the Colossians passage being lived out in the culture of your school?
4. How can a Christian school assist students to live within their non Christian culture?

Personal Reflection

A ... Christian lifestyle may be described as a life [continually] fed and led by God's truth (the scriptures) which results in a progressive reflection of God's holiness (Christ likeness) in personal character and God's love and righteousness in personal relationships²⁹. How does your life stack up with this statement?

²⁸ McKenna, David L. 1993. The Preacher's Commentary. Isaiah 1 -39. Thomas Nelson. Nashville Tennessee. P268.

²⁹ Osei-Mensah, Gottfried. The Christian Lifestyle in Stott, John R W & Coote, Robert (ed) 1980. Hodder Stoughton. London. P283.

Prayer

1. Pray for the leaders of your country to be wise rulers (Romans 13).
 2. Pray for your country that God might bring revival.
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50 A Lesson from King Omri

1 Kings 16: 21 - 26

King Omri ruled the northern kingdom of Israel for twelve years from 885 – 874BC; like most kings of the time he was also commander in chief of the army.

During his kingship he completed a number of notable achievements:

1. He brought peace to the land of Israel.
2. He bought an area of high ground on which the city of Samaria was built.
3. He put a fort on the top of the hill which had walls 1.6 metres thick covering one and a half hectares. The construction of the wall is now considered a work of art.
4. He built a large palace in part of the fort.
5. Samaria became quite a rich city due to peace treaties with neighbouring countries and the presence of many traders.
6. Omri had large horse stables built in Megiddo and developed a large cavalry.
7. He strengthened the walls of other neighbouring cities.

Historians would say that Omri was a great king but that's not what the Bible says about him:

But Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD and sinned more than all those before him (1 Kings 16:25).

Why such a harsh critique of Omri?

1. He did not put God first and worship him.
2. His heart was not right. The Bible tells us that he did evil before God more than his family before him by worshipping false gods. He did not lead the Israelites in the right direction because he allowed the people to worship idols. Consequently he was a poor example to his children. His son Ahab became a very wicked king.

As a result God turned His back on Omri and his dynasty.

What can we learn from King Omri?

It is our attitude and heart towards Jesus Christ that is the most important; without a deep personal relationship with Christ everything else pales into insignificance. There are many people in our country that have done great things, we look up to them, but, because of their attitudes and heart towards God, their work will not be recognised in eternity. It is great to study hard and gain excellent results but unless the heart and mind is focused on Christ what we do ultimately counts for nothing. This is a key lesson we must pass onto our students.

Group Discussion

1. Think of leaders in the Bible who led their people in a godly way.
2. Consider people in your country who you consider 'great.' From what you can tell, did they lead the people in God's way?
3. How can we stress the importance of academic excellence but at the same time stress a right orientation towards God?

Personal Reflection

Reflect on the orientation of your own heart; why are you a teacher? Will what you are building last for eternity?

Prayer

Pray that teachers in your school will strike the right balance between students' high academic achievement and a right heart towards God.

51 Conditional and Unconditional Love

Philippians 2: 6-11; 1 Corinthians 13: 4 - 7

There are two types of love, love that is conditional and love that is unconditional. Conditional love says, 'I will love you if I can get something in return.' Unconditional love says, 'I will love you no matter what.' The New Testament uses the word, 'agape' to convey the unique dimension and overwhelming depth of God's unconditional love which sent Jesus into the world to die in place of mankind.

A young girl was showing off her collection of dolls. Although she had many fine dolls, her favourite one was the oldest one – torn, tattered and limp. When she was asked why, she preferred this one, she replied, 'I love her most because if I didn't love her, no one else would.'

Loving the unlovely is the test of love³⁰.

Children need love, especially when they don't deserve it (Harold S Holbert).

One of the most difficult tasks a teacher can undertake is to practice unconditional love towards their students. It is our nature to want to act kindly towards good students but to 'pay back' students who refuse to cooperate or who are poorly behaved. Learning to love the unlovely can only occur when our lives are totally in tune with God and that comes through a close relationship with Him.

Group Discussion

1. Read Philippians 2: 6 – 11 and 1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 7; what examples of unconditional love do you note from these passages?
2. How can you apply the principles from these passages to your classroom?
3. How can you show unconditional love to a student who frequently misbehaves?

Personal Reflection

Which students in your classroom do you find hard to love? Think of strategies to redress this situation.

Prayer

Ask God to help you love the 'unlovable' student in your school/class.

³⁰ Look What We Found. Anecdotes, quotations, speech sparklers, humour, wit and wisdom compiled and edited by Peter Sumner. Christian Blind Mission International.

52 The Cause of Climate Change

Haggai 1: 3 – 11

In December 2009 a conference on climate change was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, under the auspices of the United Nations. The first week was given over to presentation of position papers by various delegates. Sadly, but not unexpectedly, no one presented a biblical view of climate change.

The Bible draws a strong link between, relationship and obedience to God, on one hand, and the state of the world He created on the other. In Haggai chapter 1 we find that the exiles had returned home, and after an initial flurry of enthusiasm to rebuild the temple, had re focused on constructing their own houses instead. The use of the word '*panelled*' seems to indicate that a superior type of housing was being constructed.

As a result God said. 'Well if you don't get your heart right and put me first and get to work and rebuild the temple then I will send a drought upon the land and withhold your crops.'

This is not the only passage that correlates productivity of the land with commitment to God. In you have time look up Genesis 3: 17 – 19; Deuteronomy 28: 23 – 24, 38 – 40; Amos 4: 6 – 10, Haggai 2: 15 – 19 and Romans 8: 20 – 22.

Christian teaches need to break down the sacred – secular divide within their classrooms and talk openly about the possibility that the cause of climate change is due to our nation (and indeed the world) turning away from God.

It is also exciting to consider that God may be using Christian schools as an agent of climate change by building a faithful remnant of people totally committed to Christ and so an instrument in turning our nation back to Him. . Kaiser commenting on Haggai 2: 15 – 19 says;

... yet a bounteous harvest can be anticipated when a nation's righteous remnant begins to please God from their hearts, for positive results are felt even in nature and in people's labours. In that sense, the believing remnant, who truly fear God, are the nation's keepers. They know that one benevolent act of mercy, like starting to build the temple, is not all that there is to serving God. Holiness is not something that can be transferred merely on contact with religious acts, and thus excuse us from involving ourselves for the rest of our lives. Rather we must wholeheartedly dedicate the entirety of our lives – every facet of our lives - to our Lord³¹.

If that is the case then let us approach our task with vigour

Group Discussion

How could you impart a biblical understanding of climate change but at the same time maintain the outcomes of state based curriculum?

Personal Reflection

Think about how well you inculcate biblical teaching into your lessons.

³¹ Kaiser, Walter C Jnr. 1992. The Preacher's Commentary: Micah – Malachi. Thomas Nelson. Nashville. P282.

Prayer

1. Pray that God will give you wisdom to be able to impart biblical principles through every aspect of your teaching.
 2. Pray that your class might be an instrument in reversing climate change.
 3. Pray for your country that people will turn back to God.
 4. Pray for farmers who have suffered years of drought.
-

53 Very Strange Verses

Psalm 19: 7 - 11

[God's laws] 'are more precious than gold; than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb' Psalm 19:10

We do not usually say that laws are precious and sweet. In fact we often feel the opposite, especially when we disobey them and have to pay the consequences by paying a fine.

So what does the psalmist mean?

Firstly, God's laws are meant to give meaning to life. They give meaning by settling the standard for our relationship with God and our fellow man. The Ten Commandments, the most well known of God's laws, do just that; the first four define our relationship with God and the next six relationship with humanity.

Secondly, God's laws are a strong foundation on which to base our life. They give direction and guidance in the way we should live. If a high school girl, for example, reads teenage magazines, readily available at newsagents, she will receive no guidance about whether she should have sex before marriage. She will be told to make her own choices. The Bible says that sex before marriage is wrong. God created sex to be a gift between a husband and a wife. That is God's way; if we live according to His plan our lives will be 'sweet' we will not end up living a life of second best.

Thirdly, the law is our school master designed to bring us to Christ. When we realise that it is impossible to obey the law in its entirety we are challenged to turn to Christ who fulfilled the law and so was able to pay the penalty for sin.

But there can be a problem; in our desire to have students obey the law we can become very legalistic; we might institute the 'the three strikes and you are out' principle and then wonder why students are unhappy and want to leave our class.

Hebrews 10:16, quoting Jeremiah 31:33, gives us a clue as to how this problem might be avoided; by allowing God's Holy Spirit to write the law on students' hearts as well as ours. It is then that true freedom within the law will result.

Group Discussion

1. What does it mean for God's Spirit to write the Law on our hearts?
2. How can a Christian school help students to be achieving this goal?
3. How can Christian schools avoid the trap of becoming too legalistic?

Personal Reflection

Consider your own classroom management strategies; are you legalistic in your approach to discipline? Consider management strategies that might avoid being too legalistic.

Prayer

1. Pray that students will allow God's Spirit to write His Law on their hearts
2. Pray for guidance in assisting students to write God's Law on their hearts.

54 Classrooms and The Kingdom of God

Matthew 13: 24 - 30

Our classrooms should reflect a Christ centred learning community which will be part of The Kingdom of God. The Parables of the Kingdom will, therefore, have relevance to our work as teachers.

What, for example, can we learn from the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13: 24 – 30)? Read the parable together. Frisken comments³²

... a Christian School community will contain those who are true disciples' those who appear to be disciples but are not and some who do not look like disciples but really are. Teachers and school administrators will not be able to tell the difference so they need to treat all students equally the same and be prepared for some surprises in the lives of students later in life.

Matthew 13: 31 – 32 conveys positive and negative teaching about the Kingdom; what starts small can grow very large but undesirable elements may come and dwell within it as shown in the parable by the presence of the birds of the air.

Group Discussion

1. What can you learn about your classroom, or school, learning community from the parables in Matthew 13: 33, 44, 45 -46, 47 – 50?
2. How can these parables apply to your classroom or school?
3. How can you make the preciousness of the Kingdom available to all families who desire Christian education?

Personal Reflection

Consider ways you could promote the Kingdom of God within your school?

Prayer

Pray that God will give you help and understanding to show how you might promote His Kingdom within your classroom or school. Pray that you will recognise and be able to deal with any 'birds of the air' that might come and lodge.

³² Frisken' R J. New Hope International. Limited. Effective Teaching Series No 1. Alternate Phase 1 lecture.

55 Being a Watchman

Ezekiel 33: 7 - 9

Watchtowers were common in biblical times. They were used to protect cattle and sheep from thieves and wild animals; they were probably also constructed to protect vineyards and other crops. Watchtowers of a more complex and lasting nature were constructed to protect larger cities. The towers were manned by watchmen whose job it was to look out for enemies who might attack the city. If any were found they had to report the fact to the king immediately (2 Samuel 18: 24 – 25). Imagine being a watchman on the night shift with no powerful searchlights to spot the enemy! They would certainly breathe a sigh of relief, no doubt, when the shift was completed.

In this passage Ezekiel is called upon to be a watchman to hear God's Word and announce judgement. This was not the first time he was given this role as similar instructions were given in 3: 16 – 27.

Let's think today a little more about the 'watchman' metaphor as it might apply to a teacher. What might we need to look out for? We will certainly need to keep a close eye on the welfare of individual students in our care and pass concerns on when appropriate but what about the need to be on the watch that we always teach from a Christian perspective, that we correctly interpret government syllabus documents and teaching material from a biblical viewpoint.

This task must be taken extremely seriously. Ezekiel was given a stern warning about the consequences of not watching (Ezekiel 3: 6) so we have a similar warning by Jesus in Luke 17:2.

Group Discussion

1. Give other examples how the metaphor of a 'watchman' can apply to a teacher?
2. How can we train ourselves to be better watchmen?
3. What kinds of issues should we be on the lookout for in syllabus documents, textbooks that might cause a child to stumble?

Personal Reflection

What extra quipping have you undertaken which has contributed to you being a better watchman? Consider other avenues of preparation.

Prayer

Meditate on Luke 17:2.

56 Do You Need Encouraging?

Acts 18: 1 – 17 (Longer reading)

Acts 18: 1 – 4; 9 – 11 (Shorter reading)

Teaching is a ministry that can bring a lot of discouragement as you are probably all too aware. Children can misbehave and spoil our lesson presentation; students in our class may not be learning as quickly as we think they should; we may feel we don't have the time to complete programs and reports adequately and there are times when we have to deal with difficult parents. I am sure these sound all too familiar.

Paul had just arrived in Corinth quite discouraged after a very difficult few months; he probably felt that his preaching to the Athenian philosophers had not been as effective as he wanted (Acts 17: 16 – 34; 1 Corinthians 2: 1 - 5); the Jews had stirred up trouble in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17: 1 – 15); he had been imprisoned and beaten in Philippi (Acts 16: 22 – 30); further he had walked fifty miles from Athens to Corinth, to a city which was noted for its sensual and unsavoury practices.

God encouraged Paul in a number of special ways;

1. God brought special friends into his life in the guise of Aquila and Priscilla (verse 2). And guess what! Aquila was a tentmaker just like Paul. This enabled them to enjoy fellowship together while they worked.
2. Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia (verse 5). They were able to earn enough income to allow Paul to devote himself exclusively to teaching.
3. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, became a Christian along with his family. That would have been a real encouragement to Paul, as the synagogue ruler was a pivotal person in the Jewish community (verse 8).
4. Jesus came to Paul in a vision exhorting him not to be afraid but keep speaking because nothing could harm him (verse 9).
5. Gallio did not support the Jews in their attack on Paul (versus 12 – 16).

I think the greatest encouragement you can receive is to know that you have the opportunity to input 'truth' into students' lives that will stand them in good stead, not only for this world, but for the whole of eternity. The greatest encouragement in my teaching came from seeing students make progress, perhaps only in a small way, in their Christian growth. It was most encouraging to see the result of the Holy Spirit working on student's lives during a school camp. In a funny kind of way we need to be encouraged in the knowledge that we will get discouraged from time to time; after all if the Apostle Paul went through times of discouragement we must surely expect to too.

Having good Christian friends are extremely important. I heard a definition of 'a good friend' recently as someone who you can confide in and whose judgements can be trusted. Remember too the words of Moses to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:6 that the Lord God goes with us; he will never leave nor forsake.

I encourage you to take Jesus' prayer to Paul in verses 9 and 10 as your own, perhaps with a little reinterpretation: *Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack or harm you, because I have many people [around you].*

Group Discussion and Encouragement

1. Share with the group ways that you have been encouraged especially in your ministry of teaching.
2. Provide a sheet of paper for each staff member (including non teaching staff); place their name on the top and leave in a prominent place. Ask all staff to make encouraging comments about their peers. Distribute sheets to staff after a day or two.

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on when you last encouraged someone.
2. Think about someone that you need to encourage today.
3. Think about how you might encourage that person.

Prayer

Pray for staff and students who need encouragement. Ask the Lord to show how you can encourage them.

57 The Transformed Life Revisited

Philippians 2: 1 – 11

François de Salignac de La Mothe Fenelon (1651 – 1715 sought a deeper spiritual life³³. He met Madame Guyon who assisted him in this journey. Over the next few years Fenelon wrote frequently to her reporting on his deepening Christian growth.

Finally he wrote a long letter in which he told her that that he believed he had finally discovered the secret of the transformed life. He described his journey in a number of points which are summarised below:

1. *The first step that is taken by the person who has formally and permanently given himself to God, would be to bring what may be called his external powers – that is, his natural appetites and propensities under subjection...*
2. *The second step is to cease to rest on the pleasures of inward sensibility... It is hard to die to those inward tastes and pleasures that make us feel so happy.*
3. *Another step is that of entire crucifixion to any reliance on our human virtues... Having gained the victory over his senses and having gained the strength to live by faith, independently of inward pleasures, an individual begins to take on a degree of satisfaction.*
4. *A fourth step consists in dying to the repugnance that men naturally feel toward the process of inward crucifixion. A person's perception of God's presence in everything is so clear, his faith is so strong, that those apparently adverse dealings, which once were so exceedingly strong, are now received, not merely with acquiescence but also with cheerfulness. He kisses the hand that smites him.*
5. *... there is a fifth step ... This is not merely the beginning of a new life, but it is a new life in the higher sense of the term, it is the resurrection of the life of love. All the gifts that a person previously sought in his own strength... are now richly and fully returned to him by the great Giver of all things... This life in the sixth phase becomes a truly transformed life, a life in union with God, when a person's will becomes conformed to God in everything that it does and in all its relationships. At this point, there is such a harmony between the human will and the divine will that they may be properly regarded as having become one. This I suppose was the state of Paul when he said, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal 2:20 KJV)... Its life is love, all love, but the capacity of that love continually increases³⁴.*

Group Discussion

1. Discuss what Fenelon meant by each of these steps.
2. How might we journey through these steps in the backdrop of the 21st century?
3. Why is it important that teachers in a Christian school journey, by God's Grace, through these steps?

³³ Lawson, James G. 1998, Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians. Whitaker. P86f.

³⁴ Pp90 – 92.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on your own spiritual journey in the light of the above steps.

Prayer

Pray that God will encourage and help you to live the transformed life.
