

## How to Teach a Bible Class

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### I. Intro

A. When you look at the topic of teaching in the Bible you see a mixture of both encouragement and warnings.

1. In Hebrews you have instructions telling all Christians to teach:

Hebrews 5:12

<sup>12</sup>For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

- a. Hebrews does not seem to be written to a special group of Christians, but rather a large general audience. Yet he says to this large audience that they've been Christians long enough that they really need to be teachers.
- b. Now he doesn't say how they should be teaching. There are plenty of different ways to teach – public, private, one-on-one, etc. He simply lays down the general principle that all Christians should grow to the point where they are doing some kind of teaching.
- c. In this case, the thing that's holding them back is a lack of knowledge. They're unable to teach because they never moved past the basics of Christianity, so they don't have the Biblical understanding to be able to teach other people. The solution is simply to learn more so they can grow and teach others.

2. On the other hand, the New Testament writers also tell some people not to teach.

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

- a. What's going on here? Why would Hebrews say we all need to be teachers and James say only some of us should be teachers? It's because they're dealing with different issues.
- b. James is dealing with a problem of people who don't know how to control their tongues. They're saying things that they shouldn't be saying. If that person gets in a teaching role the result could be disastrous.
- c. Putting these concepts together we see that all Christians need to be growing spiritually so they can get to the point where they can teach others. Yet at the same time, we should not be teaching if we're not spiritually mature enough yet.

B. Now let's talk about how to teach a Bible class.

1. Throughout the bible we see example of a variety of teaching styles. Sometimes teaching was in a lecture format like the sermons in the book of Acts. Sometimes it was in a conversational format like when Nicodemus spoke with Jesus. And sometimes it was in a interactive lecture format where Jesus did most of the talking, but the crowds with occasionally ask him a question. There are a lot of ways to teach the Bible.
  - a. In our Bible classes we typically use a format where we explain a Bible passage or series of Bible passages and involve the congregation through questions and discussion. We've found that to be a beneficial way to teach the Bible.
  - b. The ladies use a similar format for the ladies Bible classes. When we have studies in other places such as restaurants or homes, we use a similar kind of discussion format.
2. But anyone who's led an interactive Bible class knows that it can be very challenging sometimes. So this evening we're going to look at how to teach in that kind of setting. I'm going to try to keep this lesson general enough tonight that it will apply to most of the setting where we teach.

## II. The Perfect Bible Class

- A. In the book of Nehemiah we have what I consider the perfect Bible class. It's not exactly the same format as our Bible classes, but it's pretty similar. And it was a Bible class that accomplished incredible good. There are some wonderful principles that we can learn from this example.
- B. In this chapter Ezra reads the law to the people and then the Levites help the people understand it.

Nehemiah 8:1-3

**8** And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup>So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup>And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and

the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

**C. For Everyone**

1. He read the law to everyone. This was not just for the smart people or just for the older people or just for the younger people, this was for everyone.

**D. Focused on God's word**

1. People were listening to the law. It wasn't about the reader. It wasn't about the teacher. It wasn't about the listeners. It was about the words of God. They even stood up while the words were read.

**E. Focused on God**

<sup>6</sup>And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

1. When we focus on God's words it should focus us on God. They were there because they wanted to honor God.

**F. They read the text**

1. Ezra stood in front of everyone and he simply read God's word to them.

**G. They explained the text**

<sup>7</sup>Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites,<sup>[a]</sup> helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup>They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly,<sup>[b]</sup> and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

1. These people explained the text so that people would understand it. Why did they have to do that? Because sometimes the Bible is difficult to understand. We need to help each other understand it. That's why we have Bible studies.
2. They explained it so everyone could understand.
3. Now if we do those two simple things well, then it will change people. The word will change them.

**H. What does the perfect Bible class do for people?**

### **1. Led to joy because they understood it**

- a. As they celebrated this feast they are joyful:

<sup>12</sup>And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

- b. They're excited because they can understand the Bible. That's an exciting thing! When everyone comes into Bible class saying, "I read this text and I have no idea what it means." And then they go away smiling and saying, "Oh now I get it!" That was a successful Bible class!
- c. But when I teach a class and people go away more confused than before they came, that was a failed Bible class.
- d. There is great joy in understanding the Bible. It's an exciting thing to see what God is really communicating to us.

### **2. Led to Action**

<sup>14</sup>And they found it written in the Law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths<sup>[e]</sup> during the feast of the seventh month, <sup>15</sup>and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." <sup>16</sup>So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

- a. While they're studying they discover that they were supposed to build shelters out of palm branches. So they go out and they do that. They read it and then they went and did it. It sounds so simple.

### **3. Led to Confession**

- a. When the people heard the read of the law, they saw specific sins that they had committed. It convicted them. They saw their own guilt. And so they confessed their sins.

**9** Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their

heads. <sup>2</sup>And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

- b. In the previous chapter it even says they were crying over it. The word itself pinpointed their sins.

#### **4. Led to Worship**

- a. As they confessed their sins they prayed to God and they worshipped him.

<sup>5</sup>Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

<sup>6</sup> "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.

- b. Reading and studying God's word caused them to see his greatness.
- I. That's a picture of the ideal Bible class. Now most of our Bible classes are not going to end with sackcloth and ashes. But this shows what's possible when we simply read the word and explain the word.
- J. God's word is powerful. The basic principle we learn from this is that when we simply read and explain God's word, God can accomplish incredible things. That's the foundation principle to teaching a Bible class.

### **III. How do we do that as teachers?**

- A. Now for us to do that effectively as teachers we need two skill in two areas:
  - 1. Understanding the text
  - 2. Explaining the text
- B. If you can do those two things effectively then you'll probably be a good Bible class teacher. There are other things that will make the Bible class better or more exciting, but really if you develop those two skills, people are going to get a lot out of your Bible class.

#### **C. Understanding the text**

1. Teaching a Bible class requires a very large amount of study time. I have to know what I'm talking about for my class to be effective.
2. So use all of the study techniques that we talked about in previous weeks:
  - a. See the larger context
  - b. Go through and highlight words and phrases
  - c. Find connections
  - d. Look for purpose statements
  - e. Read commentaries
3. Find the author's main message
  - a. My goal in studying needs to be to find the message that the author is communicating. I need to be able to look at a chapter or paragraph or set of chapters or whatever my section might be and says, "The author is teaching us \_\_\_\_\_."
  - b. Examples:
    - i. Luke is teaching us that we have to have faith to come to Jesus.
    - ii. Moses is teaching us the importance of obedience.
    - iii. Paul is teaching us to have a spiritual mindset.
    - iv. David is teaching us that God deserves our praise.
  - c. Whatever section of scripture I am teaching I need to be able to fill in that blank. Now there may be several things, but I need to at least find one thing that the author is trying to teach us.
  - d. Once I can fill in that blank I will know what's important to emphasize. I'll know how to emphasize it. I'll be able to see how the author's various arguments lead towards this conclusion.
    - i. If I don't find the answer to this question, then my Bible class is in trouble. It's probably going to turn mostly informational. I can teach people the definitions of the words or the locations of the places on a map, but I won't be able to actually bring people to any kind of application because I won't know what the author is teaching.
    - ii. Another risk is that my class will become very scattered. If I can't figure out one or two or three main things that the author is communicating, then I'm just going to emphasize everything that I come across. Because I don't know

what's most important in the text I treat everything as though it's most important. In that situation people may go away feeling very confused.

- e. Now it's not always cut and dry and simple. Some texts have several things that are emphasized. Some texts don't really teach a specific lesson because they're just laying the groundwork for a lesson that's going to be taught 3 chapters later. That's going to make my life much more difficult. But in most cases I should be able to nail down at least some kind of answer to this question.

#### **D. Explaining the Text**

1. Now that I understand the text well I should be able to go in and just tell people what it means. If I can connect it with other passages, sometimes that's helpful. If I can give some historical background, sometimes that's helpful. All of those things are good if they help me communicate what the text actually means.
  - a. At this point you've spent a lot of time with the text and you've had the joy of discovering what it means. It's already helped you in your life.
  - b. Now you need to lead everyone on that same journey. You need to help them understand what it means and give them the joy and excitement of Bible discovery.
  - c. Think of it as though you are leading people on a journey. When we get to the end of class they will see the whole chapter or section and they'll understand the message that God revealed. Each step helps them understand it a little more clearly and takes them closer to the final treasure. We might stop and look at things along the way, but our focus is getting to that final application.

#### **2. Managing my time**

- a. Timing is extremely difficult in a Bible class. Bible classes are designed to begin and end a very precise time. But it's not just a matter of having exactly the right number of notes. There are some unpredictable factors like people's comments.
- b. A lot of times when we teach a class we put our big point or our application at the very end. Then we run out of time and people miss out on the most important part of the class. That's a big problem. So how do I handle timing?
  - i. I need to watch the clock. I need to be constantly aware of how much time is left.
  - ii. I need to mark a midpoint on my notes. When I hit that midpoint I need to have used up exactly half of my time. At that point, if I'm off I need to either slow down or speed up to compensate.

- iii. I also need to know which parts of my notes are important and which are optional so I can start dropping stuff if I'm running out of time.

### 3. Questions & Discussion

- a. One of the great things about a Bible class is that you can ask questions and interact with the congregation.
- b. Class discussion has several great benefits:
  - i. Helps people stay engaged. People typically learn better when they're talking and interacting. It causes them to think more critically sometimes.
  - ii. Brings out points that some people may not have thought about. Sometimes a student will bring out something that the teacher hasn't thought of. That can be really helpful sometimes.
- c. Challenges of discussion
  - i. Sometimes teaches error. Sometimes a student will say something that isn't quite right. That puts the teacher in a really difficult situation. He needs to be able to gently, lovingly, firmly correct the issue and bring the class back on target. This takes some work.
    - I. But the best way to deal with this is to know the material well. If you know the chapter backwards and forwards then if someone makes a comment that clearly goes against what you know the chapter teaches, then you'll be able to identify that.
    - II. If someone makes a comment that you're not sure about, but it's outside the scope of what the class is supposed to be covering, then sometimes you can just say, "I'm not sure about that but let's get back to the chapter we're studying."
  - ii. Another challenge is when comments slow down the flow of the class. It helps if the teacher can sense when the class is starting to drag and can either cut off the comments for the time being or channel them back towards a positive direction.
  - iii. A third challenge is: Puts the focus on minor details and distracts from the core message of the text. Sometimes people make really good comments, but it leads to a discussion of something minor. The teacher needs to know what the text is actually communicate so that he can guide the students back towards that.

- iv. Causes arguments. Arguments should not happen in a congregational Bible class. Discussions are good, arguments are not good. If things ever start to get heated, the teacher needs to be able to cut things off. He needs to be able to say, "We're going to have to study this more and talk about it another time."
- I. Arguments typically revolve around things that aren't all that important. If you read 1 & 2 Timothy you see over and over again Paul warning Timothy not to be involved in quarrels. Evidently there were a lot of arguments going on over things that didn't matter.  
  
2 Timothy 2:23-25  
  
<sup>23</sup>Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. <sup>24</sup>And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup>correcting his opponents with gentleness.
- II. That principle needs to guide every Bible class.
- III. Now if it really is a big issue, then this is still not the time to argue about it. There are visitors in the assembly during a Bible class. They are going to get a very bad impression of this church if they see people arguing. I need to go and talk to the individual privately after Bible class.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

- A. Bible classes are a wonderful way to communicate God's word. They can help people to see the truth and change people's lives.
- B. Let's all become more like Ezra:  
  
Ezra 7:10  
  
For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.
- C. Let's learn to study, to live it, and then teach it to others.