



Global College of Ministry

EMPOWER
The Christian & Teaching

Do You Understand?

“Understandest thou what thou redest?
And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?”
(Acts 8:30-31).

It is said in Asia, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” The Ethiopian eunuch was traveling along, reading from the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. Through a series of events, God sent a teacher named Philip to the right place at the right time. He came into the life of the student and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

“A son will be what he was taught.”
(Swahili Proverb)



The man replied, “How can I unless someone is willing to teach me?” Actually, *the King James Version* says, “guide.” What a tremendous opportunity we have as teachers. We “guide” the future direction of our students. The Ethiopian was saying, “I don’t have a teacher. I want to know. I want to be able to understand.”



Teaching involves taking someone from where they are to where they need to be. It is taking someone from the known to the unknown. That is exactly what Philip did. He took this man from where he was reading and brought him to where he needed to be. As a result he was baptized.

The *Dirt on Learning* is an interesting book by Thom and Joani Schultz. This book is instrumental in the formation of this lesson. They say, “His Word is not a collection of facts to be memorized. His Word is a guide for how we should live today . . . Look also at the learning approach used by Jesus. His lessons emphasized life application at every turn.”

Genesis 2:15 reveals that farming is the world’s oldest profession. God took Adam and placed him in the garden. He was asked to take care of it.

In Matthew 13:1-23 we read the story of a farmer that went out to sow. This story is a good one for all who spread the Word. If you teach, this is your story.

-  Some of the seeds fell along the path. These heard the Word but did not understand it. The devil snatched away what had been sown in their hearts. What was the problem in this situation? The devil was not the problem. The birds that came were not the problem. The problem was a lack of understanding.
-  Some seeds fell on the rocky ground. These people received the message but could not stand the persecution.

-  Some of the seeds fell among thorns. These heard the message, but worries, riches, and a desire for other things choked it out.
-  Some seeds fell on good soil. They heard the message, understood it, and produced abundant fruit.

Jesus emphasized the results of sowing. His focus was not on the sower. It was not even on the seed. Both are very important. However, His focus was on the ground and the results.

Without understanding, the seed does not produce. Jesus was interested in understanding. The seed that fell along the path was destroyed because of lack of understanding.

The seed that was sown in the good soil succeeded because the person heard the message and understood it.

Paul outlines different responses to the gospel. Some believe and some do not (Acts 28:24). He said, "Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand . . . For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they . . . hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted" (Acts 28:26-27).

Satan's desire is to keep people from understanding the Word of God. Satan "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Some hearts do not receive the Word. They are "hardened." Through continuous witness, prayer, preaching, and the operation of the Spirit, the heart softens. Understanding comes as the person opens his heart to God.

The success of the crop (in this story) depended on the condition of the soil and the seed producing fruit. It was not a matter of just sowing seeds without any thought to the results. We seem to rarely notice if people are learning or not.

The fundamental product of a school is not teaching but learning. The focus should be on the learner.

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalms 119:11). It is interesting to note that the Psalmist then asked the Lord to "teach him" the statutes.

A Word from Paul

Paul was an educated man trained by some of the best teachers of his day. He was very intelligent. Yet, he was able to get down to the level of his students. He spoke "in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom" (2 Corinthians 1:12). Why did he speak so simply? He wanted all to understand.

“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Corinthians 3:12).

Paul warns that the devil will try to rob you from “the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

The truth contained in God’s Word should always be presented in a simplistic and understandable way. We want the hearers to understand and respond.

How do I know that you are a great teacher? From what your students have learned. Every good teacher knows that it is his responsibility to cause the student to learn.

“The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.”
(Hans Hoffman)

Many feel teaching is what the teacher says rather than what the student learns.

Often teachers feel that it is their duty to cover a large textbook of material. They race through the book and conclude that they are teaching. This is a wrong understanding.

As teachers, we are responsible for the students learning. It has been said, “No teacher has taught until the student has learned.”

Many times the teacher walks into the classroom and lectures. We confuse lectures with teaching. One of the problems is that we view ourselves as lecturers. Students are expected to listen. Teachers speak the words, and students just write down everything that is placed on the blackboard. Their minds have been placed in neutral. They just write without thinking about what they are doing.

The dictionary defines “teach” as to “cause to know the subject.” We have taught a subject well when the student learns the subject.

The important test of the teacher’s effectiveness is the student’s performance.

“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40, *New American Standard*).

Study Questions

1. What did Philip ask the Ethiopian eunuch? _____

2. What was the eunuch’s response? _____

3. What does teaching involve? _____

4. What is the world's oldest profession? _____

5. What happened to the seeds that fell on the rocky ground? _____

6. What happened to the seeds that fell on the good soil? _____

7. In the farming story where did Jesus put the emphasis? _____

8. Why did the seed sown on the good ground succeed? _____

9. Why did Paul speak with simplicity? _____

10. Why should the truth be presented in a simple way? _____

11. How can you know if someone is a good teacher? _____

12. What is the difference between teaching and lecturing? _____

13. What does the word "teach" mean? _____

14. What is an important test of the teacher's effectiveness? _____





15. A pupil that is fully trained will be like whom? _____

Teaching for Understanding

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house”
(Acts 20:20).

Howard and William Hendricks in their book *As Iron Sharpens Iron* wrote, “One of the fundamental laws of education: people only learn what they can use. If information has no use, people won’t learn it. They may write it down, they may file it, they may be able to regurgitate it on an exam; but that doesn’t mean they’ve learned it. Learning involves change. The result is a different person as a result of the learning process.”

Gene Edwards in the *Titus Diary* suggests Paul and Barnabas may have used stories to teach illiterate converts. The hearers were free to interrupt teachings to ask questions. The eager converts repeated the stories back to the teachers. The apostles were able to teach enough lessons and stories in three or four months to allow the baby church to go on and survive after their departure. People were able to learn through:

-  Practical and applicable advice.
-  Asking questions.
-  Repeating what had been taught.
-  Paul and Barnabas probably kept to the basics and reviewed until they were learned.

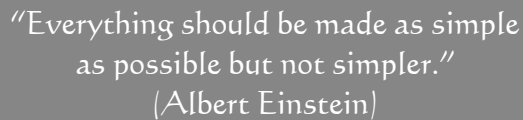
Welcome to the School of Learning

It is registration day. Students are stepping into the classroom with a heart to learn. You can feel it as you look over the class. You can see it in their eyes. What will you teach them? How will you go about teaching it?

1. Use plain language. If people do not understand what is being said, the lack of understanding prevents the seeds from taking root.
2. Clarify hard words to increase understanding.
3. Use good questions to deepen understanding. These should not only be recall questions that ask, “What do you remember?” but questions that ask, “What do you think?” Asking questions allows you to know whether the student has understood what has been taught. Students enjoy answering questions if they know the answers. It builds their confidence and motivates them to learn more. It also convinces them that they can learn what is being taught. You can also check and see if the students are paying attention by asking questions. Let your students ask questions as well. The only foolish question is the unasked question.

4. Make your teachings “relevant.” Teach things applicable to life.

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4).



“Everything should be made as simple as possible but not simpler.”
(Albert Einstein)

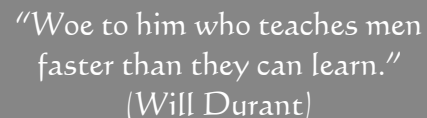
Jim Rohn once said, “Don’t let your learning lead to knowledge, but let your learning lead to action.” Students must be encouraged to practice what they have learned.

5. Keep it simple. The real test of intelligence is the ability to come down to the level of the

students/learners.

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

6. Schedule the important classes and subject matter during the best time of the day. This is when the student is most alert and ready to learn.



“Woe to him who teaches men faster than they can learn.”
(Will Durant)

7. Focus on learning and not just covering the content. More is not always better. Teach the things that are important, and let your students know what is important. Ted Sizer says, “Less is more. Thoroughness counts more than coverage.” Jesus said, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.” (John 16:12, *NIV*)

8. Make your subject interesting. We are teaching from the most exciting Book in the world. Don’t be boring. Someone has said that it is a sin to bore a child, and that could be true of anyone.

9. Teach from the overflow of your life. Teaching is not what you do; it is what you are.

Howard Hendricks has said, “If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow . . . If you don’t know it—truly know it—you can’t give it out.” We should learn before we try teaching others. The best teachers possess a teachable spirit. They are always striving for excellence and continuous improvement. Before we can expect others to learn and grow, we must first grow.




“He who learns, teaches.” (Ancient Africa Proverb from Ethiopia)

10. Prepare well. Know your subject matter. You become more confident when you have prepared properly.

11. Care about your students. It has been said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”




12. There are five teachers in life—family, school, media (radio, newspapers, etc.), peers (acquaintances), and church.

13. Set the example. Someone is watching you. You are a walking Bible.

-  People learn least by what you say.
-  They learn a little more by what you do.
-  People learn most by what you are.

Students are saying to you, “Don’t tell me, show me!”

14. Protect your teaching time through:

-  **Study** (You must learn first.)
-  **Specialize** (Become an expert in your subject.)
-  **Prayer** (Depend on the Holy Spirit to work.)

15. Start from where your students are. Take them from the known to the unknown. Take them into a deeper understanding. Effective learning builds on what the student already knows.

16. Allow the students to discover truth and answers. Encourage their creativity. Give them assignments that cause them to discover the lesson you want to teach. Students learn by doing. Remember, “Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.” (Anonymous)

17. It would be wonderful if teachers and preachers learned the “one lesson, one point” approach to education and preaching. This means that each lesson contains one major point and is taught in such a way that the student learns that point.

*“As long as you live, you learn;
and as long as you learn, you live.”
(Howard Hendricks)*

18. Make your teaching time a priority. Do not allow yourself to be distracted by telephone calls, knocks at the door, and other things that pull you away from your class.

19. Assume nothing. Your students may not understand the basics. Do not assume that the students know anything about the subject.

Study Questions

1. Why should plain language be used in teaching? _____

2. What are the benefits of asking students questions? _____

3. What does “making teaching relevant” mean? _____

4. What is the real test of a teacher’s intelligence? _____

5. Which type of material or classes should be scheduled during the early part of the day or program? _____

6. How does a teacher focus on learning and not just covering the content? _____

7. Good teachers possess what type of spirit or attitude? _____

8. Quote the African proverb used in this lesson. _____

9. Why should a teacher know the subject matter? _____

10. What are the five teachers we have in life? _____

11. Why should teachers set an example? _____

12. How does a teacher protect his/her teaching time? _____

13. Why should a teacher start with what the student already knows? _____

14. Why should teachers give assignments? _____

15. What should we assume (about our students) when we start teaching? _____

16. According to Howard Hendricks, what is one of the fundamental laws of education?

17. According to Hendricks, learning involves change. What is the result of learning?

Additional Notes

Listening to the Word of God

“Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us”
(Acts 10:33, *NIV*).

No need to shake yourself awake. This is not a dream. Every preacher yearns for people to come to church anxious to hear a message from God’s anointed messenger. This usually does not consistently happen. However, as preachers, there are ways that we can prepare our people to hear the life-transforming Word of God.

Preparing People to Hear the Word

Preaching is the highlight and heart of the church service. This should be reflected in the way we organize services. When the service is overloaded and insufficient time is given for preaching, it is silently transmitted that preaching is low priority. Such churches could be rightfully accused of being carnal, and in danger of spiritual decline.

Kenneth Barney in an article entitled “How Shall They Hear without a Preacher” said, “It is clear what happens when preaching time is crowded into the waning minutes of a congregation’s attention span in a service dominated by lengthy preliminaries. The service’s heart has been weakened and left barely beating, the people’s spiritual health impaired. Balance is destroyed, the weight put in the wrong place.”

He goes on to suggest that “the preacher should go to the pulpit while the spiritual tide is still rising, not after it has crested and is receding. The tide should keep rising during the message and reach its peak at the altar call.”

What causes the flow in the service to recede right before preaching? Here’s a short list:

1. Boring announcements, presented by someone who has spent little time in preparation.
2. The pastor rebuking the congregation right before turning the service over to the guest speaker.
3. Taking an offering and then quickly turning the service over to the preacher.
4. Giving a long, flattering, introduction. Worst still is making introductions of everyone on the platform. There may be a place and time for such but not right before the preaching. If you are looking for a brief, yet powerful introduction, why not try this one? “Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us” (Acts 10:33, *NIV*).
5. Making lighthearted comments and jokes right before the preaching event.
6. Announcing that the congregation will eat together right after the preaching. That will work on their stomachs but not on their hearts.
7. Turning things over twenty minutes before the scheduled close of the service.

It is imperative that the service is turned over when it is a spiritual high. When it seems appropriate for preaching, let it happen, regardless of what remains to be done with the normal routine. A move of God does wonders for bringing the anointing on a preacher. It breathes life into a sermon outline of dry bones. Get in the habit of following the lead of the Spirit, and not regimented programs.

Pastors should be concerned with the entire service and the way it flows. It is possible to organize the preliminaries: Bible reading, praises and worship, choir, special songs, and testimonies so they flow together, are timely, and lead up to the preaching of the Word of God.

When time is wasted it means the preacher is coming to the pulpit when the people are tired spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It is not fair to the preacher, the message, or our God. Another enemy is routine. People get used to the mechanics.

People Preparing to Hear the Word

Preachers occasionally retreat home feeling they are a failure, assuming their sermon lacked anointing. Sometimes, it isn't the preacher who has fallen short; it is the congregation who has failed to listen.

Cornelius used a military term "commanded" (Acts 10:33) in speaking to Peter. John MacArthur said, "He understood that when the Lord spoke it was a command demanding obedience. He was ready to receive his orders from the Lord."

Hear the Word. Then do it!

We should be doers of the Word, and not hearers only.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25, *NIV*).

The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* provides this word of instruction, "Christianity is a religion of action. As important as it is to listen (cf. James 1:19), one must not stop there. Doing must follow listening." Let us avoid becoming a "hearing-but-not-doing man."

James 1:18-25 provides important steps in hearing the Word of God. It explains what we should do before, during, and after hearing the Word.

1. Be swift (quick, prompt, ready) to listen to God's Word (verse 19). See Romans 10:17. Faith, believing, and salvation are results of hearing preaching. (Preacher, remember there can be no hearing without preaching.)
2. Rid your life of filth and evil. The word picture here is stripping off dirty clothes. We cannot have progress in our spiritual lives if we are unwilling to reject and forsake sin (verse 21).
3. Receive (accept) the Word of God (verse 21).
4. Humbly yield (give way to, or submit) to the Word of God.
5. Allow the Word to be engrafted (implanted, planted) in the soil of your heart (verse 21).
6. Obey the Word of God (verse 22). Become a doer. Hearing, reading, and studying God's Word has no benefit if we do not obey. The *Life Application New Testament Commentary* says, "God's Word can only grow in the soil of obedience."
7. Do not forget the Word of God (verse 25). Hide it in your heart (Psalms 119:11).

"Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice" (Ezekiel 33:30-32, *NIV*).

Donald S. Whitney, "How to Make Every Sermon Count" provides three tips for better concentration:

1. Get enough sleep. If you go to church sleepy on Sunday morning, what will be the side effect? You will be drowsy.
2. Take notes. This helps focus attention on the preaching. It also assists burning the idea into your brain. You can also record your thoughts and how the preaching applies to your life.
3. Sit near the front. This helps minimize distractions. When sitting at the back you have a full view of people talking, sleeping, and moving around.

Let us also add:

4. Attend the pre-service prayer session. This will help you get in touch with God, and prepare your heart for what God wants to do through His Word. Come to church expecting to hear from God. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalms 122:1). If you come to church expecting nothing the service will likely measure up to your expectations.
5. Do not get involved in stressful activities before church. It is hard to focus on the service and hear from God if you just had an argument with your wife or friend.

6. Train your family to listen to God’s Word by asking them questions about the preaching after service. Ask, “What did your Sunday school teacher teach this morning? What did the pastor preach? What were his key points? What illustrations did he use?”
7. Prepare for preaching by taking an active part in every part of the service. Participating in the worship service causes us to focus on the greatness of God. We worship God for who He is—His attributes or character, and for what He does—His work or actions.
8. Always switch off your mobile phone (if you have one) when you enter God’s house. A phone ringing in the middle of preaching is distracting to everyone—the preacher included.

Study Questions

3. What is the highlight and heart of the church service? _____

4. What idea is transmitted when the service is overloaded and there is little time for preaching? _____

5. What could we call churches that give little time to preaching? _____

6. What are the churches that give low priority to preaching in danger of? _____

7. What happens when preaching time is crowded into the final moments of the congregation’s attention span? _____

8. List four things that cause the flow of the service to recede right before preaching. _____

9. When should the service be turned over to the preacher? _____

10. How can a pastor organize the service so that it flows properly? _____

11. What is another enemy of the service? _____

12. Preachers sometimes feel their sermons lack anointing. At times it is not the preacher's fault. Who then can be blamed? Why? _____

13. What does participation in the worship service cause? _____

14. Why do we worship God? _____

15. What is the impact of a cell phone ringing in the middle of a sermon? _____

16. According to James 1, what are three (of the seven) steps in hearing God's Word? _____

17. Briefly mention Whitney's three steps to better concentration. _____

