

## LESSON TEN

### **Continued from last week.**

The efficacy of teaching diminishes in relationship to the size of the “great gulf fixed” between the teacher and the taught. According to one poll, common complaints about lessons from hearers were: 1) too many complex ideas; 2) too much analysis and too little answers; 3) too formal and too impersonal; 4) too much theological jargon; 5) too propositional and too few illustrations; and 6) too many lessons reach a dead end and give no guidance to commitment and action. These are problems that can’t be solved without preparation prior to retiring to the study.

Too many teachers get into the classroom and begin to spout esoteric (antonym, straightforward) material. Then the bell rings and it is over. But real teaching does not work this way. Real teaching grows out of the counseling session, the elders’ or deacons’ meeting, the visitation call, the casual encounter in a restaurant or a grocery store. It speaks of and to what the teacher has learned in all of his dealings with the people during the week. It relates the gospel to human situations and works back and forth between them like a weaver’s shuttle.

Teaching that does not do this is not true teaching. It has not understood the nature of the gospel. The gospel addresses and assumes the

forms of real people's lives or it does not exist at all. It is not theoretical or academic; it is blood and bone, gut and marrow. It speaks to human hurts and hopes, to specific needs and possibilities, or it does not speak at all.

#### GATHERING MATERIALS FOR THE LESSON

Ingredients are important. To make biscuits you don't use corn meal and you don't use only flour. You measure and mix just the right amounts of flour, baking powder, baking soda, cream of tartar, sugar, salt, shortening and buttermilk. Then you cut and cook them at the right temperature for the right amount of time. While they are cooking, you "stir" the butter and the sorghum. When the biscuits come out of the oven you sit down to feast.

Regrettably, for lesson preparation there is no supermarket where you can go and get five pounds of illustrations, a box of points, and a can of organization. How, then, does the teacher prepare a lesson that, when completed, his hearers may sit down to feast? Where does he gather the ingredients for his lesson? What should be in his pantry? When the demands are high and the time is short, how does he go about developing his lesson from "scratch" and avoid the temptation to use Bisquick™ or, worse yet, Hungry Jack.™ On the other hand, why go to all of that trouble? After all,

can the class really tell the difference? Do they even care as long as they get to the cafeteria on time?

Good questions in this day of fast food restaurants and precooked cardboard hamburgers. There was a day when you could hear the meat sizzle and smell the tantalizing odor as it cooked. Today the only odor is the overwhelming reek of used grease as it spews from exhaust fans. The former whets the appetite; the latter dulls desire. Those who have tasted the former can never be satisfied by the latter.

Since time is money, and fast food by definition takes less time, fast food restaurants are forgivable. Besides, those who frequent such establishments are there by choice. The only consequences of not going are lower cholesterol and less weight! Not so with Bible Study. We study publically and privately at the behest of God. Though voluntary in the sense that God does not force attendance, more is at risk than clogged arteries if His invitation is refused. Those who come deserve more from the teacher than “canned” lessons and fricasseed clichés.

The teacher who loves both his Lord and his hearers will not be satisfied with a “thrown together” lesson. He will take the time necessary to gather the finest of ingredients, and he will prepare them with love. In the manner of a fine chef, he will labor to make his presentation both pleasing

and palatable. While not everything tastes good, even castor oil can be mixed with orange juice. If a teacher gives the class too much castor oil, he makes things worse, not better. He should not be surprised that the class greets him as youngsters used to greet castor oil -- with thumb and forefinger clamped firmly to the nose!

So how does the teacher gather lesson material and from whence does he gather it? First and foremost, the primary source of material must always be the Bible. This does not mean that every point and sub point must be followed by some passage; it does mean that the focus of every lesson is the application of God's authoritative will to the hearer. Thus, the Bible is the first source for gathering material. Failure to ground the lesson in scripture results in a skyscraper lesson – story after story with nothing in between. If the stories are good they may keep the hearer's attention, but they will not fill him with any sense of the eternal or make him long for the home of the soul. The study of the Bible should be regular and systematic. The teacher who opens his Bible to get a text so that his civic club speech can be called a Bible lesson has no message from God.

While the study of the Bible must never be neglected, neither can the teacher neglect the reading and study of books, newspapers, and magazines. The teacher's library should contain, among others, books of history, science,

theology, commentaries, great literature (both prose and poetry), and discussion of current issues. Commentaries and other sources should include a variety of types – exegetical, hermeneutical, and devotional – to provide material both to understand and to apply the text. Exegetical and critical information without application tends to produce lectures, not lessons.

In addition to reading widely on the text and on the issues chosen to develop the purpose of the lesson, the teacher should spend time thinking about his personal observations of life that can add meaning to his lesson. What is there in nature that is helpful? What has he seen in the lives of the congregation? What is going on in his city, state, nation, and world? The Master Teacher commonly began his lessons with personal observations: “Behold a sower went forth to sow”; “A certain man had two sons”; “Consider the lilies of the field.” He who has eyes to see can often see a better lesson in a brook than he can in a book, unless, of course, that book is the Bible.

Finally, the teacher should search his files to see what he has gathered on the subject. In this day of marvelous filing mechanisms, there is no reason for the teacher not to have a rich supply of lesson material at his fingertips. If he does not, it indicates that he has not yet mastered the skill of preserving the results of his study, observation, and meditation. Instead, he

treats his mind like a sieve – that which enters passes through and leaves nothing but perhaps a little residue.

Teachers who reserve all material gathering for the week the lesson is finally prepared risk teaching only half-digested thoughts. The material passes over the lips of the teacher but not through his heart. He has not made it his own. Before a cook undertakes the preparation of a meal, she has the ingredients on the counter. The greater the selection of ingredients the richer and more attractive she can make the meal. Teaching is no different. Before beginning final preparation of the lesson, the teacher should have materials gathered and at hand. He will have a greater variety of illustrations and facts at his disposal to enrich his lesson. Some suggest that the teacher's job is not to teach, but to gather and proclaim truth. To do so effectively, he must be gathering constantly. He must be always seeking truth for truth's sake and not for the sake of lesson preparation. When he does, his lessons will be richer and his hearers will be blessed.

Continued next week. . .