
THE REALITIES OF TEACHING IN THE CHURCH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

BUILDING BRIDGES AND DESTROYING WALLS



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Then

- Teachers were recruited to serve for extended periods of time, one to three years
- Teachers meetings were often held on a monthly basis.
- A majority of teachers were stay-at-home mothers.
- It was possible teachers meetings daytime, especially care was provided. to have in the if child
- Church school and congregational worship were held at separate times. Children attended worship with their families, and many adults attended adult classes.
- Teachers were expected to spend a lot of time planning to transform the printed curriculum into effective session plans.

Now

- Teachers are recruited to serve for limited periods of time; one Sunday a month, a month at a time, or just one month a year.
- Teachers meetings are seldom held, and almost never on a monthly basis.
- A majority of teachers are employed outside the home.
- It is virtually impossible to have meetings in the midweek daytime.
- Church school and worship often happen at the same time, with children being excused from worship after a children's sermon.
- Most teachers expect the curriculum to require very little planning on their part.

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Then

- There were relatively few community activities competing for children's time on Sunday mornings.
- Many teachers were willing and able to attend teacher training events locally as well as regionally.
- The printed curriculum provided the basic resources needed for teachers to plan their lessons.
- Children, youth, and adults were more consistent in their attendance on Sunday mornings. Some churches gave perfect attendance awards each year

Now

- There are a multitude of activities competing for the children's time on Sunday mornings.
- Very few teachers are willing and able to attend teacher-training events.
- The printed curriculum changes often, and teachers expect to be able to use it without much work on their part.
- There is very little consistency in attendance. Many churches have fewer than 50 percent of those enrolled present on any given Sunday.

WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE REALITIES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

- The root meaning of *Pedagogy* is leading children. It is defined as *the art or science of being a teacher*” and it *generally refers to strategies of instruction, or a style of instruction.*” (Jo McShane, 2007)
- This is the opposite of *Andragogy*, or learner-centered education, which not only portrays the most effective method of learning in this digital age but also describes the adult learning process, such as the (a) freedom to select learning goals and methods relevant to the person’s needs, (b) problem-centered rather than content-centered learning, (c) learning from experience, and (d) creative thinking and collaboration with fellow learners.
- Those born around 1990 can be said to belong to the Digital Communication Culture. They usually grew up and have become adept with information and communication technologies from an early age. They have become citizens of the digital world which now provides instant access to all information related to:
 - All religions, sciences, arts and educational disciplines
 - All existing bibles, religious and scientific writings, books, journals, magazines
 - All kinds of theological and educational presentations, music and videos
 - All kinds of theological and biblical analysis, sermons, music and videos

WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE REALITIES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

- Plenty of these digital resources can be freely downloaded, copied, shared and re-produced from the internet. And because of this deluge of information, the theologian, the religious person, the teacher and the student have been enormously empowered and made independent. As a consequence, they have become:
 - More knowledgeable, because virtually all information can be accessed at the click of a mouse.
 - More interactive, because it allows them to ask questions and interact directly and swiftly with the source of information.
 - More potent, because they can easily share their continuously enhanced ideas with other people anywhere in the world.
- All these means that the pace of religious education in our own churches and schools can be immensely accelerated. What takes years to learn in Sunday Schools and Bible Studies can be learned in a few months. What takes semesters to learn in Religion Classes can be covered in several days.
- But rapid acquisition of knowledge also creates an abundance of questions. Scientific discoveries whether in the field of archeology, biology, physics or astronomy surely provide answer to their respective scientific questions. But such discoveries will either support or demolish the interpretation of biblical scriptures, the integrity of church traditions and the doctrines of faith-based religions.

WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE REALITIES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

- Change from a "doing my duty" approach to a "this is my ministry" approach.
 - We need to preach, teach, and have conversations that speak of teaching, as well as other of the church's programs, as ministry.
- Change from recruiting to calling the teachers based on their gifts.
 - Calling is a biblical concept; recruiting is not.
 - God place the members in the church such as were needed
- Emphasize what is expected of teachers rather than understating the expectations.
 - We stress the importance of teaching to the church's ministry
 - The specific responsibilities of the teachers
 - Establish relationships in terms of who will be on the team and whom to go to for assistance
 - Identify the time frame in terms of how many weeks in a year and how many hours a week is required
 - Highlight the gifts that will be utilized and developed
 - Ensure the resources and support will be provided
 - Emphasize the benefits or blessings the teachers can expect to receive as they engage in this ministry.

WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE REALITIES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

- Invite teacher and leaders to serve with partners.
 - “Two heads are better than one” is true
 - When two or more persons are serving on a team, they are able to easily cover for one another when one of the team members is absent.
- Emphasize Christian relationships as being most important.
 - The most important task of teaching is building Christian relationships
 - You must realize that the greatest resource, the greatest gift, you bring to the classroom, is yourselves
- Demystify teaching to make it less complicated, not less important
 - Teaching is building relationships through conversation.
 - We talk about our experiences; interests; and what we know regarding God, Jesus, the Bible, and other topics central to teaching in the church.
- Adopt ways for equipping teachers that fit the new realities

WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE REALITIES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

■ Acts 17 Paul's Playbook

Apostle Paul's playbook as we observe this master communicator bringing his message to Athens. At that time, Athens was the cultural and intellectual center of the world. Athens was heir to the great philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others who established patterns of thought that have affected human learning for centuries. Almost all philosophies follow, to some degree, the teachings of these men.

While Paul was in Athens, he did what any Athens tourist would do. He went sightseeing. There were magnificent architectural edifices, statues, and images erected to every deity imaginable. You name it, and the Athenians had erected some kind of representation to a god they thought existed. But he was grieved to see the absolute absence of the living God. Instead, there was every imaginable substitute.

Have you ever felt that way as you look at our confused society? Do you ever find yourself channel surfing, and as you look at all of the things that are being offered to our culture today, you find yourself getting angry? We have a choice: We can wring our hands in exasperation and complain about the state of affairs in our world. Or we can do something about it: take the gospel to the world.

Paul could have cursed the darkness, but instead he turned on the light. And that brings us to our first principle of effective evangelism.

PRINCIPLE 1: EFFECTIVE TEACHING ALWAYS BEGINS WITH A BURDEN.

- Effective teaching always begins with a burden. Paul's message began when his spirit was stirred. He was grieved to see the absolute absence of the living God and, in His place, every conceivable substitute. So he took action. Acts 17 (NIV) tells us,
 - “So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.”
 - The phrase “greatly distressed” in verse 16 could be literally translated, “exasperated” or “irritated and roused to anger.” In other words, Paul was hot and mad.
- Moved to Action
 - One of the reasons we don't effectively reach our culture is because we are woefully out of touch, living in our own Christian subculture. And to be honest, many of us don't really care about people who do not know the Lord. This is hard for some of us to admit. If some of us were to be brutally honest, we would have to say that we don't have that burden. Paul was burdened to the point that he declared, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). We simply have to care, or nothing will happen in the way of effective evangelism. Does your heart ache for lost people?
 - C. H. Spurgeon knew the need for such a burden when he said, “The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest, too. But if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy, too.”

PRINCIPLE 2: EFFECTIVE TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW THEIR AUDIENCE.

- We need to know the people we are speaking to. Paul went right to where these people were and brought the gospel to them. It is important for us to have contact with—to be out and among—the people we are speaking to. Jesus certainly modeled this. Time and time again, we see Him breaking free from the multitudes to bring the message to one individual. From the midst of a crowd, He called Zacchaeus out of the tree...In the blazing noonday sun, He engaged the Samaritan woman in conversation...And He managed a late night meeting with the religious man, Nicodemus. Jesus always had time for people, and we should, too, be it day or night.
 - Realize everyone is not at the same level of Christian maturity when teaching.
 - Employ different technique and learning style to reach all.
 - Ensure the learning environment is safe, open and comfortable for all to speak
- **Build a Bridge**
- That is why one of the best ways to share the gospel is to listen and ask questions, because I have discovered that everyone's favorite subject is themselves. We can turn a monologue into a dialogue by saying, "Tell me about yourself," or asking, "What do you think about this or that?" As you do so, you are learning about and better understanding that person. And because you have taken the time to listen to what they have to say, it's more likely they will be willing to listen to you.

PRINCIPLE 2: EFFECTIVE TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW THEIR AUDIENCE.

- According to the Epicureans founder, Epicurus, the chief goal of life was to attain the maximum amount of pleasure and the minimum amount of pain. The Epicureans believed the world came about by chance, a random concourse of atoms, and that there would be no afterlife or future judgment. Their basic belief was that this life is all there is. You only go around once, so if it feels good, do it. If it doesn't feel good, don't do it. Avoid what hurts or causes pain. You could say they were the party animals of the first century.
- The Epicurean mentality is still with us today, as this way of thinking is so common in our culture. The Bible even points out that this mindset will be prevalent in the last days: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...without self-control...haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." (2 Tim. 3:1–3, emphasis mine) The Bible also warns against embracing this philosophy: "She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." (1 Tim. 5:6)

PRINCIPLE 2: EFFECTIVE TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW THEIR AUDIENCE.

- In contrast to the Epicureans, the Stoics were more disciplined, shunning the pursuit of pleasure. Founded by a man name Zeno, the Stoic philosophy taught self-mastery. The Stoics' goal in life was to reach a place of indifference to pleasure or pain. Zeno taught that life is filled with good and bad. Because you cannot avoid the bad, you must try to grin and bear it. The Stoics believed that God was in everything material: in the spirit of the trees, plants, animals, mountains, and fields. The Stoics' descendants are among us today as well. These are people who have no sense of God or His will for their lives. They just do the best they can, and if bad comes, they just try to be strong and endure it.
- Yet both of these philosophies are wrong in that they both reject God. After all, if you don't know God, then you will put something else in His place.

PRINCIPLE 3: EFFECTIVE TEACHERS MUST BE CULTURALLY RELEVANT.

- Paul could have blasted his listeners with both barrels. But amazingly, he sought instead to build a bridge to them and quoted one of their own poets: “For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’” (v.28)
- It is so important that our listeners know we are living in the same world as they are. We don’t necessarily want to build our message on these issues, but to completely ignore them is to miss an opportunity. We need to keep up with the times. Far too often, those of us who are called to communicate are out of touch with the people we are speaking to. The Bible speaks of the leaders of the tribe of Issachar, “who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” (I Chron. 12:32)

SUMMING IT UP: KEEP IT INTERESTING

- Paul's message aroused the interest of his listeners. The first thing he did was to build a bridge to his audience:
- Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. (vv. 22–23)
- The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you... Now that was a diplomatic way for Paul to begin his message. He could have said, "You are a bunch of pagans, and you're going to burn!" Technically, that would have been true. But the objective of effective communication is to build a bridge, not burn one. So Paul sought to find something in common with these so-called religious people. Along the same lines, Paul said, "Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ... Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings." (1 Cor. 9:19, 22–23 NLT)