

The Gift of Teaching

A gifted story: He has a way of finding a story to explain every situation. Jesus did that too, so in a way he is like Jesus. The stories come from his life's experiences or from his reading, but they always do the trick. They help him get the point across every time. Al knows instinctively how to teach, and his teaching comes from the heart. He will bear his soul if you will learn from it. Some of his drive to teach comes from understanding the importance of it for the spiritual development of the members of the church, but the instincts and desire for helping others to truly learn are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Al has the gift of teaching, and it is a joy to see how he creatively exercises it each Sunday.

Biblical references:

Eph. 4:11 - It was he who "gave gifts to mankind"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers.

Heb. 5:12-14 - There has been enough time for you to be teachers - yet you still need someone to teach you the first lessons of God's message. Instead of eating solid food, you still have to drink milk. Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right or wrong. Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil. Let us go forward, then to mature teaching and leave behind the first lessons of the Christian message.

1 Cor. 12:28 - In the church God has put all in place: in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues.

Definition and comment:

The gift of Teaching: the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to communicate information, relevant to the health and ministry of the Body and its members so that others will learn and be edified. Through the employment of this gift the truths of God's Word are conveyed to others for the purpose of building up the church. This gift enables a believer to communicate a personal understanding of the Bible and faith to instruct, guide, and nurture Christians in the Word of God in such a way that it is comprehended and can be applied to life. There is a strong warning in James 3:1, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." This statement seems to indicate that there is a special responsibility attached to the role of teaching. Having the gift of teaching is an important asset in the carrying out of a teaching ministry. Teachers in the church today, unlike the teachers in the early church, have the completed canon of Scripture and almost 20 centuries of church history to shed light on the interpretation of the Bible. The role of the Christian teacher has changed from verbal communicator of the Word to facilitator of the Word as found in written materials. Teachers today must exercise care to pass on both head and heart knowledge and to be more concerned with the person being taught than with the teaching content itself. Teaching effectiveness is strengthened by a basic grasp of the content and doctrine of the Bible as well as by adequate preparation before teaching sessions.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

1. When you communicate biblical truth to others, do you see changes in knowledge, attitudes, values or conduct?
2. Do others understand as you explain the Bible or the Christian life to them?
3. Are you able to communicate truth clearly and concisely and hold the interest of those you instruct?
4. Are you concerned to help others learn what the Bible teaches about life?
5. Have people responded that you have helped them learn biblical truth in a meaningful way?

Areas for study and personal growth:

1. Study the lessons in scripture that pertain to this gift: James 3:1; Acts 18:24-28; 20:18-21,27; 28:30-31; Eph. 4:13-14; Col. 3:16.

2. There are certain skills in teaching that can be developed. Review opportunities for Christian education workshops that may be available for you to attend, or consider attending a Sunday school convention.
3. Good lesson plans are often constructed by utilizing ideas from a variety of sources. Although a particular curriculum will probably provide a teacher's manual, you need not be limited to the suggestions in that one source. Build a library of good materials that will help you "spice up" the lesson plan as needed to hold attention or broaden the perspective being presented. Keep a card file of your own creative ideas that can be used to improve a teaching presentation, and make note of how well you perceive the idea was received by the class.
4. Increase your personal knowledge of Christianity by reading some of the spiritual writings of well-known modern authors (C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham, Katherine Marshall, Keith Miller, Thomas a Kempis, and others). Read also some inspirational life accounts of answered prayers (Merlin Crouthers, Harold Hill, Betty Malz, David Wilkerson).
5. Look for a mentor among other teachers - someone whom you feel clearly has a well developed spiritual gift of teaching, and share teaching stories in order to improve your teaching methodology and sensitivities

General ways to use the gift of teaching:

- Personally: lead a friend through a Bible study; clarify religious issues for an acquaintance.
- Within the church: serve as a Sunday school teacher; lead an adult Bible study or spiritual conversation class (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).
- Within the wider community: instruct in a life-enrichment class

For reflection:

There is a difference between brilliant knowledge and brilliant teaching. Sometimes it is absolutely dazzling to behold a great oratorical display of knowledge, but little or even none of what was presented may be retained past the moment. Brilliant teaching, however, will be retained because the knowledge and ideas conveyed are somehow vividly made applicable to your own life. We need scholars to sift through pools of knowledge and figure things out for us, but we need teachers to put the knowledge thus attained into terms that we can understand and relate to. It is important to recognize that faith is a matter of both the heart and the mind. Heartfelt faith will be vulnerable to any onslaught of adversity unless it is sustained by a sound foundation of knowledge attained through the reasoning process. This is where teaching comes in - we can learn a tremendous amount about our faith by simply reading about it, but until it is tested in the crucible of reasonable debate with a good teacher, it may shatter under duress.

All Christians are to share their faith stories as a means of evangelizing and bringing others to Christ. But it is the teacher that builds upon those initial stories with lessons of doctrine, church history, scripture, and personal experience that really converts the learner to a full acceptance of the Christian life. People bearing the gift of teaching will also have an on-going thirst for knowledge and a passion for learning themselves. The incentive will always be to discover new ways to convey God's love through their teaching. When the Holy Spirit is invited to join in the teaching, the result is truly inspirational!