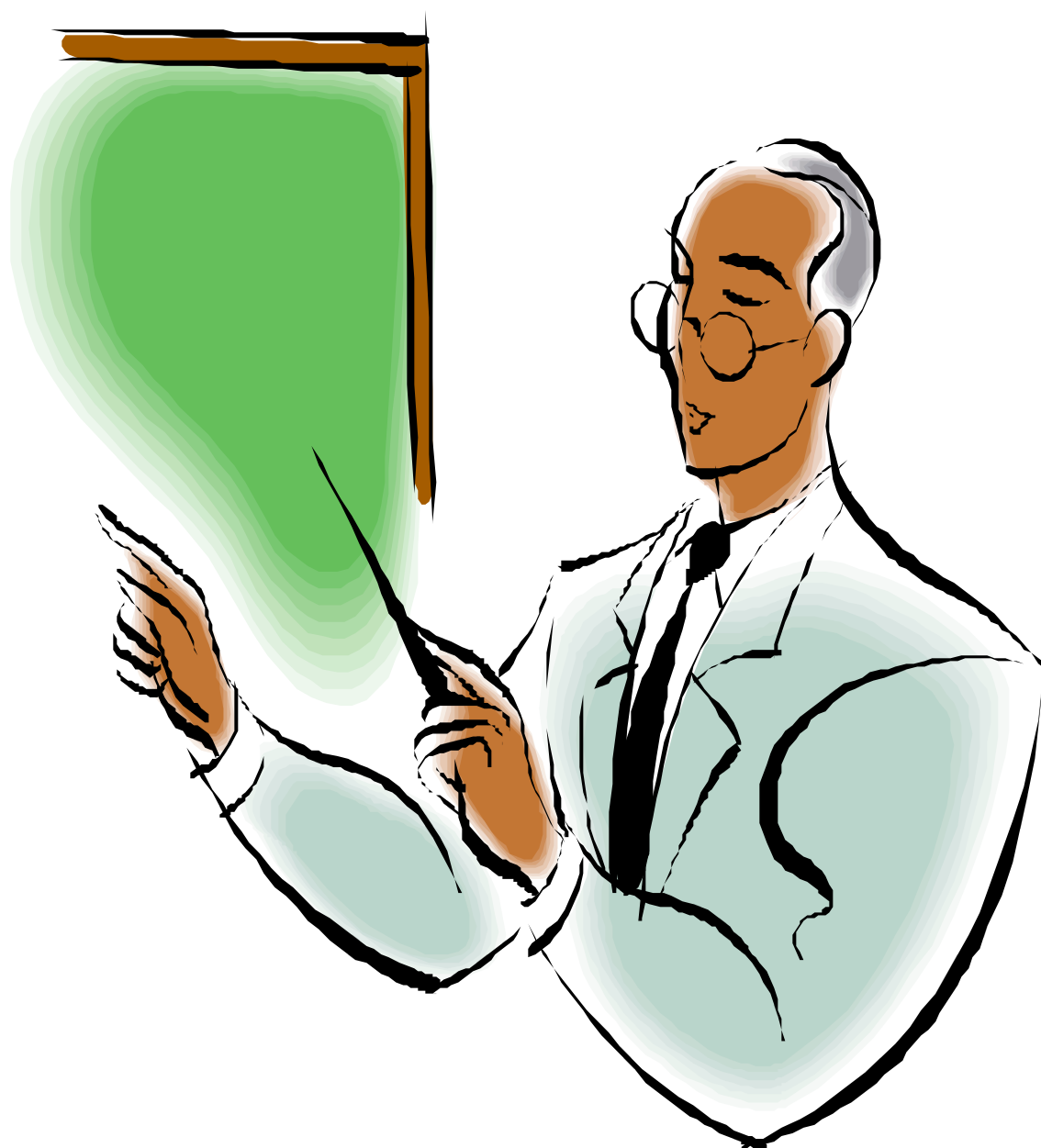


Public Teaching: A Men's Training Class by Jeff Smith



Introduction

The Hebrew writer complained that there were not enough teachers and James cautioned that not many should become teachers. Were they at odds in their objectives? Not at all.

It is just that teaching God's word on any level and in any setting is a grave responsibility. Those who are not truly committed both to teaching and to Christ should let others do the teaching until their hearts are in it. Those who are unwilling to study, prepare and present their lessons should likewise step aside until they have made themselves more fit for God's use.

The ability and desire to teach God's word in various settings will appear differently from man to man. Some will prefer to teach more privately and can excel in that realm. Others will find it easier to teach in classes than from the pulpit or vice versa. Everyone of us, however, who is spiritually minded should desire to teach in some way.

Other books have been written on becoming fishers of men, but this little booklet is on aspects of public teaching in the congregation -- in bible classes, the midweek invitation and the full sermon.

Every preacher on Earth was once an unsure novice, as you may feel yourself to be now. We only have teachers and preachers because people like you overcame their lack of confidence and began trying to teach. No one expects a novice teacher to be immediately polished and complete. Instead, we expect new teachers to take time to learn their craft and hone their abilities. Your brethren will be understanding and helpful while you are learning. They may come to you with constructive criticism, which if followed will often help make you better at what you are trying to do. Be careful not to be so sensitive that you refuse their help, consider it an insult and quit trying. That is what the devil wants you to do and that is your pride preceding your fall.

You can do it and if you do not, who will? The church suffers for lack of interested, capable teachers. So many just figure that someone else will do it, but if everyone thinks that way, no one will do it. Christianity is not about passing the buck, but about being responsible and active. As much as James 2 condemns an idle faith as unworthy of salvation, so that chapter warns against allowing one's faith to become dormant and stale.

"Study to show thyself approved to God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). You may never become a full time gospel preacher like Paul and Barnabas, but you may become just as vital to your congregation. If you can fill in on occasion when the regular preacher is sick or out of town, you will be vital to God's work. If you can fill a slot in the bible classes from time to time, you will be useful. If you can extend Christ's invitation publicly, you will know better how to extend it privately.

Becoming a teacher begins with becoming a student. Before you begin, read 1 Peter 3:14-16 and follow the apostle's instructions. Set Christ apart from every worldly ambition in your heart and begin a genuine pursuit of his service. Then you will be prepared not only to teach in the class and assembly, but also from house to house. For "by this time you ought to be teachers" (Heb. 5:12).

Syllabus

- Extending The Lord's Invitation
- Teaching A Bible Class
- Preaching Gospel Sermons

Extending the Lord's Invitation

We extend the invitation of Jesus Christ every time that we come together as a church. In so doing, we are merely following his example in Matthew 11:28-30 and giving people a convenient opportunity to confess their newfound faith or rededicate themselves to their redeemer.

After classes on Wednesday, the church assembles for a brief period of worship in the auditorium and one man or another is responsible for wording the invitation of Jesus Christ. Although you will only speak for five or ten minutes, you should take this moment before the church as seriously as any other. You should dress respectfully for the occasion. This may not mean a suit and tie, but it surely will require more than a tee-shirt and jeans. You will be holding a Bible in your hands and imploring your hearers to consider the most serious decision of their lives. You should look as though you are taking it that seriously as well.

The Lord's invitation is not a mini-sermon or sermonette. It should not be on any and every subject, as Sunday sermons are. The invitation should be just that and nothing more or less. It should be an invitation.

Often, the invitation will center on one or two passages, perhaps three at the most. By making application of the scripture to your audience's own condition, you can motivate them to make a weighty spiritual decision. Use scriptures that are morally inspirational, that encourage confidence in Christ or submission to the will of God. Use Old Testament stories of bravery and godliness. Use both men and women and even children in your invitations. Be careful not to limit yourself to the same obvious scriptures, but delve deeper into God's word and offer your audience something they might not have considered recently.

Avoid going for shock value. Using carnal language or melodrama may seem to be effective, but the emotions that are created are not genuinely practical when it comes to obedience to the gospel.

Write out some notes for your invitation, but avoid writing a full text. Few novice speakers can take such a manuscript and make it seem engaging and interesting. Make your notes orderly and clear, using a regular outline format. Use a translation of the bible with which you are comfortable. The King James Version, New King James Version and New American Standard Version (NASV) are all good translations to consider. Modernistic translations should be avoided because they alter the text to fit multicultural, liberal or Calvinistic agendas. The New International Version (NIV) especially transforms certain words to fit a Calvinistic bent. Be prepared by practicing your first effort in front of family or even a mirror.

Take a deep breath before you begin to clear away some of the nervousness. Then speak clearly and at a moderate pace. If you feel that you are speaking too quickly, stop at a period and take another deep breath. Many older people have trouble following fast talk, so don't neglect them. Many younger people who need to make the good confession need time to think on each point, so don't hurry.

Make eye contact throughout your invitation with the entire audience. Eye contact serves as a connection between the speaker and the hearers. If you never look up from your Bible or your notes, you will lose your audience very quickly. They will simply wait for the cue to sing and never hear a word you say.

The midweek invitation should last from between five to ten minutes. Focusing on 1-3 passages of scripture and giving a short explanation and some practical applications will easily fill this time. Your goals are to encourage the lost to confess Christ, repent and be baptized and to encourage the wayward to be restored, either through public repentance or private confession to God. Don't end your invitation with humor, for this is not funny business. End it with conviction and clear directions on what a person should do who wants to answer the invitation. "If you need to respond to this invitation, please come forward as we stand together and sing ..."

Here are some recommended ideas for midweek invitations:

- the story of the fall of Adam and Eve
- the story of Noah's ark
- the story of Abraham's departure for Canaan
- the story of the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah
- any event in the life of Joseph
- the conviction of men like Daniel and his three friends
- the folly and faith of Samson
- the greatness of women like Abigail, Deborah and Hannah

Here are some scriptures that may prove helpful:

- Matthew 11:28-30
- Matthew 28:18-20
- Mark 16:15-16
- Acts 2:36-47
- any case of conversion in Acts
- any of the parables of Christ
- Galatians 3:24-27
- Romans 6:1-23
- 1 Peter 3:20-21
- 2 Corinthians 7

The best idea is to start making notes during your regular Bible reading of passages and ideas for invitations. Simply write them down in a little notebook and keep them for when you are called upon. We make the invitation seem a lot more difficult than it is or should be. With a little effort, you can present an effective invitation and begin learning to teach in this friendly venue.

Teaching A Bible Class

Why do more men not desire to teach Bible class? Some are afraid of being embarrassed by questions they cannot answer, but that is either pride or ignorance talking. Others complain they have not time, but really just need to learn to make time. Some don't care enough to teach Bible class, but if that describes us then we are too weak to do any good anyway.

No one expects a new convert to get up and start teaching class the day after he is baptized. He needs time to study and learn, but there is a point at which maturity should be gained and an ability to discuss convictions from the scriptures should appear. No one will ever know everything, or be able to anticipate every question that could arise, but we can gain enough knowledge and wisdom to teach effectively.

Study and prayer form the first step. You have to know something before you can teach anything. Read God's word every day and in a structured way that allows for connecting passages that are parallel. Purchase a copy of *Nave's Topical Bible* and use the references that are in the footnotes of your own Bible. Make notes for yourself. Know the fundamentals of the faith very well and then delve into deeper matters.

There are many good class books available for purchase, which make teaching as easy as studying the lesson and the scriptures it mentions. Truth Bookstore offers many good titles and there are class books available for free on the Internet as well. This is the easiest way to get comfortable with teaching -- by letting someone else write the lesson and structure the study. You are as much a student as a teacher with a book like this. Yet by teaching from prepared materials, you will gain an appreciation for how the lessons are constructed. You will also learn what is your own teaching style and gain confidence in your growing ability.

The ability to write class material is in many ways a distinct gift. Some can teach, but cannot write, while others can write, but are not good teachers. If you want to try your hand at class writing, start by selecting a short New Testament book like one of the "minor epistles." After reading some commentaries, write a brief introduction to the book.

A word of caution is necessary here. Most commentaries and even the comments in your Bible footnotes were written by Calvinists. Be careful that you do not include some bad information with what is helpful there. Test everything you read in the crucible of scripture and abandon that which is error. Look especially for evidence of the five major points of Calvinism, all of which are false: Total hereditary depravity, unconditional salvation, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the impossibility of apostasy. Good commentaries by brethren are available and will provide a safer environment for study.

The introduction should set the course for the class book and the themes that you will emphasize. Decide how many lessons you think the book will require and divide it up accordingly. Covering one chapter per lesson is the easiest method, but sometimes, that divides texts that need to be considered together. Most commentaries provide an outline of the book and by considering that, you will be able to discern how you want your lessons to be structured.

Rather than looking at the book verse-by-verse or even chapter-by-chapter, consider it paragraph-by-paragraph. Verses and chapters were developed by men, but

the letters and books were originally written as we write today, with certain subjects forming obvious parts of the whole.

Looking at a paragraph, identify the major theme and focus on that. Write questions that ensure that the student must read the passage. Ask for pertinent facts and build to more difficult questions. Most importantly, write questions that require the student to apply the doctrines in the text. Christianity is not an academic religion; it is a practical faith. Compel the learner not only to learn facts, but how to use those facts. Again, using a concordance or topical Bible, cross-reference your questions to other, related passages.

Write in such a way that most will be able to understand you easily. You don't have to prove how smart you are or how great is your vocabulary if simpler words can do the job of communication better. If you are writing for children, write on their level. If you are writing for adults, write on theirs. Don't be condescending to your audience, though. Challenge them to think. There are no penalties if a student needs the class's help to answer a question completely. Don't make the lesson so difficult that it exasperates the student, but don't make it so easy that it bores him either.

Before teaching a class, study the lesson intently. Try to anticipate the kinds of questions you would ask if you were the student and be prepared to answer them as the teacher. If you ever do not know an answer to a spontaneous question, don't be afraid to solicit the other students for assistance or to admit that you do not know. People will respect that honesty more than watching you trying to fake it.

During the class, keep the study on track. Politely keep talkative students to the subject at hand and encourage everyone to participate. Don't embarrass anyone purposely, for some are uncomfortable speaking in class.

Watch the clock. Don't go so quickly that you finish early or so slowly that you leave behind too much material. This feel for timing will only come with experience, so don't worry too much if you have a little difficulty gauging it at first.

Confidence in teaching class is about getting over the natural nervousness that comes with any public speaking. The only way to use your talent is to submit your nerves to the challenging experience of teaching and to get over your fears by facing them.

Preaching Gospel Sermons

The Bible says that Saul of Tarsus began preaching Christ very soon after his conversion. He might have been a special case, however, for he was empowered by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to introduce the gospel to the Gentiles and he had been engaged in religious training throughout his life.

Still, his example is an encouragement to the zeal of every Christian, new or seasoned. As you begin to accrue knowledge of the word of God, you can begin to connect certain events, sermons and scriptures into coherent lessons simply through study. This process is the basis of compiling a gospel sermon and it probably is not as difficult as you imagine.

There are three parts to gospel preaching:

- Study
- Writing
- Delivery

Every Christian should be a Bible student, for there is so much to learn that the longest lifetime would not afford enough quiet moments to comprehend it all. The beginning is the best place to start. Go to Genesis and begin reading, taking notes of the major characters and events as you move along. Also, take note of scriptures or principles that move you in some way. Work your way through the Old Testament and its different kinds of literature: law, history, prophecy and poetry. Don't be just a Bible reader; be a Bible student. A workman must study to show himself approved and that he may be ready to defend his faith to the curious and disdainful alike.

Reference works are very helpful at this stage of study. Use a Bible with references and don't be afraid to stop and take the time to consult dictionaries, encyclopedias, concordances and lexicons if you need more information. Knowledge is unlocked through study, not merely reading.

A diligent Bible student will have lessons leaping around his head all the time, like fireflies illuminating the night. He can reach out and grab one and have the basics for a short sermon in no time.

Sermons can be textual in nature. You choose a passage of scripture and build a lesson by explaining it (Nehemiah 8;1-8) and then making several applications with support from other passages of scripture.

Sermons can also be topical in nature. You begin with a topic in mind and assemble examples and doctrines to form a discussion of that topic. This is probably the more difficult kind of sermon.

Writing a sermon requires an organized approach. An outline is much more useful than simply writing prose. Before you write anything, sketch out two to four major parts of your lesson. These few points will cover your subject matter as thoroughly as you want and give the audience something to know and apply personally.

Then, write an introduction. In the introduction, you attempt to gain the audience's attention and inform them of what you plan to teach, to prove and to leave them with.

Under each of your Roman numeral points, you will put several sub-points with capital letters. These are like the paragraphs that form each section of your speech.

Then, for each paragraph, you will have numbered statements that form the bulk of your lesson.

Every sermon should be informative, interesting and applicable. Don't ever preach a lesson that has no application to anyone in the audience. Some lessons may focus on women or men or children or unbelievers or saints, but it must be applicable or it is useless.

Write to be understood, not to show off your vocabulary. Write so that you can speak respectfully, not like a comedian or buffoon. Simplify your complex points even if it takes up time.

A strong conclusion is necessary to remind the audience of what you have taught. Always, close with an invitation for the wayward and lost to respond and to be saved.

Delivery is the part of preaching that scares most people away from it. Most of us had to get over our fears of public speaking in school in order to pass, but that is the same fear that cripples us now. The only way to deal with stage fright is to face it. Take a deep breath, exhale and begin. It may take many attempts to get comfortable with preaching before an assembly, but unless you start, you will never succeed.

While preaching God's word, be serious about it. While humor may be used, the sermon should not exist for the sake of it. Scripture should be the focus, even beyond your own wisdom and talent. Don't become an actor, parading around dramatically. Be yourself.

Most nervous people speak too quickly to be understood, so make a conscious effort to slow down. Even put warnings in your notes to slow down if necessary. Do not read your lesson, but make eye contact with your audience. If you do not maintain eye contact, you will not maintain interest.

In your early attempts, keep it short. Aim for a lesson of about 20-25 minutes. Until you gain some experience, it is hard to hold an audience's attention for any longer than that. Practice your preaching ahead of time and clock yourself. You will always go a little longer when you actually preach it, so don't worry if it seems a little short.

If you are worried about being able to find your scriptures, mark the opening with Post-It® notes. Even so, always leave your audience time to catch up with you. They are trying to follow the Bible as much as following your discussion, so give them a chance to look at God's word.

Use visual aids if available. Well-designed charts help the audience keep up and stay involved.

You can put together a sermon and preach it. Purchase a sermon outline book and get some ideas. Who knows how good you might be?

Other Class Material By This Author

A Passage Through the Old Testament

OT1 In The Beginning
OT2 From Egypt to Canaan
OT3 Taming Canaan
OT4 The Throne of David

OT5 Israel and Judah
OT6 The Major Prophets
OT7 The Minor Prophets
OT8 Wisdom Lit./Post-Exile

A Passage Through the New Testament

NT01 Harmonized Gospels
NT02 Acts of the Apostles
NT03 Early Epistles
NT04 Liberty Epistles
NT05 First Corinthians
NT06 Second Corinthians

NT07 Prison Epistles
NT08 Preacher Epistles
NT09 Hebrew Epistle
NT10 Minor Epistles
NT11 Revelation to John

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Brotherly Love
Characters of The Acts
Characters of The Old Testament
Golden Rules
Golden Rules II: More Golden Rules
Great Themes of Isaiah
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Proverbs
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Special Studies
The 10 Commandments Today
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The Life and Times of Jesus
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