

Teaching Like Jesus

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"No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46). That's what the temple guards said to the chief priests, when they had sent them to apprehend Jesus and they came back empty-handed. When Jesus finished his great Sermon on the Mount in Galilee, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, "because he taught them as one having authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:29). Jesus was the master teacher, hands down. What was it that gave him such power over his hearers? Well, first of all he was Jesus, God in the flesh. Of course he had power over people. His words were always the very words of God. But we can go further in discovering the power of his teaching than just pointing to his deity. In both content and style his words packed a punch for everyone who heard them every time he opened his mouth. Since we are "little Christs", as Luther put it, we want to teach like Jesus. We want to teach like him because we want to save people through him. What was it about Jesus' content and style that we can emulate in order to be the best stewards of our vocal cords?

Jesus Kept His Teaching Focused on Saving People

First of all, Jesus' words were so powerful because they were aimed at the soul for its salvation. Even though many times people tried to deter him from speaking to their need for him and his salvation, he would always get back to that very point. So many people wanted Jesus to settle their personal disputes (Luke 12:13-21), their theological debates (John 4:1-26), or to satisfy their selfish desires (Mark 10:35-45). But he had one thing on his mind. He was on a mission to save their souls. So, when he taught publicly or privately, he kept himself from getting trapped into discussions about issues peripheral to this one question, "How is the soul saved for all eternity?"

Not one person was exempt from his attempt to call them to faith. Consider the following examples:

1. Jesus was at a well getting a drink of water in the heat of the day and a woman who "happened" to be there ended up hearing law and gospel even after she tried valiantly to keep the conversation off of herself and on theological disputes (John 4:1-26).
2. Pilate was trying to resolve the dilemma of what to do with Jesus. But instead of defending himself, Jesus opened the door to discuss saving truth with his statement, "I have come to bear witness to the truth." Pilate slammed it closed with his retort, "What is truth?"
3. When Jesus cleansed the temple on Monday of Holy Week he did not do it just to fulfill the prophecy that he would have zeal for God's house but also to restore the court of the Gentiles to its rightful purpose of providing the spiritual education of the Gentiles along with the Jews. He wanted the Gentiles to have the opportunity to be saved and the temple sales counters had taken that opportunity away (Isaiah 56:6,7 and Mark 11:12-18).
4. When the disciples rebuked people who were bringing little children to be touched by Jesus, he stopped them and said to let the children come. But instead of stopping there, he quickly used the children as an illustration for the disciples to show them that they could not enter heaven unless they trusted like a little child (Mark 10:13-16).
5. When Jesus healed the man lowered down through the roof he started by saying, "Your sins are forgiven," instead of, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," because he wanted everyone to know that he came to save us through forgiveness more than to heal us through miracles (Mark 2:1-12).
6. When a man interrupted Jesus to get him to settle his dispute with his brother over an inheritance, Jesus deflected his request for a judgment and then went on to warn against this kind of greed that would rob his soul of eternity (Luke 12).
7. While Pharisees were more worried about ceremonial uncleanness from mixing with the tax collectors and

sinners, Jesus pointed out that he was spending time with them to save their souls through his righteousness (Matthew 9:9-13).

You can turn to any page in the gospels and you will find Jesus speaking the words that lead people to salvation. This is a compass for our teaching. We want to teach everything there is to know about the Bible and what it says about God's will for our lives. We want to teach about spiritual gifts, the Trinity, the prophecies in Revelation, and the ways we keep the Ten Commandments. Marriages are in shambles today. A ton of folks in our pews had poor role models of conflict resolution. Not many have a clue about a life of radical Christ-like stewardship of one's time of grace. So many Generation X'ers are seeking insights to repair their fractured relationships. But as loudly as these issues beg for our attention, we had better not ever be found teaching the word of God without leading souls back to their Savior in some way. The power is in the cross and so we must put every issue squarely at the foot of that sacred tree. There our people will be saved and there they will receive from the gospel the power to be sanctified. The power will come from the dynamo of their own justification.

In order to save our audience we simply must not shrink back from making our people wrestle with the uncompromising law of God. The Old Adam with his nine lives is sitting in the pew and standing in the pulpit every Sunday. The *opinio legis* says every Sunday, "Look I am here aren't I? I am not all that bad." Even we preachers easily fancy ourselves as not being like other sinners. Whether we want to admit it or not, ever since we have awakened this morning, we have battled thoughts of comparing ourselves to others and evaluating people and ourselves based on performance or perceived performance. We cannot get away from it. That's why we need an honest soul-searching law to crush the pride in us and make us seek our Savior.¹ My father was never a pastor. But he loved the law and the gospel. He knew that it was what kept him saved. Once, when he and mom came to visit our service on a Sunday, he was so happy to hear how I preached law from Isaiah 6. But he wanted to make it a teaching tool for the rest of my sermons. I can still hear the sobriety in his quivering voice as he said, "We all come to church with different values for ourselves. Some come thinking they are really something because of how well things are going at work. Others feel good about their church life. But your job, Donald, is to make us all a zero. Then, after you have put us all on that same low level you can restore us to Christ and make us 100% in him." Uncompromising law, that's what it means to preach like Jesus. Remember how he told his brothers, "The world hates me because I testify that they are evil"? (John 7). Or consider him saying in the Sermon on the Mount, "If you give good gifts to your children even though you are evil..." (Matthew 7:11).

When we preach the law, we need to hit close to home just as he did. God save us from the generic piffle, "We are all sinners." Or "We sin in thought, word and deed." Or "All of us are condemned." Instead, we want to ask pointed questions, "Have you had any jealousy today? When someone else gets a good grade, is it hard to rejoice with him or her?" Or "This morning when you were at home, did you say anything to your mother or sister that Jesus would wince to hear? Should God let a person like you into heaven? Did you lie to anyone this week? Are you harboring any hatred toward someone at work? If an angel were to run to Jesus to tell what you said at school today, would you chase after him to beg him to let you take back what you had said"? Bring the people to the edge with the law and then comfort them with the gospel. Pray about it dear preachers. God will give you more examples of specific law. And don't forget to look for the law in the text. It is a misuse of God's word to continually recite your favorite list of sins when the text has specific sins right in its borders.

Also, when preaching the law Jesus did not always shout. He did speak out boldly in Matthew 23, but most often the words themselves pierced into the division of soul and spirit without any help from the diaphragm. Most often when we raise our voices to preach law, we actually put a blunt end on the arrow.

¹ Jesus wasn't afraid to leave his listeners with only the law. If they needed to let the law finish its work, he left them with law. Look at Luke 10:25-37 or Luke 18:18-30. Have you ever taught the Parable of the Good Samaritan to teach us how to love others? That's not why Jesus told it. He told it to show one man that he didn't love others and therefore needed a Savior from his condemnation. He left that man with the law. "Do this and you will live."

Keep the words as sharp as a scalpel, not sarcastic, but penetrating and then carefully cut to the chase like the hands of a surgeon separating a tumor from life-giving brain tissue. Pierce with words, but don't beat over the head with volume. Then the folks will more easily see that you are saving them as you cut away the cancer rather than wondering why you are bruising them out of frustration. And while I am at it, get rid of that pulpit tone. Nothing will kill law and gospel more quickly than a sing-song, soft and loud, fast and slow rhythm.

It might be safe to say that we probably don't need as much help with preaching the law to our people as we do the gospel. After all, we are naturally familiar with the law. The gospel on other hand is that foreign word that even we must have preached back into our souls each dawn. Jesus' preaching of the gospel was pure, simple, and personal. When the law had done its work, he cleansed, restored, and purified with free forgiveness.

Jesus was always talking about believing in him personally (i.e., to trust in his person and work for their salvation). Consider how many times Jesus pointed to himself. In fact, if he were anyone but God, our Savior, he would drive us crazy with his seemingly egocentric claims. But since he was the One who had come to save us in living color, his claims were more than appropriate, and they serve as a guide to how we want to teach. Look at John 5:39,40. These experts in the law studied Scripture all the time because they thought they would learn how to be saved by keeping the word faithfully. Jesus said to them, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that *testify about me*, yet you refuse to come to *me* to have life." Here are some others, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). "Whoever believes in *him* will not perish" (John 3:16). "No one can come to the Father except through *me*" (John 14:6). You know that there are tons of examples.

For your preaching take careful note of this: we are not saved merely by careful articulation of an abstract doctrine of justification. We were saved by a person. He is called Jesus Christ, and what he actually did was live and die for us. That is personal and powerful. So, when we teach and preach, we want to talk about Jesus and his work not just about doctrine without practical application. When we pastors teach the catechism in 5th-8th grade and our new member classes we must be especially careful that we do not get so caught up in "right thinking" that Jesus becomes this cadaver that has all the right parts but is no longer alive and vibrant for the soul. Jesus told us to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name (Luke 24:47). We do that best when we tell them everything about him, about his life and what he did to save us and then call people to trade in their ugly lives for his forgiveness. When we tell them about Jesus we also want to tell the story as if we were there. That takes extra study and preparation. But our people's souls are worth it. People need to see that we personally believe in this Jesus that we are talking about. That means personal and passionate communication.

Now that I have written all this ink about always preaching to save souls you might argue that Jesus did not always talk directly about himself and his saving work. For instance, the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13 is about the word of God and the different kinds of reception it receives in human hearts. Or consider when he taught us to forgive each other 70 x 7 times (Matthew 18). That's not about salvation. That's about obedience.

Yes indeed, to teach like Jesus is to teach so that God's people grow in their sanctification too. Everything Jesus taught had to do with either our justification in him or our sanctification through and because of him. To say it more plainly: Jesus taught in order to save people or to make saved people more like him through his gospel. The two are never separate and they weren't separate in his teaching either.

Jesus taught to change lives. That's sanctification. The Parable of the Sower changes our lives when we read it. When you read about the three bad soils don't you ask yourself what you can do to avoid being those worthless soils? It leads us to look at our hearts and repent so that our hearts will be good soil, and bear more fruit.

The command to forgive our brother 70 x 7 times changes us too. In our flesh we want to put limits on our love for others. Jesus' love is limitless. And he demands that we love with his love, not with our own feeble love. We listen to the limitlessness of his love and forgiveness and we cry out, "Lord, help me do that!" He

always answers that kind of prayer affirmatively.

The feeding of the five thousand teaches that Jesus will provide what we need. It teaches us to relax and trust him as Savior and as our daily provider. That's sanctification and justification all in one. The Parable of the Persistent Widow teaches us to trust God enough to pray to him for help instead of working out everything by ourselves in unbelief.

So, everything Jesus did or taught either leads to our salvation or to our sanctification, or both. It either saves us or changes us for the better, for greater service to his glory. What's the point? The point is that we want to have the same focus in our teaching. We want to teach in order to save people and change their lives with God's word. We don't teach to make sure we are right and everyone else is wrong. We don't teach to change outward behavior without an inward change of attitude. We teach the word to make people quit trusting in themselves and to keep them trusting in their Lord Jesus for everything. So, as far as the content of our preaching and teaching goes, to teach like Jesus is to persistently and doggedly preach for the salvation and restoration of their souls and lives.

Jesus Used Simple and Powerful Techniques to Get the Point Across

While it was the content of his teaching that made it have power to save and to change lives, we cannot overlook his style. It was so perfect, so powerful, so penetrating! Jesus took the most profound truths and made them something a child could understand. In my years of ministry I have read many commentaries and articles that use words I have to look up in order to understand what the author is trying to say about Jesus. But I never have to look up any of Jesus' words. With rare exceptions he spoke in plain, simple terms. His original listeners could listen and learn and believe. We will want to follow his lead by teaching God's truth in plain, simple terms and not grand theological phrases. Simple, clear teaching is what God used for adults and children alike. It kept static out of their reception of the truth. We want that same clear reception. One disclaimer: Jesus did say things at times that he knew would stump his listeners. He had his reasons. Sometimes it was to veil the truth from them. Sometimes it was to pique their interest. Sometimes it was to reveal to them the huge gaps in their thinking about him and true spiritual matters. But even when he was hard to understand it wasn't because the words he used were polysyllabic. His words were plain and simple but his concepts often took people to a whole new paradigm. Consider the words on the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." These words challenge the most Lutheran mind don't they?

Jesus Used Picture Language More Than Simple Facts

With his plain and simple words Jesus used picture language to efficiently get his message into human hearts. His use of picture language made the truth come alive in living color. Metaphors, parables, similes, and comparisons are all over the place in the gospels.

I paged through all four gospels and examined the pages where we see the words of Christ. Guess how many pages I found where he did *not* use some kind of concrete picture, metaphor, or simile to teach his truth? One. Only one page of all the gospels, and there aren't many of his words on that page! Our Lord was the master of picture language. By using pictures he made sure his teachings would live in the hearts and minds of his listeners forever. In fact, I would guess that I could reference any one of his parables right now and if you had ever heard it (even only once) you could tell me the basic story line of the parable and its meaning. That's amazing don't you think? This guy lived 2000 years ago and his stories are still memorable, meaningful, and life-changing today.

We must return to our reference materials over and over to remember and rehearse what we mean by our theological phrases. When we use them we often find ourselves explaining again and again what they mean to our people. They cannot remember them that easily. Our theological arguments are important tools especially when building up fortresses out of the truth to protect its integrity from false teachers. But let's not kid ourselves. Our people need to hear the simple, plain word of God 99 times out of

100, instead of a term we must explain.

Sometimes Jesus' parables and pictures stumped even his followers. They didn't always understand Jesus. Think of when he warned against the yeast of the Pharisees and his disciples thought he said this because they hadn't brought any bread. Or when he talked about living water at the well in Sychar and the Samaritan woman thought for a while that he was talking about H₂O. Or when his disciples asked, "What is the meaning of the Parable of the Weeds?" (Matthew 13) But even in the moments where Jesus stumped his listeners, he still was able to keep their interest and get them to remember the picture he was painting for them. He even made his enemies remember his words when they stoutly rejected him and his message.

Do you see the value of this for teachers of the Word? There is a very important insight and encouragement for you who are sent to teach Jesus' little lambs. When you are teaching, find ways to paint simple and clear pictures of the truth you want to convey. Make God's word as memorable as possible when you teach it. Sometimes you may feel your work is nonessential because it deals with the basics, the plain and simple. Oh, nothing is farther from the truth! The basic truths are exactly what your Lord taught people. When you are teaching the rudimentary teachings of our beloved faith in simple clear words and pictures, you are saving and preserving souls in the most powerful way, just the way Jesus did.

Another benefit for the kingdom when you use vivid pictures is that they echo through your listeners to those who will listen to them. People who remember your simple illustrations and pictures will someday tell them to their children in tender bedtime conversations and supper table devotions. They will be passed on from friend to friend and from generation to generation. I am still telling my children the stories my pastor and Sunday school teachers used 35 years ago. One in particular is about a little boy who made and lost his boat and then bought it back again at a store. Have you heard that one? I think my pastor got it from his pastor when he was a boy. It is still bouncing around teaching the concept of redemption after all these years.

Teaching With Parables and Stories

What is it about a story that is so much more powerful than simply telling the truth as a naked fact? First of all, the story relaxes the listener. Instead of working hard to grasp a concept the person simply follows the events and characters in the story. It is an easy and enjoyable way to learn.

Secondly, a story allows for the speaker to get behind the defenses of his listeners in order to drive a point home. If I came to you and said, "Gay people have feelings too and I want to tell you how to be sensitive to them," you would raise your defenses. You would immediately wonder if I was a flaming liberal trying to subvert God's Word and make you change your morals. But if I tell you about a guy who tried hard to change the way he was but just couldn't and I share with you his struggle and his feelings about his harsh father and prejudiced grandfather, before too long you are empathizing with him well enough, even though you don't approve of his self-chosen sexual orientation.²

How is this insight about the power of story useful for the classroom? Well, for that student or member who dares you to teach him anything, telling stories can get behind his defenses and teach him without him being able to stop you. Some of you have people who have put a chip on their shoulder toward you. Stories help get behind their defenses. And the story helps them to forget you and listen to the things of God. The story pushes you aside although you are the one telling it.

Thirdly, stories allow the listener to feel what the speaker is talking about. They reach the heart and emotions at the same time that they reach the mind. The whole inner person is involved in learning and not just the intellect. Think of Jesus' three parables about lost and found things in Luke 15. Each one gets you

² Hollywood has been using the power of story for decades, and by means of stories they have changed the moral fiber of our nation. In fact, some folks are even saying that the television show, "Commander in Chief," which features a woman president, is specifically intended to get Hillary Clinton elected in the next presidential race. Whether the accusation is true or not, it shows that people realize just how powerful telling stories really is. In Apache culture they have 31 stories that tell their legendary world view and religious roots. Telling stories has by itself preserved a segment of their culture true or imagined. The stories live on and on in the minds of Apaches and make them feel, well, like Apaches.

in touch with anxieties you have had about the loss of important things or people in your life. And you can easily relate to the happiness of the ones who found what they had lost. Do you remember to whom Jesus told these three parables? He told them to the Pharisees who were highly critical of his outreach ministry to the dregs of society. Jesus got behind their defenses and helped them feel the urgency of finding and restoring lost treasures. The people Jesus was reaching were lost treasures to God, and Jesus wanted the Pharisees to see and feel this. That's why he told them these three parables. When they heard the three parables, they couldn't stop themselves from feeling and seeing what he wanted them to.

Fourthly, creatively telling a story engenders involuntary attention. People easily get bored and don't want to listen to us, especially in this television and video game age. But when they hear creativity they think, "Hey, this took time to think through. I am going to see what this is all about." Telling well-prepared stories unlocks some good vibes that make us want to listen.

Finally, stories allow you to take your listeners by the hand and lead them from where they are to the very place you want them to be. You are able to land them at the very spot you want them to land. Jesus did this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. By the end of that story you want to be a good neighbor to people. You feel guilty for all the times you haven't been a good neighbor too. You want forgiveness for that sin. The story accomplishes all that without anyone telling you it did.

At this point you might think, "I like the idea but I don't have any good stories. My life is boring. What can I share?" Well, you can borrow from anyone. When you hear a good story and can think of a verse it illustrates, jot it down in the margin of your Bible next to that verse. And jot down who first told the story too. (I even date it as to when I heard it.) Then when you teach that passage and tell that story, just tell your audience that you heard this story and reference your source.³ But more importantly, I want you to challenge yourself to unlock that creative side in you and to make up some stories of your own. Tell lies? No, don't tell lies. Was Jesus lying when he told parables? No. He made it clear that he was telling fiction. If the Lord used fiction to convey truth, why can't we? But do not attempt it without training and direction. "Sponge Bob Square Pants" is a story told by people without training or direction.⁴ Entertaining with stories is not what we are talking about. Jeff Foxworthy entertains with stories.⁵ That's not what we are talking about either. There are lots of helps to guide and direct good story telling for illustrating God's word. In the appendix of this paper you will find some.

Jesus Used Metaphors and Similes

Jesus not only told stories to draw pictures of truth. He also drew small pictures in brief one-liners. He used metaphors and similes. For example, instead of simply telling the Pharisees that Herod was a deceptive man, he said, "You go tell that fox that on the third day I will reach my goal" (Luke 13:32).

Instead of simply telling his disciples that he loved to do his Father's work, he said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

Instead of just telling his disciples that they were the ones sent by God to influence the world, he said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

Instead of saying, "There is no way to please the Pharisees and Sadducees," Jesus said, "They are like children sitting in the market place complaining no matter what you do" (Paraphrase of Matthew 11:16).

Instead of just saying, "Put your trust in my teaching," he said, "Everyone who hears these words of

³ I just heard a great story to illustrate the thought in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "We have this treasure in jars of clay," from Rev. Mark Schroeder of LPS. He told the story about a picture he saw of a hurricane Katrina victim who was intently watching some rather inconspicuous burlap sacks in a ragged net dangling from a helicopter coming to her yard where her home lay destroyed. He asked us, "Do you think she cared more about the sacks or about the food that was inside that would keep her family alive?" He didn't have to answer it for us. That's the sign of a good story. I wrote a summary of his illustration in the margin of my Bible next to 2 Corinthians 4:7. Now this one is yours. Borrow it and use it to comfort people and to teach them to let Jesus' light shine out from them without regard for themselves.

⁴ Sponge Bob Square Pants is a popular kids' cartoon.

⁵ Jeff Foxworthy is a current popular comedian.

mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

Do you feel how these metaphors and similes make the truth more palatable and more memorable? It makes you think of his words in terms of your five senses. You feel, taste, touch or hear something when you think of what he is saying.

To teach like Jesus, start trying to be more illustrative when you tell the main point of your lesson or sermon. Here is a metaphor for the thought, "Jesus forgives all of your sins." Say, "Jesus highlights every one of your sins on his computer screen and with the click of the delete button they are all erased forever, never to be recovered." All of us have marveled at how a large volume of information can be deleted in a split second from our computer. So, the illustration taps into our emotions and our sense of sight. The metaphorical presentation of the truth is more memorable than the plain sentence. The very best place for the metaphor is at the end of your lesson or any place where you are driving the main point home. A word of caution: be careful not to use so many metaphors for so many parts of your lesson that you are actually just displaying a penchant for metaphors and not well-planned teaching. It just takes practice to use metaphors and similes well. But diligence pays off. You will get better with time.

Jesus Used Arguments from the Lesser to the Greater

Sometimes in his teaching Jesus would refer to something in the lives of his listeners that he knew they could understand (the lesser) and relate that something to our relationship with God (the greater). Look at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. There Jesus is encouraging us to pray confidently because we can trust that God will give us what we ask for. After all, we are his children. He says, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11).

Did you notice that we are "the lesser" as sinful parents who love our children and that God is "the greater" as the perfect loving Father in heaven? The power in the illustration is in our deeply felt desire to be a blessing to our children. We know we have that desire even though we are sinful. By tapping into our deeply felt emotions Jesus supercharges his point and makes it download twice as fast into our long-term memory (notice my use of metaphor). We reason along with Jesus, "If God is perfect and we are his children, how much more then does he have that power to bless us? We are more confident to pray to him since we know he will answer." Jesus' argument from the lesser to the greater motivates us to trust more in God and pray more to him.⁶ It changes us for the better.

Using this teaching technique will be more challenging for us. We aren't used to finding arguments from the lesser to the greater. We will pray for God's help. Remember that he promises to answer our prayers. One example will suffice here. Little kids know how to forgive, usually better than adults. But they often wonder if God really forgives them. You could teach your children with an argument from their lesser to God's greater. It might go like this, "Have you learned to forgive anyone of something he did to you? Did you love him so much that it made you find a way to forgive him? Well, God is perfect in his love for us. He loves us more than we will ever love anyone else. So, he has found a way in Jesus to forgive us because he loves us so much." They will understand your point.

Jesus Used Questions To Control and Guide the Conversation to a Proper Conclusion

Another technique Jesus used was questions. He would ask a question that piqued the listeners' interest. Then he would drive the point home with his answer. Consider when he was at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Simon was critical of Jesus for letting a prostitute touch him as she washed his feet with her hair. Jesus asked a question, "Two men owed another man some money. One owed 500 denarii and the other 50. He forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" (Paraphrase of Luke 7:42-44). Simon had to answer while Jesus

⁶ In Matthew 6:26-30 there are two more examples of this technique.

controlled the conversation and taught him about grace and the response it provokes.

Whoever asks the questions controls the conversation.⁷ Jesus' enemies knew this and tried desperately to control him with questions. But he would refuse to answer bad questions. Instead he would use his own counter questions. He refused to answer the way the question was asked because if you ask the wrong question, you will get the wrong answer every time. Jesus knew this and so he turned the conversation back to the right question. Jesus' enemies would ask, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" "By what authority do you do these things (cleanse the temple)?" "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" All of these were wrong questions, and Jesus didn't bother to answer any of them directly. Instead, he gained control of the conversation by asking his own questions. For instance, when they asked him by what authority he cleansed the temple he told them, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (Matthew 21:24,25). With his refusal to answer their question and his counter question, Jesus gained control of the conversation. He asked them a question that would reveal the political motives. They couldn't get him to answer without answering his question first and so they just let him have control. Once he had the control he told a parable of two sons, one who obeyed and one who didn't. With a question and a parable he called them to faith.

There is an insight here for our teaching. Often our students are asking questions but they are not asking the right questions. Every now and then a bold teenager will ask, "How far can we go on a date?" If you ever try to answer the question in the way it is asked, you will fall over yourself especially if your answer is challenged. It is better to answer with a question. In response ask, "First of all let me ask you a question. If Jesus were your date how far would you go?" Or "Describe the kind of physical contact that you believe would a) glorify God, b) show respect to your date, c) keep yourselves from being tempted by sexual thoughts, and d) show respect for your date's future spouse." See how the right question can be used to answer the wrong question.⁸

Jesus Lived With His Students

Jesus' teaching was powerful for his disciples for more reasons than just the words he used. A lot had to do with the way he lived. Jesus lived with his disciples in a selfless relationship. He loved them perfectly. They learned to trust him as their friend. Therefore their hearts were open to him. The truth is that one of the reasons we listen to Jesus so easily is that we know him as the One who graciously came to live with us and die for us right here in our world. Knowing he did and does spend time with us makes us want to listen to him. He gave his time so he has our hearts. It is an undeniable fact of human nature that if you selflessly spend time with people, they will respect you and appreciate what you have to say. It underscores a maxim for ministry, "*Whoever gives the time gets the heart.*"

What does that mean for our teaching? It means that we must live with our people. If our contact

⁷ Reporters show us every day that the person asking the questions in a conversation gets to control the conversation and set up the limits and parameters for an answer. The question itself "boxes in" the responder. For example, Larry King recently asked a preacher named Joel Osteen on national television, "Do you really think that all those millions of Moslems who work hard, pray and love their families the way you do but do not believe in your God are going to hell just because they do not espouse your religion?" He boxed Joel in. If he answered, "Yes," he was not just stating a fact but was saying that he really believed something that Larry King insinuated was bigoted and crazy. He was also condemning people based on what he himself thought according to Larry. What if he said "No"? He would deny the faith. Joel lapsed in his faith and denied his Savior. He said that his dad had worked with many Moslems and found them to be honest and nice people. They were good folks and he felt he couldn't condemn them to hell. What Joel failed to see was the third choice when someone else is asking you the questions. The third choice is to ask or answer the question that should have been asked. Larry King should have asked, "What were Jesus' claims and what did he do to establish those claims as fact?" Joel could have asked, (without answering Larry's question) "As a Jew do you believe that people are sinners?" Then he could have asked, "Do you know why Jesus died on the cross?" He would therefore make Larry confess the gospel even if he didn't believe it himself. Then Joel could have boldly proclaimed, "God the Father sent Jesus so no one would have to go to hell. Those who trust in Jesus won't."

⁸ Rev. Mark Paustian does this very effectively in his two books, *Prepared to Answer* and *More Prepared to Answer*. One should learn how to teach like Jesus by rereading his books every year. For an example see pages 44-50 of *Prepared to Answer*. (NPH 2005)

with the families in our congregations is only in the sanctuary, fellowship hall, or classroom, then we have diminished our ability to teach them. "Whoever gives the time gets the heart." So here are some suggestions for living with your people. Go to some of the games the children of your congregation play at the local soccer fields on Saturday. Comment on their performance. Praise only, please. Be sad with them when they lose. Jump up and down and hug them when they win. Other thoughts: bring cookies to school for other staff members. Play golf and go fishing even if it is not your thing. Visit your members at their work for lunch. Phone them on their birthdays. Stop by their homes for no reason at all. Offer to give them a ride home once in a great while. Send a get-well card when they are absent from school for being sick. Find out how their vacation went. Email them a hello every now and then. Listen to their silly little stories about whatever. Play with the kids on the playground. Get dirty with them. Attend their city choir concert. Talk about their parents in glowing terms. What ideas can you come up with? Remember, whoever gives the time gets the heart.⁹

Finally, dear pastors and teachers, I leave you with a promise from Jesus. Remember the parable of the growing seed that Jesus taught us in Mark 4:26-29. Seeds planted today will sprout and grow in time.

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

You know the meaning of that parable and how it applies to your ministry. You are sowing seeds every time you step into your study, your pulpit, your Bible class, and your classroom. We don't have to see the results to know that Jesus' words are true. So, teach like he did. Do it faithfully and with all the creative force you can muster so that some day a rich harvest will be reaped in the lives of those that the Lord entrusts to you to nurture.

This thank-you letter written by a man to his childhood Lutheran elementary school teacher, illustrates the power of teaching like Jesus.

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I'm just writing to thank you for being noticeable throughout the years I was your student. I noticed that every morning when I arrived at school your car was safely parked in the lot. It told me that my mind was valuable enough to you to be taught well. I noticed on Sunday morning that when you saw me, you walked in my direction to shake my hand and say, "Good morning." It told me I mattered to you as a person not just a student. I noticed when you arrived late to my basketball game and left early but still cheered when I scored that free throw. It told me that you cared about what was important to me. I noticed how the tears welled up in your eyes when you carefully told our class about your grandmother and the pie she made every year for your birthday. It told me you knew what love feels like. I noticed when you giggled right before you got onto Billy Thompson for sticking crayons in his ears. It told me that a sense of humor makes life a little easier to bear. I noticed when you were listening to the pastor in church that you nodded when he talked about Jesus. It told me your faith was in your heart and not just your head. I noticed when you cried at your father's funeral but smiled when you sang, "I know that my Redeemer lives." It told me you understood pain and how it could be mixed with true spiritual joy. I also noticed how you had a lump in your throat when you said good-bye to our class on the last day of school of the last year you had us. It taught me that Christ's love lasts for a lifetime.

Maybe you didn't notice that I was noticing you so much. Frankly, I didn't notice that either, not until now. Now that I am older I can see that the way you taught me, the way you lived in front

⁹ Why do you think that television has had such an impact on our lives? It is because we have given it so much time in our lives. How do you think gangs succeed in getting kids to do terrible things for their acceptance? It is because they give the time. A district criminal judge in Austin, Texas, once said at a banquet, "In 20 years of sitting on the bench I have only seen 5 men that I believed were hardened, unreachable criminals. The rest just didn't have a dad." See. Whoever gives the time gets the heart. Our teaching will have more power in the hearts of the people we live with.

of me and the way you loved me honestly and with forgiveness has been a major reason I am safely in Christian adulthood. I just want to say thanks for being so noticeable.

In Jesus,

Mark

Dear pastors and teachers, feed Jesus' little lambs and live noticeable lives of love in front of them.

To God Alone Be the Glory

Appendix

Some guidelines for writing parables or using true stories to illustrate truth:

1. Know exactly what point you are trying to teach from a passage or passages. Lead to that one (not two) main points. Illustrate the most important point or the hardest point to understand. Do not illustrate a thought just because you like the illustration. Don't illustrate several different points of the text with several different stories.
2. Consider your audience. Use age and gender appropriate stories. Some stories are ageless and genderless. Some are not.
3. Keep the facts simple. Too much detail can confuse the mind of a listener. Try simple parables first and embellish more when you get better at "orchestrating" the facts.
4. Make the parable emotional in order reach the heart and the mind, not just the mind of the student. I once heard a saying about preaching that I use to help me be real. "A message prepared in the mind reaches a mind. A message prepared in the heart reaches a heart. And a message prepared in life reaches a life."
5. In your over-all teaching ministry, make sure that you often illustrate the gospel, not just the law. We easily come up with law parables and moralize. It is sometimes harder but much more productive to illustrate the gospel.
6. Try using one main character in your parable and help the student relate to that character so that your student will learn as the character learns the truth you are teaching.
7. Make sure all the details of the parable help the listener to better understand the final point of the story.