

Keys to Effective Teaching

If someone challenged you to tell all there is to know about Bible teaching in just five words of one syllable each, what would those five words be?

These five probably come about as close as any:

Need
Hear
Know
Search
Do

Every lesson plan in DiscipleGuide's adult Sunday School teacher's guide, *Compass Teacher*, builds on these five words. They are so crucial to effective teaching that every Bible teacher should memorize and consciously implement them in every lesson presentation (though some may want to pick out new wording for the same concepts).

Here are the reasons for making these five keys to effective teaching a part of your teaching routine and some ways to put them into practice.

Need

This word is the key to determining beforehand what a lesson is really about. What *need* in the lives of your students is addressed in the Bible text you will teach?

Identifying your students' life need is the *scriptural* approach to preparing to teach. Psalm 119:105 describes God's Word as a lamp to His people's feet and a light to their path. In more theological language God declares His inspired Scripture to be "*profitable*" in the lives of His people by teaching them "*doctrine*," by countering their sins and mistakes with "*reproof*," by redirecting them with "*correction*," and by keeping their lives straight with "*instruction in righteousness*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

In his characteristic way of making theology painfully clear, James says that God did not give us the Bible just to make us "*hearers*," but "*doers of the word*" (1:22-25).

What the Bible says about itself tells us that everything God put into His Word says something important about human behavior, attitudes, and responses to truth about God. The scriptural approach to finding the primary message in a Bible text, then, is to determine the life need God is meeting in the passage.

That truth, by the way, is the reason DiscipleGuide's plan of studies for adult Sunday School is called the Compass Curriculum, why the key adult Sunday School publication is entitled *Compass*, and why all supporting titles include the word *Compass*. The approach to every lesson is to focus on a passage of Scripture searching for guidance for

life. The overarching question in these Bible studies is, How can we go the way the Bible is pointing?

Your initial step in preparing to teach a Bible lesson, then, should be to examine the Bible text to determine where the “life needle” is pointing. For help in focusing your mind and heart on the life need, meditate on the lesson parameters displayed at the beginning of every teaching plan in *Compass Teacher*. There is a title, a Bible text, a central truth, a life-response statement, and a key verse. Let your eye fall in particular on the life response, for it is the tip of the “compass” needle. And for a succinct restatement of the life response from the Bible itself, look to the key verse.

The number-one word in Bible teaching is *need*. Then the other four keys are steps in classroom delivery: *hear*, *know*, *search*, and *do*. They fit together for a natural scheme of teaching that is scriptural and relevant.

Hear

You know the value of gaining your students’ attention during the opening moments of class. From observing other teachers, preachers, and public speakers, you have also probably developed a sense of how you can get your class to *hear* you. You can ask a question. You can tell an interesting story. You can “hit them” with a startling truth. You can cite a revealing statistic. You can share an experience from your life that will spark a memory from theirs. You can tell a joke. You can show a visual.

But there’s one sure-fire way to connect with your class from the beginning: focus on a life need. When you are talking about something that is relevant to me, I’ll listen, right?

So to plan your opening activity, go back to that brainstorming list of attention getters two paragraphs above. Choose the best one for causing your students to focus on the life need the Bible text will address. For best effect, do this in a casual, nonthreatening, hopeful, inviting way.

Once you have your students focused on their life need, it’s time to take them to the Bible to discover how it meets that need. But first there’s a little transitional step.

Know

This step is so simple that it need not consume more than a small fraction of your class time. Just point to the Bible text through the “frame of knowledge” that will enable the students to read it intelligently.

Here are the typical “knowledge frames” that, according to the nature of the lesson and its Bible text, may need some attention at this point.

1. If you are teaching multiple sessions in a unit, such as a quarter on a given theme, review the unit theme and the lessons already covered.

2. Whether you are teaching a larger unit or just one isolated session, put the Bible text into its essential context. For example, skim the highlights of preceding chapters or verses that control the interpretation of the passage. Or, if the Bible text narrates a point in time in a person's life or in Bible history, mention preceding events important to the flow of action.

How much material should you cover in the *Know* step? This will vary, but the rule is to limit yourself to the essentials. Aim for a quick framing of the Bible text and move on.

Search

The heart of the session's activities is the search of the Bible text for its message concerning the life need you focused on in the *Hear* step. In most instances *Search* will take up the largest time block. Devote the necessary time to....

Read the Bible text aloud. Don't assume that the class already knows what the passage says. Remember, they have not spent the time digging into the text at home that you have. Even if they are such eager learners that they have "read their lesson" before Sunday School, give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to speak to them directly from Scripture during class time.

Gear the reading to the nature of the text and the way it will be developed. You can choose between letting various ones read a verse each, calling on one person to read the entire passage, or reading the natural segments of the text separately. If the text contains dialogue, you can assign roles to various students and let each one read the words of the Bible person assigned him.

Explain or emphasize details in the Bible text. When the passage contains obscure wording, reference to unfamiliar customs, unfolding plot elements, significant historical details, key doctrinal concepts, etc., stop to clarify or highlight them before reading on.

Develop the *need* message in the Bible text. Never treat a text like a box of chocolates: a collection of diverse goodies, all begging to be sampled. Instead, treat it like a medicine cabinet containing various remedies, but only one of them appropriate for a particular ailment. Select from the Bible text the "medicine" for the life need you introduced at the beginning of class.

If you are what preachers call a "noted speaker" — one who speaks from an outline — make sure your points outline God's answer to the life need. For example, one person outlined a study on "The Lord Our Peace" from Judges 6 this way: "Gideon's Fear, Gideon's Valor, and Gideon's Faith." Those are three tasty chocolates, but notice how focused this improved outline is: "Peace Through Mercy, Peace Through Divine Intervention, and Peace Through Reassurance." The points outline God's solution to the human need for peace in a time of crisis.

Involve the students in the search of the text. Remember that their own discoveries in the Bible will take root in their hearts better than any platitudes you or anyone else throws at them. So ask questions for them to answer *from the Bible text*. Assign verses for them to paraphrase. Lead them in taking notes on the text. Divide them into groups to research and report on concepts from the text. Lead them to respond emotionally to the joys, sorrows, humor, fears, thanksgiving, and surprises in the text.

And then return to where you began.

Do

Guide the class in active life response that corresponds to the need you brought to their attention in the opening moments of class.

The best *Do* concentrates on specific action. It's not just, "Be good"; it's, "Take a pot of soup to poor Mrs. Stringfellow."

The best *Do* gives students an opportunity to choose their action as the Holy Spirit has led them individually during the session. After all, what will poor Mrs. Stringfellow do if everybody in the class brings her a pot of soup at the same time?

The best *Do* is decisive. It leads the student beyond, "I know I ought to," to "I will ... next Tuesday."

Do you follow the natural progression in this teaching plan? (1) Determine the *need* addressed in the Bible text. (2) Open class by focusing students' minds on the need in such a way that they will *hear* you. (3) Frame the need within the contexts they must *know* as they approach the Bible text. (4) Lead the students to actively *search* the Bible text for God's answer to the life need. (5) And guide them to *do* what God says.

Memorize and practice *need, hear, know, search, do*. With these five keys, you can teach God's Word effectively.

[Click here](#) to see a sample lesson from *Compass Teacher*.

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