

Getting Everyone Involved in Learning

The value and practice of active learning

Teaching is a science and an art with different understandings of what qualifies as teaching. Some equate presenting or preaching with teaching and miss the nuanced differences in the three actions. For the next few moments, let's unwrap our understanding of teaching and how that understanding impacts what is found in the The Gospel Project for Adult Leader Guides.

If we view teaching as presenting or preaching, we may decide to make it our practice to tell our group all we discovered, giving the group tons of researched information as the lone voice and, in the process, create an unhealthy and unholy codependency. The expectation for the group is to sit and listen as passive participants. We prepare to deliver a well-thought-out presentation. We execute the presentation flawlessly, saving only enough time at the end for a simple question. The question is easy enough since all they had to do was listen to give an answer. We may then collect a couple of prayer requests and share an announcement before dismissing with a prayer. The group seems happy to soak in our wisdom and a few tell us how impressed they were with our presentation. As a group, they are content to simply sit and listen, and we are content with the pats on the back. We then begin to put together our next presentation so the group can easily sit and soak some more before they affirm us for our presentation. They depend on us to present facts so they can feel good about their religious education while we depend on them to affirm us for the work we did in crafting the presentation. In short, we have created a codependency that fuels our egos while eliminating any critical thinking that might take place within the group time.

(on screen footer: We can create an unhealthy codependency.)

In his book *Teaching as Jesus Taught*, Roy Zuck explains that "people learn by doing. By means of activities, assignments, and projects, students have opportunity to reinforce what is learned in the classroom....Jesus believed in the importance of student participation: this fact is evidenced by the many ways in which He involved His disciples and others in the teaching-learning process." (p. 174) Zuck then gives a list of examples of ways Jesus involved the disciples in learning that include Peter taking a coin out of the mouth of a fish, the disciples distributing food to five thousand, and Jesus sending the disciples to a Samaritan village to find food (remember Jewish people and Samaritan people were at odds with each other at that time).

(on screen: Jesus taught by involving people.)

John Milton Gregory espoused seven laws of teaching, with the fifth being the law of the teaching process which he stated in these terms: “Excite and direct the self-activities of the pupil, and as a rule tell him nothing that he can learn (or discover) himself.” (p. 84)

This same idea of learning by doing has been worded in different terms by others who have sought to discover and state learning principles and practices including Susan Ambrose and her team of researchers who note in their book *How Learning Works* that “learning is not something done to students but rather something students themselves do.” (p. 3)

(on screen: Tell them nothing they can learn or discover for themselves.)

We want the group we lead to discover for themselves what we discovered for ourselves as we prepared to lead the Bible study group time. The possibilities are limitless here as to how the group might be led to discover the truths of a Bible story or teaching. We could lead the group to create a personality profile of characters involved in a Bible event, develop a timeline of the actions of an event, correlate events from the Old and New Testament, or produce a comparison chart of similarities between stories found in Scripture. The point is to involve the group in learning together. The learning experience matters when we assemble as a group and we as the teacher must lead, guide, facilitate, and shepherd our group through that process.

(on screen: B role of people doing in a Bible study group in a circle, doing an activity is possible)

The group plans found in Lifeway’s resources are designed to help you engage the group in active learning that invites them to participate. You may alter the ideas with what is included in the Leader Guide serving as a starting point or as a tool that sparks additional ideas. The goal is to engage the group, to enable them to participate and discover God’s truths for themselves. Some may balk at doing some activities, moaning as instructions are given. A few may even view anything other than lecture as beneath them or childish, forgetting that we truly learn better when we are active participants in the group experience. We serve as needed guides that assist them in the process, pointing them, prodding them, and challenging them when needed.

Jesus was no doubt a master teacher, understanding how to engage with people and to involve them through a variety of means in the learner process. He invites us to do the same with the groups we lead, knowing some will need to be pulled along and encouraged to get involved in their own learning. However, these same ones will be the ones who gain the most in the long run as they discover God’s truths, wrestle with what those truths mean to them, and then formulate values and actions based on what they discover.