



part 1 of 2—

What Makes a Good Teacher?

by Verda Rubottom

Have you ever wondered what makes a good teacher? We've heard much about incompetent teachers, but what about the good teachers, the ones who inspire and leave an indelible imprint on the lives of their students? What can we learn from them?

Paul told Timothy to "stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6, NKJV). This indicates that we have a responsibility to develop and exercise our teaching gifts. It's not enough to possess the gift—God expects us to be *skillful* teachers.

Again, in 2 Timothy 2:15 (Amplified Version), Paul admonishes Timothy to do his best. "Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth."

Let Your Students Know You Care

When I've heard my children discuss their favorite teachers, I've often asked them what they appreciated the most. They usually mention things like a good sense of humor, the teacher's expertise on the subject, the teacher makes learning fun, and

the teacher has control of the class without being overbearing. One thing that seemed to emerge consistently was that their teachers all enjoyed teaching—and really cared about their students. Regardless of the teacher's personality type, age, or teaching style, students respond to a competent teacher who cares.



In his book, *Molder of Dreams*, Teacher of the Year Guy Doud discusses one of his favorite teachers. As a sixth grade boy, Guy was struggling in school. Mr. Card was one of those special teachers who cared and made an impact on his students' lives. Mr. Card expressed confidence in Guy, and gave him opportunities to succeed.

Guy Doud recalls it this way: "I

worked hard for him, and he told me I was a good worker. I came to believe that maybe doing your best and working hard was even more important than being really smart and getting your artwork up on the bulletin board.

"The last week of class, Mr. Card handed out awards. It was a full-blown ceremony. He seemed to find something to give everyone.

"He even gave an award for the person who had to ride the farthest on the bus every day. He got down to the two last awards and said he thought these awards were the two most important of all, for they would go to the hardest working girl and the hardest working boy."

When Mr. Card gave the award, Guy describes the feelings he had. Mr. Card announced, "The award for the hardest working boy in Mr. Card's sixth grade class goes to Guy Doud."

"I heard him say it," Guy says, "but I didn't believe it. Hardest Working Boy in Mr. Card's Sixth Grade Class—that's what the certificate said. Just a plain piece of mimeographed paper; but it couldn't have meant more to me if it had been a gold statue."

God used this teacher at a critical point in Guy Doud's life. Mr. Card wasn't just teaching the

sixth grade class; he was building confidence and character in the lives of his students. He was molding young lives. Likewise, the relationships we have with our students in Sunday School will determine, in large part, their desire to learn and follow our example.

Know Your Subject Well

If you've been teaching for any length of time, you know teaching is not a simple task; it involves time and preparation. In a recent reprint of the classic, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, John Milton Gregory explains that the first law of teaching is

“to know thoroughly and familiarly the lesson you wish to teach—teach from a full mind and a clear understanding.”

Having a good understanding of the subject being taught may seem pretty basic, yet some teachers tend to rely on a curriculum or someone else's interpretation of Scripture instead of studying the Bible for themselves. In *Teaching to Change Lives*, Howard Hendricks explains the Law of the Teacher this way: “If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow. Neither personality nor methodology can substitute for this principle. You cannot communicate out of a vacuum. You cannot impart what you do

not possess. If you do not know it—truly know it—you can't give it.”

Hendricks tells the story of one of his favorite college professors, who had a profound influence on his life. He questioned the professor about what motivated him to study so many hours in preparation for his classes. The professor answered, “Son, I would rather have my students drink from a running stream than a stagnant pool.”

Knowing *about* the Bible is not enough. We need to dig deep into the Word ourselves before we can teach it to children.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What do you think makes a good teacher?
2. In what ways can you let your students know you care about them?
3. Why is it important to know your subject well?



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Successful Teaching Requires Preparation

The best teachers prepare well, knowing they and their students will reap lasting rewards. Preparation is indeed one of the marks of a good teacher.

At times, I think we are all tempted to use shortcuts in our preparation. I remember a lesson I learned as a junior high girl. I looked forward with anticipation to my first sewing class. Soon I would learn how to sew and design my own clothes.

But before long I realized the preparation steps were going to be very time consuming. First, the material had to be shrunk, then the pattern pieces had to be trimmed and carefully placed on the grain line of the material. But that was only the beginning. There was pinning, basting, sewing, and pressing.

I decided I could easily skip a few of these steps. Shrinking, basting, and pressing seemed unnecessary. But my teacher was not very impressed with my shortcuts, and needless to say, I ended up with a skirt I could not wear! My shortcuts in the essentials of preparation did not pay off.

Teaching is no different. Cutting out the essentials of

good lesson preparation, Bible study, and prayer will only result in disappointment and ineffective teaching. New technology can save us hours of precious time in the preparation of visuals and other teaching materials, but technology cannot replace preparation of the mind, the heart, and the spirit.



Help Children Apply Biblical Truths

Life application is simply showing our students how to apply the things they've learned in Sunday School to their everyday lives. When a fourth grade child hears about the courage of David, he can be helped to see that God will give him the

courage he needs too—at home, at school, and in his neighborhood. Examples of how God works in the lives of children today will help him understand this in more concrete terms.

To be effective, the life application should be woven throughout the lesson—and the entire morning, not just applied at the end of a Bible story. Jesus often told stories to illustrate His point and to increase the understanding of His disciples.

Children, as well, will have a better understanding of a biblical concept when life application is taught through stories, interest centers, discussions, drama, and other methods. Through skillful teaching we can help students discover how the Word of God applies to their daily lives.

Let's heed the inspired words of Paul and stir up the gift God has given us. We will certainly be rewarded, and our students will be glad we did!

