

Article Title— “Teaching v. Learning”

Article Category— Making Disciples

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It's true: I used to be a Bible teacher. Then it occurred to me that nobody can "teach" groups of young children how to ride their first bikes—and the most gifted of preachers can't make Disciples from their pulpits. Neither can Sunday School teachers and small group Bible study leaders make Disciples, given the skills they likely have today—Believers, maybe; Disciples, not. It may surprise you to learn that Jesus never commanded us to make Believers. The Matthew 28:19,20 Great Commission is all about sharing the 1st-Century Gospel message with all who demonstrate ears to hear it and then to make Disciples of those who believe it. Making Believers is the exclusive domain of The Holy Spirit. Our assignment comes next.

While you're digesting that one, here's another possible shock: 1st-Century Believers didn't "get 'saved';" They repented. John the Baptist preached repentance, as did Jesus and each of the original apostles. A credible study of church history will yield this conclusion: The "getting 'saved'" phenomenon was first introduced 18 centuries later! Early 19th-Century evangelists in the British Isles, being salesmen at heart, perceived the need for something with which to *close the sale*. That's where, when and why the popular "altar calls" and "getting 'saved'" practices got started. Feels really good but, at this writing, just 180 years young!

Yes, the 1st-Century gospel message has *evolved*. That includes at least four (4) new winds of doctrine that got their start in the early 19th Century. The three most popular of them were born in the British Isles and quickly made their way onto the U.S. continent. Each of those three quickly metastasized in the U.S. visible church and then spread around the world. What are they? Why the early 19th-Century timing? Not a quick study. Certainly a worthy study, though. And isn't studying and teaching others to study, too, what Disciples do? We do it for two reasons: to gain God's approval, per 2 Timothy 2:15, and to play a small role in fulfilling The Great Commission.

Helping Believers make the successful transition to Discipleship is a process. A critical part of the rationale for encouraging them to engage and continue in that process is the message of Hebrews 11:6, that our Heavenly Father "...is a rewarder of them that **diligently** seek him." Of what eternal value, then, is any **passive** search for truth? With that in mind, consider this easily observed phenomenon: The notion that "the ministry" is a special calling for professional christians has driven the vast majority of Believers into the Sunday morning bleachers...

So! might the making of Disciples be a coaching assignment and not a teaching assignment? If so, where are the coaches? If those guys are not present in the visible church, then who's making Disciples? How can we transform Believers into engaged and visibly fruitful Disciples? And of what possible value is a church filled to capacity with passive Believers...when even the devils believe and tremble?



Corporations are paying huge fees to learning consultants who help them discover some truly fascinating alternatives to "teaching." They've learned that teaching is NOT the best way to yield Learning. That's precisely how I learned what I've learned about all this. (Long story; not for this forum.) Corporate leaders want real learning with measurable efficiency and effectiveness. Should we of The Church settle for less?

The style is INTERROGATORY. That was Jesus' method, too. He either asked questions or told simple stories that yielded curiosity. He painted word pictures and answered questions with questions. When curiosity intensifies, people ask questions. Only then do they have what Jesus called "ears to hear." Only then can they learn the really important stuff. Afterward, he helped them learn. Not before. He knew that if he were to have shared valuable information or insight at any point before a person clearly wanted to receive it, His effort would've been completely wasted. He consciously practiced good stewardship of Truth *and* of Time. If He hadn't done that, it might've taken Him multiple decades to accomplish what He accomplished in just three years. After having created each new **Learning Vacuum**, Jesus waited...

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I knew what my denomination believed and that's what I taught.
Yes, I should've checked it out to make sure it was true.

So why didn't I do that? Well, maybe I didn't do that for the same reason that you haven't really checked out what your denomination teaches.

"In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second hand, and without examination." —Samuel Clemens



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Soon after discovering that Conversational Learning Environments can yield measurable improvement in corporate behavior and performance, I approached my pastor about moving our Sunday morning sanctuary class into the fellowship hall. He agreed, but didn't quite understand why we needed to move the tables into a large horseshoe shape, with a small table and chair for me at the front of the room.

On that first Sunday morning, people were astonished to actually see their classmates' faces. (They had memorized the backs of one another's heads, you know.) After prayer and a reading of our key scripture, I opened by asking the primary question I had prepared for the topic. They responded beautifully and we read a couple more verses from the Bible. I asked a second and a third question and also began probing their responses. In short, I wound them up and turned them loose and they learned what they needed to learn—from the Bible and from one another. While guiding them through that process I learned, too! Previously, I had no idea how smart some of those good people were!

We were attracting adults of all ages, from the late teens to much older folk. Many of the regulars in our Sunday School became "more regular." Most of the new people who came hadn't been Sunday School regulars. What attracted them?

**Tell me and I'll probably forget.
Show me and I may remember.
Involve me and I'll understand.**

I saw this, first, on the wall of an insurance office at Chipley, Florida.

That Sunday School class continued to grow. The outside of the horseshoe arrangement easily seated 18-20 people. It was always full. The inside was full every Sunday, too. And there were people on either side of me, beyond the tables, and some occasionally had to sit *behind* me. That's far too many people for maximum learning efficiency in a fully interactive forum.[^]

[^] One of the reasons why attendance must be limited, especially for a time-constrained Conversational Learning Forum, is that naturally talkative participants tend to dominate larger groups. In smaller groups, a reasonably skilled Leader can effectively equalize participation to yield maximum interaction. When that happens, a rich synergy often emerges. That is true in corporate Learning forums, but more true in Christian Learning environments. Holy Spirit synergy!

A particularly talkative participant (a former pastor of that church) agreed to recruit a large number of older adults back into the church's main sanctuary. He promised them an enlightening series of lectures on Daniel and Revelation. Whew!

Later, when the church added an adjacent building, we opted for a considerably smaller room with a large conference table and first-come-first-served seating. The former sanctuary class moved into the new, much larger fellowship dining area across the hall. Both classes flourished. After the Sunday School hour one morning, I observed to my wife, "They're really getting good at this, aren't they!" Before the metamorphosis I had typically asked, "How'd I do today?" I used to be a Bible teacher, you see.

There are multiple reasons why an adult Learning forum is more effective and more efficient than the typical Teaching forum. The following information and insight may prove helpful to you:

Given a traditional Teaching forum, the Teacher studies and prepares to lecture with a focus on prescribed learning points. Although some in their audiences may ask questions and occasionally even contribute valuable insight, the learning is typically limited to the knowledge, insight and understanding of the Teacher.

For an Adult Learning forum, the Leader prepares 2-3 or more primary questions and/or 1-2 interactive learning activities designed to help participants conclude those same learning points for themselves.

> "People typically don't argue with, or even question their own conclusions."

Fully interactive Conversational Learning is limited only by the collective knowledge, understanding and insight of the participants. That's the primary reason why the Leader often gets to learn, too.


Traditional Teaching forums are all about the Teacher. Conversational Learning is all about the Learners. Involved (maybe even fully immersed) in the process, participants actually remember what they learn!

> "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." —Abraham Maslow

What Is Known About Adult Learning Also Applies To Many Older Teenagers.

- > Adults like to be respected for what they already know.
- > They learn best when their minds are engaged.
- > Adult learners feel the need to think for themselves and to take responsibility for their own learning.
- > They enjoy the learning more when they are personally involved in the process.
- > Their learning is in proportion to their enjoyment of the process.
- > Many adults don't like to be Lectured to.

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- > They can learn from Lecturers, but often not as effectively or as efficiently as when they are actively involved in the process.
- > Given a Learning forum where they are encouraged to participate actively they feel more like...well, "adults."


Only when a believer's MIND is fully engaged is he likely to embrace a take-home message, gain a passion for studying the underlying scriptures for himself and applying it to his own life. Traditional Preaching and Teaching simply cannot yield such enormous value. Fully interactive Conversational Learning can. He that *teaches* edifies himself. He that *facilitates learning* for others edifies those others. Create ye the more excellent forum. Learn ye the more excellent method.

Got questions or feedback for us? Please share: <https://www.Link1.info/contact-us>.

—T. C. Newsome 

PS: To participate in Bible discussions about articles like this one – or to just read and enjoy them – join us at TC's Friends Club. Here's the hot link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/136708110091989/>

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