

Modeling the Master

How to Teach Like Jesus

By Steven James



What could be better than modeling our teaching techniques after Jesus' methods? Here are four observations about the educational theory and praxis of the world's greatest teacher.

Jesus Prioritized People

Jesus was always ready to jettison His lesson plan and show compassion to people, even if it sidetracked Him from His primary mission.

For example, Mark records that huge crowds were coming to Jesus to be healed. Jesus spent the night in prayer and then announced, "I've come to preach, not heal. Let's go somewhere else." Almost immediately, He met a man who needed to be healed. And what did Jesus do? He had compassion on him and healed him! The guy told everyone about it, and as a result, "Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere" (Mark 1:45 NIV). Read the whole story for yourself in Mark 1:29-45.

Jesus couldn't help but show compassion! He loved God by loving people. He served God by serving people. In your ministry, too, people must take precedence over programs. Compassion must take precedence over learning goals and objectives. If people seem to be getting in the way of your ministry goals, you've got the wrong ministry goals.

Jesus Entered the World of His Students

When God became Man and, to paraphrase John 1:14, "set up camp among us," He left His heavenly glory behind and became totally human--body and soul. He entered our world completely. And whenever Jesus taught, He connected His lesson with the world of His listeners. He spoke in their language. He used their lingo. He chose examples from their everyday lives--in His tales of farmers and fishermen... seeds and sheep... vineyards and pigs... fishing nets and pearl merchants.

Get to know the world of your students. Ask yourself, "What types of TV shows do our guests watch? What do they do in their free time? What books are they reading? How can I make a connection between their world and the spiritual truths of the gospel?" Then, use their language, lingo, and lives to connect them with Him.

Jesus Asked Probing Questions

Too much of our educational system is based on trying to get students to guess what the teacher is thinking. Jesus' questions weren't like that. They weren't set-ups. Instead, Jesus used questions to confront people, to convict people, to unsettle people, and to make sure they understood his lesson.

Rather than ask review questions that simply restate the obvious, ask questions that challenge your students to look for ways to relate the lesson to their own lives. Jesus often did this after He told stories. He asked thought-provoking questions that helped His listeners discover the point of the story for themselves.

Avoid asking questions that everyone already knows the answer to. Instead, strive to ask questions that challenge both you and your students to think about truth in a new light.

Jesus Used Real-life Stories and Vivid Imagery

Whether He was talking about what it means to forgive others, or what it means to enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus filled His messages with vivid and memorable imagery. And He never preached a three-point sermon. Instead, He simply told stories that made spiritual truths concrete and understandable to His listeners.

Jesus used stories both as positive examples of how to act (see "The Good Samaritan" in Luke 10:25-37) and as warnings of how not to act (see "The Foolish Rich Man" in Luke 12:13-21). You can do the same. Think of parallels, metaphors, images, and stories that show either the truth you wish to convey, or the consequences of doing the opposite of what you hope to teach.

And by the way, don't feel like you have to explain everything. Usually, the more you explain a story the less impact it has. Let your stories speak for themselves. Just like Jesus did. ♦

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