

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

Clarence H. Benson, Litt. D

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Part IV: The Lesson

CHAPTER TWELVE

Assembling Material

MARION LAWRENCE said: "The greatest need in our church work today is trained teachers who will put their whole mind into their preparation, their whole souls into their presentation, and their whole life into their illustration."

Such a teacher will not be satisfied with a hurried preparation Saturday evening for the next day's lesson. A trained teacher will realize that more exercise of his faculties than that will be necessary to keep him in training. Poise in the presence of his class, which so conspicuously marks a trained teacher, cannot be maintained without the mastery of the lesson of the day and a reserve knowledge of the Bible and its truths. Dr. A. H. McKinney inquires:

"Are we not seeking to learn how the teacher may have that poise during the lesson study period which gives him the mastery of the situation? It may not be easy to gain such poise, but it is well worth paying a large price in order to obtain it. What is the price? Prepare carefully every lesson you are to teach. Get the largest possible acquaintance with the contents of the Bible as a whole, with its historical, geographical, and social background, with the truths which it imparts. Having done this, you will have made much progress toward the poise which is so desirable and so essential in successful teaching." (McKinney, *A Top-Notch Teacher*, p. 90. 165).

The value of the time and opportunity afforded by the Sunday school hour should be appreciated. It is a brief time at best. How important then, that every precious moment shall be turned to the best possible account. Observation shows unmistakably that there is no greater cause for a waste of recitation time than a feeling of unpreparedness on the part of the teacher. Not having a definite plan for beginning causes hesitation, apology and delay. The Christian teacher can learn something from the methods of the most successful school teachers, who painstakingly prepare for each recitation. They know they must do this if they are to hold the attention of the thinking, progressive pupils.

In a previous lesson we studied the preparation of the teacher. Now attention should be given to the preparation of the lesson. This will consist largely of the assembling and organizing of lesson material. The first part of this important phase of a teacher's work will be considered in this lesson, and the second part in a subsequent study.

In the assembling of lesson material, the first consideration should be its sources.

I. THE SOURCE OF MATERIAL

1. Bible.

The Bible is the textbook of the Bible school; therefore it should be the teacher's first study.

Aside from the fact that it is the inspired Word of God, it is the recognized text of the school which entitles it to first consideration. When one uses lesson helps exclusively, he is apt to appropriate the thoughts of others and do no original thinking himself. Lesson helps should be used with the Bible and never apart from it. The plan of printing Scripture with the helps has been a temptation for teachers and pupils to dispense with the Bible. The new All Bible Graded Series of Sunday school lessons has not made this mistake, as its helps are unintelligible without the accompanying Textbook.

Every true teacher knows that the Bible is its own best interpreter, and that by comparing Scripture with Scripture infallible light is thrown on obscure passages. At this point it might be well to recognize that the supplementary content of Bibles is of three kinds.

The first is serviceable for

a. Information.

Some Bibles contain many valuable geographical, historical, and archeological helps, but as these can all be provided in other volumes, such a type of Bible is not of the first importance.

b. Interpretation.

A few Bibles are now offered with copious notes and comments on various passages. In reality a commentary is provided with the text. Such explanations are valuable, especially to a beginner, but they have the effect of discouraging independent thinking and of tempting the student to accept the opinion of the commentator as his own.

c. Investigation.

The great aim of the teacher, as we have already seen, is to make the pupil an independent investigator of truth. That will not be possible unless he himself is an investigator. To that end the best kind of a text will be a chain reference Bible, or one amply supplied with references, so that parallel passages can be independently investigated and Scripture compared with Scripture. Bibles of this character in the hands of adolescent pupils will make it possible for them to be profitably employed in hunting parallel passages and related incidents and teachings for further illustration of the truth which is being studied. The class period may become a real Scripture-searching hour, and the pupils can acquire skill in using their Bibles to find help for themselves as it may be needed.

2. Bible dictionary.

If a teacher can possess only one book in addition to the Bible, that volume should be a Bible dictionary, which is in reality a topical Bible, as it gathers from all parts of Scripture every reference pertaining to a particular subject.

3. Bible concordance.

Some Bibles are provided with a concordance, but they are abbreviated so that one is often disappointed in not finding the word that will direct him to the desired passage. *Strong's*, *Cruden's*, or *Young's Complete Concordance* will serve every purpose.

4. Bible commentary.

After he has carefully investigated the passages of Scripture designated for the lesson, the teacher will want to know what interpretation and explanation Bible scholars give to difficult verses. Dr. James M. Gray's *Christian Worker's Commentary* is an excellent one-volume work of this kind, while a complete set of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown is to be recommended for those who desire a more exhaustive commentary. Books of this type are so valuable that the school may well afford to provide them for a church library and to make them available at all times for the use of their teachers.

5. Lesson helps.

In studying the lesson from the Bible, read it specifically:

- First, for the story;
- Second, for the incidents;
- Third, for the persons mentioned; and
- Fourth, for the practical teachings.

Then when lesson helps are finally consulted, the teacher will see a great deal more in them than otherwise because he is getting light on what he has already covered in his Bible reading and study. He will discover that he has already thought of many things mentioned in the lesson help, and he will have the satisfaction of blazing a way for himself.

Lesson helps should supplement the teacher's knowledge. Sometimes a difficult passage is made clear or an apt illustration is provided. Sometimes the helps provide some information on oriental manners and customs that is essential to a right understanding and application of the Scripture passage.

6. Maps.

Children of school age should be as familiar with Bible geography as with that of their own country.

It will not be possible for them to follow the journeys of the patriarchs, the wanderings of Israel, or the campaigns of Joshua and David without the aid of maps. If maps found in the ordinary Bible are the only ones available, these should be studied with much care. Wall maps, especially those constructed by the members of the class, are the most practical and profitable.

7. Pictures.

Teachers of children have long recognized the value of visual instruction; pictures should be collected from various sources not only to illustrate but also to present the truth more vividly. As some of the greatest works of art are Bible scenes, copies of suitable masterpieces should be made available for instruction. Hundreds of such pictures hang in our art galleries, and not a few of them have been incorporated into several excellent series for the Sunday school.

II. THE SELECTION OF MATERIAL

Someone has said that in the selection of lesson material we should go to:

- (1) The Bible for all things.
- (2) Books for past things.
- (3) Newspapers for present things.
- (4) Human nature for point of contact.

A teacher, like the reporter of a newspaper, should be constantly on the alert for lesson material in his devotional study, in his reading of books, magazines, and newspapers, in listening to the radio, and in personal contacts. But in the gathering of promising material the teacher should:

1. Provide for future lessons.

A carefully planned series of lessons, like the *All Bible Graded Series*, is not made up of independent units. As in the study of geography, history, mathematics, or any secular subject, each lesson is related to those preceding and those following in such a way as to develop a theme which runs through the entire series. In such a series of lessons one lesson cannot be taught apart from those before and after it. Instead of gathering material merely for the next lesson, the teacher will have in mind all the lessons that present a general theme, and these may cover an entire quarter.

If the teacher is to have the class participate, it is quite necessary that the lesson be assigned the previous Sunday. And if these assignments are to be made with the care and the effectiveness they deserve and are to secure the co-operation of the pupils, the teacher will have to give considerable time and study to an advanced lesson. When we remember that Sunday school lessons written for religious papers must be prepared from four to six weeks before they are published, the manuals of the *All Bible Graded Series*, six months in advance, and such annual periodicals as *Peloubet's Select Notes*, more than a year before the lessons are used, it will be seen that the consideration of future lessons is neither impossible nor impractical.

2. Provide for individual needs of pupils.

As material is selected, the teacher will keep in mind not so much the class as the individuals of his class.

In the teaching of the lesson Sunday after Sunday the teacher cannot fail to discover the needs of his pupils, and as a fond father will search for some suitable gift that will meet the needs and desires of his son, so a teacher will ever be on the watch for material that will best meet the needs of each pupil. This will be true not only of instruction that may be imparted, but of what the pupils may themselves discover from personal research or assignment in which they have been directed by the teacher.

3. Provide for personal needs of teacher.

In our study of the preparation of the teacher, we stressed the importance of reading constantly, systematically and intelligently, in order to be mentally alert. The teacher may be a channel through which streams of helpful instruction may constantly flow to the pupils, if he is wisely tapping reservoirs that will enrich his own life.

The teacher, who is constantly on the lookout for those things that will enlarge his vision, increase his knowledge, and deepen his spirituality, will have the satisfaction of seeing his pupils drink from a running brook rather than a stagnant pool.

III. THE SAVING OF MATERIAL

As the human mind does not, except in rare instances, remember half of what it sees or hears, some provision should be made for conserving worthwhile material.

1. Paint mental pictures.

Before the teacher can bring the facts vividly before the imagination of the pupils, he must have them distinctly before his own imagination. He cannot make the pupils see what he himself does not see.

For this reason, promising lesson material should be reproduced in mental pictures. As ninety per cent of imagination is memory, the teacher in reading newspapers, magazines, or books, should stop frequently, close his eyes and strive to form a vivid picture of the scene and of the persons about whom he has just been reading. Let the teacher try this experiment on himself and endeavor to discover how much visualizing power he possesses.

As a child recalls an object of his construction far better than something of which he has only seen or heard, so the construction of these mental pictures will provide a permanent impression for the future use of the teacher. Power to see these new pictures vividly, as well as to use the imagination with ease and rapidity, will come with practice and cultivation of this wonderful, faculty of the mind.

2. Provide a notebook.

Writing assists the memory in retaining information, and keeping a record preserves it for future use.

Such a depository of teaching material should be kept:

a. For general information.

One should not read without thinking, and one should not think without writing. If on reflection the teacher has discovered something worthwhile for his class, he should either copy it in the notebook or note the book and page so that it can be readily found when needed.

The notebook should

(1) Record facts.

Statistics of all kinds are valuable for the foundation as well as the court of appeal for class discussion. Statements of representative men also will carry authority. The latest discoveries and inventions may be found useful in making a point of contact with a wide-awake class.

(2) Record experiences.

True stories of human experience are always interesting, and more of these are in the religious realm than most people imagine. Remarkable answers to prayer and other miracles of God's providence are constantly being reported, and a teacher can always make effective use of them, especially if the experience is closely related to some member of the group.

(3) Record illustrations.

The value of illustrations in the teaching of the lesson has already been stressed, so that every teacher will want to have a large fund in his possession.

To one who is on the alert, illustrations will readily suggest themselves from nearly every source of material, but unless notation is made at the time, they will be forgotten. Only by taking notes and referring to them when preparing the lesson is it possible to preserve most of the illustrations from daily life for future use.

b. For specific lessons.

The notebook should also be used for a comprehensive forward look over the lesson. Perhaps it is sufficient if provision is made for the thirteen lessons of each quarter, although Amos R. Wells believed that there should be at least fifty-two pages, one for each lesson of the year. Mr. Wells says:

“Head each page with the title of the lesson and the Scripture reference, and use these blank pages for planning your teaching far ahead. If you are a wise teacher, you will be always on the lookout for teaching material. Every walk through the woods gives you a teaching parable. Every copy of the newspaper gives you an illuminating incident from current history. Every book brings you a fine anecdote or appealing thought. Every day your observation of the men and women around you is rich in illustrative material. Much of this is entirely unsuited to the immediate Sunday school lesson, and will be lost unless you have this storehouse in which to garner it, placing it under that lesson with which it seems most appropriate.” (cf. *How to Teach in Sunday School*, Theodore E. Schmauk).

The chief value of the notebook to the teacher will be in the cultivation of the habit of thinking ahead over the lessons to come. Until this plan has been tried, the teacher will have little idea how this survey of the entire lesson series strengthens the presentation of the individual lesson. If he faithfully uses his notebook, he will soon come to regard it as his chief pedagogical aid.

QUESTIONS

1. Name seven sources of lesson material.
 - a. What three types of Bibles are available?
 - b. Which is the most valuable for research work?
2. For what four objects should lessons be studied from the Bible?
3. How should lesson helps be used?
4. Why are maps and pictures to be included as essential lesson material?
5. For what threefold purpose must all lesson material be selected?
6. Why does a series of lessons require advance preparation?
7. As material for the lesson is selected, who should be kept in mind?
8. In what way can the teacher provide for his personal needs?
9. Show the value of reproducing material in mental pictures.
 - a. What is the value of a notebook?
 - b. What three lines of general information should be kept in it?
10. What provision in the notebook should be made for specific lessons?

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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