

To what end do we teach?

Why do some teachers have much more enthusiasm and endurance than others? Why are some more burdened for their students and for the unreached around them? Why do some put in more time and effort than others?

Although individual character traits and training opportunities account for some differences between the lackadaisical and the zealous teacher, a key factor is the teacher's view of his task.

To what end do you teach?

This consideration is crucial, and cannot help but affect how you perform.

There are three common levels of understanding of the task of teaching, resulting in three levels of dedication.

The first level sees teaching as reaching the unreached, that is, making the Gospel clear to those without Christ. This understanding is vital, for without a strong commitment to evangelism, our churches will soon either be empty or filled with people who are religious, but lost. Nominalism and decay set in quickly, unless each teacher possesses a strong commitment to reach the unreached with the Gospel.

The problem arises when evangelism becomes the teacher's only objective. If you believe every student in your class has trusted Christ for salvation, is there nothing more for you to do? The teacher who thinks of the teaching task exclusively in terms of evangelism will not be strongly motivated to disciple his converts. This teaching is a dead end that reaches only one generation.

The second level sees teaching as "passing the torch." The teacher with this perspective understands that students must not only be evangelized, but must be well grounded in the faith so they become strong believers. Assuming that each of these believers passes on the faith to at least his own children, the second level teacher will reach a minimum of two generations.

But there is a third and deeper level of understanding of our task as teachers. I call this level "training soldiers for the army." Here we see teaching as evangelism and discipling converts in the Word, with the objective of reaching not only immediate converts and their future families, but also the world.

This teacher understands that his ministry is one way of obeying Jesus' command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every person (Mark 16:15). He knows his pupils will have opportunities to go where he never could. They can reach and train others, who can reach and train others, until the whole world is saturated with the Gospel! Teaching is not a dead end, nor simply the business of adding disciples; it is a

multiplication process. We do not merely teach individuals, we train soldiers for the army of Christ; soldiers who, if properly instructed, may capture whole nations which have long been strong-holds of the enemy.

Coming gradually to this third level of understanding has revolutionized my own ministry. It helps me to keep on when it appears there is little I can do, because training one soldier for the army can be crucial in God's plan for the world. Most great movements of the church can be traced to the courage of one individual. Perhaps I will reach a Luther, Wesley, Carey, Moody or Townsend.

In discussing problems with teachers, I have found that the end they visualize for their teaching usually makes a significant difference in their zeal, endurance, preparation and depth of teaching.

All three levels of understanding of the teaching task are biblical, but the third, training soldiers for the army, represents the fullest understanding.

Paul admonished young Timothy, "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). There are three links in this chain: Paul teaches Timothy; Timothy teaches faithful men; and the faithful men teach others. Paul implies that this teaching is to go on and on, multiplying itself each step of the way. He also implies that he had this wider end in mind in his own teaching of Timothy. Timothy, likewise, is to remember that he is training soldiers for the King—soldiers who will in turn reach others.

Jesus teaches this principle in the Great Commission. He instructs his disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ..." (Matthew 28:19, 20). Our task is not complete until our converts become teachers and evangelists themselves.

Jesus instructs each believer, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). How can one individual preach the Gospel to every creature, except by this principle of training converts to reach others, who will reach others, who will reach others.....Understanding our teaching on this level not only makes teaching exciting, as we think of what God can do through us, but also adds incentive to do the very best job we can.

A teacher who has this level of understanding will make the most of every class, and will also seek out "unofficial" opportunities for training more soldiers. We must work with our own children, using every chance to train them to witness effectively, then reach out to our extended families, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, cousins, etc.

In 1891, Robert Speer addressed the delegates of the Student Volunteer Movement for World Missions with the dying words of Simeon Calhoun: "It is my deep conviction...that if the Church of Christ were what she ought to be, 20 years would not

pass away till the story of the cross would be uttered in the ears of every living creature.” I contend that if even the children’s teachers of the Church were what they should be, 20 years would not pass till all in the remotest corner of the earth would hear the good news of the Saviour. If teachers of children have the vision of training soldiers for the army of the Lord, these soldiers will reproduce themselves time and time again.

How does a trainer of soldiers teach? He is more concerned with evangelism than the evangelism—only teacher, realizing each person not won may mean millions lost around the world. The trainer of Christian soldiers is concerned that students have assurance of salvation, because only when we are assured of personal salvation can we find the energy to reach out to others. He makes sure that students have both a heart knowledge and a working knowledge of God’s Word, realizing the Word of God is our mighty weapon in pulling down the strongholds of Satan. This trainer instructs his students in methods and principles of evangelism, encouraging them to be faithful soul-winners, forging the next link in the chain to the whole world. He makes provision for his students to grow in their understanding of and burden for the missionary task of the church.

Teachers with a lesser understanding of their responsibilities and opportunities tend to produce spectator Christians.

The teacher who trains “soldiers,” trains them to fight, endure hardship and make any needed sacrifice to share the Gospel. Consumed with a vision for reaching the whole world, this teacher is an example and role model to his students. At Urbana 79, the challenge was given, “Christ is asking you to renounce your plans, your goals, your ambitions and your motives. He asks you to put His plans first, make his goals your top priority.” A teacher-trainer of soldiers for the army of the Lord has done this. He asks his students to follow in the same kind of radical commitment to Jesus Christ.

This expanded vision of the teacher’s task enables us to accomplish the greatest good for the longest period of time. While preparing for our missionary assignment to Zaire, I recognized the importance of this vision. In the 1960’s, political turmoil ravaged that land, eventually ousting missionaries and taking many missionary lives. What if our missionary career, or even our lives, were to be cut short? How could I enthusiastically face my missionary task and yet realistically face the fact that a similar fate could befall us? I joyfully faced the task before me because I realized my teaching is not an end in itself, not even an end in those I teach.

I am training soldiers for the Lord’s army, teaching Africans who will teach others, who will teach others. If my missionary career ends prematurely, the task of evangelization in Africa will go on through those I taught. I can rejoice knowing that what I teach in the smallest, most difficult class may have fruits that will be felt in the remotest part of the earth.

To what end do YOU teach?