

WHY NOT QUIT TEACHING?

By Lorella Rouster

Topic: Helping teachers cope with discouragement

I dragged myself away from the home of one of our former students. As I slumped into the car seat, I thrust my face into my open hands. “Oh, God, what can I do?” I cried. “I came many miles to see this student but received no response. I’ve tried so many times! I wear myself out visiting these students, and some of them don’t show a bit of interest. Maybe I shouldn’t be a teacher at all. Maybe I need a long vacation. I haven’t sat in an adult class in years. Maybe I should just quit – for a while, at least.

I finished praying, started the car, and drove down the street to see the next student on my calling list. I knew I wouldn’t give up my role in Christian education. I knew that for me there couldn’t even be as much as a vacation from Christian education. Oh, it was not that the church was hard up and couldn’t find a replacement. No, it was just that in spite of all the discouragements, I *am a Christian educator*. The students in our Sunday school are as much a part of me as my own children. I could never sit in the adult class without wondering if Sheri was in class that day, if Jane got over her cold, if Sandy had persuaded her best friend to come to Sunday school yet, or if Roger had told his parents about his salvation as I had asked him to.

Why not quit? If it is only because the pastor twisted an arm or the church was hard up and someone begged you to fill in for a while, then you ought to settle the matter in your own heart.

Why am I a Christian educator? First, because of God’s clear command to teach. The last command Jesus gave His disciples before He went back to His Father was, “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” (Matt. 28:19-20). This command is addressed to every Christian. Although every Christian is not called specifically to be involved in the official Christian educational program of the church, every Christian is – or should be – a teacher.

I am also a Christian educator because I am called to teach. How do I know that? Perhaps others know it in different ways, but I know it because, for one thing, I am not content unless I am doing it. Paul, who was called to preach, said that he was under compulsion – “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (I Cor. 9:16). Likewise, I can truthfully say, “I am under compulsion, for woe is me if I am not involved in Christian education!”

Do you have a restless urge to teach? Are you excited about getting into a Sunday school lesson? Are you constantly thinking of ways to make your Sunday school better? Do you like children and youth and enjoy teaching them God’s Word? Regardless of past success or failure, if you really like teaching and yearn to do it better, you too, are

probably called to the ministry of Christian education in the church. If there is any doubt about it, God will show you His will when you earnestly seek His guidance.

I am also a Christian educator because God has given me the gifts of teaching and leading. God has given each person talents and abilities to be developed. For some, teaching and leading are among these. My sister is such a person. Place her with a child – any child -- and her instinct for teaching will arise. She cannot resist telling a story or teaching a song to every child she meets. My children look forward to her visits, knowing that she will always take them on an imaginary tiger hunt or make up some new stories about their favorite mouse. Persons with natural gifts such as these make excellent Christian educators, provided they are also dedicated Christians.

But my gifts of teaching and leadership are of a different order. I am a naturally retiring, introverted person. My gifts were not received at birth, but at the time of my new birth. Paul describes such gifts in Romans 12:6-7: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teaches, on teaching.” This is not a gift received from genetics but from the Holy Spirit. I know that I have received special gifts from the Spirit because, whereas I once could not have faced even a small group, God has now given me the ability to teach a large class, to counsel, to visit in homes, to talk with parents, and to meet a variety of people as a result of my ministry. He has replaced my natural introversion with both the desire and ability for church leadership. This doesn’t mean my ministry is always easy for me; nor does it mean I don’t have to work and prepare well. But it does mean that God works with me, helps with my preparation, and gives me strength beyond my own ability. I am a Christian educator because God has given me the gifts of teaching and leading.

One of the most wonderful aspects of Christian education is that I am involved in witnessing to the saving power of Jesus Christ and winning others to Him. I wish I had kept an accurate record of each student that I’ve led to Jesus. I wish I had a list so that I could pray over each name.

But teaching not only wins students, it can often win parents, too! Last year I was visiting in one of my student’s homes. Since the time seemed to be ideal, I asked her mother if she knew for sure that if she died she would go to heaven. She was honest enough to admit she didn’t, so I shared the gospel story with her. She bowed her head at her own dining room table and asked Jesus Christ to come into her heart and life and to save her. That Sunday I had the joy of walking down the aisle with her to make a public profession of her faith in Christ. Soon things began to change in that girl’s home.

Parents become open and receptive when they can see their child’s behavior improving as a result of Sunday school and when they can see that the teacher and the church as a whole really care about their child. The ministry of Christian education provides many opportunities to win people to Jesus.

But a Christian educator is not concerned exclusively with soul winning, although that is rightly a primary emphasis. The Christian educator is also interested in serving others because of the love God has given to him for other people.

Through Sunday school visitation I have discovered that a new mother needed baby clothes, that a student was in the hospital with food poisoning, that another student's home was being torn apart by divorce, and that another parent was terminally ill. I can't do everything, but I want to do what I can to aid those around me who need help and encouragement. This is a vital part of Christian education.

I must honestly admit, however, that even though I am glad for the opportunity to win others to Christ and to serve and help them, being involved in Christian education is also one of the greatest means of personal growth I have ever experienced. It is impossible to teach the Bible without studying it thoroughly. Therefore, my knowledge of the Bible multiplies. It is impossible to teach without thinking in very concrete terms about how the Bible applies to life. Therefore, I am forced to face the issue of how it applies to my own life.

I cannot stand before my girls and teach that they should pray unless I pray, nor that they should expect God to answer unless I have first experienced God's answer. I cannot tell my girls they should forsake all and follow Christ unless I am not only willing to do it, but am currently doing it and can testify to them that it brings joy and blessing. I need reminding and prodding, as so many of God's children do. This process of Christian education reminds me of God's expectations, and it prods me to fulfill them on a regular basis! As a means of personal growth, teaching is unsurpassed.

Why am I involved in Christian education? Why do I bother? Why not quit? Because I know that God has called me to this ministry. Because I love this ministry. Because I wouldn't feel right doing anything else. Because I want to win others to Christ. Because I love others and want to help and serve them. Because I myself am becoming a better person and a better Christian through this ministry.

Christian teaching is a sobering responsibility. The eternal destiny of many lives rests largely in my hands, not to mention their happiness and fulfillment in life. The ministry of Christian education is demanding. But it is also rewarding and fulfilling. That's why I didn't quit.

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