**Who Should Be a Christian Teacher?**

This is not a scholarly lesson. This is not even a Bible lesson. This lesson is the result of my experience of teaching. Inductive. Like Solomon said, “A wise person stores up knowledge. Prov 10:14

My background:

40 years as a teacher.

35 year career as professor of chemistry and physics. My vocation

And my avocation as well.

Led teaching ministry with Gordon Ferguson 38 years ago in San Diego. (before you know who ended the teaching ministries in our movement)

About 26 years ago I decided to devote the majority of my energy to the teaching ministry—again, when that was not much of a thing in our churches. This is what I am and what I will do with my life.

My minister said to me, “Who told you to write a book?”

Taught for 200+ churches in 80+ countries. Written 16 books, web site, ARS, etc…

A passion: to raise up teachers to increase the faith of the saved and to save the lost. Have mentored dozens of current teachers.

I have made a few observations (and discovered a few ideas in the Scripture as well) I want to share.

I am sharing them, more or less, in order from most to least important.

I. Humility

II. Humility

III. Humility

Illustration from that insurance ad campaign Price, Price, Price A price you can afford, A price that will not change and A price that fits your budget.

I. Humility. Because a prideful person cannot learn.

We as teachers need to set the example as learners, and prideful people cannot learn. They think they know it all.

The potential teacher who is prideful will inevitably have a hard fall.

I have seen this many times. Prov 16:18 Pride goes before destruction.

No one appreciates my gift. Why won’t they let me teach this material?

I need to find a place where my knowledge will be appreciated and used. So, they leave our fellowship and go to another group which does not teach proper doctrine.

Or they use their teaching gift in a secular position only.

II. Humility. Because those with the gift of teaching are prone to be know-it-alls, who start by being annoying, but often become downright divisive and disloyal. They go off and do their own thing.

I have known many passionate intelligent young believers with great passion.

They saw themselves as smarter than the leaders (which was probably actually true)

Confidence becomes pride. They become know-it-alls. And no one likes a know-it-all.

If only the church members knew what I know.

If only they would let me have the stage.

How can these less-informed believers teach me anything?

That passage was taken SOOOO out of context. That person made such a blatant historical or theological error.

I take all they say with a grain of salt, filtering it through my superior wisdom.

Others can see coming this a mile away.

*Mea Culpa*. I have been and done all these things.

I confess that one of the comments I have received in my student evaluations as a professor are statements such as, “he is a good teacher but arrogant when I talk to him in my office. He makes me feel stupid.” Ouch! Double Ouch!! I made a decision many years ago that I will go after defeating this kind of pride with unrelenting vigor. I will leave judgment about how successful I have been in this area to those who know me.

Result:

No one wants to hear from a know-it-all. No one wants to be taught by a know-it-all. It is obvious…. Everyone knows. This is easy…

No church leader will give the stage to such a person—nor should they.

The prideful teacher will cause more damage to the church than any help they can offer.

This is frustrating! What a waste of potential!

Mark it down; if you have a prideful attitude about your wonderful knowledge, you will never be a respected and fruitful teacher.

 You are like Nebuchadnezzar, who stood over his beloved Babylon and said to himself, “Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30) You have forgotten the admonition of Paul in 1 Corithians 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive, and if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?”

III. Humility. Because the teacher role, first and foremost, is a servant, not a leadership role.

Bottom line: To teach is to serve. True of all leaders (Matthew 20:26, John 13:13-17).

But fundamentally true of teaching. Many teachers do not see it this way.

In Ephesians 4:11-12 we are told that the evangelists, shepherds and teachers are to prepare God’s people for works of service.

Teaching is not the most important ministry in the church. Or the second. Or probably even the third.

Definitely in the top 10, and probably in the top 5.

If you want to do the “most important thing” then you need to recognize that teaching is not that thing.

 Your role as a teacher is to provide something to others. Yours is one of the parts in putting together the whole. Teaching actuates other abilities, but it is not that most essential ability and it will not normally be the thing which will be noticed first.

The purpose of the Christian life is to know God and to be known by him.

The Christian mission is to win as many as possible to Christ.

The teaching ministry does not take an up-front role in these things, although it is important to these things. In fact it is essential to these things in the long run, but the teacher’s role is not the most essential one in helping people to have a relationship with God and to conversion of the lost.

Yours is a service role. You will be tempted to think that it is the top priority, but it is not!

A church built out of people, all of whose skill is intellectual will not be an effective church (effectiveness being defined as achieving the purpose and ministry of Christianity).

Evangelism and shepherding and taking care of the physical and spiritual needs of the lost and the saved are more essential. They are higher up on the list. If this is not okay with you, then perhaps you should pursue something other than teaching.

IV. Having the spiritual gift of teaching.

It is not required. As a stop-gap we can use non-gifted teachers.

I am an appointed evangelist, and evangelism is not my gift!

(story from Bakersfield)

But…

Ideally, the evangelist has the gift of evangelism, the elder has the gift of shepherding…

This principle in 1 Peter 4:10-11, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

This begs the question… Do I? How would I know?

a. Do you love to teach? Is it your passion?

b. Do you love to learn/read? (ex: the library in Boulder)

c. Are you relatively gifted, intellectually? Do you see yourself making rapid strides?

d. Do you have at least one required skill: strong public speaking, If you cannot communicate well.

But not a *sina qua non* A very good writer.

V. Having passion to teach. Already mentioned, but… (And I wrote a book Golden Rule Membership on this topic of finding and using our gifts)

What do you love to do?

What is the thing you will do whether or not asked to do it or encouraged to do it?

It takes a LOT of training. Hours and hours of work that no other disciple does. Late at night…

Evangelist: 3 years

Elder 8 years

Teacher 12 years.

Am I truly passionate about teaching?

VI. Having the will and the opportunity to get the training.

We cannot teach what we do not ourselves know.

The Holy Spirit will at times give us the words to speak (Luke 12:12),

Jesus the Master Teacher and he did not have a degree in theology, but we are not Jesus.

Certainly some focused training and very likely including a post-graduate degree, will be required for the effective teacher in the twenty-first century.

Knowledge of additional languages is not a requirement, but very helpful.

Some training in history, philosophy, and the natural sciences as well.

I tell my students the reason for getting a degree is to learn how to learn—to become smart.

If you have a deficit in this area (converted at a more advanced age or behind in book learning) you might be limited as a teacher.

VII. Able to take the long view and to hold our tongue—not having an agenda or an axe to grind.

Another quality is patience for the mission. Anyone who is a teacher will have deeper than average insight into those qualities required for churches and individual members of churches to grow and be effective in their faith. We notice the mistakes our preachers make. We often cringe when we hear outlandish interpretation of the scripture, especially in public forums. We know some church history and notice immediately why a decision is a bad one. What will we do with this knowledge?

My advice: 90% of time hold your tongue.

Why? a. not a know-it-all and b. a serving role.

I decided many years ago to bide my time. I sometimes keep convictions under my hat, waiting for the proper time to speak.

I have traveled to MANY churches. I ALWAYS remind myself I am there to support what they are already doing, not to tell them what to do and how to do it.

They did not bring me here to tell the leader how to lead or the elders how to shepherd.

Example: Marriage and Divorce in Bangaladesh. Parenting in Fresno.

Those who forget this tend to not be invited back.

Going in with an agenda to correct these folks is a really bad idea.

Like in a marriage. Just because it is true does not mean you should say it.

Wait to be asked! (like unsolicited advice)

James 1:19 Quick to listen and slow to speak applies to teachers as well. (also read James 3:17)

Their passion, skill, ability knowledge

The Holy Spirit told me to speak. Maybe, but would he tell you to create havoc in the group you are speaking to. Are you a controversy-maker? That is the evangelist or the prophet, not the teacher most of the time. And there is a time to stir the pot. But rarely.

If you will have self-control here, your influence will grow over time. The leaders will trust you and want to use you more. You are a team player. I am welcome just about everywhere in our churches for this reason.

The next few qualities on my list are important ones, but perhaps not absolutely essential. These qualities can be acquired over time.

VIII. Broad knowledge combined with one or more areas of specialized knowledge.

Why would you be invited to teach in subject X by group Y?

Two kinds of knowledge

a. Expert knowledge. For now, choose approx. 2 areas you want to be THE expert in your church, your family of churches, in the ICOC for.

Nail that topic! A biblical book, a doctrine, an aspect of theology, church history, area of apologetics…. You are good to go, and people around you know it! Advertise your skill to leaders in your church and outside your church.

Later your specialties will expand to 3 or 4 or even more!

b. Broad-based knowledge.

Be a Christian renaissance man.

Know the whole Bible. Have no completely blank spots.

Know a little apologetics.

Know a little about Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism.

Know a little about church history.

Know a basic outline of Christian theology.

Why? You will become a go-to answer person for your church. (but be willing to say I don’t know or to farm out the question, or send people to EFC)

IX. Willingness to think broadly and cross-culturally.

To be a good teacher, you need to leave your political, cultural and theological bubble.

To teach singles, campus, outside the US.

Prepared to eat strange food, to be sensitive to the other side, politically.

Learn to like country music, socialist politics, spicy food, soccer (football), etc.

Americans are SOOOOO bad at this.

X. Having an active ministry. Kept for last, but because it is least important.

Members and guests alike want to learn from a teacher who has an active ministry. Ex: Marty Solomon Bema. Great teaching, but no ministry. No evangelism.

Without ministry you lose credibility.

I have always put ministry first. Singles in SD, Bakersfield, Merced.

Who are you discipling/mentoring? Who have you led to Christ recently? What ministry is thriving because of your role in it?