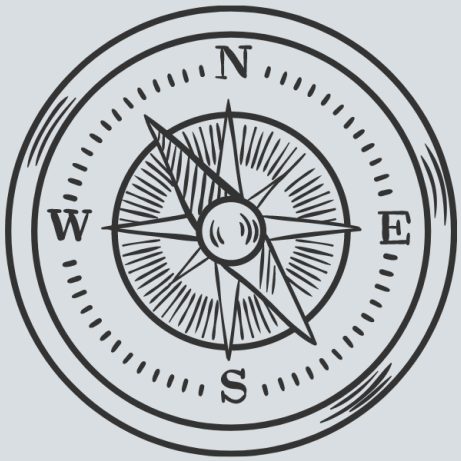
A GUIDE

FOR SECONDARY BIBLE TEACHERS



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A Guide for Secondary Bible Teachers

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Structure or Freedom? The Perennial Debate in Education

Before we get to the details of your work, let's consider your working environment and the forces that have shaped it. This chapter explores the philosophy of education; the next chapter dives into the history of modern-day schooling.

Structure vs. Freedom

The history of thought on education has moved between two poles—structure and freedom. Here is a basic overview of the philosophy of education conveyed through the structure-freedom spectrum.[1]

Questions

Under what conditions do we learn most effectively? Perhaps that is best asked in a personal and specific way. Do you need compulsion in order to learn? Or do you need to be set free to learn on your own? I know, it depends on what you are trying to learn, but think in general terms.

Think of your experience in school. What did you learn from classes you were forced to take? Now think of your experience outside of school. What have you learned on your own because you were interested in the subject or skill? Now compare the two. Which type of learning was more effective? Since the time of Plato, there has been a continual tug-of-war between structure (or compulsion) and freedom in the field of education.

Progressive (or Informal) Education

Advocates for freedom, or as they are sometimes called progressives, argue that we learn best in a free setting where we are allowed to explore and follow our interests. This is often called student-centered learning or interest-led learning. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) strongly advocated for this approach in his work *Emile*. Student-centered learning is the approach used by Montessori schools, Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts, and homeschool families who follow the unschooling approach across America.

[1] For an excellent overview of the history of education see Gary Thomas, *Education: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Traditional (or Formal) Education

On the other hand, traditionalists argue that we learn best in a structured setting where a set body of knowledge is passed down from teacher to student. According to this approach, teachers should not be concerned with what students *want* to learn, but with what students *need* to learn. Who decides what children need to learn? Federal, state, and local authorities. (In the case of Bible classes, the Christian school or a local church decides what students should learn.) Who follows this approach? Traditional schools around the world.

Different Assumptions

The debate between progressives and traditionalists stems from different assumptions. Traditionalists assume that without external pressure, children will naturally go in the wrong direction or will fail to reach their full potential. Progressives assume that children have everything they need to guide them in the right direction. For example, infants don't need to be taught to use their five senses to reach out and explore the world because they do it instinctively. Progressives often point to those early childhood years and note the incredible amount of learning that occurred without structured education. While traditionalists see the benefits of direct instruction, progressives like John Holt (1923–1985), believe direct instruction often serves to dampen a child's innate desire to learn.

Structure *and* Freedom

As with most debates, the structure-freedom debate in education is not an either-or choice. We need both structure and freedom in order to flourish. Too much of either can harm us. For example, to gain proficiency in anything we need structure to learn the fundamentals and to develop the discipline of practice. But to have the willingness to try new things and to have fun with what we're doing, we often need freedom.

Think of a young tree rooted in the soil with its trunk tied to wooden posts on either side of it. The wooden posts provide structure for the trunk, but the branches are free to spread out toward the sun. If the wooden posts were tied to every branch the tree would be severely deformed. But without the wooden posts, the tree would grow in the wrong direction. Both structure and freedom are necessary.

Let's try another analogy. Players on a basketball team need the structure of practice and set plays, but they also need freedom to make their own moves during the game. Without structure the players will not play as a team, but without freedom, they will begin to complain and some will even quit. More examples could be given, but the point is that structure *and* freedom are woven into the fabric of most things around us and an adequate philosophy of education will include both elements.

The following thinkers displayed a sensitivity to both structure and freedom in the learning process.

Moses (c. 1391–1271 BC)

Moses says,

> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut. 6:6–7)

These verses clearly encourage parents to practice a direct teaching method. "Impress them [the commandments] on your children." But just a few verses later, Moses shows sensitivity to the interest of the learner with these words:

> In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. . . . The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today." (Deut. 6:20–24)

This passage is fascinating because it implies that parents should wait for their children to ask before explaining the meaning of the laws and rituals they are obeying. Instead of lecturing children while their eyes are glazed over with boredom, wait for that spark of interest and then explain it to them. Yes, there is a set body of knowledge to pass on (structure), but wait until the learner shows interest (freedom) and then pass it on (structure).

Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

While Plato's ideal state was highly structured, the following statement shows the need for both structure and freedom in the learning process with an emphasis on freedom:

> Now, all this study of reckoning and geometry and all the preliminary studies that are indispensable preparation for dialectics must be presented to them while still young, not in the form of compulsory instruction. Why so? Because, said I, a free soul ought not to pursue any study slavishly; for while bodily labors performed under constraint do not harm the body, nothing that is learned under compulsion stays with the mind. True, he said. Do not, then, my friend, keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play. That will also better enable you to discern the natural capacities of each. (Plato, *The Republic*, 536d–537a)

Notice the tension between structure and freedom. Specific subjects "must be presented to them while still young" (structure), but "not in the form of compulsory instruction" (freedom). And then "a free soul ought not to pursue any study slavishly" because "nothing that is learned under compulsion stays with

the mind." As Plato continues, it's clear that he wants those who educate the young to err on the side of freedom.

Paul (c. 5 BC–67 AD)

Paul writes, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

That statement begins by encouraging fathers to show sensitivity to the feelings of the child. Since too much structure can lead to exasperation, parents need to consider the amount of structure they are giving to their children. He then adds that a certain type of structure is needed—"bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Throughout his writings, Paul stresses the importance of people doing things on their own initiative. As a result, he is reluctant to coerce or force others to take certain actions.

- For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. *Entirely on their own*, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. (2 Cor. 8:3–4)
- *I am not commanding you*, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. (2 Cor. 8:8)
- For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and *on his own initiative*. (2 Cor. 8:17)
- So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, *not reluctantly or under compulsion*, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 8:5–7)
- But I did not want to do anything without your consent, *so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary*. (Philemon 14)

Augustine (354–430 AD)

In his *Confessions*, Augustine acknowledges both structure (compulsion) and freedom (self-directedness) in his upbringing. Reflecting on his early years he says,

> In boyhood itself, however . . . I loved not study, and hated to be forced to it. Yet I was forced; and this was well done towards me, but I did not well; for, unless forced, I had

> not learnt. But no one doth well against his will, even though what he doth, be well. (Book 1, Ch. 12)

Without force, Augustine says he wouldn't have learned. But reflecting on his earlier years learning Latin, he indicates his preference for freedom.

> Time was also (as an infant) I knew no Latin; but this I learned without fear or suffering, by mere observation, amid the caresses of my nursery and jests of friends, smiling and sportively encouraging me. This I learned without any pressure of punishment to urge me on, for my heart urged me to give birth to its conceptions, which I could only do by learning words not of those who taught, but of those who talked with me; in whose ears also I gave birth to the thoughts, whatever I conceived. No doubt, then, that a free curiosity has more force in our learning these things, than a frightful enforcement. (Book 1, Ch. 14)

I think most of us would agree with Augustine. Personal interest or "free curiosity" is a more effective ingredient in learning than compulsion.

Question

Is it possible that teaching directly without waiting for students' questions can be ineffective? Could we be exasperating our children by lecturing to them before they are interested in the topic? Can too much academic compulsion kill the spark of interest in students by making them feel like their interests and questions don't matter?

I think so. I know that may not count for much, but I have spent several years in the classroom and I have listened closely to how students feel about school. From my experience, many students feel that school is pointless and some feel crushed by the academic requirements.

Too Much Freedom

People can always take advantage of freedom to the detriment of their character and development. Laziness or the path of least resistance is a universal human tendency. Augustine said that he learned nothing unless compelled. Therefore, some degree of structure is necessary for most people. But if we care about seeing our students as unique individuals, it's probably best to view the type of structure needed as variable to the individual student.

But we shouldn't be concerned that students are receiving too much educational freedom because the modern-day traditional school is heavily weighted toward the structured end of the spectrum. In most traditional schools, students have little to no say in their schedule, courses, teachers, classmates, and assignments. Too much freedom is not the problem in that setting.

Too Much Structure

What's wrong with too much structure? It often leads to apathy, boredom, and obstinance, all of which obstruct deep and meaningful learning. Think of it: If everything is forced on you, without you having any say in the matter, you will begin to go through the motions. And that means, you won't really care about what you're doing. Over time, if nothing changes, your attitude will probably become more negative.

Emphasize Freedom

If this statement from Augustine has a universal ring, and I think it does,—"free curiosity has more force in our learning . . . than a frightful enforcement"—and if learning is a primary objective of our schools, then we must give a great deal more thought to cultivating freedom in our classes. While structure is needed, if we're going to err in the educational process, we should err on the side of freedom.

Practical Steps

So what can you do to improve the classroom environment for your students?

- Talk with your students about their experiences in school and in your classroom. What do they like? What do they dislike? Seek to sympathize with them.
- Give your students an opportunity to act on their own initiative. For example:
    - Offer two or three project ideas from which they can choose.
    - When assigning a group project, allow students to choose their partners. I know some students may be left out so don't do this at the start of the school year or every time you give a group project.
    - Let students freely express their opinion on certain topics. Find the balance between presenting content and allowing students to explore ideas for themselves.
    - Consider allowing students to decide on class rules or the order of class assignment/activities.
    - Consider rewarding students with free time.
- Be flexible. Your students are going to have bad days. They may have just come from another class where they had a difficult test or where they heard a long lecture. If you see a lot of solemn-looking faces, you may want to change your plans and give more freedom. Remember your students are experiencing a high degree of structure throughout the day.

2

The Origins of National Compulsory Schooling in America

Have you ever wondered how school became what it is? If not, you've probably heard others asking, "Why do I *have* to go to school?" "Why do we *have* to study this?" "What's the point?" These types of questions put me on a long-term search to understand the nature of traditional schools. In particular, I wanted to understand the compulsory nature of schooling. Why are children *required* to go to school from ages 5-18?

The Search Begins

My search was fueled by bold critiques of traditional schooling written by John Taylor Gatto (1935-2018), author of *Dumbing Us Down*, and John Holt (1923-1985), author of *How Children Fail* and *Instead of Education*. Holt and Gatto were teachers who left the classroom because they believed they were harming kids more than helping them. Their writings have provoked many to question commonly held assumptions about school.

For example, Holt concludes the latter book with a powerful attack on the compulsory nature of schooling: "education—compulsory schooling, compulsory learning—is a tyranny and a crime against the human mind and spirit. Let all those escape it who can, any way they can" (ch. 18).

Gatto's writings have a strong historical emphasis. For instance,

> In America, in the 21st century, we force public school children to pass through a system designed in the 19th century, for the purpose of creating obedient soldiers. . . The story of our schools begins in 1806, in the military dictatorship of Prussia, in Germany, during the Napoleonic wars." (*Skip College*, Kindle, 150)

How so?

After Napoleon and his non-professional army conquered Prussia in the early 1800s, Prussian leaders blamed their defeat on disorganized and disobedient soldiers. Their solution was to devise a new method for ensuring loyalty among the ranks—compulsory schools where obedience would be taught beginning in early childhood. Gatto states, "School in Prussia existed to create obedient soldiers, not to educate independent, self-reliant citizens" (*Skip College*, 196). It was this model of schooling, he argues, that American educational leaders were seeking to imitate.

Is this an accurate view of the origins of compulsory schooling in the U.S.? Did we simply copy Prussia's system of loyalty training? Does that explain why our schools are the way they are? If so, this is deeply disturbing.

After about two years of searching for answers, here's what I've concluded: historical reconstruction is complex. In human affairs multiple things are happening simultaneously so anyone who says "this one cause led to this one effect" is probably oversimplifying things.

Initial Resistance

Before listing key forces behind our contemporary school system, we should acknowledge opposition to the idea of compulsory education.

- Although Thomas Jefferson believed the government should make educational institutions available for those too poor to afford them, he did not support the use of compulsion (Rothbard, 42).

- In 1891 and 1893, Governor Pattison of Pennsylvania vetoed compulsory education bills because he believed they interfered with the personal liberty of parents and therefore were un-American (43).

- Wisconsin state superintendent C. P. Cary warned against the expanding role of the state and top-down legislation in education because he believed it would impair democracy. In his words, "the efficiency of Germany is not worth what it costs" (Steffes, Kindle, 84).

- The Denver superintendent explained the reasons compulsory attendance laws were "dead letters on the statue books noting that 'the president of the school board, the justice of the peace, or even the superintendent of schools, living in an American community, hesitates to call upon the might of the law to coerce a neighbor in other than criminal offences'" (2756).

- On the state level, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and most southern states initially rejected compulsory attendance statutes.

- Educators "were often ambivalent about enforcement of compulsory-attendance laws. Often they did not want the unwilling pupils whom coercion would bring into the classrooms" (Tyack, 361). As a teacher, I sympathize with this sentiment.

In sum, compulsion was opposed because it was viewed as un-American or undemocratic. According to one critic, "coercion may prove effective, but it is not the instrument of a free people" (Steffes, 99). In other words, the value of liberty that gave birth to the country should triumph over the forces of compulsion. This history of resistance to coercion is a recurring theme in U.S. history.

Eight Key Forces

In this case, however, resistance was unsuccessful. The majority of Americans in the early twentieth century approved of compulsory schooling. By 1918 every state in the U.S. had mandatory school attendance laws. Why? What forces coalesced into this mandate?

1. A desire to spread a specific religious belief. The religious drive can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation. In 1524 Martin Luther argued:

> I maintain that the civil authorities are under obligation to compel the people to send their children to school . . . If the government can compel such citizens as are fit for military service to bear spear and rifle . . how much more has it a right to compel the people to send their children to school, because in this case we are warring with the devil. (Rothbard, 20)

This is an important statement in our search for the roots of compulsion. According to Luther (1483-1546), the government has the right to compel citizens to attend school for religious reasons— "because we are warring with the devil." Four years later, Luther and his friend Philipp Melanchthon crafted the Saxony School Plan to instill Luther's religious views in the population. And in 1530 Luther wrote a sermon on keeping children in school. The first compulsory attendance system followed in 1559 enacted by Duke Christopher and enforced by fines (Rothbard, 20). The use of compulsion spread from one territory to states throughout Germany, requiring attendance under the threat of fines and imprisonment of children. Then the first national system of compulsory schooling was formed in Prussia under King Frederick William I in 1717 (Rothbard, 25).

Like Luther, John Calvin (1509-1564) formed several compulsory public schools in Geneva. As Calvinism spread throughout Europe so did Calvinistic schools. The first to reach the shores of New England were Protestants. In particular, they were English Puritans who brought their Calvinist-Puritan doctrines to Massachusetts Bay Colony, stressing "Bible reading and early education as preparation for salvation" (Kaestle, Kindle, 117). Protestantism, then, with its emphasis on personal Bible reading and thus literacy, was a unique driving force behind modern education.

2. A desire to provide a safe place for youth after the rise of industrialization. About 150 years after the first settlers arrived in America, technology began to radically change the nature of work and the location where people lived. Instead of working on the family farm or in some type of apprenticeship, great numbers of people thronged to cities. As a result, children found themselves on the street or working in factories. While reformers argued successfully for restrictions on child labor, removing children from the factory would be futile if those same children ended up on the street (Steffes, 2467). Compulsory schooling, it was argued, was a way to protect children by removing them from both the factory and street. For the most part, parents agreed and so did labor unions who wanted to keep children out of the work force (Gaither, 67). Industrialization, then, made most of the preindustrial settings for youth obsolete and school became the new government-sanctioned parent-supported setting for youth.

3. A desire to develop national unity by forming loyal citizens. School was a way to direct people, primarily from European countries, to assimilate to the "American way of life." For example, it was the venue where the common language was passed on, American curriculum was taught, and national loyalty was encouraged (e.g., the flag and pledge of allegiance). Tracy Steffes writes, "Educating for citizenship had been one of the primary justifications of public schools since their inception" (167). In other words, school was a major component of "national state-building" (235).

How should we view this desire? Is it right for the state to have an interest in its health and growth? Of course. What government wants its citizens to be disloyal and disunited? Every country has a legitimate interest in itself.

Historically speaking, however, there are two issues with this desire. First, the initial implementation was exclusionary and racist because assimilating "others" did not originally include Africans, Native Americans, or later, Mexicans and Asians. Second, some did not want to merely encourage loyalty; they wanted to control thought and behavior:

The primary educational concern of leaders in government and industry was not to make people literate, but to gain control over *what* people read, what they thought, and how they behaved. Secular leaders in education promoted the idea that if the state controlled the schools, and if children were required by law to attend those schools, then the state could shape each new generation of citizens into ideal patriots and workers. (Gray, Kindle, 60)

Gatto highlights this idea of obedience training or thought control. His writings include frequent references to disturbing statements made by educational leaders in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, including statements made by Horace Mann (1796-1859), a staunch advocate of compulsory Prussian schooling in Massachusetts (*Skip College,* 160).

4. A desire to reduce crime and develop virtuous citizens. Carl Kaestle writes, "Both English and American advocates emphasized collective goals—such as the reduction of crime and disruption—rather than individualistic goals—such as intellectual growth or personal advancement" (622). This is another key statement in our search for the origin of modern schooling. Collective not individual goals were driving the thought process of modern school founders.

Regarding how nineteenth-century citizens thought about the purposes of schooling, David Tyack says, "Rhetoric about the purposes of education emphasized socialization for civic responsibility and moral character far more than as an investment in personal economic advancement" (382). This "rhetoric" is fascinating because it is the opposite of the way many think today: "go to school so you can get a good job." Also notice how being a good citizen and developing moral character overlap: "socialization for civic responsibility and moral character." And the emphasis on "socialization" corresponds with the idea of "collective goals" in the previous statement.

We should also note that America's founding fathers were trying to do something unique: form a new system of government—a democratic republic. And they believed educated and virtuous citizens were essential to this type of government. A government "of the people, by the people, for the people" would be a disaster if those people were ignorant and corrupt. So some looked to forced schooling to form citizens fit for the republic. However, it's important to mention that during the first 150 years of America's history, government schools did not exist. (A government school is government-sponsored and tax-supported.) This history leads some to conclude that "an educated citizenry does not depend on, nor require, that government provide or operate schools" (Brouillette, 5).

5. A desire to develop productive citizens. "One of the dominant aims of schooling was to socialize children into their adult roles, including that of worker" (Steffes, 581). There's that word again: "socialization." The idea of shaping productive citizens goes back to the early education laws of Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1642 colony leaders were concerned because they believed some parents were becoming negligent in teaching members of their households. As a result, they enacted law ordering selectmen in every town to ensure that parents were teaching their children to read in English, adhere to local laws and religious principles, and follow "some honest lawful calling." Additional education laws followed with more details, eventually leading Massachusetts to become the first state to have a statewide tax-supported compulsory school system in 1852 (Katz). Every state followed ending with Mississippi in 1918. This force also leads to Germany because early educational leaders did not want the U.S. to fall behind the productivity of Germany. And they believed Germany's school system was the key to its productivity.

6. A commitment to equality. Many argued that equality required all citizens, even poor children, to have a basic level of knowledge. Unlike wealthy parents, poor parents could not afford to hire private tutors to educate their children. To decrease the intellectual gap, many supported the idea of public schools to ensure that every child received at least a basic education. But how could they guarantee that every child would acquire this essential knowledge? Through *mandatory* school attendance.

Individual schools, however, were vastly different from each other. Some were one-room schoolhouses, others separated children into different grades; some had qualified teachers and others didn't. This diversity, resulting in different experiences for students, was viewed as unacceptable. "Voluntary efforts lost ground to state coercion as the diversity among local schools was defined as a problem" (Brouillette, 9). Reformers argued that schools should follow the same model so that children would receive the same education. The Committee of Ten (1892) played a vital role in standardization by recommending eight years of elementary education followed by four years of high school and urging all schools to teach the same subjects in the same way. Andrew Carnegie also contributed to this process by investing in teacher retirement pensions. In order for university teachers to participate in the pensions, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1906) required universities to adopt the Carnegie-unit system, which gives academic credit for contact hours with a teacher. The designated amount of time for one credit was 120 hours with a teacher per year. (Note the focus of this system is not learning but contact hours with a teacher.) High schools followed suit with most continuing to use the Carnegie-unit system.

In addition to equal opportunity and a shared experience, some advocates, relying on writers such as Johann Fichte (1762-1814), went to an extreme by arguing for equal outcome or a social utopia. They believed that by planting equality in the mind at an early age they could equalize habits, feelings, and conditions. But this could not happen while children still lived with their parents because their home environments were not uniform. These home differences could only be eradicated when all children received the same food, clothes, and treatment during their formative years. Thus, children should live at public schools year-round for twenty-four hours a day. In his influential *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte said, "children ought to live together in complete isolation from adults, with only their teachers and masters" (Tenth Address).

7. Trust in school as the answer to societal issues. "An array of reformers looked to school reform to pursue specific social goals like protecting children, policing morals, expanding democracy, furthering socialist revolution, protecting adult labor, promoting economic development, or Americanizing immigrants" (Steffes, 612). Obviously it was unrealistic to think school could accomplish all these goals, but at the time many were not thinking realistically. Notice how contradictory elements, such as "expanding democracy" and "furthering socialist revolution" were involved in the push toward modern schools. For some reason, school was seen by many groups as an institutional savior.

8. Trust in the government's use of compulsion. Charles Burgess views the Civil War as the transformative spark that led to the era of compulsion: "Following the Civil War, a dramatically different concept of Union gained popularity, primarily among intellectuals. . . the imperatives of Union required the Americanization of all citizens" (206). Simply put, to have a Union, all citizens must be Americanized.

Burgess continues by explaining how the Civil War changed the way citizens viewed the nation: "State militias learned an unexpected and abrupt lesson in the Civil War: their tasks could be assigned and directed by the federal government" (208). In addition, the question of national military conscription grew out of the Civil War as "both the North and South attempted to draft men into military service" (208). After the Civil War, a trend toward national compulsion began: pressure to enact compulsory voting laws, national rules on divorce and obscenity, and teetotaling. The rise of compulsory schooling fits into this cultural milieu.

Judicial Verdicts

Despite these powerful forces, resistance to compulsory schooling continued in the form of highly contested judicial decisions. These rulings were necessary because the authors of the Constitution did not address the issue of mandatory school attendance; education was left up to the states. In two legal cases affirming compulsory attendance laws, the state's police powers were used as justification for schooling (Provasnik, 329-30). Thus the state's right to protect itself overruled the rights of parents to determine how their children should be educated. How did school serve to protect the state? By providing a place for youth who might otherwise be idle in the street, by stamping out ignorance with knowledge, and by their hierarchical structure that imposed the virtues of obedience, self-control, and diligence. School, then, was

a way for the state to watch over its youth. Although the judicial decisions were contested, once the laws were established, “legal challenges were so infrequent that they only reinforce the general point that the overwhelming majority of Americans willingly and eagerly embraced formal schooling” (Gaither, 71).

Summary and Analysis

Gatto is right that the story of modern compulsory schooling has roots in Germany. The following forces have a direct link to Germany:

- religion
- national unity
- productivity
- equality (especially those who wanted equality of outcome)

But I think we should begin the story further back—in the 1500s with Luther—and also consider non-German influences. In so doing we will avoid the fallacy of reductionism. History does not take place in a laboratory where we can isolate variables and determine cause and effect. Therefore, we must expand our vision and consider multiple variables at play at any one time.

Which force was primary? Historically, I think it’s fair to say that the religious drive is first, but allocating a percentage of influence to each force is impossible. Moreover, the influence of each force changed over time and their importance varied for individual advocates. Most proponents were probably driven by one or two key forces. With that said, a unifying concept between at least four of the eight forces is socialization.

The diversity of forces shows that implementing compulsory schooling was not simply a top-down process. Many citizens were persuaded of its benefits and fought for its establishment. (This is a core idea in Steffes.)

The diversity also shows that bad elements were involved in the establishment of our modern compulsory school system: a police-state mentality, forced unity along with its racist emphasis, a desire to control, misplaced trust in the government, and creating a social utopia. But there were noble elements as well: genuine concern for children’s welfare in the age of industrialization, a desire to help immigrants assimilate into society, and ensuring that everyone had a basic level of knowledge by giving them a standard education.

Let’s look at these forces from another perspective. What questions were school founders seeking to answer?

- “How do we make sure our children carry on our faith?”

- “Where can we find a safe place for our children?”
- “How do we develop national unity in a country filled with immigrants?” or “How do we most effectively spread American values?”
- “How do we make sure our children become productive citizens?” or “How do we prevent youth idleness and youth ignorance?”

Those are significant questions but what’s missing?

The individual. In particular, the individual’s intellectual development, unique skills, and interests. When government and community leaders were thinking of answers to the questions above, they were not thinking of how to help *individual* citizens excel at pursuing their interests. They were considering a one-size-fits-all model of education.

Of course, there was no way they could have been thinking about millions of individual children. I am simply pointing out that compulsory schooling is a communal answer to communal questions. Founders were focused on *our* faith, *our* unity, *our* productivity. As a result, the modern school system places the community before the individual. And that means individuals must fit into the system rather than the system adapting to individuals. “What does *that* student need?” is not a question the modern school system is well-equipped to answer.

The struggle to help primary and secondary students develop their personal interests and individual skills in the compulsory school setting is rooted in the structure of school itself—it was not designed with that objective in mind.

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3

How to Become a Secondary Bible Teacher

Now we are ready to get into the details of your work. Well, not quite. For those of you seeking a position in a Christian school, here's what you will need to land a job.

Requirements

In general you don't need a degree in Bible, but you will need an undergraduate degree with a few undergraduate Bible courses under your belt. I say that because many Christian schools are accredited, or in the accreditation process, with the *Association of Christian School International*. ACSI-affiliated schools often require their teachers to be certified with ACSI. The requirements for *ACSI Bible specialist* certification include:

- an undergraduate degree
- a minimum of 24-semester hours in biblical studies
- agreement with ACSI's statement of faith

With a master's degree, 40 semester hours in biblical studies, and five years of teaching experience, you can apply for lifetime certification. (For more details see the ACSI list of requirements.) If, however, you don't have ACSI certification, don't despair. Many ASCI schools will hire teachers without ACSI certification as long as teachers pursue certification while they're teaching.

Finding Job Openings

After getting the degree and courses under your belt, you need to find the job openings. Unfortunately, compared to other teaching positions, the number of Bible teacher positions posted each year is relatively low. After all, how many high school Bible teachers does a school need? Small schools—and many Christian schools are small—only need one. In addition, many Christian schools are especially careful about who they hire to teach Bible courses.

But every year there are openings for high school Bible teachers. The earlier you start looking in the school year the better your chances of getting a job. Probably the best way to learn about a job opening is by word of mouth so remember to network. Also make sure to check online job postings. (Since online job lists are not always up-to-date, contact the school directly to confirm the opening.)

Websites

The *ACSI* website includes an extensive list of job openings. Though much smaller, *Christian Schools International* is another association of Christian schools that maintains a jobs database. If you would like to teach in a classical Christian school check the website of the *Association of Classical & Christian Schools*. Classical Christian schools do not have sole Bible teacher positions so you will need to be able to teach something related to the humanities as well. Along the same lines, a new type of school has recently been established called *University-Model*.® These are classical Christian schools that follow a university-based schedule at the high school level so they tend to be less expensive and less time intensive. See the job board on their website: www.umsi.org.

If you're interested in teaching outside of the U.S., register with *TeachNext* then browse their job openings. I believe *TeachNext* represents hundreds of international schools, though many may not pay a full salary with benefits so you may need to raise financial support. Also visit the jobs posted on the *Network of International Christian Schools* site. NICS operates about 20 schools around the world and some pay a full salary with benefits. There are a few other large Christian schools that pay a salary and provide housing, such as *Seoul Foreign School* and *International Christian School* in Hong Kong.

Teacher Agencies

If you have experience in the field, you may want to apply to a teacher agency to improve your chances of getting an interview. Yes, you will need to apply and be accepted by a teacher agency. Of course, for Bible teacher positions, you will need to apply to teacher agencies that focus on independent and private schools, such as *Southern Teachers Agency*.

Landing the Job

Make sure to send in everything requested promptly; make personal contact with the school—perhaps a phone call or even a visit; if you know someone at the school let him or her know that you're applying; finally be prepared and positive in the interview.

4

Three Goals

"Begin with the end in mind" has become a proverbial wise saying. So what should be our goals or objectives in teaching the Bible?

1. Enable students to grasp the essential truths of Scripture.

The Bible highlights certain teachings more than others. For example, there are four Gospels, there's a greatest commandment (Mk. 12:29–31), and there are things of "first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3). Topics of secondary importance should be considered, but they shouldn't sidetrack us from placing the emphasis in the right place. Given the prominence of Christ and salvation in Scripture, the purpose of the Bible is concisely summarized in this way: to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ" (2 Tim. 3:15). We can compare the Bible to an outstretched finger pointing to Christ, a monitor displaying Christ, or a vehicle transporting us to Christ. Unfortunately, some people study the Scriptures and miss the point by refusing to come to Christ (Jn. 5:39–40). A Christian interpretation of Scripture emphasizes Christ.

Second, Scripture has the practical purpose of equipping us for a life of good works (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The stories, commands, and exhortations, should motivate us to do good and discourage us from doing evil. As we take a step back and look at these two stated objectives we find ourselves at the greatest command: love God (which involves believing in and loving his Son), and love people (Mk. 12:28–31).

2. Challenge students to respond to the message of the Bible.

The Bible aims to affect our head (intellect), heart (emotions/desires), and hands (actions). First, the Scriptures have to engage the mind and this can be accomplished in a variety of ways: observing and interpreting details in a passage, taking notes while listening to an online sermon, and researching a topic. But engaging students intellectually has to be done at the appropriate level. Secondary Bible class is not seminary nor is it Sunday school. That means students should be exposed to controversial issues in biblical interpretation, but they don't need to be taken into the depth of controversy of a graduate student. When exposing students to controversial issues, try to give the possible solutions without being dogmatic. Being fair to both sides, as best as we can, is the honest thing to do.

Second, the Scriptures convict and challenge the attitudes of the heart and Bible class should do the same. Use relevant questions, reflective assignments, artwork, and movies to help students engage with the Bible on an emotional level.

Third, there are important things to do in response to Bible study. For example, James says if we merely listen to the word without doing what it says, we're deceiving ourselves (Jam. 1:22). Since observing or grading action is outside the scope of an academic class, this particular objective is targeted through the use of encouragement. And the primary encouragement you will leave with the students long after they leave your class is the example of your life.

3. Encourage students to read the Bible and interact with its ideas for a lifetime.

As with any class in school, it's possible for Bible class to actually decrease students' interest in the Bible. Why does that happen? Perhaps for many reasons, but one is because of the highly structured environment, including the many required assignments. We should be aware of this danger and realize that it's the complete opposite of what we are hoping to accomplish on a long-term basis. In addition, the stakes are much higher when students turn away from the Bible than when they turn away from science or social studies. The Bible is not meant to be a textbook that we put away when class is over. Bible class should motivate students to read and study the Bible for the rest of their lives. I believe this long-term encouragement is best given through meaningful and engaging Bible lessons and through a teacher who is passionate about the subject.

5

Scope and Sequence

Deciding on the scope and sequence of high school Bible curriculum is a challenge. There really is no way to do an in-depth study of the entire Bible in four years of high school so you will need to prioritize content. Moreover, there are many variables that go into a high school Bible scope and sequence, such as the middle school curriculum, the duration of courses (semester vs. year), the school's enrollment policy, the graduation credit requirements, and the preference of teachers and administrators during a curriculum review. With that said, many schools have a Bible curriculum that looks something like this:

- *OT Survey* (Grade 9)
- *NT Survey* (Grade 10)
- *Theology/Doctrine* (Grade 11)
- *Worldview/World Religions/Apologetics* (Grade 12)

I'm not a big fan of Bible survey courses because I prefer depth to breadth. Survey courses can also be more stressful for me to teach because I feel pressure to cover a lot of ground and get to the end. I prefer to do in-depth book studies (e.g., Genesis, Exodus, Mark, John, Romans, etc.). The keys to doing proper books studies are the following:

- Zoom out at times to give the big picture.
- Place the book in its ancient historical and literary context so that students engage with other worldviews and ideas.
- Highlight key themes and show how they are repeated and developed throughout Scripture.
- Make it practical by explaining how students can apply it to their lives.
- Show how the book points to Christ.
- Be flexible. You may need to deviate from your book study to pursue a topic of interest in the students' minds.

If book studies are done this way, students don't need a year of theology. And rather than focusing on worldviews, I prefer to teach world religions. Worldviews can be too theoretical, while world religions expose students to on-the-ground realities of practicing religious adherents. Disregarding the many variables that could affect the choice of curriculum, here is my ideal scope and sequence:

- *Israel's Origin* – focusing on Genesis and Exodus (Grade 9)
- *Israel's Prophets and Kings* – focusing on 1 Samuel-2 Kings, and key chapters in Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah/Jeremiah, the book of Revelation could fit here as well (Grade 10)
- *Israel's Messiah* – focusing on Mark and John, and key chapters in Acts (Grade 11)
- *World Religions* – choose a key textbook, such as *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery* by Jeffrey Brodd. Also engage with ideas from the NT letters throughout the course (Grade 12)

Admittedly, covering that much ground in Grade 10 is ambitious. In fact, I think 9th grade is even ambitious, so it will be necessary to skip or skim certain portions in book studies.

One wrinkle to my scope and sequence is your school's graduation requirements. Some schools don't require a Bible credit all four years. In light of my preference for giving students more freedom as discussed in the beginning of this guide, I am in favor of allowing students to opt out of Bible class for one year, thus requiring three Bible credits instead of four. In that case, schools could offer something like this:

- *Israel's Origin* – focusing on Genesis and Exodus
- *Israel's Prophets, Kings, and Messiah* – an overview of Israel's history with a focus on Jeremiah, Mark, and Acts
- *World Religions* – choose a key textbook, such as *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery* by Jeffrey Brodd, also engage with ideas from the NT letters throughout the course

If your school is reconsidering its Bible curriculum, I recommend doing a survey of several Christian schools to see what they are doing with their scope and sequence. It's usually fairly easy to find on school websites under their curriculum section. Then incorporate ideas that you think best fit your school. And remember to walk the fine line between presenting content and giving students an opportunity to explore and express ideas for themselves. The latter is especially important as students get older.

6

Eight Pitfalls

Full-time teaching is a challenging job. That assertion is supported by the high turnover rate among teachers. Here's a list of seven pitfalls that have the potential to sink the secondary Bible teacher.

1. **Stress.** Being with 100 students all day, five days a week can be stressful. And trying to motivate them to do things they don't want to do can be exhausting.

2. **High number of classes.** Full-time Bible teachers teach twenty to twenty-five classes per week. At that rate, a pastor would need to preach twice a week for forty years to equal the number of lessons taught by a high school Bible teacher in five years. The amount of required teaching leaves little time for in-depth study. And a lack of study and learning usually leads to a lack of passion for the subject.

3. **Lack of curriculum.** Many Christian schools leave it up to the Bible teacher to create the curriculum. That means in your first year, there's a chance you will be creating the following from scratch: tests, quizzes, handouts, activities, and assignments. No other teacher is expcted to do that. The good news is that your second year will be easier.

4. **Limitations of the academic setting.** Of course, the perfect setting doesn't exist, but it's important to be aware of the limitations of the academic setting. First, many biblical topics are not easily taught in an academic environment – e.g. love, joy, peace, etc. These vital aspects of the Christian life can't be graded. The Bible doesn't only teach head knowledge, it teaches relational or heart knowledge. That kind of knowledge can be difficult to convey in a formal academic setting.

   Second, the teacher and student relationship tends to be one dimensional. Students sit and listen while the teacher speaks. When the bell rings, the teacher stops speaking and the students leave. Jesus' approach was different. While Jesus lectured, he also lived with his students on a daily basis.

   Third, the school setting makes it easy for both teachers and students to miss the point. The primary purpose of teaching the Bible is not for students to pass a test or get an A. The goal of biblical knowledge is biblical belief and action. The Bible isn't just another textbook. Perhaps Francis of Assisi summed up this pitfall best when he wrote to Anthony of Lisbon, "I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers—providing that you do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion during study of this kind."

5. **Student misbehavior.** Responding appropriately to student misbehavior is one of the hardest aspects of teaching because it's full of judgment calls: Was it right for me to call out this student and not that student? Was the discipline I gave fair? Did I have the right attitude? Do my administrators approve of this discipline method? Although the details may be confusing, appropriate discipline is essential. If we don't discipline well, we could be undermining our teaching. Bible class shouldn't be run like a military boot camp because students need an opportunity to share freely and think about life, God, and faith. But Bible class also shouldn't be run like a circus because students won't learn, and the teacher will burnout.

6. **Lack of student interest** poses a major problem for any subject, but especially Bible class where students must be humble and receptive for it to make an impact. Sin is a major cause of disinterest because it directs our attention away from God's Word. However, sin is not the only factor.

   Poor teaching and the school setting may contribute to the problem in the following ways. First, to turn students off to the Bible (or anything for that matter) here's the recipe: run class the same way every day (e.g., lecturing for the entire period), don't listen to honest doubts and questions, ignore student suggestions, act superhuman by never showing weakness in front of the class (e.g., ignorance, error, sorrow), discipline harshly, avoid students outside of class, don't worry if the students are enjoying class, don't bother to rethink issues in light of new evidence, teach below or above their level, don't prepare for class, and stop reading. Basically the more we think about ourselves, the less students will care about our classes.

   Second, in a Christian school environment, students who perceive hypocrisy in fellow students, teachers, or administrators may become jaded to the Bible and the Christian faith. It's important to note, however, that the perception of hypocrisy may not be accurate.

   Third, because of the different levels of knowledge among the students, at times it will be necessary to teach material that some find repetitive and boring. Augustine noted, "A speaker who clarifies something that needs to be learnt is a blessing, but a speaker who labours things already learnt is a bore."[2] Reaching some students may require you to be a bore to other students. The degree to which you face this challenge depends on your school's admission policy.

7. **Controversial issues in biblical interpretation.** With a two-thousand-year history, we are the beneficiaries of a vast library of opinions and the library is growing daily. A good teacher

[2] Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, in Oxford World's Classics, trans. R.P.H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 116.

understands different points of view, presents them fairly, and ideally is able to offer an educated opinion on the matter. A good teacher is also aware of where they are and doesn't spend too much time traveling down the rabbit trails of controversy. That is no small task.[3]

8. **Hypocrisy in the heart of the teacher.** This is an enormous pitfall for any public speaker and that's because it's all too easy to say one thing and do another. In the book of James we find this warning, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (3:1). I can't tell you how many times I've felt a disjunction between what I was teaching and what I was living. For example, why do I talk all day about prayer and not pray? Why do I talk *about* God, but not *to* God? This personal struggle isn't fun, but it keeps us honest and it helps us remember what's most important—being a disciple and not just talking about it.

[3] For a helpful introduction to controversial theological topics see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Including the appendix, the authors concisely explain thirty debatable topics within evangelical Christianity.

7

Eleven Tips

In the previous chapter we identified seven pitfalls for secondary Bible teachers. Being aware of the pitfalls is the first step to avoiding them. Here is a list of ways that we can navigate around the pitfalls.

1. **Pray for your students.** As a Bible teacher I'm sure you are familiar with the emphasis on prayer in Scripture so I won't belabor this point. I have frequently received new ideas and rejuvenation for my time in the classroom while praying for my students.

2. **Prepare your lessons.** If you want to burnout fast in teaching, stop spending time preparing your lessons. That will lead to boredom for the students and eventual classroom chaos, causing you to look for another job. Conversely, if you prepare your lessons, you will gain an extra burst of energy, confidence, and even excitement to teach.

3. **Target the whole person.** The Bible aims to affect our head, heart, and hands and Bible class should do the same. Remember to make your lessons practical for your students. That doesn't mean you have to make a practical point in every lesson. It means don't lose sight of the practical aspect in a unit of lessons. One way to accomplish this goal is to have a check-in day once a quarter when you ask students about their lives. For example, since the Bible teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves, you can ask, "How is your relationship with your siblings, parents, friends, etc?" And "What have been your high points and low points this quarter?"

4. **Use a variety of teaching strategies.** One of the major findings from a multi-year study of award-winning teachers in the U.S. and China was that such teachers consistently use a variety of teaching strategies.[4] Class shouldn't begin the same way every day and only rarely should students do the same thing for an entire period. While teachers shouldn't feel pressured to put on a variety show every period, they should have a well-stocked and frequently-used collection of activities at their disposal.[5] One of the most effective and flexible teaching strategies is also

[4] James H. Stronge & Xianxuan Xu, *Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching* (Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2016), 1. Stronge and Xu continue by exploring ten effective instructional strategies.

[5] See John Van Dyk*, The Craft of Christian Teaching: A Classroom Journey* (Sioux Center: Dordt Press, 2000). Van Dyk proposes the following categories for teaching strategies: (1) Direct teaching – lectures, demonstrations, videos, worksheets, etc.; (2) Indirect teaching – story-telling, discovery learning, research projects, etc.; and (3) Participatory teaching – brainstorming, cooperative learning, dramas, etc. Van Dyk also gives the pros and cons of each strategy (157-68).

one of the simplest: ask thought-provoking questions. The greatest teachers (i.e. Socrates, Confucius, Jesus) understood the importance of asking questions. Take time to prepare good questions in your lessons.

5. **Implement grace in grading.** For example, don't be a stickler for a specific word in a memory verse if a student has captured the same idea with a different word. After all, there are a few dozen English versions. Give students credit for being close enough. From time to time, when giving a quiz or test, allow students to work with a Bible, a notebook, or a friend. Of course, don't take grace to an extreme, but consider incorporating it into your grading. After all, grace is at the heart of what we're teaching. Being a stickler in grading usually communicates a legalistic and grade-centered emphasis.

6. **Teach to their level.** This is not easy to define because every class is unique, but the point is that middle school or high school teachers shouldn't teach on the seminary or the Sunday school level. When we make things too hard or too easy for the students, we run the risk of losing their interest or even provoking their disdain. One of my former colleagues told me that she had to memorize about fifty verses for her high school Bible final exam. I asked her how she felt about it and she replied, "I hated it and I forgot all the verses anyway."

7. **Get to know the students and help them get to know each other.** The message of the Bible focuses on our relationship with God and with each other. Teachers can emphasize the relational aspect by cultivating a respectful and listening atmosphere, facilitating group activities, and celebrating the unique attributes of each student. Ideally teachers should enjoy the company of their students. Jesus is the supreme example; he ate with his students, walked with them, washed their feet, and died for them. We can start small by eating lunch with our students from time to time or just shooting the breeze in class. Surveys can also help you get to know your students. For sensitive information use an anonymous survey. (Of course, remember to take survey results with a grain of salt.)

8. **Change the classroom environment.** For example, have the students sit on the floor or move the desks away from the chairs for a period or two. "Over fifteen hundred years ago St. Augustine insisted . . . that the learning environment in religious education should be physically 'comfortable' for the participants."[6] Accomplishing this in a school setting is not easy, but it's something to be aware of and work toward. Maybe the Bible classroom can be painted a different color or perhaps cushions can be placed on the floor where students can sit once in a while. I prefer to have students sit on the floor when we have our check-in time once a quarter. Along

[6] Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), 226.

these same lines, consider your position as a teacher in the classroom. Are you sitting or standing during class discussions? Both are fine, but be aware that you can influence the classroom atmosphere by changing your physical posture from time to time.

9. **Teach honestly.** While we should emphasize primary biblical teachings as stated in chapter 4, we shouldn't ignore controversial or difficult teachings. Plan to address challenging issues in your lessons. When a student asks a difficult question, don't brush it off. There's no way around the fact that there are difficult verses to interpret and complicated issues to consider. We're not doing students a service when we shield them from Bible difficulties or when we act like we have everything figured out. Honesty means saying "I don't know" and even "I'm sorry."

10. **Live honestly.** First, be a genuine follower of Christ. Hypocrisy is a powerful corroding agent that eats away at our work. In five or ten years, students will probably forget almost everything they heard in class, but they won't forget their teachers. They will have caught certain things from our lives. They will remember if we were serious about our faith and loving toward them. Antidotes for hypocrisy include a disciplined habit of prayer and Bible reading, regular confession, and close godly friendships. Second, be a learner. As a teacher, you're presenting yourself as someone who's interested in learning so keep learning. Read in your field and read outside of your field. Read everything you can. And continue to consider new ideas just as you did when you were a student.

11. **Try to figure out what is causing you stress and seek ways to address it.** The first pitfall listed in the previous chapter is stress, but can you identify your source(s) of stress? Is it one student, preparing lessons, grading, or something else? For me, getting through my lessons can be a source of anxiety. When things get off-track in class, I experience a degree of pressure because I want to get through the lesson. So one thing that can cause me stress is my lesson plan. I have realized this only because I've worked in two types of schools: (1) teachers not required to submit weekly lesson plans and (2) teachers required to submit weekly lesson plans. I experience less stress in the former. Identify your source of stress and determine how it can be mitigated.

8

Biblical Controversy

At the start of one school year I asked my students how they felt about previous Bible classes. A few of their responses sounded off warning alarms in my head. In different ways they were saying that Bible class turned them off to the Bible. Undoubtedly, there are several causes for this negative feeling toward Bible class. But one was clearly mentioned: the way Bible classes were taught was dogmatic and closed to discussion.

A main antidote to a dogmatic and closed Bible class is to expose students to controversy in biblical interpretation. High school or middle school students should be exposed to biblical controversy for the following reasons:

- **It keeps students from losing interest in Bible class.** Don't we all love a good debate? Doesn't overhearing a disagreement catch your attention? There are many good debates in the history of biblical interpretation and as Bible teachers we ignore them at our own peril.

- **It acknowledges the questions students already have.** If they are taught to read the Bible closely, and they should be, students already see challenging areas of biblical interpretation. Although we may try, we can't shield students from Bible difficulties.

- **Students want to wrestle with challenging questions.** Whether we facilitate it or not, the wrestling match has already begun. Haven't you noticed how effortlessly students can express their questions when given the opportunity? By ignoring the tough questions, we are boring the students. Secondary students are full of energy and confidence—except for when they're falling asleep after lunch—so let them wrestle.

- **It prepares them for future theological challenges.** Students will face tough questions during college, hardships in life, encounters with others, etc. Allow theological wrestling to begin in a safe environment.

- **Bible teachers should be examples of honesty.** Since Christian history stretches back two thousand years, we are the recipients of a vast library of opinions and those opinions are not always in harmony. We should be honest about differences in biblical interpretation because if we're not honest, we'll lose the students' trust, and then we'll lose their interest. Can we really hide things from our students today anyway?

- **Bible teachers should be examples of humility.** We don't have all the answers. And because we don't know it all, we have to demonstrate humility by listening well to others.

- **Bible teachers should be examples of courage.** Why do some religious groups only teach one interpretation without even mentioning other interpretations? Or if they do mention other interpretations why do they do so only disparagingly? Fear. They don't want to entertain the idea that they may be wrong. But what do Christians have to fear? We should be able to look directly at the evidence without flinching.[7]

As you can see, my reasoning acknowledges that a lot of what students learn is caught rather than taught. Long after class is over and the material is forgotten, students will remember the example of their teacher. And that means students can only be exposed to biblical controversy in a healthy way under the guidance of mature and competent teachers. But if secondary Bible teachers are immature and incompetent, what results can we expect? Two thoughts come quickly to mind. First, we run the risk of driving these students away from the faith. Second, we run the risk that these students will remain in the church and act like their teachers.

Confident in the Gospel

I know some may fear that exposing students to biblical controversy will only lead to confusion or agnosticism, so let me be quick to add: Christians should always be confident in the gospel. We are confident that the gospel is the message of salvation for all people and that the good news is centered on Jesus Christ. But when we forget as Paul said that "now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12), we stop listening, we ignore questions, we act arrogantly, and ultimately we turn students off to us and the Bible.

[7] If you're interested in how I handle the difficult topic of hell, see my book *Surprised by Hell: Unexpected Discoveries in the Bible and Church History* (BibleBridge: 2017).

9

World Religions

People who only know about their own religion and discard all others are like people who have only tried one kind of salsa and disdain even the thought of another salsa. While these loyal salsa consumers know the ingredients, nutritional value, manufacturer, and flavor of their salsa, they don't have anything with which to compare it. And comparing is crucial to understanding because it enables us to appreciate the distinctive flavors in our salsa of choice. For example, learning about reincarnation helps us to appreciate the concept of resurrection all the more. And understanding the law of karma can make us more grateful for grace.

In addition, there are ingredients in our salsa jar which we think we understand, but we don't know them as well as we think we do. We need to see tomatoes outside of our salsa to understand them as we should. The emphasis on compassion in Buddhism, prayer in Islam, and meditation in Hinduism, can help us grasp things we may have missed or underemphasized in our own faith.

"But" some may ask, "what if after tasting other salsas we don't like our salsa as much as we used to?" To that I say, if you've really tasted the Christian gospel of grace, I highly doubt that you're going to like the taste of another salsa more. Moreover, fear is no excuse for remaining in ignorance. We live in a global melting pot so we simply can't ignore others.

Others may object, "the Christian faith is not just another jar of salsa sitting on the shelf next to others. In fact, you can't even find it in the store because it's free and it's a relationship." I agree. No analogy is perfect, but I still hope this conveys my point.

Ultimately we don't need the salsa analogy, because the greatest argument for learning about other religions is the greatest commandment. Jesus instructed his followers, "love your neighbors as yourselves" (Mk. 12:31). And since faith is one of the most important things to our neighbors, when we take the time to learn about their beliefs, we are communicating love to them. So here are the two reasons to learn about world religions: it helps us appreciate our faith and it helps us love our neighbors.[8]

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[8] For an accessible introduction to world religions see *World Religions: An Indispensable Introduction (Nelson's Quick Guides)* by Gerald R. McDermott. For a standard textbook treatment see *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery* by Jeffrey Brodd.

10

Classroom Management

Some days teaching will be a breeze. Everything will go as you planned. Students will stay on task, you will have enjoyable and thought-provoking discussions, and you will feel like you made meaningful connections. Those days will make you feel like there's little to manage.

Other days will not be so easy. You will be discouraged by students who are falling asleep or talking to others during your lesson. You will be frustrated by students who are not doing any work during a group assignment. And you will be annoyed because no one is responding to your questions. Teaching can be an emotional roller coaster.

It's important to realize that how the day goes is not completely up to you. There are many variables that go into each individual class: the number of students, the personalities of the students in the class, how the students are feeling, what happened in the previous class, the time of day, the day of the week, what's happening after school, etc. So don't take everything personally. Realize that your class is just one aspect of a much bigger picture.

How you manage your class is largely a reflection of your personality so I'm not going to tell you how you should run your class. However, I think that teachers should seek to avoid two extreme classroom environments—chaos and military drill. Since I prefer open-discussion classes and often allow students to talk without raising their hands, I need to be especially cautious of chaos. My preference for freedom comes from my personality and my philosophy of education as explored at the beginning of this guide.[9]

With that said, here are a few classroom management strategies you may want to consider implementing.

1. **Assigned seating.** You may want to wait a week or two before assigning seats to give you time to get to know the students' personalities.

[9] For an insightful exploration of what it means to be a *Christian* teacher both philosophically and practically see John Van Dyk*, The Craft of Christian Teaching: A Classroom Journey* (Sioux Center: Dordt Press, 2000).

2. **Follow the discipline procedure set up by your school.** For example, give out a pink slip for chewing gum or whatever rules your school asks you to enforce. If you're going to enforce the rules, it's important to start enforcing them during the first week of school.

3. **Use the silent stare method.** Raising your voice constantly to get students to quiet down can be wearisome. One teacher I knew never had to raise her voice because she mastered the silent stare. Stop speaking and stare in the direction of the students who are misbehaving. This method works because when a teacher is silent, students are uncertain of what is going to happen next.

4. **Talk to the student one-on-one after class.** Tell the student how his or her behavior makes you feel and how it makes their classmates feel. The reality is that the majority of students are just as annoyed with the misbehaving student as the teacher.

5. **Require the student to sit with you during lunch.** Sitting with friends at lunch is something students look forward to, so if they are required to sit with you, it will make an impact.

6. **Email or call the student's parents.** It's best if your first contact with parents is positive so you may want to consider making a connection with parents at the start of the school year. "Hello, I'm Mr./Mrs. _____, and I will be teaching your child this year. If you have any concerns or questions about my class, please feel free to contact me by calling the school or emailing _____. And if I have any concerns I will reach out to you."

No matter what strategies you use or don't use, you will need to learn how to put up with different personalities. Teachers definitely need to follow Paul's advice and "bear" with their students (Col. 3:13).

11

Computers in the Classroom

Many private schools allow or even require students to have a laptop or tablet device in class. This creates new opportunities and challenges for teachers.

Let's start with the negative: computers can be a major distraction. What are students doing on their devices? Probably not what you have asked them to do. In fact, they could be doing things that are serious violations of school policies. Here are two ways to manage student computers.

1. Only allow students to open their computers at certain times. You will need to stay on top of this throughout the year, but I recommend telling them at the start of the year that class begins with computers closed. According to studies, notes taken by hand are more effective for learning so require students to take handwritten notes then allow them to use their computers to complete certain assignments.

2. Use an app, such as Apple Classroom, that locks computer screens or limits what apps can be accessed.

On the positive side, computers provide the following possibilities:

- Assignments submitted digitally
- Handouts distributed digitally
- Online surveys and quizzes, giving teachers a more efficient way to view and use data and a more exciting way for students to answer questions (e.g. Socrative, Kahoots, Poll Everywhere, SurveyMonkey, etc.)
- New types of assignments and activities (e.g. have students create a PowerPoint with a certain number of slides and images for particular Bible stories, complete group video projects, listen to music with headphones while working, etc.)

12

Twenty-One Icebreakers

How are you going to begin class? The opening activity is known as an icebreaker (usually a term used by church youth groups) or an anticipatory set (the formal term used in the academic world). There are probably distinctions between the two, but there's a high degree of overlap, so I'll use the term icebreaker because I like the way it sounds.

What's the point of using an icebreaker? The point is to break the ice, of course. But if you're a classroom teacher who sees the same students five days a week, what kind of ice needs to be broken? You're already quite familiar with each other. I would suggest that the academic ice needs to be broken.

Bible class is different than other classes. What the Bible teacher is seeking to accomplish is unique. And that means students need to be in the right frame of mind where they can let down their guard and really think about God and life and relationships. Put yourself in their shoes: They enter a classroom, sit down, listen, take notes, then move on to the next class and do it all over again. Imagine doing that all day long. How do you want Bible class to fit into the scheme of things for them? Do you want it to be just another class? Hopefully not, because there's a devotional and spiritual aspect that's at the heart of Bible class, which is not necessarily the case in other classes. So an icebreaker can serve to change the academic atmosphere for the students.

Ideally, the icebreaker will connect with the topic of the day. At least that's the idea behind an anticipatory set. But if your goal is to get to know the students better and help them relax then you don't need to be too concerned that the icebreaker directly connects with the lesson.

I don't recommend using the same icebreaker every day, but some of these can be used quite effectively on a weekly basis.

1. **Q & A** – At the start of the quarter/semester, have students write out their questions about God, the Bible, other religions, etc., and questions about you as their teacher. Pull out two or three questions at the beginning of class and answer them. This is a great activity and students enjoy it, just don't spend too much time answering one question.

2. **Random lessons** – Allow students to come to the front and individually share anything they want with the class for 2-3 minutes. I like to require them to use the whiteboard as well. If you

want to hear from every student you'll probably have to make this a requirement. I've had students share about their favorite restaurant, how they make a sandwich, a story from their childhood, how to save the world from hunger, a book they recently read, a joke or riddle, a magic trick . . . Encourage the students to think about sharing things they don't usually share. This is a great way to get to know the students. A variation of this is random Bible lessons. Give students five to ten minutes to flip through the Bible and find something to share.

3. **Random question** – Make up your own question or use a book of questions, such as *The Conversation Piece: Creative Questions to Tickle the Mind*. You can also spur on creative thinking by asking lateral thinking questions, such as "How is a book like a light bulb?" If you don't have a creative question handy ask what they've learned from a previous class or ask them about what they were discussing before class started. You can go around and have every student answer or call on volunteers.

4. **Show a video clip (e.g., music video) or an image (e.g., famous painting).** For middle school classes, I showed a Christian music videos at the start of class on Fridays then gave 30 minutes of free time, calling it Genius Half-Hour. Genius Half-Hour is a time for students to learn whatever they want or create something. It's also a time for me to help individual students catch up on things they missed. This is a great way to end the week!

5. **Written reflection** – Give a writing prompt, such as a thought-provoking question then give time for students to write. For example, print out a short Bible passage with three or four questions and have students work on that for the first 10-15 minutes.

6. **Gratitude list** – Have students share what they are thankful for from the week. Students can come to the board and write their gratitude list or share with a neighbor.

7. **Review** – Remind students of the major ideas that were taught in class during the week. Think of creative ways to do this.

8. **Play catch** – Bring a ball to class and randomly throw it to students while you ask them about their day. You can also have them get into a circle and you can get a couple balls going at the same time. This can be a review activity if you ask questions to the person who caught the ball. If they miss the ball or answer incorrectly they're out of the circle.

9. **Interview** – Act as if you're a talk show host and invite one student to the front and ask anything that comes to mind. I like to start with easy questions then move on to deeper questions like "When have you been surprised?" Allow students to skip any question they don't want to answer. My students really enjoy this.

10. **Prayer** – There are many ways to incorporate prayer but let me give a caution: taking prayer requests may take a long time. Some teachers are comfortable praying at the start of every class and others aren't. Also, your comfort level with praying in class may depend on your

school's admission requirements. Schools that practice open enrollment allow non-Christian students to attend so you should consider that classroom dynamic when incorporating Christian practices such as prayer.

11. **Word associations/brainstorm** – Write a word on the board and have students write down words or phrases that they associate with it. You can also do, "things that make you sad, angry, bored, etc." This can be turned into a competition by awarding a prize to the student with the most associations. It's usually fun to read these to the class.

12. **Graffiti** – Ask students to come to the board in groups and draw something related to a particular theme. The following groups can build on what's been drawn or draw something different. This is also a good end of the semester activity.

13. **Progressive story** – Give the first line of the story and then have each student add a line or two.

14. **Exercise** – You can ask review questions while doing light exercising such as stretching.

15. **Tell a joke or funny story** – Tell one yourself or ask one of your class comedians to share one. There are also a few clean comedians online.

16. **Play a quick game** – e.g., sword drill, 7-up, thumb wrestling, hang-man

17. **Drawing/sketch** – On the first day of class I pass out a blank sheet of paper and ask students to draw color images along with words or phrases showing their interests and facts about their lives. I also ask them to write their names on the front of the paper. Then I post the papers on the classroom walls.

18. **True or False** – Write three true facts and one false fact about yourself then share with the class. Break the class up into groups and have them guess the false fact.

19. **Play or sing a song**

20. **Current event** – Share a recent story from the news.

21. **Share and reflect** – Allow students to get comfortable, perhaps by sitting on the floor, then lead them in a time of reflection. For example ask, "What's been happening in your lives? How is your relationship with your siblings, parents, friends?" I like to pass around a tennis ball during this activity. The only person who can speak is the one with the ball. The end of the semester or quarter is usually a good time to share and reflect. This is more of a life-review activity and it can take 5 minutes to an entire class period.

13

Sixteen Assignments for the Mind

Since the Bible aims to affect our head (intellect), heart (emotion/will), and hands (behavior/actions), I've separated the Bible class assignments into those three main areas. While all three areas are interconnected, seeing assignments under separate headings helps us to intentionally target each area. Again, our goal is to help students know it, feel it, and do it.

Here's my list of Bible class activities targeting the intellectual dimension. Feel free to add your own activities to the list.

Head: Content Work (Know it)

1. **Reading** – There are a variety of ways to read a passage in class: silently, randomly call on people, popcorn reading where the reader finishes reading wherever they want and then calls on another student to read, dramatic reading, assigned character roles, etc.

2. **Observations** – Help the students to see details in the passage. You can give guidance by telling students what to look for such as repeated words and phrases or you can give them freedom to record whatever they notice.

3. **Q and A** – Have the students write out any questions they have about the passage and then discuss. (Of course, you can always prepare your own questions to test the students' knowledge as well.)

4. **Partner discussion** – Place students with a partner to read and discuss the passage together.

5. **Notes** – Have students take notes on your lecture or a sermon/video, then collect them at the end of class. Students can record notes in a variety of ways such as dividing the paper into four sections to write down facts, new ideas, questions, and action steps.

6. **Handouts** – use the handouts included in your curriculum or make your own.

7. **Outline** – Hand out the passage without subheadings and have the students outline it.

8. **Summarize** – Give guidelines such as a minimum number of sentences to be written.

9. **Prior knowledge** – Find out what the students already know about the topic before you explore it together, then end class by reviewing how they've grown in their understanding of that topic.

10. **Scripture memorization** – Give a passage to be memorized by the end of class. You can also have students memorize a chapter or passage as a whole class – e.g., memorize one or two verses each, then go around the class.

11. **Translation comparison** – Give three or four translations and have students compare the similarities and differences. Use www.biblegateway.com for free access to different translations.

12. **Keyword search** – Use the keyword search tool on biblegateway.com and have students search for a particular word in a specific part of the Bible and summarize each reference.

13. **Surveys** – Poll students in class or send them out to collect data on a specific topic.

14. **Crossword puzzle** – Make one for the students or have the students make one for each other as a review activity.

15. **Research paper** – Make sure to give the details of what you're looking for and how you'll be grading.

16. **Debate** – Divide the class into two groups and assign positions to be argued for. Give class time for the groups to prepare their arguments then have representatives from each group debate then rotate in new representatives.

14

Eleven Assignments for the Heart

We not only want students to know biblical content, we want them to feel it—to engage with it on an emotional level. Here are eleven Bible class assignments for the heart.

Heart: Creative Work (Feel it)

1. **Journal entry** – Have the students write a journal entry for one of the characters in the biblical story. You can specify the content you want (e.g., use the five senses) and the required length.

2. **Drama** – There are many ways to incorporate drama into Bible class: act out the story using skits or mimes, create a talk show with characters from the Bible story, present TV commercials promoting a theme from the passage, and show a life situation illustrating a particular theme. If you want quality skits give plenty of class time for students to prepare.

3. **Drawing** – Allow students to doodle as you're lecturing then collect and share with the class. A more structured assignment is drawing a biblical scene, on the whiteboard or on computer paper. A major project could be creating a Children's Bible cartoon strip.

4. **Reflection** – Ask students to summarize the passage in their own words, record their own questions of the passage, pose questions to a character in the passage, and explain how the passage connects to some area of their life.

5. **Artwork** – Many of the great artists painted or drew biblical scenes so incorporate these masterpieces into your lessons. (Use Google images to find these works of art quickly.)

6. **Article** – Have students create a newspaper or magazine article from the assigned passage. The article should include a title, picture, summary, and interview.

7. **Questions on Feelings** – Ask questions such as the following: How does this passage make you feel? Why?

8. **Craft** – Bring play-doh, magazines, or other materials, and have students make something related to the lesson.

9. **Music/Poetry** – Have students write song/rap lyrics or a poem that relates to the lesson. You can also begin class with a song or play an appropriate song during a lesson then discuss the lyrics.

10. **Prayer** – Students can write a prayer incorporating the passage they're reading. If you're comfortable with it, you can lead students through a meditative exercise where they imagine they're in the biblical scene and then turn their thoughts into private prayer. (If you want a book to help you with this activity see *The Spiritual Exercises* by St. Ignatius of Loyola.) Of course, you can always take prayer requests then pray, but if you want to keep that to a certain length of time, limit the number of prayer requests. (The degree to which you incorporate prayer may depend on your school's admission policy. If there are non-Christian students in class, you'll need to be more sensitive to how you incorporate prayer.)

11. **Case study** – Give an example of a life situation then discuss appropriate responses. For example: You are a Christian counselor and a married couple with two children comes in to meet with you. They say they want a divorce because they no longer love each other. The feelings they used to have for each other are gone and they believe it is best to end the marriage. How would you respond?

15

Six Assignments for the Hands

We've already considered Bible class assignments that target the mind and heart. Unfortunately, I've had a more difficult time coming up with assignments that target the hands—ways to encourage students to put into practice what they've learned. How can we really get students to *do* something in a classroom environment? And if they do it, how can we put a grade on it?

Nevertheless, targeting the hands is still worth a try because as James says if we only hear the word without doing it we're deceiving ourselves (1:22). Here's my six-item list.

Hands: Active Work (Do it)

1. **Prior experience** – To encourage students to reflect on and modify a particular behavior, begin class by asking how they currently perform a particular task (e.g. showing hospitality, serving the poor, granting forgiveness, etc.). After teaching on that topic, end class by asking students how their performance of that task should be affected by the lesson.

2. **Student lessons** – To encourage students to teach the Bible, place them in groups of three to four and have them prepare a lesson to be taught to the class or another class or chapel/assembly.

3. **Time with elementary students** – If your secondary school meets in the same building as your elementary school, seek to facilitate a time between your secondary students and elementary students. Perhaps they can read to them on a regular basis, help them with special projects, or just spend time with them during recess. Placing older students with younger students brings out the nurturing aspect in older students and gives them a break from their highly structured environment.

4. **Community service** – To encourage students to serve, facilitate community service events or a introduce a community service requirement (with the approval of your administrator).

5. **Prayer journal** – To encourage students to pray, have them keep a prayer journal for a specific period of time. (Non-Christian students could be required to keep a daily diary.)

6. **Application day** – To encourage students to consider what actions they need to take, have an informal class where you sit on the floor or in a circle and ask the students what they learned and can put into practice from the past week/month/semester of Bible lessons.

16

Project Ideas

Experienced teachers know the importance of good projects. Projects are essential because they break up the monotony of everyday lessons and reinforce the content in a different way. And group projects provide an opportunity for students to work together and improve their presentation skills. Here are a few project ideas that I have used in Bible class.

1. **Research paper** – Make sure to give a rubric.

2. **Debate** – Divide the class into two groups and assign positions to be argued for. Give class time for the groups to prepare their arguments then have representatives from each group debate then rotate in new representatives.

3. **Drawing** – Draw a biblical story in color. They can draw one scene or several scenes as a comic strip.

4. **Newspaper article** – Students take on the role of reporter then create a newspaper or magazine article based on a Bible story. The article should include:

    - catchy headline
    - drawing in color
    - summary
    - Q and A interview with someone in the story

5. **Music/Poetry** – Write song/rap lyrics or a poem that relates to a Bible passage or biblical theme then present it to the class. You can also require that they use background music or beats from online sources.

6. **Drama** – There are many ways to incorporate drama into Bible class, but if you want quality skits, give plenty of class time for students to prepare. If your students have computers, they can do any of the following as video presentations. (More details on video projects are given in the next chapter.)

    - act out the story using skits or mimes
    - create a talk show with characters from the Bible story, e.g., interview Adam and Eve regarding life in the garden and life outside of the garden

- present TV commercials promoting a theme from the passage
- show a life situation illustrating a particular theme

7. **Song analysis** – Have students analyze lyrics of their favorite songs. They can present songs with disturbing lyrics as long as those lyrics are not seen or heard during the presentation.

8. **Student lessons** – Place your students in groups of three to four and have them prepare a lesson to be taught to the class or another class or chapel/assembly.

9. **Time with elementary students** – If your secondary school meets in the same building as your elementary school, seek to facilitate a time between secondary students and elementary students. This builds a sense of community across grades. Placing older students with younger students also brings out a nurturing sense in older students. Of course, it can exasperate older students so you will need to closely monitor this activity. Here are a few activity ideas:

    - The easiest thing to do is to mix your students with elementary students in small groups of four or five. Then have them find a place on the floor and play a game like Uno.
    - Have your students read to an elementary class—ideally one (or two) secondary student(s) with one (or two) elementary student(s), taking turns reading from an age-appropriate book
    - teach a Bible lesson by acting it out for an elementary class
    - teach a Bible lesson in the small group setting
    - have your students help elementary students prepare a skit then present it to the class
    - help them with special projects
    - spend time with them during recess

17

Group Video Project

Group video projects can be a lot of fun, but you should give plenty of class time for students to prepare them. You may also need to give students more freedom in the school building to go to different places and record. When I do this, I know where everyone is, I make sure they are not far from our classroom, and I walk back and forth to observe what is happening. Obviously, if anything goes wrong, it will come back to you as the teacher, so be observant. Here is an example of a group video project on the Sermon on the Mount.

Assignment

Present a video showing any four items below from Matthew 5-7:

- Love your enemies
- Give and pray in secret
- Pray to God like this: “Our Father”
- Don’t worry; look at the birds and flowers and trust in your heavenly Father
- Don’t judge others or they will judge you
- Ask, seek, and knock, and you will receive
- Watch out for false teachers; they are wolves in sheep's clothing
- Show that you are a real follower of Jesus by doing God's will

Requirements:

- Include four items from the list above (25 pts. for each item; 30-60 seconds for each item).
- Begin each item with the key verse(s) on screen.
- Present a scene for each item you choose. For example, people fighting about how to pray then someone comes and teaches them how to pray to God as “Our Father.”
- State how following Jesus’ instructions helps us
- Total time: 2-4 minutes – not including bloopers (5 pts. deducted for every 30 seconds below and above the time limit)
- Include a title screen (5 pts.) with the names and faces of everyone in the group

- Include everyone in the group on screen (5 pts. deducted for each person missing).
- Include background music (5 pts. deducted for no music)

*Also, try to incorporate humor ☺.

18

Spiritual Journey Paper

Here is an assignment that I have given for several years. It is a simple self-reflection paper, which has helped me learn more about my students. I recommend giving this assignment near the beginning of the school year. Also, since I try not to give much homework, I give students time to write this paper in class. Before giving this assignment, explain the following:

- You must be honest. We cannot make progress in our spiritual journey if we are dishonest.
- You will not be judged for where you are in your journey. Some very influential Christian authors and leaders like Augustine and C.S. Lewis didn't come to faith in Christ until they were in their 30s. If God is real, obviously it's better to come to him sooner, but everyone is moving at a different pace on their own unique journey.
- You do not have to write anything that you are uncomfortable sharing.
- What you write is confidential, but if you mention abuse, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts or attempts, I will need to share it with administrators. That is standard for all schools because it is a child safety issue.

Assignment

Write a 1-2 page paper describing the following two items:

1. **Your parents' faith.** If you are not sure what your parents believe, just state that you are unsure. But consider these questions: Do your parents pray or go to church? Have they ever talked with you about God or religion? Have you ever heard them say anything about God or religion, either positive or negative?

2. **Your faith.** Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? Do you consider yourself to be a follower of another faith? Are you not sure? Why? What are some key things or people that have influenced your beliefs? Key people may include relatives (other than parents), friends, teachers, celebrities, friends on social media. Consider especially specific conversations that made an impression on you. Key events may include youth group meetings or retreats, an experience in nature, reading a book, listening to a certain song, going to a funeral, etc.

19

Nine Review Ideas

Let's be realistic. Your best lessons will probably be forgotten. Forgetfulness is one of our major problems. Fortunately, there's a remedy—reminders. And since God knows our tendency to forget, the Bible is filled with reminders. The following three men in Scripture spent their last few moments giving reminders.

1. **Moses** – left the people of Israel with a massive review lesson called the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, Moses rehearses the previous forty-year period in Israel's history. The book is replete with the command to remember and even contains a song to aid Israel's memory (Dt. 32).

2. **Jesus** – on the night before he died, he took bread and broke it and said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19). In other words, you're going to forget so do this because it will help you remember. And so Jesus gave a little ceremony—eating the bread and drinking the cup— as a regular reminder of his death. And what a great reminder because it involves all of our senses. By giving this unique reminder, Jesus set the review of his death in perpetual motion.

3. **Peter** – left his listeners with a review lesson. In his second letter, Peter writes,

> Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Pet. 1:12–15 ESV)

Peter's words carry implications for both listeners and speakers. For the listener, try to avoid the "I already know that" reflex. Don't despise hearing the same thing for a second, third, or fourth time because reminders are good for us. For the speaker, it's okay to cover the same ground with your audience. Relieve yourself of the pressure of trying to say something new every time you speak. According to Peter, reminders are like stirring sticks. Peter writes, "I think it right . . . to stir you up by way of reminder" (v. 13). And two chapters later he says,

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the

holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. (2 Pet. 3:1–2 ESV)

There are many things that enter our brains like fireworks, but a few days later they have settled somewhere in the back. Regular reminders keep important information fresh. The stirring stick is necessary.

Third, reminders are important enough to be our last words. Knowing that death was near, Peter put his energy into helping his audience remember what he taught them. “I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things” (2 Pet. 1:15). Peter wasn’t trying to share something new and profound at the end of his life. Like Moses and Jesus, Peter wanted to go out on a review lesson. All three knew that without the review their best lessons were soon to be forgotten.

Conclusion

It’s easy to belittle reviewing. How many times have you heard students say, “We didn’t do anything today. We just reviewed for the test”? But there’s nothing more important to long-term learning than reviewing. Yes, it can be boring and mundane, but it doesn’t have to be. Think about the creativity and longevity of Jesus’ review lesson—a reminder that uses all five senses, initiated two thousand years ago and will continue until he returns. Don’t underestimate the power of reviewing.

Review Ideas/Activities

Here are a few review ideas. Experiment and figure out what works best for you and your class. And don’t forget to add your own ideas to the list.

- **Study guide** – Create a study guide for tests and distribute it at least one week before the test. This can also be done by using an online program like Quizlet or Socrative.
- **Signs** – Make posters or signs for key ideas or words that you want students to remember then post them on the classroom wall, or better yet, have the students make them.
- **Basketball/Trashball** – Divide the class into two teams. Ask a question to an individual student. Students who answer correctly get the opportunity throw a ball into the trash can. Use different distances for different point totals. The teacher can also serve as a hoop by holding out his or her arms. This is probably my favorite review game.
- **Tic-Tac-Toe** – Divide the class into two teams, draw the tic-tac-toe board and then ask questions to each team.
- **Prepare a quiz** – Have students write their own quiz questions. Then have them take each other’s quizzes.

- **Exit slips** – At the end of class, have students write down answers to questions related to the lesson and then collect.

- **Jeopardy** – Search online for websites that help teachers create Jeopardy boards for their classes.

- **Catch and throw game** – Students stand in a circle and throw a ball to each other. A student throws a ball then asks a review question to the student who caught the ball. (Or the teacher can ask a question.) Students who drop the ball or answer incorrectly are out. Bad throws can be penalized.

- **Split-Second** – Place students in groups of four. Ask review questions and have students write the answers on small sheets of paper. The first student to write down the correct answer and place it in the middle earns four points, the second student three points . . .

20

Online Resources

There are many excellent online resources. Here are three of my favorites.

BibleGateway (biblegateway.com)

BibleGateway has been extremely helpful to me as a classroom teacher. It contains the entire text of Scripture in dozens of translations. I have used this site in the following ways.

- **Print out a passage of Scripture** – select a translation, enter the verses, copy the passage onto a Word document, then print it out so students can mark it up by highlighting the repetition and making notes in the margins. Even when I don't distribute a copy to students, I often follow these steps for myself.

- **Compare translations** – when struggling with certain phrases or verses, I frequently compare how they are translated in other versions. If you enter one verse in the search bar then hit enter under the verse you will see a link to view all English translations of that verse.

- **Keyword search** – to find every use of a particular word in the Bible or a book of the Bible, enter the word in the search bar and select the version you want to explore. The results will show each time that word is used within your search parameters and the right side will display the number of times it appears in individual books of the Bible. I like to teach these steps to students and have them do their own keyword search for certain assignments.

- **Play audio Bible** – instead of reading the passage aloud in class, choose one of the audio versions and play it for the class.

NET Bible (netbible.org or bible.org/netbible)

The NET Bible is the New English Translation, originally published in 2005. This version is unique because it includes almost 60,000 translators' notes. Using it online allows for easy navigation of the notes. Just click on the blue superscript numbers in the text. While the notes contain technical details, such as information about Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, readers without professional training should be able to understand most of the information.

YouTube

YouTube contains many educational and thought-provoking videos for just about any topic. See especially, *The Bible Project* channel for animated Bible videos. In addition, since music is a powerful influence, consider showing Christian music videos and then discussing their meaning.

21

Lessons on Genesis 1

The first chapter of the Bible is the source of much controversy. How will you help students understand the controversy while highlighting the big ideas? Since you know your audience best, these sample lessons are offered as suggestions only.

Lesson 1: Genesis 1:1

Activity: Write out Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew. (Note to teacher: If you don't know Hebrew, you can find YouTube tutorials or other online resources that will help you with this. Make sure to write from right to left.)

Q: What do you notice about the opening statement of Genesis?

Key Points

- The first verse of Genesis is explosive. Certain religious and philosophical teachings claim that the universe is eternal, but Genesis teaches that our universe had a beginning. The Big Bang theory, currently the dominant model in cosmology, also affirms that the universe had a beginning. From observational data, such as the Hubble telescope, scientists believe the universe is expanding. Thus, if we reverse the process, the galaxies must have been densely packed together at one point before moving outward. **Cosmology** = the study of the origin and development of the universe. The name of the book comes from the opening words "In the beginning." **Genesis** = beginning.

- While the age of the universe is a highly contentious issue, Genesis doesn't begin with an explicit date of the universe's origin, but rather with the generic, "In the beginning."

- Genesis is unique in the modern world because it doesn't give logical arguments for God's existence; it simply asserts God's existence in its opening words. And then it goes on to assert that the one God who exists, made everything. **Elohim** is the Hebrew word used for God in Genesis 1.

- Genesis was also unique in the ancient world because it doesn't explain the origin of God. Ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian writings narrate the origin of the gods. **Theogony** = the birth story of the gods. Moses, who has traditionally been viewed as the author of Genesis, wrote "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps 90:2). In other words, God always existed.[10]

- **Bara** is the Hebrew word for create. Throughout the Bible, God is the subject of bara. It is God who can bara. Bara is usually focused on the creation of something new by God.[11]

In Genesis 1, bara is used to refer to three entities:

1. "Heavens and the earth" (v. 1)
2. "Great creatures of the sea" and every creature in the sea (v. 21)
3. The image-of-God bearing humans (used 3x in v. 27)

The phrase **"the heavens and the earth"** refers to everything. That is the traditional interpretation of "the heavens and the earth." A minority interpretation views the phrase more concretely and literally as a reference to "the sky and the land." Technically, the Hebrew words **shamayim** and **erets** can be translated as sky and land respectively, but when placed together they are usually understood as a merism for the totality of all that exists. **Merism** = an expression of totality that uses contrasting parts. Everything includes:

1. all matter—even atomic and subatomic
2. the physical laws that govern all matter
3. space and time

Since God made everything, nothing existed before God created it. So before creation, God and only God existed. That rules out **dualism** = the existence of two eternal entities. And it implies **creatio ex nihilo**, which means creation out of nothing, because nothing could have existed before God created it. We should admit that creation ex nihilo is not stated explicitly in Genesis, but it is a reasonable inference.

[10] For more info. see Bill T Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 49.
[11] For support see Richard E. Averbeck, *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013), ch. 1.

In this one brief verse, the key biblical theme of **monotheism** = the belief in only one God, is introduced. And monotheism is a rejection of **polytheism** = the belief in many gods; **pantheism** = the belief that everything is god; **atheism** = the belief that God does not exist; and **agnosticism** = the belief that we cannot know for sure if God exists. Genesis 1:1 can keep us thinking for a lifetime.

Assignment: Show famous works of art depicting divine creation, such as William Blake's *Ancient of Days* and Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. Have students write a reflection on what these show about God and creation.

Lesson 2: Repetition in Genesis 1

Q: How do you emphasize something in your writing?

Q: How do you emphasize something when you are sending a text message?

The biblical authors were limited in how they could emphasize something because they didn't have access to all the methods we use today.

Q: How would you emphasize something without using bold print, italics, underlines, emojis, exclamation points and all caps?

One of the primary ways biblical authors emphasized something was by repeating it. That means when we read the Bible we have to pay special attention to repeated words and phrases.

Activity: Read Genesis 1 carefully then highlight the repetition.

[**Note to teachers:** to have students find the repeated words and phrases in a passage, print out the passage by using biblegateway.com in whatever translation you want to use, then ask students to highlight the same word or phrase in the same way each time it appears. For example, they can draw a rectangle around the word *light* each time it appears and a circle around the word *water* each time it appears, or they can use different colors. Just make sure they are consistent by using the same color or symbol each time that word or phrase appears. Of course, if students have computers, this type of assignment can be done without paper.]

Repetition in Genesis 1

- God/he/him (~ 30x)
- "And God said" (vv. 3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24) begins each day. "Then God said" (vv. 11, 26, 29). "God blessed them and said" (v. 28). Verse 22 actually contains a different form of the verb, which most English translations render as "saying." This gives us a total of ten references to "God said" in Genesis 1. Many have noted a connection between these ten words and the Ten Commandments: God's ten words started the world and God's ten commands ordered the way his people should live.
- "Let there be"
- "And it was so"
- "And God saw that it was good"

- And there was evening and there was morning
- God created/made
- God called
- God saw that it was good (and very good)
- God blessed
- Evening and morning
- And it was so
- According to their kinds
- Let there/them
- Separate(d)
- Light
- Darkness
- Vault

Q: What is the significance of God's declaration of goodness at the end of each day?

Many religions and philosophies view the body as evil and the spirit as good. If that is true, salvation can only be attained by escaping matter. But Genesis affirms that God made all things, including matter, and declared everything good. Therefore, matter is not fundamentally evil; it is fundamentally good. The story of the Bible doesn't begin with original sin; it begins with original goodness.

The days of creation are the most prominent repetition in this chapter.

Q: How would you categorize the six days of creation? What groups could you put them in?

While not everything fits neatly into the categories below, many scholars believe the six days can be divided into two main sections: forming and filling. (For further study see Blocher, pgs. 39-59.)

Forming	Filling
Day 1 – Light	**Day 4** – Sun, Moon, Stars
Day 2 – Sky	**Day 5** – Fish & Fowl
Day 3 – Land and Seas & Vegetation	**Day 6** – Animals & Human Beings

By categorizing the six days in this way, day 1 corresponds with day 4, day 2 corresponds with day 5, and day 3 corresponds with day 6. In the first three days, God prepares the place and in the last three days, he fills it with occupants. In this way, God's forming and filling solves the fundamental problem of the "formless and void" earth of Genesis 1:2.

Interpreting the days of Genesis 1 has caused a lot of disagreement. Here are four main views.

Views on the "Days" of Genesis 1

I. 24-hour days – the days were literal 24-hour days. The events of creation occurred in the order in which they are stated in Genesis 1.

Support: The Hebrew word for day (yom) usually means 24 hours and the references to "evening and morning" at the end of each day make it sound like the author is thinking of typical 24-hour days. In addition, the statements in Exodus 20:8-11 and 31:17 support this view. Two variations of this view include: (1) The days are literal 24-hour days with huge amounts of time between each day – the "intermittent day" view. (2) The days are 24 hours as we understand time today, but Einstein has proven that time is relative so time worked differently at the start of creation than it does now. For example, 24 hours today could mean billions of years in the beginning. Some use Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 as support for this view.

Problem: Many have been challenged by logical problems with the 24-hour-calendar-day view. For example, how could there have been light on day 1 before the sun was made on day 4? Without the sun, how could there have been "evening and morning" on days 1-3? How could the plants (day 3) have survived without the sun (day 4)? Origen (182-254) and Augustine (354-430) asked these questions long ago. In his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine entertained the idea that, contrary to the way it sounds in Genesis 1, God actually created everything instantaneously.

Some solve this problem by suggesting that the light of day 1 was a non-solar, divine light. Others suggest that the sun was in existence prior to day 4, but its light finally penetrated Earth's atmosphere on day 4.

The following views are alternatives to the 24-hour-day view.

II. Day-Age – each of the six days were ages or long periods of time. Most who hold this view affirm the sequence of events as stated in Genesis 1 (see reasons.org) but others don't (see oldearth.org/progressive.htm).

Support: In the Bible, the Hebrew word for day is sometimes used for longer periods of time (cf. Gen 2:4, 17; Is 34:8). And echoing the words of Moses in Psalm 90:4, Peter says, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet 3:8).

III. Analogical – the days of Genesis 1 are real days but they are not days as we understand them. They are God's days used as an analogy with our days. As with all analogies there are similarities and differences between the two items being compared.

Support: On the one hand, the evening and morning that concludes each of the six days directly correspond with what we think of as a normal day. On the other hand, days 1-3 could not have been normal 24-hour days without the sun, which wasn't created until day 4. The point of the analogy is to encourage us to follow God's example of work and rest.

IV. Literary Framework – the days of Genesis 1 as recorded in this chapter did not actually occur; they are metaphorical. Specifically, the days are a creative literary device used to structure the account of creation.

Support: First, Genesis 1 is written symmetrically and includes rhyme, so we should interpret it as a creative piece of writing. Second, divine creation is mentioned in many other places in Scripture, but Genesis 1 is unique in using days to convey the account of creation. The point of the metaphor is to help us understand that God made everything and to encourage us to follow God's example of work and rest.

Q: Which of the four views makes the most sense to you? Why?

[**Note to Teacher:** The next section may be too much detail for your students, but I think it's important for you to consider.] Some note the chronological differences between Genesis 1 and 2 and conclude that they must not be giving a chronological account. Here are two differences between the sequence of events in Genesis 1 and 2.

1. God's creation of vegetation and humans:

- Genesis 1: God creates vegetation (day 3) then humans (day 6).

- Genesis 2: God creates man then vegetation (vv. 5–7).

Here are two main ways of harmonizing this difference.

First, some translate the Hebrew word ***erets*** in Genesis 2:5 as *land* not *earth*. The ESV takes this approach: "When no bush of the field was yet in the *land*" (v. 5). That would mean Genesis 2:5-7 is focused only on a particular piece of land where vegetation had not yet grown, and therefore, it does not contradict the order of events in Genesis 1.

Erets can mean "earth" or "land," but most major versions translate *erets* as "earth" in verse 5 because in verse 4 it's used to refer to the entire earth: "This is the account of the heavens and the *earth* when they were created, when the LORD God made the *earth* and the heavens" (v. 4 NIV).

Notice that even the ESV, which translates *erets* as "land" in verse 5, translates it as "earth" in verse 4.

> 4 These are the generations of the heavens and the *earth* when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the *earth* and the heavens. 5 When no bush of the field[a] was yet in the *land*[b] and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the *land*, and there was no man to work the ground. (vv. 4–5, italics mine)

(In the footnote the ESV indicates that land can also be translated as earth.)

A second solution is to add the word "had" to Genesis 2:8: "Now the LORD God *had* planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed" (NIV).

The word *had* is not in the Hebrew of Genesis 2:8 and the NIV is unique in adding it. Adding *had* makes it seem like the garden was planted prior to the creation of the man, and therefore, the order of events remains the same as Genesis 1: vegetation then humans.

2. God's creation of animals and humans:

- Genesis 1: God creates animals then male and female humans.
- Genesis 2: God creates the man, then animals, then the woman.

Can you think of how to harmonize that chronological difference?

If these differences should stand, perhaps they encourage us not to interpret the days of Genesis 1 in a strict chronological fashion.

Lessons 4: Revolutionary Ideas in Genesis 1

The following ideas in Genesis 1 were revolutionary for ancient people.

- **There's only one God, Creator of everything.** This conflicts with polytheism—the belief in many gods—that permeated the ancient world. Starting with verse 1, Genesis rejects all other gods and confronts us with an all-powerful God. In addition, many other ancient accounts convey a **theogony**, or a birth story of the gods. In contrast, Genesis 1 simply asserts God's existence without referencing God's origin.

- **God made everything and it was all "very good."** God didn't make a mistake nor was anything made accidentally. Much of the ancient world embraced dualistic ideas, which differentiated between good and bad parts of creation. But the Bible begins with a strong declaration of universal goodness. The Bible doesn't begin with original sin; it begins with original goodness.

- **There's a distinction between the Creator and creation**. We should not confuse the two by worshiping the sun, trees, or human beings. This was a revolutionary idea in the ancient world where, for example, the sun or the king was identified as a god. (See YouTube videos on how the sun, moon, and stars were formed. Also make sure to emphasize the pervasiveness of sun and moon worship throughout human history.)

- **Humans were created to rule.** Unlike some ancient creation stories, humans were not created to be slaves of the gods. They were designed to exercise dominion on Earth.

- **Men and women have the same status—both created in God's image.** Throughout human history women have been viewed as inferior to men, but Genesis 1 affirms that both have the same dignity—created in the image of God.

- **God's word is powerful and creative.** While other ancient creation stories describe the origin of the world as a battle between the gods, the God of Genesis creates by merely speaking. "And God said" begins each of the six days of creation. In contrast to Genesis, consider the Babylonian creation story, called the *Enuma Elish*, which comes from 1200 BC or earlier.

  Activity: Have students draw cartoon depictions of the following story or act it out in groups.

  Apsu and Tiamat have children

  - The gods of the water, Apsu (male) and Tiamat (female), give birth to other gods.

Ea kills Apsu

- The children (gods) liked to party and stay up late.
- Apsu grew tired of their noise so he planned to kill them. Tiamat didn't agree with his plan.
- The oldest son Ea knew about Apsu's plan so he killed his father.
- Ea and Damkina have a son named Marduk.

Tiamat plans to kill her children

- The god Kingu tells Tiamat to kill her children because they killed her husband. Tiamat agrees.

Marduk kills Tiamat

- Ea was afraid and asks his son Marduk for help.
- Marduk agrees to help as long as he would become the king of the gods.
- Marduk attacks the army with his thunder and storms until he and Tiamat were left alone.
- Tiamat opened her mouth to devour Marduk, but Marduk filled it with the wind.
- While Tiamat could not close her mouth, Marduk shot an arrow down her throat, piercing her heart and killing her.

Marduk creates the world from Tiamat's body

- Marduk split Tiamat's body in half to create the heavens and the earth.
- He placed the stars and moon in the heavens, and grain, fields, and animals throughout the earth.

Marduk kills Kingu

- Marduk made the defeated gods work in the fields.
- The gods complained so Marduk killed their leader, Kingu.
- Humans were created from Kingu's blood, clay from the earth, and spit from the gods.
- Humans were made to relieve the gods of their work.

Lesson 5: The Image of God

Activity: Review the *Enuma Elish* story. Have students write a journal entry pretending as if they were an ancient person who believed in the *Enuma Elish* creation account and were trying to make sense of the world through it.

Activity: Place students in groups to complete the following assignment: show three ways that humans are unique or special in comparison with other creatures. (They can do skits, use the whiteboard, etc.)

Genesis 1:27 asserts that we were made in God's image. What does that mean?

I. We are **replicas** of God, and therefore, we **represent** God on Earth. Ancient rulers made statues of themselves "in their image and likeness." In a sense, God made a statue of himself and placed it in the garden. This means, among all the creatures, we have a special connection with God.

II. We are God's appointed **rulers** on Earth. This doesn't mean that we should rule with an iron-fist and destroy creation. Rather God wants us to be caretakers of creation, bringing it to its full potential. As it says in Genesis 2, God "took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (v. 15). Note the references to ruling in Genesis 1:26-28:

> 26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may **rule** over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
>
> 27 So God created mankind in his own image,
> in the image of God he created them;
> male and female he created them.
>
> 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. **Rule** over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (NIV)

III. Many have equated God's image with a particular human trait. However, what does that mean for those who don't have that trait? Are they not made in God's image? This line of thinking has led some to use the image of God idea to demean various people groups—those of a certain race, those lacking intellectual or physical abilities, those lacking socioeconomic status.[12] But

[12] For more detail see John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

this is a misinterpretation of the Bible and a failure to make a key distinction: we were *made in* God's image, but Christ *is* God's image.

- **"**The Son is the image of the invisible God**,** the firstborn over all creation." (Col. 1:15)

- "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**"** (2 Cor. 4:4)

IV. Since Christ is God's image that image is unchanging and secure. It is not affected by human variation. And it is in that image in which we were made. As John says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (1:3). He is our origin; the blueprint of our existence. Additionally, he is our destiny. Consequently, though we were made in this image, when we sin we turn our back on this image, so through Christ's redemption, we are in the process of being conformed or transformed into his image. In this way, the blueprint plans will be realized—we were made in God's image and we will be fully conformed to that image.

- "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29)

- "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18)

Lesson 6: The Challenge of Day Two

Verses 6-8 create a unique challenge for modern interpreters.

> 6 And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. (NIV)

What is the vault? And what is water above the vault? Here’s one way to introduce and teach this passage to secondary students.

Christians and Jews believe Genesis is a part of God’s Word. A human wrote it (traditionally attributed to Moses), but God inspired that human to write it. Now, if God is going to effectively communicate with humans, he will need to **accommodate** to human limitations. When we accommodate someone, we make room for them in our home. So by accommodate we mean that God made room for our lack of knowledge and lack of ability to understand.

Q: Have you ever accommodated to someone in the way you explained something? How so?

Activity: Now, you will be taking on roles with the person next to you. One of you will be a five-year-old and the other will be their actual age. I’m going to have you explain something to the five-year-old.

Here’s the first question for you to answer: Where do babies come from? (Remember your questioner is only five.)

Now switch roles.

Here’s the second question: Where does rain come from?

Q: How does an adult communicate with a baby?

A: Sometimes adults talk normally, but other times they talk in a different language known as “baby talk.” Some famous Bible teachers have used that analogy to explain how God communicates with us in the Bible. The distance between an adult and a baby is nothing compared to the distance between God and us. So if God is going to communicate effectively with us, he will have to come down to our level or accommodate to us. And since the Bible was written thousands of years ago, God had to accommodate to the level of an ancient audience.

Two Challenges

These are difficult verses to understand for two reasons:

1. the translation of the Hebrew word *raqia* is disputed
2. the idea that there is water above the raqia

Dome or Space?

First, the translation of the Hebrew word raqia is controversial and that can be seen by comparing English translations. Some translations use a word that indicates an opening of space rather than something solid. For example,

- “expanse” (NASB, ESV, NET, HCSB)
- “space” (NLT)
- “huge space” (NIRV)
- “horizon” (GW)

Other translations use words that indicate something solid, such as:

- “firmament” (NKJV, RSV)
- “dome” (NRSV, CEB)
- “vault” (NIV)
- “canopy” (ISV)

Pro Dome

In support of the translation “dome” we have references from the Old Testament and other ancient literature that suggest ancient people viewed the sky as a solid dome with heavenly lights embedded in it and which when opened caused rain to pour down on earth. For example, “Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies” (Ps. 148:4). And “the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky” (Gen. 8:2).

Obviously, a solid interpretation of raqia would create a problem for those who believe everything in Genesis 1 happened exactly as stated because we know that our atmosphere contains layers, but none are solid.

Pro Space

Others disagree, either by asserting that a solid-like translation is inaccurate or by claiming that a solid-like translation is accurate but shouldn’t be interpreted literally. Ancient people who talked this way about the sky were using simple language for the way things appeared just like we refer to sunrise or sunset,

but we know that the sun doesn't actually rise or set. Perhaps it was even their way of speaking poetically. Therefore, the translation "expanse" or "space" is more accurate to what the ancients actually believed.

Obviously, there's no way for us to get inside an ancient person's brain to know what they *really* thought, but we do know that they had to understand the world without modern scientific tools.

Be Nice to Old People—*Really* Old People

Q: What modern tools and technology do we have that ancient people did not have?

A: Ancient people had to understand the world with their bare eyes only. They didn't have telescopes, radar, cameras, satellites, planes, or rockets.

Water above the "Vault"

These verses are also difficult because they distinguish water under the raqia from water above the raqia. But today we don't think of a body of water being above the expanse or sky. However, from an ancient and uneducated person's point of view it would seem like water descends from some place above the raqia.

Some claim that the water above refers to water vapor or clouds (e.g., John Calvin). Hugh Ross identifies the raqia with the troposphere—the layer above the ocean where clouds form.[13] However, there are two challenges with these proposals.

First, the vocabulary doesn't support it. The Hebrew word used for "water" in "water above" the vault is *mayim.* In the Old Testament mayim is usually used for water not clouds. Also, the description of day two uses *mayim* for what is above *and* below the raqia making it difficult, though not impossible, to argue that one is a different form than the other (e.g., vapor vs. liquid).

Second, the prepositions don't support it. The text refers to "water above" the raqia causing us to think of water somewhere *above* and not merely *in* the sky. Additionally, since God sets the two great lights—sun and moon—*in* the raqia (vv. 14-17), the water above the raqia must be somewhere *above* the two great lights.

So putting together the uses of raqia and mayim in Genesis 1 gives us the following: (1) the sun and moon are set *in* the raqia and (2) mayim or water exists *above* and *below* the raqia. Thus, water, like the water in our rivers, exists somewhere above the sun and moon.

[13] Hugh Ross, *Navigating Genesis: A Scientists Journey through Genesis 1-11*. RTB Press, 2014.

A solid interpretation of raqia along with the claim that water exists above the raqia leads some to this conclusion: the description of day two does not convey accurate scientific information. Support for that conclusion can be found in other places. For instance, although the moon is called one of the "two great lights" (Gen. 1:16), we know that the moon doesn't actually emit light.

Conclusion

These insights can lead to one of the following responses:

1. **Total rejection of Genesis 1** – We should not accept anything as true in Genesis 1.

2. **Total rejection of modern science** – We should cling to the Bible even when it contradicts science.

3. **Seek to harmonize Scripture and science** – Attempt to reconcile modern-day science with the details in Genesis 1. For example, astronomers have recently discovered an enormous amount of water, 140 trillion times larger than all the water in the world's oceans, 12 billion light-years away.[14] We also know that water vapor exists in the Milky Way galaxy, so perhaps the reference to water on the second day can be supported by modern-day science. This response would need to defend the non-solid view of raqia.

4. **Adjust expectations** – Genesis 1 was written thousands of years ago to ancient people who didn't have modern-day technology. The original purpose was not to convey accurate scientific information to people in the twenty-first century. It was written in a way that ancient people could understand. Divine inspiration of Genesis 1 means that God had to accommodate his message to an ancient audience. Yes, it's possible to combine #3 and #4 in various ways.

Finally and most importantly we must ask, what is the primary point of Genesis 1:6-8? The description of day two is making one simple assertion: God made the sky. Verse 8 says, "God called the raqia 'sky.'" If the point was to convey to ancient people that God placed the big blue canopy-like structure over their heads, then modern, scientifically-informed believers can fully agree with it, even if our understanding of the nature of the sky is different from theirs.

[14] Whitney Clavin and Alan Buis, "Astronomers Find Largest, Most Distant Reservoir of Water," NASA, accessed June 26, 2017, https://www.nasa.gov/topics/universe/features/universe20110722.html.

Lesson 7: Five Views on the Origin of Life

[**Note to Teacher:** Lessons 7-9 focus on relating science to Scripture. Use these as you see fit with the age and interest of your students.]

The origin of life is one area where science and religion seem to clash. In fact, with some forms of science and religion the two clash repeatedly. Here are five views on the origin of life.

1. Atheistic Evolution[15] – God does not exist so only natural physical processes were involved in the origin and continuation of life on Earth. The diversity of life comes from a common ancestor + lots of time + random mutation + natural selection (or survival of the fittest). In sum, the account of creation in Genesis is scientifically false and completely irrelevant for us today.

2. Deistic Evolution – God brought the universe into existence and set the process of evolution in motion, but since that time God has been completely uninvolved in the world. Thus, God has not given divine messages or performed miracles in human history. In sum, Genesis is scientifically false and irrelevant for us today, but it is correct in teaching that a transcendent God started the universe.

3. Evolutionary Creationism (Theistic Evolution)[16] – God brought the universe into existence and set the process of evolution in motion. In addition, God remains actively involved in the world through the evolutionary process and through other means (e.g. miracles, messages, etc.). Since God is involved in the evolutionary process, ultimately the mutations that occur are not random. In agreement with much of the scientific community, this view affirms that life first appeared on Earth 3.5 billion years ago, Earth originated 4.5 billion years ago, and the universe is about 13.8 billion years old.[17] Speaking for the movement, Francis Collins, one of the leading evolutionary creationists, states,

> we do agree upon descent from a common ancestor, gradual change over a long period of time, and natural selection operating to produce the diversity of living species. There is no question that

[15] Also called dysteleological evolution because it is ultimately purposeless.

[16] Since evolutionary creationism is new and suspect to many let me highlight the fact that many prominent Christian scholars and leaders either fully subscribe to this view, support one of its key concepts such as common descent, or have expressed openness to the view in general: e.g., Denis Alexander, Michael Behe, Francis Collins, Dinesh D'Souza, Peter Enns, Pope Francis, Karl Giberson, Deborah Haarsma, Tim Keller, Alister McGrath, Mark Noll, Alvin Plantinga, John Polkinghorne, John Stott (deceased), Bruce Waltke, Richard Mouw, Dennis Venema, and Keith Ward. Old Testament scholar, Tremper Longman III, writes, "At the present moment, there is wide consensus among scientists including scientists teaching at most Christian schools—including Westmont College where I teach—that evolution best fits the evidence, particularly the genomic evidence, for how human beings came to be." (*Reading Genesis 1-2,* ch. 4). For one believer's journey to this view see Denis O. Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus & I Accept Evolution*.

[17] For NASA's online timeline showing the history of the universe see map.gsfc.nasa.gov.

> those are correct. Those are three cardinal pillars of Darwin's theory that have been undergirded by data coming from multiple directions and they are not going to go away. Evolution is not a theory that is going to be discarded next week or next year or a hundred or a thousand years from now. It is true.[18]

While evolutionary creationism allows for different views of Adam and Eve, it necessarily affirms that humans evolved from non-human creatures. In sum, this perspective claims that science and the Bible are focused on different domains so they cannot substantially contradict each other.

4. Progressive Creationism (Old Earth Creationism) – This view agrees with the ancient dates of creation proposed by theistic evolution. However, in distinction with theistic evolution, progressive creationists claim that living organisms were created *directly* by God. To be more specific, cosmological and geological evolution occurred, but biological evolution did not occur because organisms were created directly by God at specific points in history. This includes the creation of hominids (human-like creatures without God's image, e.g., Neanderthal, Homo erectus) before Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were the first two hominids that God placed his image upon. The following items are used to support this view: (1) the account of de novo creation = brand new creation in Genesis, (2) the evidence for the explosion of distinct life forms in the fossil record, and (3) the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record. In sum, Genesis 1-3 is scientifically accurate, it does not teach a young Earth, and God directly created various life forms at specific points in time.[19] Thus, science and the Bible correspond with each other.[20]

5. Young Earth Creationism – God created everything directly as stated in Genesis, 6,000 to 10,000 years ago. Adam and Eve were the first two humans created directly by God; they did not evolve from animal-like creatures. It is vital to hold to a historical-referential interpretation of the opening chapters of the Bible, which includes a literal 24-hour day interpretation of Genesis 1, because that is how Jesus and the biblical authors interpreted Genesis. Additionally, a failure to hold to this interpretation will negatively impact other doctrines. Proponents of this view explain the scientific data used to support the old-Earth position in the following ways: (1) *apparent* age only (e.g., Adam was created fully mature and so was the universe), (2) age markers created during the global flood, and (3) demonic deception. This view is also

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[18] "Francis Collins and Karl Giberson Talk about Evolution and the Church, Part 2," biologos.com (accessed 9 Feb. 2015).

[19] For a summary of the scientific arguments for an old earth, including evidence from geology, radiometric dating, and astronomy see Deborah B. Haarsma and Loren D. Haarsma, *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2011), chs. 5, 7. Also Deborah B. Haarsma and Loren D. Haarsma, "Multiple Lines of Evidence for an Old Universe," biologos.org (accessed 8 Feb. 2015). And "Scientific Evidence for an Old Earth," reasons.org (accessed 8 Feb. 2015).

[20] Both progressive creationism and evolutionary creationism can be labeled old-Earth creationism (OEC) because they both affirm an old Earth and God as the creator. The **gap theory** is another view that affirms an old Earth and it can be incorporated into progressive creationism or evolutionary creationism. According to the gap theory, an enormous amount of time, or gap, exists between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. For more detail and more variations of groups see Haarsma, *Origins*, Appendix.

unique in asserting that dinosaurs and humans lived concurrently and that there was no animal death prior to Adam and Eve's sin. In sum, the events recorded in Genesis are scientifically accurate and they affirm a young Earth.[21]

[21] For more information on this view see answersingenesis.org, creation.com, icr.org, creationresearch.org.

Lesson 8: The Age of the Earth

When confronted with a challenging and complex topic, I find it helpful to start by making a list of things I know—or at least think I know—about the topic. The list below mainly focuses on the biblical side of this controversy.

I. According to Paul, the most important thing he taught was Christ's death for our sins, his burial, his resurrection on the third day, and his resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

II. An explicit statement on the age of the Earth and the proper interpretation of the days in Genesis 1 is not found in the Bible.

III. While Genesis 1 received much attention by the early church fathers who lived prior to AD 325, none of them explicitly endorsed the 24-hour-day interpretation of the days in Genesis 1 (See Hugh Ross, *Navigating Genesis*).

IV. None of the major historic Christian creeds mention the age of the Earth nor specify the correct interpretation of the days in Genesis 1.

V. Most modern-day statements of faith do not mention the age of the Earth nor specify the correct interpretation of the days in Genesis 1.

VI. The debate between young-earth and old-earth advocates has been one of the most contentious issues in modern-day Christianity in the U.S.

VII. For some believers today, the Bible clearly teaches that God created the earth in six, 24-hour days. For these believers to hold to a different view would be to compromise the clear teaching of Scripture for the sake of current popular opinion. The following arguments are used to support this view:

- The Hebrew term used for day in Genesis 1 is the typical term used in the Hebrew Bible for a 24-hour period.
- The account of each of the six days concludes with the refrain, "And there was evening, and there was morning—the ___ day" causing us to think of a typical 24-hour period.
- Exodus 20:11 states, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day" (cf. Ex. 31:17). That statement is used as support for Israel to have a literal 24-hour period of rest once a week: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."

*Those who believe the days of Genesis 1 were 24-hour days often arrive at the conclusion that Earth is relatively young—6,000-10,000 years old. This date is arrived at because:

- The first man is connected to his descendants in the biblical genealogies and those genealogies include the years each person lived.

- The first man and woman were created on the sixth, 24-hour day.

- Using data from the genealogies along with a literal view of the six days enables us to determine the relative time when the six days began.

VIII. For other believers today, there are multiple lines of scientific evidence which all point to one conclusion: the universe is about 14 billion years old and Earth is about 4 billion years old. For them to go against this data would require them to be dishonest with what they believe they know about the natural world.

*For Christians who believe science clearly supports an old universe/earth, there must be a great deal of elapsed time in Scripture that the six-day creationists are missing. Proponents of an ancient universe see that time in various places:

- Biblical genealogies are known to be selective rather than exhaustive.

- A large gap of time exists between Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 1:3. The six-day account does not narrate the creation of the water-covered earth of Genesis 1:2; instead it assumes its existence. Genesis 1:2 sets the scene for the six-day creation account with the Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the deep. But where did the water and earth come from? And most importantly for this topic, how long did the water-covered earth exist before God said, “Let there be light” on day one? The text doesn’t say. The origin of the water-covered earth in Genesis 1, can only be found in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (The phrase “the heavens and the earth” refers to the entire universe or everything that exists.) And that leads to the view that Genesis 1:1 is not merely a summary statement of the six-day account, but it is a prior event to the six days of creation. (For support read here.)

- The days of creation are not literal, 24-hour days, but longer periods of time.

- The Hebrew term for day is used for a wide range of time periods: some of the daylight hours, all of the daylight hours, a 24-hour period, a long but finite time period. (Ross, *Navigating Genesis*).

- The seventh day is not a literal 24-hour day which opens the door to viewing the first six days as non-literal. First, there is no “evening and morning” refrain at the end of the seventh day (Gen. 2:1-3). Second, Hebrews 4:1-11 refers to God’s Sabbath-rest as something we can enter into thus indicating its on-going nature.

- Genesis 2:4 says, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (ESV). Notice the singular

"day" in this creation statement. This observation led Augustine to view God's acts of creation described in Genesis 1 as occurring instantaneously.

- The sun was not created until day 4 so days 1-3 could not have been literal 24-hour solar days.
- The chronology of the creation of plant life and human life varies between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, therefore we should not take the days of Genesis 1 literally. In Genesis 1, plants and trees first appeared on day 3, while humans were created on day 6 (Gen. 1:11-13, 26-30). However, in Genesis 2, humans were created before shrubs or plants appeared (vv. 5-7).
- If Eve was made in the same 24-hour period as Adam, Adam's accomplishments in that one 24-hour period are quite impressive. For example, among other things, he would have had to name all the livestock, birds, and wild animals in less than one day (Gen. 2:15-24).
- The text of Genesis 1:1-2:3 has non-literal elements such as God resting on day 7, which opens the door to non-literal interpretations.
- The Hebrew word used for God's rest refers to tiredness and exhaustion in the other places where it is used. Was God really tired and in need of rest? Since the Bible clearly teaches that God doesn't get tired or weary (Is. 40:28), God's rest should not be interpreted literally.
- In Psalm 90, Moses wrote, "A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night." (v. 4, NIV; cf. 2 Pet. 3:8). According to that statement, God experiences time differently than we do. The days in Genesis 1, especially days 1-3 without the sun, are best viewed as God's days, not human days.

IX. Church leaders are not immune to misinterpreting the Bible and the scientific data.

- While the Catholic Church did not initially reject Copernicus's heliocentric model when it was proposed in 1543 in his work *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, by 1616 the Catholic authorities "suspended" the works of Copernicus "until corrected." The reason given was that Copernicus's heliocentric proposal was being defended by a Carmelite father and the authorities didn't want that proposal to spread any further.
- John Calvin's interpretation of relevant biblical passages show his support of geocentrism.
- The heliocentric model is now universally accepted by Catholic and Protestant Church authorities.

Lesson 9: Three Views on the Creation of Humans

How and when did God make us and how does that match with the scientific record? Here are three major views held by Christian thinkers.

1. Young Earth Creation (YEC) – Humans were *created directly* by God 6,000-10,000 years ago. God did not use the process of gradual change over time (evolution) to get us here. Advocates of this view conclude that Earth is young by adding up the genealogies in Genesis with a literal interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 (24-hour days). Evidence for an old Earth is often rejected on two grounds: (1) scientific dating methods are inaccurate (2) the global flood has misplaced rock layers and fossils. The founder of this view is Henry Morris (1918-2006), who founded Institute for Christian Research. Ken Ham, president of Answers in Genesis, is a prominent advocate of YEC.

2. Evolutionary Creation or Theistic Evolution – God used the process of evolution to create modern humans. This means we evolved from pre-human creatures over millions of years. It does not mean we descended directly from chimpanzees. Rather chimps and humans have a common ancestor around 7 million years ago. Evolutionary creationists believe their view is supported by the fossil record and genetics. Although certain fossils have been proven to be fakes (see Piltdown Man), and interpreting the fossil record has been highly contentious, many ancient skeletons have been found all over the world, revealing creatures with human-like features (bipedal, larger brains than apes, small teeth, etc.) along with non-human features (shape of rib cage, size and shape of skull, etc.). These creatures were not humans like us because evidence for art, jewelry, music, and advanced tools does not appear in the fossil record until 40-50,000 years ago—known as the big bang of human culture. Francis Collins, former head of the human genome project, and Denis Lamoureux are prominent Christian advocates for this view. For more information on this perspective see BioLogos and Lamoureux's book *I Love Jesus & I Accept Evolution*.

3. Old Earth Creation or Progressive Creation – Humans were created *directly* by God millions of years ago. Notice how this view combines elements from the previous views—direct creation with ancient dates. All species, including pre-humans who lived millions of years ago, were created directly by God at distinct points in history. Direct creation accounts for mysteries that evolution cannot adequately explain, such as increased brain size, bipedal movement, and the big bang of human culture. This view accepts human-like fossils dated to millions of years ago and the big bang of human culture at 40-50,000 years ago. But it rejects macroevolution—the idea that species gradually changed into other species over long periods of time. Old Earth creationists usually view each day in Genesis 1 as encompassing millions of years. Hugh Ross promotes this view through his organization *Reasons to Believe*.

Question

In light of pre-human (hominid) creatures that lived for millions of years, how do evolutionary creationists and old-Earth creationists understand the meaning of humans being made in God's image? Here are three possibilities:

1. God selected *two* pre-humans among many and set them apart in some way with his image.
2. God selected a *group* of pre-humans and set them apart in some way with his image.
3. Being made in God's image was a *gradual process* in pre-humans, occurring over a long period of time until they became fully human.

Conclusion

Many proponents of these views feel strongly about their perspectives, defending their views in debates and books and through their organizations. But they agree on this point: God created us in his image.

Lesson 10: Quiz and Additional Details

Create a quiz from the information in Lessons 1-9.

Ask reflection questions and have students draw or write a poem related to Genesis 1. For example,

- What are the big ideas in Genesis 1?
- Why do we need a beginning?
- How do you feel when you miss the first ten minutes of a movie?
- What do you like about Genesis 1? Why?
- What do you dislike about Genesis 1? Why?
- If you could witness one of the days of creation, which one would you choose? Why?
- How does Genesis 1 make you feel? Why?
- Take 5–10 minutes and draw anything in Genesis 1.

Words on paper can make things seem much neater than they are in reality. Working with 25 kids in a classroom is not usually a tidy affair. Nonetheless, I hope you have picked up a helpful idea or two from this guide. If I can be of any help, please feel free to reach out to me at biblebridge@gmail.com.

I hope you enjoy your time in the classroom.

All the best in your Bible teaching!

Les Bridgeman

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