

...

### **The Purpose Is to Change Not Just Know**

When people become so focused on teaching lessons rather than teaching students, churches can become places where lessons are delivered, but no real change comes about. Every pastor and Christian should have a desire to become more like Christ and to have the members of the church change for the better. Over the years I have taught several teacher training classes to prospective Sunday School teachers. One of the books I utilized in the course is called, *Teaching to Change Lives* by Dr. Howard Hendricks which emphasizes the importance of having a clear purpose and an expectation that students can and will change.

When teachers or pastors spend most of their time just sharing information rather than teaching how the gospel can and will change your life, the person rarely changes. If your church's education ministry has no real focus or expectation for change then your church has

## Encourage Christian Education

a problem. Jesus did not tell us to go and teach in order for people to know only what people should do, but for the knowledge to make a difference. When individuals do not feel they will benefit from attending an optional ministry like being a student in a class they are less apt to attend. Over ten years ago I led a teacher-training workshop and shared the fact that what you're teaching should be relevant to your students. When I presented this same topic to teachers who were unable to attend the initial workshop there was one teacher who felt that teaching did not have to be relevant and that students should just come and listen to her. Needless to say with this attitude, year after year fewer and fewer of her students would attend her Sunday School class.

Often churches are concerned about hurting someone's feelings more than they are concerned about reaching the lost. When people are no longer effective or, worse yet, never were effective in a ministry, they no longer should be participating in that ministry. When people begin to feel the ministries are theirs and are unwilling to let new people get involved, then you are headed for trouble. If this is the case at your church, speak with the pastor to help address this issue; we are called to help people to become more like Christ, not to stay the same as they are. If you are the pastor please talk with the individual that is no longer effective to see if they can improve; if they can't do this, please remove them from that duty.

There are many people who read the Bible regularly, memorize scripture verses, praise God with their mouths and go through fasts. However, if people just know scripture, and how to pray, but do not know how to apply what they studied, then change is very unlikely to occur.

People are usually more attracted to Christ based on what they see someone do than by how much that individual may know. Make knowledge a milestone but make change the final destination.

### **Needs to Address Needs**

Whenever a person has arrived at your church there is a reason. It may be because they were invited by someone, or they heard positive comments about a ministry or pastor, or they saw an advertisement. Others

## Keeping Your Church Alive

may be seeking a new church home or a way to use their spiritual gifts in a new environment. Regardless of the initial motive for coming to a church, each person has needs that should be addressed. These needs can be known or unknown by the person attending. One of the key components of any Christian education program should be the desire to meet the needs of the members. Is this how it is at your church? Is it for everyone to study the same thing at the same time? If it is the latter, are you really meeting the needs of the congregation?

Having everyone follow the same curriculum makes it easier for the teacher, but does it truly help your students? So much of the curriculum published today helps people to know the Word of God but not necessarily how to apply it. In order to really find out what needs people have you are going to have to ask them. This can lead to addressing problems and concerns along with making people more committed to the church. If people see that you are interested in helping them to improve their lives, they are more apt to get involved at the church and share information about the church with their friends and associates. Make meeting needs a goal of your church; it can truly multiply your impact for Christ.

### **Use Easy-to-Read Bibles**

When people use words that you do not understand, how does that make you feel? If you're like most people you don't feel like talking or listening to those people. Often churches find themselves in this troubling situation when it comes to their Christian education programs. Many churches follow the tradition of using the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible regularly. However, the words used in this version are sometimes hard to understand. If the only exposure to the gospel is the KJV, people will often be less apt to read the Bible regularly. Unfortunately, many people do not read as well as they should. Of the many Bible versions out there, the KJV is probably the most difficult to understand.

Several years ago I attended training and learned about the reading levels a person would need to understand a particular version. Some versions that were compared to the KJV were the Contemporary

## Encourage Christian Education

English Version (CEV), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New International Version (NIV) and the New King James Version (NKJV). Pastors and other education leaders need to consider the reading skills of their congregation. If you feel that the reliance on a hard-to-understand version is impacting learning and applying God's Word then a change is needed. Many individuals have grown up with the tradition of reading only the KJV; however our goal should not be to follow traditions. We need to be about helping people to develop a relationship with our Heavenly Father. In order to do this people need to be able to understand what the Bible is saying. The Bible is the greatest resource that God has provided to us. It can guide, teach, correct, convict, encourage, edify and prepare. Additionally, use Bibles that have print that is large enough to see easily.

The Word guides us by letting us know what the Lord expects from us. When we allow it to guide us we can recognize the path He wants us to take. As the writer Solomon stated in Proverbs 3:6, the Lord will direct the path of all who recognize Him. We need to look to God as the source of everything we have. The Word teaches us what we really need to know. The Bible is our roadmap for success in God's sight. When we teach others the truths of the Bible, we are giving others the opportunity to change their lives.

The Word corrects us by showing us that we need to change parts of our lives. This could be something that is preventing spiritual growth, causing ineffective witnessing, or is misapplying God's Word, as well as many other mistakes. The Word of God does something that most of us really don't appreciate; it convicts us. When we look at our lives we often compare ourselves to other people we know and can sometimes do what the Pharisee prayed in Luke 18:11, "I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector" (NKJV). God has not asked us to compare ourselves to others, but to be like Christ. This is a standard we can never reach but it is the objective we should be aiming for. When we see how our Lord lived and the way His life impacted others our response should be to strive to be more like Christ. As the Holy Spirit moves us to read God's Word, we are often convicted regarding what we should be doing along with what