
Personal Evangelism for Teachers

Did I Do All I Could?

By Barbara L. Manspeaker

Three years ago, Eustace was a member of my Vacation Bible School. He was 13 years old. Today, Eustace is dead. The question uppermost in my mind today is: "Did I do all I could to teach him about Christ and lead him to his Saviour in the time I had with him?"

What are you as a teacher doing to lead the young people in your charge to a saving relationship with Christ? The influence of the teacher upon each student must be one of the greatest influences in child development. Approximately 180 days every year for about 6½ hours a day, a young person is under the

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guidance of one or more teachers. This totals approximately 1,170 hours each year for 12 or more years. A mass of information is accumulated by the student during these hours. How much of this information will lead a young person beyond preparation for this world to readiness for the world to come?

The teacher's influence is a major determining factor in a young person's choice for or against the Christian life-style and for eternity. I would therefore like to suggest a number of ways a teacher can influence young people for Christ.

A Positive Example

The value of your personal relationship with the Lord, lived out in a positive example, is para-

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mount. Do you “practice what you preach” or do you merely give lip service to the ideals of the church? Is there a consistency to your life-style? This is not to say that you must never make a mistake; all of us do. But when those mistakes are made, we must be mature enough to admit them and brave enough to ask for forgiveness—even from our students. The one complaint I hear most from our young people is about grownups’ inconsistency. I personally feel that these youth often have a valid point.

Concern for Every Student

The value of your personal relationship with each child ranks only a little lower than your relationship with God. Being honest with your students when you fail builds respect and a positive relationship. Fear to admit failure breeds distrust and contempt. Young people are not as easily fooled as some of us may believe. We must sincerely love each of our students—even the unlovable—and demonstrate a deep desire for the salvation of each one. How much are you willing to give of yourself that even one young person might be saved? Remember how much was given for you!

I have a little game I play when I find myself working with a child who seems unlovable. I stretch my mind, eyes, and ears to find one positive thing about that young person, and then I tell him or her what it is. It doesn’t take as long to find a second or third positive trait. I have yet to use this game when I didn’t obtain gratifying results both with the young person’s behavior and my own attitudes. As I focus on the good, I lose sight of the objectionable. Some very special moments have occurred as a result.

Choosing the Time and Place

In our work as Christian teachers, we must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit both in our lives and in the lives of our students. When we sincerely desire to let Him use us, we will be impressed with the time and place when a young person will be most receptive. This necessitates continued prayer,

Bible study, and submission on our part.

Finally, we must recognize the needs and feelings of each student we teach. Listen to yourself. If you were a student, would you trust a person who spoke the same words and used the same tone of voice you consistently use in your classroom?

In working with children, I’m sometimes tempted to give a lengthy, “much-deserved” lecture, but I remind myself of the following quote:

Those who instruct children should avoid tedious remarks. Short remarks and to the point will have a happy influence. . . . Too much talk will lead them to loathe even spiritual instruction.—*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 119.

Having addressed your personal relationship with God and your students, let’s now examine some concrete ideas you can use to lead a young person to Christ.

Student Involvement

- Involve each young person in activities that promote spiritual growth. The more youth are personally involved in discovering for themselves Bible truths and the happiness of a Christian life-style, the more susceptible they will become to making a personal commitment. How much more we learn from experience than the counsel or “preaching” of others! A detailed list of “do’s and don’t’s” (with emphasis on the “don’t’s”) does not produce positive effects. Present Christian living in a positive, appealing way. Keep in close connection with your local church, encouraging officers to use young people as frequently as possible. Encourage students to volunteer for responsibilities in church and witnessing activities.

- Unconditional acceptance of the young person (while not necessarily condoning his or her ideas) is very important. Too long we have expected our young people to accept *without question* what the church teaches. When they are allowed to question and discover answers for themselves, with our help and guidance, the principles of Christianity truly become part of their lives. We must never exclude in

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any way a child who dares to question why. Rather, we must seek to encourage questions in order that the child may discover truth and embrace it on a personal basis.

Ask for a Decision

- Always be sure that the Bible lesson you teach includes a personal application and an opportunity for a decision. After all, stories about lions and giants don't have much to do with the experiences of today's child. While these may be exciting tales, children wonder what such stories have to do with their problems and the decisions they have to make. Help your students discover for themselves what "lions" and "giants" they are experiencing and how, with God's help, they can deal with them. Guide them in finding Bible answers for their everyday problems and needs.

Of course, as their teacher, you must have already found answers in the Bible to your own personal needs, ideas you can share with your students. Don't be afraid to share these experiences—it helps students to know that you really do understand and care about them. Discussing how you have found help and guidance through God's Word reassures them that they can do the same.

Each Child Is Special

- Continually emphasize the children's importance to God. He has a plan for each of their lives. Each child is special and should be made to feel an important member of God's family. Having time to discover these unique abilities is important for young people. As their teacher, be sure you recognize that talents include more than singing and artistic ability. Look for and encourage special gifts of helpfulness, kindness, thoughtfulness, and other positive attributes.

- Help the young people to continually recognize what God has done for them and encourage them to express gratitude for His blessings. Assemble a book or chart entitled "God's Blessings." Each day, have

the children write in it specific ways God has led, helped, or impressed them. Encourage them to look for the commonplace as well as the unusual. This will build a sure knowledge that God really cares about us and what happens in even the little things of daily life. Remember to add your own blessings on the list along with theirs. This will increase your personal spiritual growth and create a bond with your students.

Week of Prayer Activities

- Plan for a special week of prayer. Two subjects that you might develop are these: "You're Somebody Special" and "God Has a Special Plan for You."

1. "You're Somebody Special"—Begin with unusual or special objects of nature and then progress to what makes young people special or unique. Focus on some particular special quality of every child in your room. Slides or pictures taken ahead of time and displayed the same day as a person's special quality is mentioned can be most helpful in building self-esteem. Tell the students God has taken such care to make every one of us so special that we want to show our love and gratitude through personal surrender to Him.

2. Use Biblical examples of people to whom God gave special work. Focus on the special abilities you see each individual child developing. Be sure to mention every student in the class—one at a time. How can each one's abilities be used by God? How can we further develop the talents God has provided both now and later in life?

We seldom discuss the area of asking children to make personal decisions for Christ. However, I believe it is important that they begin making age-appropriate decisions as early as possible. In addition to making choices about clothes and food, they need to learn to make decisions for Christ and the Christian life. Even having to live with some unwise choices is a good learning experience that prepares young people for bigger decisions later in life.

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Calling for Decisions

Teachers and others who work with youth can call for decisions in two ways—on an individual (one-on-one) basis or in a group situation. The first technique has the advantage of avoiding peer influence that often causes young people to ignore their true feelings.

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The technique described below, which is adapted from *Ministry* magazine, helps avoid the group pressure to conform. I have tried it and found that it works well.

Give each student a 3" x 5" card and ask each one to write his or her name in the middle. Based on the material you have taught, prepare two to four questions on which you would like the students to make decisions. To answer the questions, each child tears off a specified corner of the card. The cards are then collected by the teacher, who privately determines each child's personal decision.

For example: Question 1: Do you, like Daniel, want to honor God in your life? If so, tear off the upper right-hand corner of your card. Question 2: Do you, like Daniel, have problems in your life

with which you need God to help you? If so, tear off the upper left-hand corner of the card.

Question 3: Would you, like Daniel, like to give your life en-

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tirely to God? If so, tear off the lower right-hand corner of the card.

You may stop with Question 3, depending on the situation, or go on to Question 4 and ask for either

a commitment for baptism or a decision to join a baptismal class.

The Personal Approach

When the Holy Spirit impresses you to speak one-on-one with a young person, you might try the following sequence of texts (or others of your choice).

Have the young person find and read the texts. Explain and discuss the meaning as you go over them together.

John 3:16—God loves us very much. He wants us to be part of His family.

Romans 3:23—However, sin came into the world and separated us from God. Everyone sins at some time or other. What are some of the sins that young people in particular have trouble with?

Romans 6:23—The result of our

sin means death, for sinful people cannot live with a holy God.

John 1:12—God is not happy living apart from us. He wants us to live with Him. That is why Jesus was willing to come and die for us—so we might be a part of God's family again.

1 John 1:9—To become part of God's family, we must repent or be sorry for our sins and ask God to forgive us. When we ask God to do this, He can and will, because Jesus was willing to accept the punishment we deserved.

Then say to the child, How does it make you feel knowing Jesus has taken your punishment? I think it would be a good idea to tell God how you feel and tell Him you are sorry for your sins.

At this point, you can pray for the child, but it is also wise to have

the child pray, telling God exactly how he or she feels and asking for forgiveness and acceptance.

Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:15—It is important for us to study our Bibles daily to learn more about God and His plans for us.

Be sure the child understands that this is not a decision that lasts

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forever, but one that needs to be reaffirmed again and again—a daily surrender to God's will for his or her life.

When you ask for a decision, several things must be kept in mind. Avoid symbolism that children do not understand. Use words

that are plain and clear. Allow the young person to make a free choice. Undue pressure should never be exerted to force a decision that the young person is not prepared to make. Remember, God gives each of us freedom of choice.

Nurturing the Decision

After the child has made a decision, it is vital that the teacher follow through. Remember that it is not "dip and drop" but discipleship that must be cultivated. Each young person will need much encouragement and help to face the difficulties he or she will encounter. Youth need a spiritual guardian who can give them wise counsel, love, and help. Do not expect them to be the perfect Christian that you, yourself cannot be. Many times we set an unreal-

istic standard of conduct for our students that even we ourselves cannot attain.

In closing, let me cite a quotation from *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* that has been of tremendous encouragement to me as I have worked with young people through the years:

When the teacher will rely upon God in prayer, the Spirit of Christ will come upon him, and God will work through him by the Holy Spirit upon the mind of the student. . . . We may bring hundreds and thousands of children to Christ if we will work for them.—Page 172.

May God bless you as you work for Him.
