

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**NURTURING FAITH THROUGH BIBLE, RELIGION, AND THEOLOGY
COURSES AT ADVENTIST INSTITUTIONS**

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Introduction¹

Your immediate response to the title of this essay, “Nurturing Faith Through Bible, Religion, and Theology Courses at Adventist Institutions,” may very well be, “But that should happen automatically in these classes!” Perhaps. However, the question is: Are students in Bible, Religion, and Theology classes (from hereon, simply called “Bible” classes) actually growing in their faith, in addition to gaining knowledge from studying these subjects? Or, as veteran Bible teacher Carl Coffman put it: “The BIG question will always be, How can we bring the Word of God to the heart, so that dynamic and exciting Christian lives result?”²

George Reid, for many years Director of Biblical Research at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, reminds us that, “In the past many Bible classes were little more than indoctrination. In such courses, students saw their task as purely academic—absorbing and memorizing data and predigested interpretations so that they could survive examinations.”³ These classes can become as “dry as the hills of Gilboa” (see 2 Sam 1:21). This indoctrination method seldom enhances a faith relationship with God. Some have reacted to this approach, and have gone to another extreme, that of open, free-wheeling, even disorganized “Bible” classes, that provide little course content, and which turn out to be basically an opportunity for venting uninformed opinions.⁴

Thus, we return to the question: In addition to gaining knowledge, are students in Bible classes actually growing in their faith? Consider, for example, reports of students specifically studying for the ministry. In one case, it was only after graduation that they realized that they had gone through their entire seminary training without “once being

¹Before proceeding, I must note that Carol Tasker, a doctoral candidate at Andrews University at the time I was working on this paper, provided much needed and greatly appreciated assistance with the research for this essay.

²Carl Coffman, “Bible Teaching in SDA Religious Education,” *Adventists Affirm* (Spring 1989): 25.

³George W. Reid, “Building Faith in the College Religion Class,” *Journal of Adventist Education* 53:2 (December 1990/January 1991): 26.

⁴*Ibid.*

asked about their personal life, their personal relationship with God, their experience of Christ, the meaning of suffering in their lives, the ups and downs of their own spiritual journey, the ways in which they got centered and grounded, their personal discipline of meditation, prayer, and scriptural study,”⁵ etc. If this can and does happen even with those taking theology courses in preparation for full time ministry, how much greater then is the danger that non-ministerial students in general Bible classes are missing out on the faith-enhancing and spiritually-essential aspects of life!

Before addressing the core concern of this essay, it might be well to briefly remind ourselves of the important place of the Bible class in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) institutions. Whether it be in primary or high school grades, the college or graduate level, it has been correctly observed that “the Bible class is central to Adventist education.”⁶ Note the comments of the “founder” of Adventist education, Ellen G. White: “As a means of *intellectual training*, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or *all* other books combined.... And even greater is the power of the Bible in the development of the *spiritual nature*.”⁷

However, while the Bible class is “central,” Jaime Castrejon aptly notes that “it must be supported and complemented by a Bible-centered curriculum in which *all* subjects are integrated with biblical truth and biblical principles.”⁸ As one-time General Conference President J. L. McElhany indicated: “Every teacher, regardless of his [or her]

⁵Roy M. Oswald, *Crossing the Boundary: Between Seminary and Parish* (New York, NY: Alban Institute), 18. In another study, it was discovered that 93% of the ministerial students admitted: “I have no devotional life;” Foster Freeman, *Readiness for Ministry Through Spiritual Direction* (New York, NY: Alban Institute, 1986), 7.

⁶See Irene Grohar, “The Development of an Instrument to Measure Attitudes Toward Bible Class” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1988), 51, whose thesis dealt with high schools; see also Jaime Castrejon, “Perceptions of the Role of the Bible Class in Four Christian Liberal Arts Colleges, Considered in the Context of Conflicting Rationales” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1985), 2, whose dissertation, dealing with college-level students, similarly noted that “the Bible class is central” in Adventist education.

⁷Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), 124 (emphasis added).

⁸Castrejon, 228 (emphasis added).

department, should strive earnestly to build faith in the hearts of our young people.”⁹ Or, as White put it: “By some, education is placed next to religion, but true education is religion.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, as will become more obvious throughout this essay, I believe that the sacred responsibility of nurturing the faith of students in the *classroom* is clearly placed more upon the shoulders of the Bible teacher than upon any other instructor.

Bible Class Objective(s)¹¹

Early Adventist educator, W. W. Prescott noted: “There surely cannot be any controversy over the statement that in every Seventh-day Adventist school special attention should be given to the study of the Bible. But while this is true, it is important to know how to study and teach the Bible that the best results may follow. What is the object to be sought?—It is the spiritual growth of the student.”¹² Then, apparently playing devil’s advocate, Prescott asks, “But is it not desirable to be well versed in Bible manners and customs, to be familiar with Biblical history, and to know many interesting things about the Bible?”¹³—To which he responds: “Most certainly; but all this is valuable *only* as a means to an end, and that end is *personal* religion, a genuine *experience* in the things of God.”¹⁴ He notes that “every meeting of a Bible class ... should be an hour of spiritual refreshing, a time of feeding upon the bread of life.”¹⁵ Or, as Castrejon put it in his doctoral dissertation: “Its main purpose is to provide the rational and spiritual foundation

⁹Quoted in Castrejon, 216.

¹⁰Ellen G. White, *Counsels, to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 108.

¹¹The additional “s” has been added since some say the Bible class has “one” objective, while others believe it has more than one goal.

¹²W. W. Prescott, “Christian Education.—No. 1,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 22 March 1892, 178.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid (emphasis added).

¹⁵Ibid.

and motivation for developing a Christ-like character, character which is the expression of internalized Spirit-induced goodness.”¹⁶ Frank Gaebelein, in discussing a Christian philosophy of education, indicated that Bible classes had a “twofold objective:” to lead youth first of all to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and second, to nurture the faith of those already committed.¹⁷ In a nutshell, the Bible class’ primary objective is to develop the *faith of the student*.

For pedagogical purposes, this primary objective may be divided up into three aspects. Let me illustrate this in connection with the course called “World Religions” or “Comparative Religions,” offered at Adventist colleges and universities. One professor, a rationalistic thinker, taught this course from a supposedly strictly “objective” perspective in which he simply conveyed data about the beliefs and practices of the various major world religions. Another professor, a successful evangelist, went a step further, and in addition to providing basic knowledge, sought to equip students with methods essential for sharing the Christian gospel with adherents of these other faiths. But, it appears that a further vital question must be asked: How could this course in world religions be taught, so that, in addition to cognitive information and practical witnessing techniques, students may grow in their personal faith relationship with the God of the Bible?

These three aspects of the crucial components of a Bible class can also be briefly summarized and outlined as follows:

(a) Information; i.e., providing the class with the basic *material* data needed for the concepts to be learned;

(b) Implementation, i.e., furnishing students with the practical *methods* needed to apply the knowledge gained; and,

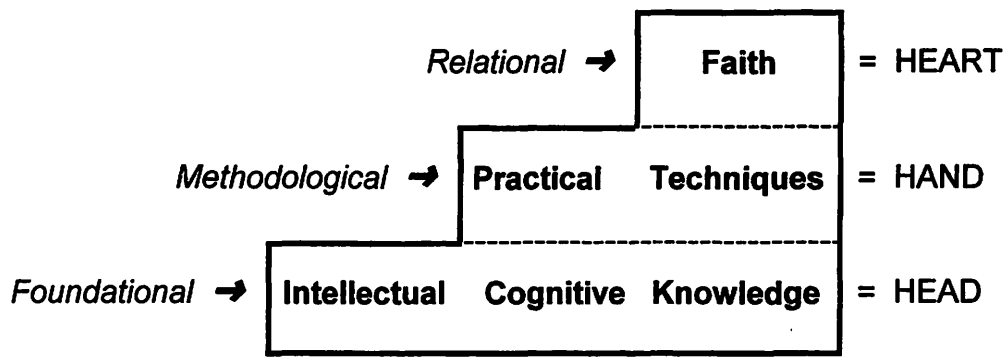
(c) Inspiration, i.e., engendering within students the *motivation* to put into practice in their personal lives what was learned.

¹⁶Castrejon, 229.

¹⁷Frank E. Gaebelein, *Christian Education in a Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1951), 30.

Ellen White similarly speaks of “our need of an education in the *truths of Scripture*,”¹⁸ of “the necessity of thorough education in the *practical* branches of knowledge,”¹⁹ and of the “*spiritual strength*” that will result from Bible study.²⁰ This three-fold concern for effective teaching is echoed in Constance Nwosu’s doctoral research on the integration of faith and learning. She posits that proper faith integration includes (a) an intellectual component; (b) a lifestyle or practical aspect; and (c) a relational dimension.²¹

Schematically, these basic aspects could be diagrammed as follows:



There is a risk though with this three-fold concept—that of compartmentalization. As Enrique Becerra aptly cautioned: “Integration is not an attempt to maintain a balance between the academic, the spiritual and the practical as separated aspects. Integration means *bringing them together into a whole*, and doing them at the *same time*.”²²

¹⁸Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 202 (emphasis added).

¹⁹Ibid (emphasis added).

²⁰White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 381 (emphasis added).

²¹Constance Chibuzo Nwosu, “Integration of Faith and Learning in Christian Higher Education: Professional Development of Teachers and Classroom Implementation” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1999), 255.

²²Enrique Becerra, “Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Training: Toward an Integrated Whole,” *Christ in the Classroom: Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning*, vol. 10 (Silver Spring, MD: Institute for Christian Teaching, Education Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1993), 81 (emphasis added).

Curriculum planners must ensure that the current general Bible courses offered²³ incorporate balanced and integrated aspects of the cognitive (solid Bible-based lectures), the practical (personal witnessing, humanitarian relief, community service, etc.), and the spiritual (personal devotions, spiritual formation, etc). In other words, all Bible courses, must provide an education that is simultaneously academic (i.e., to *know* the Word of God), practical (i.e., to *do* things as a Christian), and spiritual (i.e., to *be* like Christ).²⁴

Let me share a serendipitous personal story, that illustrates the above perspective: “Pastor, it’s time for an altar call,” a rather vocal student stage-whispered to me one day in a religion class. Though it happened more than a decade ago, the incident is still vivid in my mind. I had just completed giving a series of lectures, in which I attempted to furnish a solid scriptural basis, as well as practical guidelines on how to live the Christian life, by faith in the Father instead of out of fear of the future, when Joshua pleaded with me to make a direct “altar call” to class members. Caught off guard by this unusual and unexpected “interruption,” I paused for a moment, then proceeded to challenge the students to make a personal faith commitment to God. This occasion still stands out in my mind as a highpoint of my early days of teaching on the tertiary level. As I reflect on that experience, I realize that, though I had not consciously aimed at it, the Lord enabled that religion class to successfully provide students with the three fundamental aspects outlined above: *cognitive content*, *practical application*, and *spiritual nurture*. Frankly, this is the challenge to *all* Adventist teachers in every class, but especially in Bible classes, since it is here that students have the opportunity of focusing on eternal realities, on Jesus Christ!

Teacher as Model

Sitting at table recently with some student pastors-in-training, I listened with interest as they mutually moaned about two New Testament courses they were taking.

²³While it is recognized that some colleges do offer specific practical and spiritual formation courses for religion and/or theology majors, these are generally not offered as “general” credit; thus the above concern.

²⁴This three-fold concept is similar to White’s statement, that true education is “the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and spiritual powers;” White, *Education*, 13.

They complained about how spiritually “dry” these classes were in which they were learning to “exegete” the Greek text of Scripture. Yet, a few days later, another student at the same institution, told me how much he was enjoying other courses taught by what he called a “spiritual teacher.” I asked him why. His response was that this teacher’s lectures were always christo-centric, and gospel-oriented; they were deep, but simple, and focused on Scripture. Moreover, the student stated that the professor is transparent and vulnerable, that he shares his personal struggles, and his own walk with God, thus becoming a model for students. This dual focus on Bible-based, Christ-centered, gospel-oriented lectures, as well as an exemplary Christian teacher, finds scriptural support in the advice given by Paul to Timothy. Soon after instructing Timothy to “teach them” (1 Tim 4:11 NIrV), Paul says: “Set an example for the believers in what you *say* and in how you *live*” (1 Tim 4:12a NIrV; emphasis added). This call to *teach* by means of both *content* and *conduct* is especially critical for the effective communication of faith and spirituality. Since “content” is to a large degree pre-determined by official course descriptions and class syllabi, the more sensitive matter of the teacher as a model will be addressed here.

While it is true that all Christians are summoned to look to Jesus Christ as their supreme example, and to “follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21 NIrV), since he was living a committed Christian life, Paul could legitimately say: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1 NKJV). This type of modeling is what a genuine SDA Bible teacher (and indeed any Adventist teacher of any course) should be able to meaningfully say. In fact, White notes that the teaching of God’s Word will become effective “when it finds as faithful a reflection in the teacher’s life” as found in the life of Abraham.²⁵ Concurring, Coffman says that in order to be able to lead students to a personal relationship with the Lord, “We [Bible teachers] must first be mastered by the Master;” and second, “The student must be able to see the Master in the teacher,” by the life the teacher lives.²⁶

²⁵White, *Education*, 188.

²⁶Coffman, 26. He adds that, “The committed teacher must also master how to translate facts into experience for the students as a daily part of the program of Bible teaching;” *ibid*.

Agreeing on this essential aspect of modeling, Edward Norton, who did his doctoral dissertation on the issue of practical Christian service as part of the curriculum, observed that while students may learn correct information from subject matter presented in class, there must be a dynamic living witness.²⁷ He states: “The principles of Christian education can only be made alive through a teacher who has an experiential relation with God and who is living a life of selfless service to others.”²⁸ Or as Robert Banks indicates: “Personal formation does not develop primarily through specific programs, or even through regular chapel worship; it takes place mostly as a result of the leavening effect of the personal example of teachers and other key figures.”²⁹ Indeed, our teaching “will have only the weight of influence given it by our own example and spirit,” says Ellen White.³⁰

By way of example of modeling, consider the experience of cross-cultural missionary Jon Dybdahl. Discussing how he was able to convince the Chinese in his Bible classes of the reality of the inspiration of the Scriptures, Dybdahl stresses the significance of the teacher’s life: “The one who tells the story cannot be separated from the message. The teacher along with his message is carefully scrutinized. If the teacher does not model the message both are rejected.”³¹ To illustrate the above, Dybdahl tells the following somewhat amusing story:

I can remember in particular a young Singaporean who visited often in our home. He was quiet and the first few times he came I struggled valiantly to keep conversation going in good western tradition. There were often long silences. Sometimes frustration in me grew to the point I wanted to jump up and scream. I

²⁷Edward M. Norton, “The Philosophy of Christian Service and its Practice in the Seventh-day Adventist Senior Academies of the United States During the 1979-1980 School Year” (Ed.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1985), 242.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 201.

³⁰White, *Education*, 187.

³¹Jon Dybdahl, “The Bible Text in the Classroom: History of Religions, Three Religions/Cultures, and the Joseph Story,” p. 6, Unpublished manuscript, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

eventually learned that he didn't expect me to talk all the time. He didn't even need me to sit down with him. I could go about my work and just let him be there. One day I got up the nerve to inquire, in as gentle and subtle [a] way as possible, the purpose of his visits. Smiling he said, "We Chinese do not accept people easily. We must see what they are truly like first. The only way I can do that is to come to your house and sit and observe for long periods of time."

And, to some degree, that is what happens in *all* societies and *all* cultures, though not necessarily in such an obvious and concentrated manner—students "observe for long periods of time" what kind of person the teacher is, and based on these observations they make decisions concerning whether or not to accept and live by the beliefs that they are being taught in the classroom. What an awesome responsibility rests on the Christian teacher, and especially upon the Bible instructor, to be a model Christian believer, totally dependent on Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher!

In addition to being a model, there are some specific traits needed by the Bible teacher. In a somewhat succinct manner, Casterjon has captured much of what it means to be a truly redemptive religious educator, so he will be quoted at length here:

The ideal Bible teacher is a person embodying scholarly abilities with profound spiritual perceptions; experience combined with practicality; thorough, but patient and considerate; firm and uncompromising in principle, yet tolerant and gentle toward others. The ideal Bible teacher is a master teacher who has the skills and methodology for the effective transmission of knowledge and ideas at his command; but, at the same time, like a pastor, is ready to discern a spiritual need, a spiritual struggle, or an unexpressed fear; ever ready to inspire trust and provide a vision. He is convinced of his calling, yet he is knowledgeable in other fields as well. He is zealous of his faith and convictions and yet he does not project the image of a closed-minded, antiquated fanatic. He takes life and principles seriously, and yet everything about him projects a sense of happiness, optimism, and living life fully.³²

In addition to the above qualities, Seminary professor Richard Davidson indicates that a Bible teacher must be friendly, fair, open to discussion, and have a sense of humor; the instructor must be an interesting speaker who is excited about the subject—one who

³²Ibid., 234-235. Obviously, since both men and women can teach the Bible, the above statement applies equally to women.

can make the subject so interesting that students get “turned on” to it; in addition, the lecturer must relate well to students, and be willing to spend time with students outside of class.³³ Qualities such as these will facilitate the nurturing of the spirituality of students.

Faith Nurturing Strategies

Undoubtedly, all committed Bible teachers “would like to see the students placed within their influence develop a mature Christian faith and a sound system of values which would include commitment to Jesus Christ, commitment to His Word, commitment to the church, and commitment to a lifestyle of living out the principles of the kingdom described by Jesus.”³⁴ In order to accomplish this, many factors must be considered.

In addition to the essential aspect of modeling outlined above, the issue of course content and classroom instruction needs to be considered. This can be sub-divided into four basic areas:

(a) **Before Courses Begin:** Every teacher must be intentional in preparing the course outlines and plans for all courses. Not only should the cognitive and practical aspects be itemized, but so must also the spiritual faith components, the beliefs and values expected to be embraced by the end of each course.³⁵ While this might be a more difficult outcome to objectively measure, these aspects must nevertheless become an integral part of every Bible teacher’s curriculum plans. As Roger Dudley notes: “We should give priority to the affective domain in our classroom work.”³⁶ Questions such as: “How do my

³³Richard M. Davidson, “What Teaching Bible Means to Me,” Unpublished document available from the author at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

³⁴Roger L. Dudley, “Understanding the Spiritual Development and the Faith Experience of College and University Students on Christian Campuses,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 8:1 (Spring 1999): 7. Admittedly, Dudley is here talking about “all Christian teachers.” His remarks are especially appropriate for the Bible teacher.

³⁵See Humberto M. Rasi, “Basic Strategies for Integrating Faith and Learning in Your Courses,” Paper handed out at the 27th International Faith and Learning Seminar, Mission College, Muak Lek, Thailand, 3-15 December 2000.

³⁶Roger L. Dudley, “Beyond Bible Facts,” *Journal of Adventist Education* 46:2 (December 1983-January 1984): 4.

students *feel* about the teachings of Scripture?” “What are they willing to do about them?” are vital considerations.³⁷ In addition, teachers should require assignments that release creativity, such as individual research for presentations, keeping a personal spiritual diary, writing up a personal Bible paraphrase, taking part in witness activities, etc.³⁸

This intentional planning for faith nurturing in every period, if possible, could include the construction of a “map” in which the teacher visualizes the kinds of learning and experiences that will facilitate spiritual growth; for example, a sequence of scriptural studies, various group experiences, together with an itinerary to chart specific routes to that end.³⁹ The biblical taxonomy suggested in 2 Peter 1:5-7 may be found useful by many teachers and students:

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

(b) **Inside the Classroom:** In his book on the spirituality of education, Parker Palmer proposes that teachers do the following, in order to create a proper setting for spiritual development:

- View the classroom as a context for creating a particular culture, a culture of teaching and learning that encourages personal as well as academic formation.
- Make the classroom a safe place that encourages the fullest participation of students in the learning process.
- Encourage the expression of feelings, doubts, and dilemmas as well as ideas relating to life and service.
- Allow our passion for and response to the truth to inform the way we teach and relate to students; and,

³⁷Ibid. (emphasis original).

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Banks, 201.

- Cultivate the possibility of students practicing obedience to the truth inside as well as outside the classroom.⁴⁰

In concrete terms, how can this be done? To begin with, make sure that some type of introductory spiritual dimension is provided in class; this can be through personal testimony, or singing a song, or a short devotional reading, and a sincere prayer. Generally, if asked ahead of time, individual students will be glad for the opportunity of participating in some way in this devotional time.

Then, as the relevant cognitive concepts are being communicated, illustrate these points with faith-building stories and anecdotes (either personal or from other sources). Over time, I have personally found the following strategies to be useful in the spiritual formation of students:

- Learn to know each student by name (this could be done by simply having a seating chart, and memorizing the names over time; or develop an ID photo seating chart in order to have a more visual record);
- Do not merely read the prepared lecture notes—rather, while making eye contact, share the lecture with enthusiasm, and interestingly, using visual aids, and unforgettable anecdotes or memorable humor;
- Tell appropriate stories of both personal successes and failures (thus modeling a growing personal spiritual life);
- Utilize illustrations from the real world both on and off campus;
- Really listen to their questions, concerns, and contributions, and respond appropriately without causing any embarrassment;
- If you make a mistake (or embarrass students), admit it, and sincerely apologize as soon as possible;
- Keep up with major news stories that have a bearing on the lecture materials, and as appropriate relate these to spiritual issues, and faith concerns;

⁴⁰Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982), quoted in Banks, 202.

- Ask stimulating questions to get them to think biblically about the subject, creating a climate for youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other's thoughts;⁴¹
- If you do not know the answer to a question, simply say so, indicating that you will need to study further on the matter before giving an answer (perhaps even challenging the students to go and seek for the answer themselves);
- Publically express appreciation of and affirmation to the students where possible;
- Showing care and concern, find an opportunity to individually talk to students about their grades and class participation—congratulating or motivating as needed;
- Provide creative options for students to become involved in faith-building assignments; for example, in one Bible doctrines class, I allowed them to choose one of the following: memorize 27 passages of Scripture (each one capturing in brief the core concept behind one of Adventism's 27 fundamental beliefs), read through the entire New Testament (handing in written reports weekly), writing an in-depth research paper on a selected issue, or giving personal Bible studies to someone not a member of the SDA church;
- Avoid being distracted by “pet” topics, and unplanned controversial or divisive issues; in other words, while bravely tackling every fundamental concern, do so without quibbling over the technical or the trivial;⁴²
- Show students how to place troublesome issues in intellectual suspension till more data becomes available, thus stabilizing their faith in the meantime;⁴³
- Be fair, impartial, and visibly consistent, showing a balance between firmness (showing “justice”), and flexibility (demonstrating “mercy”);

⁴¹White, *Education*, 17.

⁴²Reid, 28.

⁴³See *ibid.*

- Show a genuine willingness to develop spiritually, thus creating in students the same desire to grow in faith; and,
- Be attentive to “special moments” of spiritual awakenings such as the one in the above story about Joshua, and proceed as needed, using prayer, songs, etc.

In an entire chapter dealing with how church teachers can nurture faith in their students, Donald Griggs proposes several specific activities that will encourage this spiritual development. In brief, he says to “relate subject matter to personal experiences, needs and interests,” to “encourage persons to share feelings, beliefs, values, and hopes,” to get students to “identify with biblical events, persons, and issues,” and to have students write out and share personal prayers and statements of belief.⁴⁴

Succinctly, in the words of Ellen White: “The teaching of the Bible should have our freshest thought, our best methods, and our most earnest effort.”⁴⁵

(c) **Outside the Classroom:** Though the bulk of the time that a teacher interacts with a student is spent inside the classroom, the contact outside class, though brief at times, can be even more effective in the nurturing of faith for the student, since these interactions are frequently more personal and focused. These visits will afford teachers the opportunity to sincerely pray with and for students in the office, as well as wherever they happen to meet and the teacher discerns the need to pray, or if the student requests prayer. Furthermore, where possible, teachers need to get involved with student activities, thereby spending time with them informally, and on their own turf. In addition, teachers can positively impact students by eating with them in the cafeteria, or inviting them over for a “home-cooked meal.”

⁴⁴See Donald L. Griggs, *Basic Skills for Church Teachers* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 102-108. For more teaching techniques, see, for example, Howard G. Hendricks, “Following the Master Teacher,” in Kenneth O. Gangel, and Howard G. Hendricks, eds., *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 13-31.

⁴⁵White, *Education*, 186.

(d) After Courses End: Once the course is over, there is still opportunity for teachers to impact the spiritual growth of students, as they meet and mingle informally on or off campus.

Then there is the matter of how the teacher evaluates the Bible class, an issue which “demands particular sensitivity.”⁴⁶ Horace Alexander, recognizing that sanctification is a lifetime process, states that the Bible teacher will “not expect the Bible class to result in finished products.”⁴⁷ Rather the redemptive educator will seek to gather information that will help to “provide the conditions necessary to promote healthy spiritual growth and development”⁴⁸ of the students.

In addition, for the future improvement of the class, the matter of student evaluations of the course needs to be seriously considered. These evaluation forms could become more useful in this area of spiritual formation if they included “faith specific” questions, such as the following:

- (a) Did this course assist you in the development of your personal faith in God?
- (b) Did this course help you to establish and/or reaffirm vital biblical values?
- (c) Did you learn to improve your personal spiritual devotions through the course?
- (d) Was the teacher a positive model of Christian values and graces?

Taking into account the responses of students, wise administrators will, together with the teacher, then be able to find ways of enhancing the effectiveness of each course. This could include further in-service training or remedial study. However, if and when it becomes clear that a Bible teacher is a detrimental influence on campus, due process needs to be followed in terminating the services of that person (and not merely opting for a reassignment to a different post in the same school or on a different campus).

⁴⁶Horace Alexander, “Evaluating Bible Classes,” *Journal of Adventist Education* 46:2 (December 1983-January 1984): 36.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Concerning this issue of trained teachers, Castrejon noted that as late as 1985, in institutions outside of North America, Bible classes had been taught by mainly untrained persons.⁴⁹ By “untrained” Castrejon meant, “persons who have not been trained to be Bible teachers.”⁵⁰ Too often, the “Bible teachers” have simply been pastors who have for various reasons been reassigned from the pulpit to the class. With little or no teaching ability, some have ended up “preaching” instead of teaching. This problem goes back a century, as seen in the concerns raised at a General Conference Education Department convention, where it was mentioned that most of the Bible teachers outside of North America were ex-preachers who were still preaching, and allowing little opportunity for student participation, and feedback. If this situation still exists, serious steps must be taken to ensure that properly trained, committed Adventist teachers are teaching Bible in our schools.

Bible Class Labs

Over time, more and more educators have become convinced that Bible classes need to be “revised”—to be seen as not merely similar to other academic subjects, but rather to be viewed somewhat like vocational courses. For example, in classes such as auto mechanics or home economics, proficiency is always tied to performance more than to mere cognitive learning. The same should be true of Bible classes. As Victor Brown observed: “One of the major underlying principles of the Christian faith is the sharing and demonstration of the life-made-new through Christ. With this in mind, it is imperative that lab experiences be provided so Bible class involves more than ‘studying to pass the test.’”⁵¹

Since about 20 years ago, this idea of “Bible Labs” has merited serious consideration by certain SDA educators. For example, in 1982 the Lake Union

⁴⁹Castrejon, 235.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Victor Brown, “Bible Class: More Than Studying for a Test? Involving Academy Students in Witnessing,” *Journal of Adventist Education* 46:2 (December 1983-January 1984): 16.

Conference Education Department issued a “Bible Labs Manual,” which recommended that one-half day per week be set aside for involvement of students in Christian service. Echoing a similar concern, the North American Division Office of Education has produced a “Christian Service Curriculum Guide,” a concept predicated on two basic relationships: (1) the student’s relationship to God; and (2) the student’s relationship to other people. Scores of outreach activities are suggested, including the following: “Adoption” projects, beautification projects, better living seminars, bread ministry, children’s story hour, community service center work, crusades against drugs, evangelism, good neighbor contacts, hospital volunteers, literature distribution, medical missionary work, peer counseling, skits, stop-smoking campaigns, witnessing, etc.⁵²

In a chapter on “Service” in his book on youth ministry, author Barry Gane has likewise included numerous outreach activities, including the following: camps for the handicapped, clown ministry, fund raising, graffiti squads (to clean up offensive graffiti free of charge), prison ministry, single-parent families Christmas party, trash bash (environmental clean-ups), vegetarian dinners, etc.⁵³

The above is not merely “theory,” as demonstrated by the incredible success of the Outreach and Witnessing classes taught by Cindy Tutsch about a decade ago at Adventist academies in Michigan.⁵⁴ Indeed, as well-respected Christian sociologist Tony Campolo writes: “Young people are not going to be attracted to a church that tries to entertain them, but they will be attracted to a church that calls them in a ministry to others.”⁵⁵ This then is what our Bible classes out to be—opportunities for youth to study the Bible so as to personally develop a relationship with God, that will impact others for eternity as well.

⁵²See “Christian Service Curriculum Guide,” North American Division, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA, 18-23; see also, Brown, 43-44.

⁵³Gane, 234-238.

⁵⁴See Cindy Tutsch, *Teens on the Witness Stand: Adventist Youth Discover the Joy of Sharing Their Faith* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1992).

⁵⁵Quoted in Barry Gane, *Building Youth Ministry: A Foundational Guide* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center Publications, 1997), 225.

Conclusion

Obviously, a lot more could be said about how to nurture faith through Bible, Religion, and Theology classes. However, I felt that the personal journey of my friend, Ed Christian, who has taught Bible at a secular university for several years, would be instructive. Here is Ed's story, in his own words:⁵⁶

“When I began teaching Bible I thought students would appreciate my rather daring, cynical approach to many Bible stories and teachings. I thought it was important to teach the entire range of scholarly opinion and let students decide for themselves what makes sense. I delighted in citing famous experts. I wasn't completely opposed to supernatural incursions into the Bible story, but in many cases cleared my throat and rolled my eyes, as if we all knew better than to take these miracles at face value. Student eagerness dropped, as did the respect students showed me. Clearly they were not happy with the class, and I wondered if I would offer it again.

“Then one day a brave student raised her hand. ‘Who are you to judge the Word of God,’ she said, ‘instead of letting it judge you?’ That period was destroyed, but I took her words to heart. When I began teaching Bible I'd actually read *it* very little in years, devoting much more of my time to reading scholarship *about* it, but by necessity I was now reading the Bible three or four hours a day, and it was having an effect. God was breaking through. Within a week of God's prophetic word to me through that student, I'd surrendered completely to Him and been born again. When I announced that in class, the effect was electrifying. I began teaching the Word instead of merely teaching *about* it and questioning it, and lives were changed.

“I've discovered that so long as I'm loving, it is difficult to offend students by teaching the Bible as God's Word to them, calling them to surrender and transformation.”

This, then, is what it means to be a Bible teacher: To lovingly share God's Word, so that students experience a personal encounter with Jesus, resulting in changed lives.

⁵⁶Ed Christian shared this publicly in November 2000, at the annual Adventist Society for Religious Studies meetings, held in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.