

Teaching with Power

by Rick Chromey

My grandma had a favorite saying, “Dynamite comes in small packages.” She should know. At five foot-nothing, her small wiry frame packed a punch in passion, persistence, and patience.

“It’s not the dog in the fight,” Grandma would say. “It’s the fight in the dog.”

If there was one thing worth fighting for, to Grandma, it was Jesus. She voraciously read, interpreted, and taught the Scriptures. Her Bible was marked with copious notes from commentary research, sermon insights, or the teachings of other Christians. My earliest boyhood memory involves going to a Bible study with her. I learned to love the Word myself while sitting with adults in a Wednesday Bible study. Grandma not only knew Scriptures, she could teach them with power. She once started a Bible study for teenage girls in her home because our small home church was losing influence with the kids. In a few short months, her study was packed with teens. Oh, and she was around sixty-five years old at the time.

If there was one thing that bothered Grandma, it was “living a life without the Lord.”

Grandma lived and taught . . . with power.

A 2007 LifeWay Research study of over a thousand Protestants between 18–30 years of age reveals that seven in ten individuals who “went to church regularly in high school” have stopped going to church by age twenty-three.¹ According to Dan Kimball, in his work, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, one megachurch college minister informed him that only one of every three teens who participated in their church’s youth ministry and who remained in the area following graduation still attended church.²

So where does the staying “power” have its genesis? Is there a period where what happens *now* will impact *then*? How do you teach children with power?

In college, my homiletics professor made a powerful statement. It’s so potent that in five years of ministry training—with hundreds of sermons and thousands of lectures—I remember vividly only this single mantra for creating a memorable sermon. I even recall the passionate delivery of the quote by my professor, whose eyes lit with fire and his voice rose with passion as he shared the homiletic advice of an old African American preacher:

First, I reads myself full.

Then, I thinks myself clear.

Then, I prays myself hot.

Then, I lets myself go!

The secret to a good sermon is here, but it’s also the recipe for teaching children effectively and with power.

Preparation (“First, I reads myself full.”)

The average Sunday school teacher spends less than a half hour every week in lesson preparation. This lack of preparation explains why classes run wild with discipline problems, why children fail to learn biblical truth, and why many kids find church boring.

After all, if you don't prepare, you will repair.

It's that simple. Master teachers have long learned that preparation is what separates the ordinary instructor from the excellent educator in the classroom. Preparation is the legwork. It's the sweat equity. It's the pain that produces eventual gain.

For those who want to teach with power, there are three primary areas to prepare prior to the actual teaching event.

First, you need to prepare your lesson. You should know your lesson so well you can leave your manual at home. Teachers who enter the classroom fully prepared and ready (even with backup plans for unforeseen circumstances) will not only enjoy teaching more, they will also discover they're truly making a difference.

A second area of preparation is the learners themselves. Master teachers recognize the majority of behavioral problems are rooted either in belonging issues (the child isn't fitting in), boredom (teaching methods aren't working), or inner beliefs (how a child views himself). Both belonging and belief issues usually involve emotional baggage in the classroom. Consequently, it is important to take time to prepare yourself and your learners for the lesson by unpacking the “bags.” Spend time sharing and caring and praying. Watch for children wearing their emotions on their sleeves. Invest in the lives of your kids outside of class (yes, this is preparation). A prepared lesson is half-taught if the learners have been half-caught by you. You'll win their affection and attention if you give yours first.

A final area to prepare is your own life. The first person you teach your lesson to is *you*. The lesson must soak your heart and change your life before you'll cause any good in the kids on Sunday morning. Want kids to memorize a verse? You better have it down first. Want them to think about something deeper? Are you considering it yourself? Want them to change and live differently? How has the lesson changed you?

Remember, if you don't prepare, you will repair. I guarantee it.

Point (“Then, I thinks myself clear.”)

Nothing is more exhausting in a classroom than the “content dump.” Powerful teaching doesn't flood the learner with meaningless material nor does it dump just to dump. Nothing is more dangerous than an educated educator who's more in love with what he knows than how to communicate and transfer his knowledge effectively. Master teachers boil down the material for memorable points. Sometimes it's a powerful metaphor, story, or illustration. Sometimes it's an engaging question. Sometimes a simple statement like “if you don't prepare, you'll repair.”

Nearly every printed curriculum will already have a primary lesson aim. This is your point. For example, it might be "The children will appreciate the love of Jesus." You pound it, you proclaim it, you propagate it roundly. If you do, your class should leave tattooed with "the love of Jesus."

Prayer ("Then, I prays myself hot.")

I'm amazed at how little time teachers spend in prayer (myself included). The act of prayer connects us to a greater power than we can even imagine. Just take the time to investigate the life of Christ and you'll see a regular commitment to communicating with the Father.

We can prepare our lessons, our learners, and our lives. We can manage our learning content into memorable moments. But if we fail to pray, all our preparation is empty. Prayer is not an add-on thing. It's not an afterthought or a pregame blessing. Prayer should infuse the whole learning process.

We should pray before we ever open the teaching manual to preview next week's lesson. We should pray as we're reviewing it, asking for additional insight and ideas. We should pray for our children to receive the lesson, enjoy the lesson, live the lesson. We should pray that our lesson time is not impacted by disruption, discipline problems, or other distractions. We should pray that our hearts are ready to teach this lesson. We should pray daily. We should pray as we enter the classroom and even while class is in session. We should pray out loud, silently, through song, in service, and regardless of the hour. Finally, when the lesson is over and the kids are gone, we should thank God for showing up in spite of our weaknesses, failures, and mistakes.

Passion ("Then, I lets myself go.")

Nothing is more powerful than a passionate teacher. He's insightful and informative, entertaining and engaging. A powerful, passionate teacher can fuel empty minds, fire apathetic hearts, and forge purposeless lives. Sometimes we call such teachers "enthusiastic," and that's correct. The word *enthusiasm* is rooted in two Greek words: *en* (or "in") and *theos* (or "God"). Technically, when we're "enthusiastic" about something, we are "in God." We've tapped into that higher power that makes us more than we can ever imagine or even ask (see Ephesians 3:20).

Imagine in twenty years that a new statistic emerges in America. Imagine that for some reason young adults no longer leave the church. They can't. Their Christianity is so burned into their souls, psyches, and value systems that it can't be erased. It can't be washed out by worldly desires. It can't be removed by painful crisis. It can't be lost to tradition, trial, or time.

Imagine in two decades that a whole generation exists unwilling to walk on, fall away, or leave behind their faith. That would be a powerful day!

Imagine the power of a Christian generation released to evangelize, educate, and equip others to follow the Jesus they love. That would be a powerful generation!

Imagine the change in future families, communities, and even whole nations. Imagine a world turned upside down. That would be a powerful time in history!

And it's all because teachers finally realized their responsibility, properly prepared, purposely targeted, incessantly prayed, and passionately taught the Scripture.

Go ahead, imagine. Then teach.

Teach for all *your* worth.

Like Grandma said, "Dynamite comes in small packages."

It's time to light the fuse.

¹*Young Adults Aren't Sticking with Church,* by Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA Today Online. http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2007-08-06-church-dropouts_N.htm?esp=34 Accessed August 15, 2007.

²*They Like Jesus, but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* by Dan Kimball (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007): 16.

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