

## Teacher Training: Proverbs, Parables, and Epitomes

July 31, 2022

### Introduction

Discuss the following questions as a table, then put the answers on the board:

*What is teaching? How does teaching differ from training? How does teaching differ from telling?*

In Hebrew, there is no word for *teaching*, but a causative form (Piel) from *learning*:

Heb. teach = “cause to learn”

Leader: If no one follows you, have you led?

Teacher: If no one learns, have you taught?

We cannot be content with merely *telling* them the truth. We must teach them!

(Note: In Christianity, there is a place for telling—to *proclaim*, i.e. preaching—but that is not *teaching*.)

In contrast to teaching, *training* involves character formation—that is, *discipline*.

Families discipline—churches discipline—even the Great Commission involves *discipling* (teaching to *obey*).

Teachers do not directly discipline, but defer to institutions set up by God for all-encompassing training.

Yes, there is a “hidden curriculum” that shapes the learning experience, but that is indirect to teaching.



***The largest category is training—using experiences to shape behavior.***

Related? Yes! Who can train without teaching or teach without telling?

***Teaching changes lives through planting truth in the understanding.***

### The Wisdom Literature in the Bible

The goal of all education is wisdom—even to be “wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). Ultimate success!

The Bible’s wisdom literature gives us programmatic statements about the process of training youth:

Proverbs 1:1-7 – The Introduction to the Proverbs of Solomon

Proverbs 22:17-21 – The Introduction to the Thirty Words of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 – The Epilogue to Ecclesiastes (about the Preacher)

Discuss these passages by table:

*What are some of the tools mentioned? What are some of the benefits these tools bring to students?*

From these questions, we will learn about the manageable objectives that contribute to meeting our goal.

(Note: In education, these objectives are stated—“a student will be able to \_\_\_”—and measured as metrics.)

Conclusions:

1. The Bible is very *content-driven*, in contrast to our culture’s emphasis on teaching methods.  
Do not be intimidated by criticisms about “the sage on the stage”—teaching is not lecturing.  
As prophets acted and Jesus put a child up front, being *content-driven* can use means to grab attention.
2. The goal involves *memorization*—able to recite on demand and eventually become master of a collection.  
Rather than rote memory as a disciplined drill, the Bible encourages us to go in a different direction.
3. The means is *delight*—it is pleasant to hear, to retain, and to recite the words of the wise.  
Interestingly, training involves *pain*, but teaching involves *delight* (cf. Comenius’ *Orbis*, Robert Frost).  
As beauty is necessary for worship (Psalms), so is delight for wisdom (Proverbs; cf. Eccl. 12:10).
4. The method is the Hebrew *mashal*, a category broader than the common translation “proverb.”  
A wise man will collect and craft sayings and stories that epitomize the truth (e.g. Herbert, Franklin).  
As a result, the student sees himself in the Hebrew *mashal* and thus judges himself (A. S. Herbert).

### The Three Forms of a Hebrew Mashal

Proverbs – short sayings with salt (Spurgeon) that use the known to illumine the unknown (not *verses*, per se)

Hebrew has parallelism, but English often has one-line forms of striking image or catchy sounds (handout).

Examples: Proverbs 17:14 (cf. stich in time, cucumber plant) and *chiasms* (inspect, best of men, the tough).

Parables – short stories of comparison (e.g. Jesus’ sixty parables and stock sayings – cf. MLK)

Some concepts are too involved for a saying, but need a story (e.g. the bouquet, the apostle of mom).

(Technically, a simile extends to a parable and a metaphor extends to an allegory—the four stock *mashals*.)

Epitomes – a person or a picture that stocks the wardrobe of the moral imagination (e.g. dictionary, no Esau)

Of the three, the stories are the core for morals (sayings) and epitomes—whether true (history) or true-to-life.