

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.