

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Jesus the Master Teacher



SESSION 10

How Do You Teach?
Focus on Lesson of Truth and Grace

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How Do You Teach? Focus on Lesson of Truth and Grace

SESSION OVERVIEW

How Important Is a Focus on God's Truth and Grace?

What Strategies Can You Use to Focus and Refocus Your Students?

How Did Jesus Focus His Disciples on Truth and Grace? An Example

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Identify at least three focusing or refocusing strategies that you will use in your teaching and explain their importance to learning.
- Write three possible focusing activities for a section of scripture that you are or will teach in the future.
- Analyze a refocusing or focusing strategy that is used by Jesus as reported in the gospels. Label the scripture and the specific strategy used.

How Do You Teach?

Focus on Lesson of Truth and Grace



INTRODUCTION

JOURNALING

Consider activities or suggestions that help you focus on God's message of truth and grace. Think about how God gets your attention, how He refocuses you throughout your day and week, and how often you get self-engrossed and forget to focus on Him. Record your feelings as you think about guiding your students to focus on Christ's message of love. Reflect on these feelings and record them in your journal. They will be helpful to you as you plan your lessons.

SANTA CLAUS AND A PITY PARTY

It was my first Christmas as a single mom. I was sitting on my sofa pondering the crooked Christmas tree in the corner, the two presents under the tree, and wondering how I was going to get through this season. I didn't want to call a Christian friend or a member of my family. I didn't want to read the Scriptures. I certainly didn't want to listen to any sermons or Bible study lessons. I had been trying to hold it together for my 3-year-old, but now that she was in bed, my tears were flowing, and I succumbed to my own personal pity party. I felt alone and unloved.

Then the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, Santa Claus greeted me with a smile and asked, "Is this the home of Aimee and Nita? I brought some presents early because I will be just too busy on Christmas Eve." I quickly invited him in and called Aimee to get up and excitedly shouted, "Santa's here! Santa's here!" Aimee climbed out of bed, looked Santa over, and said, "Mommy, don't be so excited... I knew he was coming . . . you told me!" Santa then emptied his bags of 40 wrapped presents . . . 20 for Nita and 20 for Aimee.

After Santa left, I ignored all of my motherly instincts, and both of us opened ALL the presents selected especially for us. None of them had the name of the giver (They were from Santa of course!), but they all were given "with love and prayers." I had no doubts that they were from my friends at church, the friends who loved and supported us during a very difficult year.

Although the visit from Santa occurred more than 35 years ago, I will never forget the love that I felt from my church family. I know God's love prompted my friends in my Bible study group to "be the arms of Christ" to let us know that we were loved.

Why did I include this memory in a session on teaching strategies? I have chosen this story because it deals with FOCUS. Before Santa Claus knocked on the door, I was focused on me and my situation. In my self-pity bubble, I was unable to think about God's blessings or even read the Scriptures or listen to advice from Christian friends. A focus on self and negative comparisons with others often results in self-pity, defeat, and a heart that is not open to God's truth and grace. As a teacher, you need to help your students focus on God's truth and grace. So, what are some teaching strategies that would work?

HOW IMPORTANT IS A FOCUS ON GOD'S TRUTH AND GRACE?

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Generally, your students enter your session focused on a jumbled variety of ideas, thoughts, and issues. Hopefully, they are not self-engrossed every session, but in all probability, they are thinking of something other than the session's topic. Their minds are reviewing the day's events, the traffic they experienced, the meals they need to prepare, the children who weren't minding, the financial issues, their jobs, a visit to a doctor, etc. Your job as a teacher is to help each of them focus on God's truth and grace through the lens of the session topic. If you don't get their attention from the very beginning, they may not be able to participate or listen to God's voice as He speaks in the lesson. We don't want to miss that opportunity!

Focus at the beginning of the class The purpose of a beginning focus is primarily to get the attention of the group. It initially needs to involve as many senses as possible. In other words, they should be able to SEE it, HEAR it, and sometimes TOUCH it, TASTE it, or SMELL it. My goal is always to involve sight and sound, and if I can involve the other senses, even better! Let's look at some examples of each of these to see how easy this can be.

- Sight: This is probably one of the easiest, most frequent methods to get attention. Some sight activities include writing words or prayer requests on a board, posting a picture, displaying a newspaper headline, writing a symbol and/or crossing out a symbol, a display involving lights or objects, sitting or standing in a teaching position and waiting quietly, or even wearing a costume. Example: I was teaching a lesson on integrity using the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). I was teaching a group that enjoyed sports, so I wrote a question on the board, "What kind of reputation do sports teams have?" I then wrote the word, GOOD on one side and NOT GOOD on another side of the board. Then, without saying anything, I sat down. People started talking about the idea and began writing names of groups on one of the sides. Some people even crossed off a team sport from one group and changed it to the other side. It was quite exciting! In about five minutes, I had everyone's attention and I was able to connect the idea of "reputation" to the reputation of Ananias and Sapphira and their lack of integrity as described in Acts.
- Sound: Probably the most commonly used (although not good) attention getter is saying, "Let's get started!" There are certainly many other methods like playing a special song, showing a video clip with sound, talking quietly as you read whatever you are writing, calling the name


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of a person who you want to respond to a praise or a request, telling a joke, playing a musical tune, or clapping for a specific reason. Example: Cathy was a member of our Bible study who had gone through extensive cancer treatments out of state. She had frequently talked about God's presence and healing. When she walked in with her husband one Sunday, I said her name and clapped. Everyone joined me, and when the clapping stopped, I asked her if she would share how she experienced God's healing in her life. She told of her many blessings, and it was easy to connect any lesson I was going to teach after her words!

- Touch: This sense is not often used and is normally dependent on a specific culture or individual preferences (I had many huggers in my Texas groups and no touchers in my group of students from Indonesia.). To get someone's attention, I often shake their hand, touch them on a shoulder, or simply stand by them without touching them. I also used the sense of touch by simply passing out materials or a "hot potato" that required them to either respond or pass it on to the next person. I have also used the sense of touch as a movement activity. Participants move to one corner or a side in the room to show their opinion. Or, they are asked to take out an object from their wallet or purse. Example: We were doing a series on prayer. I asked participants to take out their cell phones and analyze their use of specific keys as well as their expectations for communication. That movement alone got their attention, and again a connection to our communication with God was easy.
- Taste and Smell: I admit that I am not a fan of snacks or food as part of a Bible study. However, most of the groups I have taught desire to include food and drinks before or after our sessions; usually they organize it, and we have enjoyed the results. I also admit my hypocrisy because I believe that the many cups of coffee that I enjoy daily help me attend to work. With that said, I have used both taste and smell to get the attention of students. Examples: During the Christmas season, the smells of the barnyard (from stinky scratch stickers) were recreated, so the birth of Jesus could become realistic. When we were studying the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, we shared pieces of warm bread that smelled and tasted wonderful and compared it to bread that had no yeast. We then talked about the manna that God provided and the complaints we might hear if we had the same food over and over again like the children of Israel.

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A few more thoughts on this topic . . . and they are important! Although the primary purpose of the focus is simply to get attention, it must connect in some way to the lesson itself. Remember, it is not the actual purpose of the Bible study; it just guides students to focus on God's truth and grace.

Refocus during the session: I would like to say that you will never need to refocus students during the study. However, that is simply not true. In any session, an interruption occurs. It could be an illness, an irrelevant comment, an inappropriate joke, a student who arrives late, or a question that prompts a different way of thinking. Some interruptions are good, and whatever happens can be easily connected to the lesson topic. One of my frequent prayers is "Lord, help me see interruptions as opportunities instead of as inconveniences." For example, Joanne was one of my favorite students. She always said exactly what she thought even when it was inappropriate or improper. When I saw her mischievous look, I knew we were going to have an interruption... and it was normally a very funny comment. Generally, it provided some relief and laughter after discussing a serious topic; we could then refocus on the idea at hand.

On the other hand, some interruptions don't help your teaching, and, in fact, they get everyone "off task." I normally get students to refocus by referring to one of the strategies that I have used to gain their initial attention, e.g., pointing to the item in the outline to show where we are in the lesson. If that doesn't work, I try humor ("You all are out of control!") or ("You are really hard on my short term memory... remember I am old!"). In all cases, I try to focus on what God wants to accomplish through me. It is HIS message, not mine!

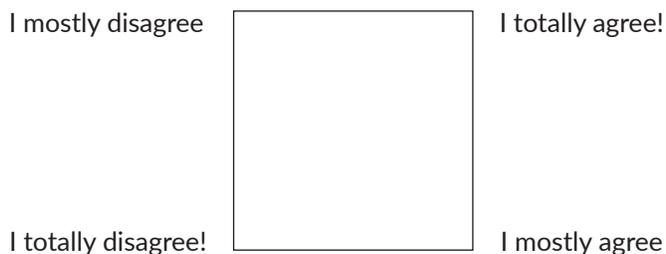
Focus anew after the session: At the end of the session, I let students focus on the next session by talking about the future topic and/or assigning homework. I believe that students who have no interest for their learning are students who don't learn much. Typically, this focus is on a small card that they could take home, a message that will be sent out in the class email, or simply a quick statement. Often, the statement begins with a phrase similar to "Before next week, think (or read or pray or talk) about..." In some cases (but I wish it was more), this type of statement has resulted in calls from students volunteering to help teach the future lesson or illustrations that contribute to the meaning of the lessons.

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN YOU USE TO FOCUS AND REFOCUS YOUR STUDENTS?

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There are many possible focus strategies. I have listed just a few I have used. I guarantee you will think of many more than the ones listed here. Some methods work better than others, and some of them are specifically helpful when matched to the right lesson content. Since nothing works the same way all the time, use a variety of focus strategies.

- Opinion Square: An opinion is stated and students go to the corner in the room that best matches their opinion. Someone in each corner states their reasoning and then students can change corners if they wish. The corners are labeled as follows:



Example: We were studying Christ's great commission (Matthew 28:19-20). I began with the statement: "We must begin helping people in our own neighborhoods and towns before going to other countries."

- Sentence Completion: All students complete the same sentence stem or pass when it is their turn. The sentence stems can obviously relate to a biblical concept like these examples: My favorite scripture is . . . I am most thankful for . . . My family is . . . I normally have devotions when . . . The hardest spiritual discipline is . . . OR they can indirectly relate to the content like these examples: My favorite animal is . . . I am most frightened of . . . I have never understood how . . . I will always remember . . . I will never forget . . . With this strategy, students should always have a choice of responding or not responding.
- Parking Lot: This is an especially good refocusing activity. If someone brings up a question or a topic that doesn't relate at the moment but is important, write it on a "parking lot" board, signaling that we will "park" the idea for now and come back to it later. This strategy acknowledges that an idea is important but not part of your focus during that session.

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- Visual Outline: Write and display a brief outline (3 or 4 phrases at the most) of the lesson session. This is a good refocusing strategy to use, especially if an interruption has occurred and you need to go back to one of the points on the outline.
- Word Prompt: Say and write a word that is not easily defined and has some significance to the day's session. Ask students to respond with the first word or phrase that they think of when they hear the word. The words faith, joy, love, discipline, money, service, peace, mission, and fear are just some that I have used.
- Humorous Statements: With the advent of internet search engines, Facebook, and other technology innovations, a great variety of jokes, funny facts, or stories can be found. With one of my earlier older groups, I often began with a joke that began, "You know you are old when you . . ." Since we all were about the same age, we enjoyed a good laugh and then could get into the lesson.
- Assessment Opportunities: Short quizzes about familiar Bible stories can be given and students can grade themselves on their knowledge. This is a particularly effective strategy during the Easter and Christmas seasons; students can be encouraged to read the Scriptures to know what the WORD actually says rather than what traditionally has been taught.
- Character Dress-Up: This is a strategy that is quite effective IF you have someone in your church (or perhaps you) that can act out a role of a Bible character or a religious leader. Over the years, our group has heard John Wesley, the young girl whom Jesus brought back to life, the man who was injured and helped by the Samaritan man, and a disciple of Christ who quoted almost all the Sermon on the Mount. I have encouraged teens in our church to be some of the characters, and it has been a unique gift to us. I believe they enjoyed and learned from it as well.

HOW DID JESUS WANT HIS DISCIPLES TO FOCUS ON TRUTH AND GRACE? AN EXAMPLE

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As always, Jesus the Master Teacher often called the attention of His disciples to focus on the important message of truth and grace throughout His ministry. Whenever I have a difficult class session or a session when I feel that I cannot get students to focus on a topic, I am reminded of the inattention or lack of focus of Jesus' disciples, the strategies He used, and the frustration that He might have felt. The seaside story after the resurrection that is recorded in John 21:15-22 is especially relevant to the idea of focus.

At the beginning of this passage of scripture, the disciples are out fishing. They have all denied Jesus, and Peter's guilt has been quite obvious. They have seen Him crucified. They have seen the empty tomb. They know that Jesus has been resurrected. They have seen Him. They have touched Him. When they realize that the man on the shore is Jesus, Peter plunges into the water, the others follow in their boat, and Jesus treats them to a breakfast on the shore. Now Jesus has their attention! He focuses on Peter and asks him some "focusing" type questions before He tells him the important part. Simply put, if you love Me, Peter, you will follow Me!

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'

'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'You know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'


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Now here comes the self-focused part. Imagine that Jesus has just focused on you after a very traumatic event and has asked you three very important questions, all of which focus on love (a message of both truth and grace). As Jesus gives His final command, “Follow me,” you start focusing on yourself and how you compare to another disciple.

²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is going to betray you?’) ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’

²² Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’”

Don’t you just love Jesus’ question, “So what is that to you?” If I relate this event to my life, I think that Jesus often needs to get my attention with a variety of strategies. He asks me questions, He feeds me on His Word, He repeats things over and over again. Then, I think He shouts, “Nita, quit focusing on yourself and how you compare to others! Focus on me . . . follow me . . . focus on the love, truth, and grace that only I can give. Follow me!” I hope my response is always . . . Yes, Lord, yes!!

CLOSING THOUGHT

When I encourage students to focus on Christ’s love for us, it is easy to teach. A. W. Tozer is one of my favorite writers, and I love to share his writings with my students. The following is one of his prayers as written in *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961, Harper and Row Publishers, New York),

“I am sure that there is in me nothing that could attract the love of One as holy and as just as You are. Yet You have declared Your unchanging love for me in Christ Jesus. If nothing in me can win Your love, nothing in the universe can prevent You from loving me. Your love is uncaused and undeserved. You are Yourself the reason for the love wherewith I am loved. Help me to believe the intensity, the eternity of the love that has found me. Then love will cast out fear, and my troubled heart will be at peace, trusting not in what I am but in what You have declared Yourself to be. Amen.” (as quoted in *Disciplines for the Inner Life*, Benson and Benson, 1989, p. 328).

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

Be prepared to share your three application activities with your mentor.

1. Identify at least three focusing or refocusing strategies that you will use in your teaching and explain their importance to learning.
2. Write three possible focusing activities for a section of scripture that you are teaching or will be teaching in the future.
3. Analyze a refocusing or focusing strategy that is used by Jesus as reported in the Gospels. Label the scripture and the specific strategy used.

JOURNALING

Consider some of the following when journaling:

- One idea, Bible verse, or story that made an impression on me today was . . .
- A new idea I encountered today is . . .
- One thing that made me uncomfortable today was . . .
- The prayer I most want to pray right now is . . .

EXAM

**NOTES**

1. The purpose of a beginning focus is _____.
 - A. to get everyone laughing with a humorous story
 - B. to shock everyone with an absurd or exaggerated statement
 - C. primarily to get the attention of the group
 - D. all of the above
2. One simple method to establish a beginning focus can be to draw a picture or write a sentence on a whiteboard.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. Using a phrase like, "Let's get started!" is not the best way to establish a beginning focus.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Once you have successfully established a beginning focus, it should not be necessary to refocus people.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Which of the following are focus strategies given by the author?
 - A. Opinion Square
 - B. Parking Lot
 - C. Word Prompt
 - D. all of the above

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Give a copy of your responses to the second and third application activities to your mentor before you meet.
2. Share your ideas for the first application activity with your mentor and discuss your answer.
3. Talk about Tozer's prayer in the Closing Thought section. Testify to the love of God in your lives and how His love is manifested in your life!