

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Jesus the Master Teacher



SESSION 6

Who Do You Teach?
Interesting Adults

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Who Do You Teach? Interesting Adults

SESSION OVERVIEW

What are the Experiences, History, and Personalities of Adult Students?

How Do You Facilitate a Culture of Acceptance?

**Who Did Jesus Teach?
An Example**

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

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

- Develop a strategy that will identify and use the experiences, histories, and personalities of adult students to minister to others
- Describe ways you can facilitate a culture of acceptance in your Bible Study
- Select a disciple of Jesus Christ and compare one of your students' experiences, histories, and/or personalities with the disciple. Explain their similarities and their differences

Who Do You Teach? Interesting Adults



INTRODUCTION

JOURNALING

In this lesson, you will be thinking about the adult learners in your group. As you identify the experiences, histories, and personalities of your students or the students in this lesson, it will be helpful for you to think about your own experiences, histories, and personality. This will be a perfect time to write your thoughts in a journal. Your writings will be particularly helpful as you think of who you are as a learner and how God teaches you. Journal prompts are provided at the end of the lesson but feel free to record your thoughts and share those you want with your mentor, your students, or your Christian friends. Reflect and write . . . Remember you are a child of the King who created you!

A PRIM AND PROPER LADY AND STUDENTS FROM THE “HOOD”

I met Shirley on my first Sunday in a new church. She was a slight, very prim woman, elaborately and properly dressed, with a frown on her face and a demeanor that was purposeful and pessimistic at the same time. Just as I perceived, she began with a non-welcoming hello and directions about where I was to go and what I was supposed to do when I got there. I soon found out she was a board member, someone who could always tell “how it has always been done,” and one of my Bible study students.

Two years later, Shirley volunteered to tell her story near the end of a study called “Walking with God.” The series emphasized we are God’s unique creation with our own gifts and personalities, and so far, we had been encouraged by the stories we heard. Although I didn’t know anything about Shirley’s story, I am ashamed to say, I was worried. I thought it would be mainly about how we should live like she did, how we should all be more Christlike, and her story would be filled with pointed corrections for each of us. Instead, I was greatly surprised and blessed by her words!

Shirley was the eighth child of a pastor and his wife. As the youngest daughter, she watched quietly as her mother and sisters were abused by her father on a weekly basis. Although she herself was not physically abused, she learned quickly how to stay out of trouble and follow the rules of the family. However, when she was 16, she was almost

starved to death and as a result, social services took her from the home and put her in foster care. She bounced around from home to home until she reached the age of 18, when she got a job and supported herself. Shirley then told her story of redemption and forgiveness and how walking with Christ was a joy that could not be destroyed. She made an important announcement, "I would like to volunteer to pick up the children from the 'hood' that attend on Wednesday nights and provide food and other supplies they need. That would be a true joy for me!"

As I looked around the group that day, I realized I was not the only one surprised. Our church was situated in a neighborhood that experienced an economic downturn with all the factors that often accompany this type of situation (e.g., drugs, robberies, sexual businesses). A small group from our church started working with the children in the 'hood' and none of us invited Shirley to be involved. We just thought of her as too "prim and proper!" Now, because of her willingness to share her history, we invited her to participate and get in on the joy. She did! It was exciting to see the joy on her face as she cared for these children in the way only someone who had that experience could!

What does this story have to do with this topic, "Who do you teach?" It's obvious, isn't it? Shirley had a unique story, a story that, prior to this telling, had never been shared with any of us, a story that made her the perfect person to work with children who faced impossible situations and little or no care. We would never have heard this story if Shirley had not felt accepted in our group. It took two years for her to acknowledge we loved her and would appreciate her story. I am so glad she told it . . . and so are the children she helped.

WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES, HISTORY, AND PERSONALITIES OF ADULT STUDENTS?



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Each adult in your class or group has been classified in some way as having a particular skill, personality, or family background. Often, other adults simply use words to label someone else (e.g., pessimistic, eternal optimist, scatterbrained, A-personality, lazy, even-keeled, product of a broken home). Or, perhaps they had their strengths identified (e.g., Strength-Finder) or areas of improvement emphasized at work or in their career education. Or, possibly they were medically or educationally labeled as autistic, slow, hyperactive, or a genius with no social skills. As a society, we are quite good at labeling! I am certainly not proposing you label all of your adult students. What I do propose is that you think about your adult students as unique creations of God and people who can minister to others in special, sometimes surprising ways. As a teacher, one of my jobs is to help students 1) share their experiences and history, 2) open their eyes to see how God can and has changed their lives, and 3) identify and present a variety of opportunities for ministry.

Many strategies and classification systems can be used to identify a person's gifts, strengths, or weaknesses. I am not advocating a specific one or speaking of their veracity; however, these systems generally use a type of self-assessment. I found it helpful for all adults (including me) to become more self-aware and to identify individual personality traits. One classification system I have used frequently connects spiritual gifts with four personality types and abilities, *Finding Your Place Ministry*. Given a long list of descriptors, the adult simply checks the attributes that best describe him or her. Then, these attributes are grouped according to four personality types. These types are labeled and specific gifts are suggested based on experience, personality, and skills. Whatever system you use (including simple observation), I want to emphasize it is important that you acknowledge that ALL of your adult students have their own uniqueness and strengths as well as different personalities, histories, experiences, and passions. Most importantly, it is important you see EACH adult, if committed to God, can minister to others about God's love, forgiveness, and compassion.

To emphasize this point, let's look at the personalities, experiences, and history of some Bible characters that are different and yet they were all servants and ministers of God's Word.



Minister	Descriptor	Scriptural Support
Paul (Saul)	Determined, Tenacious	Acts 14:19-21 “. . . they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him he rose up and went into the city . . .”
	Bold, Emphatic	Acts 13:45 “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary . . .’”
	Authoritative, Impatient	Acts 15:37-39 “. . . But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them . . .”
	Career-Driven, Domineering	Acts 9:1 “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord went to the high priest...”
	Decisive, Strong-Willed	Acts 16:9-10 “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia . . .”
Peter	Impulsive, Undisciplined	John 18:10 “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear . . .”
	Charismatic, Persuasive	Acts 2:1-1 “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said . . .”
	Spontaneous, Responsive	Matthew 14:2 “And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’”
	Expressive, Talkative	Matthew 16:16 “Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”
	Optimistic, Insensitive	Matthew 16:22-23 “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’”

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Martha	Practical, Decisive, Detailed-Oriented	Luke 10:38-42 “But Martha was distracted with much serving and she approached Him (Jesus) and said . . .”
	Hospitable, Dependable	Luke 10:38-42 “. . . Martha welcomed Him into her house . . .”
	Spiritually insensitive	Luke 10:41-42 “Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.”
	Critical, Pessimistic	John 11:21 “Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, . . . ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died . . .’”
	Faithful, Loyal	John 11:27 “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world . . .”

Please note each of these characters had both positive and negative personality traits. Also, note that some of their traits changed after they encountered God, and others were simply modified for good. What if Paul was in my Bible study? Would his strongly worded comments bother me? Would his intolerance toward mistakes be troubling to others? What if Peter was in my class? Would he respond too quickly to my questions? Would he talk too much and not let others respond? What about Martha? Would she be critical of others who do not serve as she does? Would she constantly remind us of the details and forget the focus of the lesson? The answer to each of these questions is most probably YES. In fact, I can think of people who are in every Bible study group I have ever been privileged to teach that have similar personality traits.

So, what are some strategies you can use as a teacher to help adults with different personalities and experiences get closer to God and minister to others? Here are a few that I have employed:

- Encourage your students to tell their stories. We have scheduled a “history” story once a month from individuals who volunteer. The volunteers are given guided questions, a time limit, and their choice of month. In this way, all of us will have discovered so many similarities among us and (like Shirley’s story in the introduction) suggested new ministry opportunities.


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- Have a “Baby/Child Picture Game.” Before a group dinner or event, ask each person to bring an unidentified baby or child picture. During the event, everyone views the pictures and then tries to identify the adult who is pictured. We have also done this with graduation or teen pictures. These pictures always generate some interesting (and funny) fashion comments as well as provide some family and history information.
- Before and during a lesson, provide a sentence stem that will require everyone’s response. (Sometimes the response is simply “Pass” and that is readily accepted.) These are simple phrases, like . . . “My favorite month, song, or food is . . . When I think of peace, I think of . . . I got in trouble as a child when . . . My first job was . . . The person who I admire most . . . My favorite thing to do in my spare time is . . .” These are all open-ended phrases that do not require biblical responses and provide different opportunities to share.
- Study a variety of biblical characters. Describe their personalities and support your descriptions with scripture. As part of the study, analyze how they ministered to others during their lives. Ask students to compare their personalities to those of the biblical characters.
- If possible, meet with individual students. Ask them to describe what they see as their opportunities for ministry and contribute your suggestions. NOTE: This is one of my favorite strategies! I love to encourage others to see themselves as “God’s creation with unique abilities and gifts.”
- Invite someone in spiritual leadership in the church or the world (e.g., ministers, custodians, prayer warriors) to tell his or her story. Discuss the ministry opportunities he or she experienced.

I must include one more strategy and it is the most important one! Remember you are a person with specific personality traits, experiences, and history. Because of your differences or similarities with some of your adult students, you may be (or will be) irritated or bothered by some of them (just as they may be bothered or irritated with you!) The most important strategy is PRAYER, i.e., specific prayer for each student and for you as you teach and interact with each of them. When you sincerely pray for those special people, you will be amazed how God works through your prayers to remind you your own need to grow in grace and ministry.

HOW DO YOU FACILITATE A CULTURE OF ACCEPTANCE?



NOTES

The strategies I suggested in the previous section all worked for me, but in my experience, most people were not willing to share their stories or experiences until they felt “safe” in our group . . . safe from judgments about their status, their education, their background, their faith, or their occupation. Often times, safeness has taken weeks or months or even years before they have volunteered to share their experiences. I think of a “safe” environment as one that has a “culture of acceptance.” We have all heard comments from unchurched people who say, “If I walked into the church, the roof would fall in!” or “I was kicked out of that church because I got divorced or I am just too bad or” . . . or “I will start coming when I get my act together.” In other words, “I don’t feel welcome or safe in a Bible study group.”

Sometimes, we forget the good news of the Gospel is for all, and we judge people who come to our Bible studies as not “acceptable.” We may even think people who are like us (e.g., same age, similar education, financial status, and religious background) would feel more comfortable in our Bible study group and help those who are not like us to find another group. The early church also experienced this challenge. James, the brother of Jesus who led the early church in Jerusalem wrote, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts” (James 2:1-4)?

The good news of the Gospel is for ALL! He offered His forgiveness and love to all of us. John 6:37 states, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.” In 1822, a young girl Charlotte Elliott was introduced to God by a Swiss minister who told her if she wanted peace and joy, she should “give yourself to God just as you are now, with your fightings and fears, hates, and loves, pride and shame.” She responded, “So I would come to God just as I am? Is that right?” Charlotte did come to Jesus just as she was and He accepted her with open arms and her heart was changed that day. A few years later, she wrote a poem we still sing today, “Just As I Am.”


NOTES

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

*Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid My Soul of one dark blot;
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,
Sighting riches, healing of the mind.
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

*Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

So, how do you facilitate a culture of acceptance within your Bible study group? There are many obvious welcome methods (e.g., smiling, inviting them to sit with you at a later service, invite them go to lunch or coffee as your treat, finding a similarity between them and someone else in the group). It is also important to model acceptance by including them in group activities, responding to their appearance or comments with acceptance, and not expecting them to participate in sharing experiences until they feel comfortable. Remember you are accepting the PERSON, not necessarily approving their actions or words. Most importantly, remind yourself God accepts each person just as he or she is!

WHO DID JESUS TEACH? AN EXAMPLE



NOTES

One of my favorite disciples is Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. From what we know, he was not the disciple that stood out as inspiring or as a charismatic speaker. We have none of his sermons or writings, and we only know a few things about him. Just like Peter, he was a commercial fisherman who initially followed the teaching of John the Baptist. “Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as he walked, he said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ ...One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother” (John 1:35, 40). Then, when he met Jesus, he immediately brought his brother to meet Him saying, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41-42)! Later, Andrew brought a lad with fish and barley loaves to Jesus, expressed his uncertainty, Jesus prayed, and the miracle feeding of the five thousand occurred (John 6:4-14). Then, close to the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, Andrew served as the person who brought Greeks to see Jesus (John 12:22). Jesus taught all His disciples. Andrew certainly had a different personality than his brother Peter or any of the other disciples. Because of Jesus’ teachings, we know Andrew has become a model for all of us to follow. Indeed, Andrew was an interesting student of Jesus. We, too, need to introduce our friends and neighbors to Jesus.

CLOSING THOUGHT

I hope as you read this session, you thought about words that would describe your personality, your history, your experiences, and how they relate to your ministry. I hope you also thought about your interesting adult students and how each of them is God’s unique creation. I pray you will help your students share their experiences and history, open their eyes to see how God can and has changed their lives, and introduce them to a variety of ministry opportunities.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

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

1. Identify one of your current or past adult students without naming her. (If you currently do not have any students, describe a good friend.) Describe her history, personality traits, and/or some of her experiences. Describe how you would encourage this student to minister and serve others.
2. Develop and outline a strategy that will identify and use the experiences, histories, and personalities of adult students to minister to or serve others.
3. Select a disciple of Jesus Christ and compare one of your students' experiences, histories, and/or personalities with the disciple. Describe how God used that disciple in ministry. Explain their similarities and differences.

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. As a teacher, one of your jobs is to help students _____.
 - A. share their experiences and history
 - B. open their eyes to see how God can and has changed their lives
 - C. discover how their story is exactly like someone else's story
 - D. a and b
 - E. a and c
2. Becoming self-aware and identifying personality traits is not helpful for discipleship purposes.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. The author suggested which of the following ways to creatively help people tell their stories.
 - A. Schedule a "history" story once a month from those who volunteer.
 - B. Have a Baby/Child Picture Game.
 - C. Meet with students individually.
 - D. All of the above.
4. According to the author, people will not share in a group unless they know they are safe from judgments about their _____.
 - A. background, education, faith, or status
 - B. background, health status, net worth, or position in the church
 - C. background, family size, future ambitions, or hobbies
 - D. none of the above
5. Modeling acceptance of people in your group is the best way to facilitate a culture of acceptance.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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. Tell how you plan to facilitate a culture of acceptance in your Bible study group. Plan to ask your mentor for some of his or her ideas as well.