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DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Jesus the Master Teacher



**SESSION 4**

What Do You Teach?  
The Bible, God's Word: Content that is Life-Changing

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# What Do You Teach? The Bible, God's Word: Content that is Life-Changing

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**What is Conceptual Understanding and  
How Does It Relate to Bible Teaching?**

**How Do You Teach for Change?**

**What 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:

- explain the importance of teaching for conceptual understanding
- cite examples of how you can teach the Bible for conceptual understanding
- list some examples from your life and that of others to illustrate how God's Word has been life-changing

# What Do You Teach? The Bible, God's Word: Content that is Life-Changing

## INTRODUCTION

### JOURNALING

Again, in this lesson, it is suggested you keep a journal. In fact, you will be reading some notes from my journals in most of the lesson introductions. In this lesson, you will be thinking of the content of the Bible from a teaching perspective. Your journal writings will be particularly helpful as you think how the content of the Bible has changed your life and the lives of people you know. Journal prompts are provided at the end of the lesson, but feel free to record your thoughts and share those that you want with your mentor, your students, or your Christian friends. Reflect and write . . . Think about your transformations!

### A RING BEARER AND SOME WELL-MEANING TEACHERS

Three-year-old Tucker was to be the ring bearer at his aunt's wedding. His job was to drive a tractor-like scooter down the aisle with a young flower girl sitting in the wagon. What an important job!

His mother, father, aunt, grandmother, and assorted other relatives and friends taught him "how to be" a ring bearer. We told him how to drive the scooter, how to look straight ahead, how to keep the wagon on the scooter without losing the flower girl, and how to begin and finish the trip down the aisle. We reviewed the ring bearer procedures frequently and forcibly.

Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), we forgot one important thing. We never told him **WHAT** a ring bearer was. So, on the day of the wedding, Tucker did just as he was taught *with one exception*. He roared "like a bear" throughout the wedding. When we asked him why he was roaring, he simply explained, "Cause I'm a BEAR . . . a really good BEARer!"

From my grandmother's perspective, I think Tucker is incredibly smart and cute! Don't you agree? However, from an educator's standpoint, I see an important missing attribute in what Tucker was taught. We only taught him the **SKILLS** or the **PROCEDURES** necessary for him to be a ring bearer. We never taught him the **CONCEPTUAL**

UNDERSTANDING necessary to BE a ring bearer. By his behavior, we realized he wasn't carrying a ring and the word "bearer" had no meaning for him other than one of his favorite animals at the zoo. Our teaching missed a critically important aspect . . . teaching for conceptual knowledge and understanding.

So, how does this humorous story relate to the question, "What do you teach?" Of course, you are to teach the Bible, the Word of God. From an education perspective, what does that mean? One of the primary foci of teaching is conceptual understanding. No matter what you are teaching, there are specific important concepts for students to understand. And, without conceptual understanding, students will simply be memorizing procedures or skills without truly understanding what they have been taught. In other words, just because some students can repeat the right phrase or follow a set of procedures or give a memorized response does NOT mean they can apply knowledge to their behaviors.

Let's see how this educational perspective relates to Bible teaching by looking at Jesus' teachings and some suggested methods for teaching conceptual understanding.

## WHAT IS CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO BIBLE TEACHING?



### NOTES

Teaching the Bible is more important than teaching any other topic. There are many excellent sources about the Bible, and I certainly enjoy reading them; however, the Bible is our primary source for teaching. I am not suggesting you don't use other resources (e.g., concordances, scripture expositions, a variety of translations, Bible atlases) but isn't it exciting that when we each read the Scriptures, God will reveal Himself through His Word? What a privilege it is to teach the Bible!

What are biblical concepts? The Bible is filled with concepts that are important to teach. Love, forgiveness, grace, atonement, incarnation, service, mercy, prayer, joy, peace, salvation, and humility are just some of the important concepts to teach. By definition, conceptual knowledge is "rich in relationships and understanding" and cannot be learned by rote or mindless repetition. It must be understood by thoughtful, reflective learning. If you understand a biblical concept, you can use the knowledge about the concept to recognize it as demonstrated by others and apply it to your own life as well.

Recently, I was privileged to listen to a boys' choir during Eastertide in a cathedral in Erfurt, Germany. For more than 30 minutes, they sang verses of scripture in beautiful harmonies, sometimes in German and other times in English. The scripture was from Psalm 121, and it meant much to me. However, as I watched their faces, I wondered how many of them had any understanding of what they were singing. In other words, they could repeat the phrases beautifully, but had they experienced what they were singing? In a similar incident, I worked with young teenagers who were involved in Bible quizzing. What wonderful memories the students had! They were able to memorize long sections of John's gospel, yet that did not mean they understood what they memorized. Unfortunately, some of their behaviors informed me that they had not experienced some of the concepts they were repeating.

Does teaching for conceptual understanding mean you don't encourage scripture memorization or singing scriptures? Of course not! I strongly encourage memorizing the words of scriptures by singing or by words. However, as a teacher, I want students to understand the words they memorized or the words they read. They need to understand the context of the scripture, the culture of the participants, and the meaning of the original language. Please know that I also believe we can't completely understand every concept in the Bible, and many will always remain a mystery (e.g., the incarnation). However, I want to


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teach students to think and reflect on the biblical concepts, so they can have the “same mindset of Christ Jesus” and “continue to work out” their salvation “with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:5, 12).

So, how do you teach for conceptual understanding? There are specific methods for teaching conceptual knowledge that the education community has researched. Each of these methods can and should be used in Bible teaching, just as Jesus did throughout His ministry.

- Teach concepts by defining what they ARE and what they ARE NOT. To really understand a concept, a student must be able to differentiate between examples that have the attributes of the concept and examples that do NOT have the attributes. For example, the concept of humility could be defined as valuing others above you (Philippians 2:3). Humility is NOT saying how unimportant you are or not recognizing your God-given talents.

*Jesus often used this contrasting teaching technique. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used many such examples: 1) a wise man builds his house on the rock and a man who is NOT wise builds his house on the sand; 2) love your neighbor that is your enemy and NOT just the one who is your friend; 3) treasures are stored in heaven and NOT stored on earth, where “moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;” and 4) we are the light of the world set on a hill or a lampstand and NOT hidden under a basket. Each of these contrasts between what IS and what is NOT helps our understanding of ideas or concepts.*

- Help students visualize the concepts by painting pictures and telling stories relevant to their life. Visualization is a key education technique. Asking students to “see” the story or a picture encourages them to think about the event and reflect on what it means to them. It is a way to make the concept relevant to them because it is their picture or it becomes a story they will remember.

*To help His disciples “see” the concepts He was teaching, Jesus frequently asks His disciples to visualize stories He vividly painted to help them understand His love. In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables that describe salvation and the concept of “lost and found.” The parable of the lost sheep illustrates the importance of even one sheep and the rejoicing that occurs when the lost sheep is found. The parable of the lost coin further illustrates the careful searching that is done when even one is lost and the joy in heaven “in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

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*And, the parable of the lost son is the one everyone remembers with the loving father who always forgives and rejoices when his dead son was “alive again, and he who was lost is found!”*

- Teach concepts by modeling. Most importantly, students begin to understand concepts by seeing them modeled by others and especially those who they respect. Mercy, love, grace, joy, and forgiveness are concepts we all want to model for students; however, they are often easier to talk about than to model. Modeling these Christlike concepts is not possible without the guidance of Christ and His Spirit indwelling within us.

*Jesus is our perfect Model. His model of humility and service as He washed His disciples’ feet, His model of faith as He prayed over a small lunch of two fish and five biscuits and fed more than five thousand, and His model of salvation as He died and rose again are models we can’t forget.*

Teaching for conceptual understanding is not a one-time event. We must continue to teach for conceptual understanding just as we must learn about God’s love, the peace only He can give, and the joy that comes from serving God in spite of circumstances. We want all Bible students to not only know the words of the scripture but to know and understand the concepts of His Word experientially.



## HOW DO YOU TEACH FOR CHANGE?



### NOTES

The Bible is filled with life-changing content! Every time I read the Bible, I am reminded of changes that have occurred in my life and in the lives of those in my Bible study group. I also am convicted about changes that need to occur in my life. As a Bible teacher, I know it is important to teach with an objective in mind, an objective that requires a change in knowledge, a change in action, or a change in attitude. When you study the Bible, you are teaching for change.

The Scriptures matches our needs and invites change. In fact, I am amazed how God speaks to us through specific scriptures every day. Recently in my Bible study, many of us had serious physical needs, needs that were major and not easily fixed by medicine. A study of the miracles of Jesus in the book of John spoke to each of us clearly, and our attitudes began to change as we read the words of Jesus and the changes He made in the lives He touched. When we were going through some difficult life transitions, we read, “How precious is Your loving kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 36:7) and “I have been young, and now am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed” (Psalm 37:25-26). When the problems of life seemed overwhelming, a review of Isaiah’s prophecy (9:6), “For unto us a Child is born . . . and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace . . .” reminded us of Him, who is our Hope. When we have found our complaints were more numerous than our praises, we studied the book of joy, Philippians (4:4), and we were prompted to “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

To teach for change, it is important to ask students as well as yourself to share the God-directed changes that have occurred in their lives. Sometimes that means students share answers to prayers with the group. Other times, worship songs can be suggested and sung that express the changes God has wrought. Still other times, it means students give examples in their own lives that illustrate how a particular biblical concept brought changes in the lives of others.

One of my favorite activities in my Bible study group is the “Five Minute Joys” Share. We begin almost every class by sharing events, gifts, or conversations that have been specifically joyful because of changes God has wrought. During this time we don’t focus on only the happy events; instead, we focus on joy in spite of the circumstances in our lives. Students can share a song, a Bible verse, or their own personal testimony. In other sessions, I make a point to talk about the


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changes we have seen in our group. When I remind everyone how God healed Steve, mended a relationship between a stepdaughter and father, provided a job for Jeffrey so he could be home with his family in the evening, or brought two lonely people together to make a difference for those in need, it prompts all of us to remember the changes only God can make.

A song that we often sing before we begin our weekly study is Charles Wesley's *And Can It Be?* The fourth verse is our favorite because it tells of the life-changing power of the Word of God as well as the testimonies of His people.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray--  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth and followed thee!"* (Wesley, 1738)

As a Bible teacher, I pray for my students. Paul's words in Philippians 1:6, 9-11 express the growth and changes I want for all of us, ". . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ... And this I pray, that your love may abound still more, and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

## WHAT DID JESUS TEACH? AN EXAMPLE

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### NOTES

Jesus taught His disciples to understand concepts. When His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, Jesus realized prayer was more than a practice or a set of steps to be memorized. Rather, Jesus taught prayer was an essential way of communicating with His Father, a concept they needed to understand and something that had to be taught over time. And, important to a Bible teacher, Jesus taught the concept of prayer using the three suggestions from educational researchers for teaching concepts. He taught what prayer **WAS** and what prayer **WAS NOT** when he contrasted the hypocrites who pray “so that they may be seen by men” and use “vain repetitions” with those who “pray in the secret place” and acknowledge that “your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask him” (Matthew 6:5-8). Jesus painted pictures for His disciples of prayer by telling stories of a friend who came at midnight who provided bread and a father who would give good gifts to his child when asked (Luke 11:5-13). Finally, Jesus modeled prayer throughout His ministry and even unto death, as He prayed the ultimate prayer of commitment, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

### CLOSING THOUGHT

Teaching for conceptual understanding is not easy but it is so important if you want your students to learn and apply what they learned to their lives. I have **NO** doubts that as you share the content of the Word of God, your life will be changed and you will want others to understand what you have learned.

## APPLICATION



### NOTES

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

1. Select a biblical concept from the list in the first section. Identify scriptures that address the concept and explain how you could use scripture to teach the concept. Use at least two of the methods for conceptual understanding described in this lesson to tell how you could teach this concept.
2. Select a different concept and complete a study of how Jesus taught that particular concept. Relate it to the methods suggested in this lesson for conceptual understanding.
3. Identify 10 life-changing scriptures that have either changed your attitude, your behaviors, or your knowledge. Explain the changes that occurred with each of them.

### 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

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**NOTES**

1. If a student can repeat the right phrase or follow a set of procedures, it is okay to assume they know how to apply the knowledge to their behaviors.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. Conceptual knowledge is rich in understanding but not in relationships.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. Teaching concepts is best done by defining \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. what they are
  - B. what they are not
  - C. what they could be if we use our imagination
  - D. a and b
  - E. a and c
4. Helping students visualize concepts by painting pictures and telling stories can make the concept \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. relevant to their life
  - B. more enjoyable to learn
  - C. easier to remember
  - D. a and b
  - E. a and c
5. To teach for change, it is important to ask students as well as yourself to share the God-directed changes that have occurred in their lives.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Give a copy of your responses to the first and second application activities to your mentor before you meet.
2. Share what you teach with your mentor in light of this lesson. Ask your mentor to tell what he or she teaches.