

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Jesus the Master Teacher



SESSION 8

Who Do You Teach?
Adults with Joys, Hurts, and Needs

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Who Do You Teach? Adults with Joys, Hurts, and Needs

SESSION OVERVIEW

How Can You Encourage Your Students to Grow Spiritually?

How Do You Differentiate Instruction?

How Did Jesus Differentiate Instruction? An Example

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify a joy, a hurt, and a need of one of your adult students. Explain how you might help your students grow in grace and wisdom. Use Jesus' words in your explanation.
- Describe ways that you can differentiate instruction to your adult students.
- Analyze Jesus' words to his disciples, pharisees, or to "sinners." Explain how He differentiates His teaching to meet their needs.

Who Do You Teach? Adults with Joys, Hurts, and Needs



INTRODUCTION

JOURNALING

In this lesson, you will again be thinking about the adult learners in your group. Perhaps it has been a week of joy, or perhaps it has been a month of hurts, or perhaps their needs are overwhelming. The probability is that if you only have three students in your adult class, you will have joys, hurts, and needs every week! For this journal response, think about your joys, hurts, and needs and your own spiritual growth and how a Bible study group had (or had not) addressed your situation. Your personal stories will help you teach others who have similar joys, hurts, and needs. If you do record them, you will remember them . . . and use them as you teach!

GOD'S 30-MINUTE LESSON

My husband had recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. We were traveling on a short flight from Chicago to Muskegon, and we were assigned different seating arrangements. I was dismayed when I saw Chet's seating partner, a woman covered with tattoos and piercings who wore jeans with many holes. I watched as my husband talked non-stop to her during the entire trip. Frankly, I knew my husband's aversion to tattoos and body piercings, and I was worried that his new "filter-less" conversation could present some problems. I prayed that the 30-minute flight would be over very soon!

When we arrived, both my husband and the woman were still talking, and they both looked happy! When I asked my husband what they had talked about, naturally, he couldn't remember. I was relieved and felt glad that we would never meet her again. But God had other ideas.

As we checked in for the return flight the next week, I turned around and heard the same woman greeting my husband. I sighed and we quickly boarded the plane. Again, we were in different rows but this time, I was the one seated next to the tattooed woman. As soon as she sat down, she turned to me and exclaimed, "Oh, you are the wonderful lady that has been married for more than 30 years! I really need to talk to you! How in the world do you find a man who can make you happy?" So for the next 30 minutes, I told her how God was the center of our

lives together and the importance of Christian relationships. By God's providential grace, the lesson that I had just studied was about the Samaritan woman (John 4), and as the tattooed woman shared her life of many broken relationships, I was able to tell her the beautiful story of a woman who had met the Savior. We prayed together, and when the 30-minute trip was over, we parted ways . . . two different people!

I hope you see how this story relates to this chapter on adults with joys, needs, and hurts. All adults, in or out of your class, have joys, needs, and hurts. Granted, we were not in a planned Bible study, but God had decided we were going to be in HIS plan. HIS plan included my husband's non-judgmental conversation about our marriage, the timing of both of our plane trips, the exact seating arrangement of the plane, the perfect lesson, and my willingness to talk to her (in spite of my rather judgmental spirit). Oh, I needed to be reminded of God's grace that can meet the needs of the adults that I meet wherever they are!

HOW CAN YOU ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY?

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It is true that adults enter a Bible study with numerous hurts and needs. That is an idea that we have already discussed in previous sessions along with a variety of suggested strategies. It is also true that part of our job is to remind adults of the joys that are ours as Christians. Our joys should be shared, and God must be praised at every opportunity for His gifts of grace and mercy.

In this session, I want to address another issue, our growth from baby Christians to maturity in Christ. All of us experience joys, hurts, and needs in our journeys, and the way we face the events in our lives often reflect our spiritual maturity. Hopefully, you will have non-Christians, new Christians, growing Christians, and mature (who are still growing) Christians in your Bible study group. Unfortunately, unlike physical growth, spiritual maturity does not develop naturally or consistently. Some adults appear to live the same Christian years over and over again, never growing in maturity. Unfortunately, some have even gone backwards, compromised their commitment, and need to repent, recommit, and move in their Christian walk. On the other hand, some Christians grow in amazing ways, learning and trusting in giant steps and serving as models for all of us as we face joys, hurts, and needs.

The Scriptures addresses the importance of spiritual growth in the lives of God's people. In the Old Testament, the young boy Samuel "was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men" (1 Samuel 2:26). After Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, he "kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22). As a young child, Jesus "continued to grow and to become strong in spirit" (Luke 1:80), "increasing in wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40), and "in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). The writer of Hebrews (6:1) implored Christians, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." Many other New Testament writers addressed the importance of spiritual growth.

"... and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you."

1 Thessalonians 3:12

"... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."

Ephesians 4:15


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“. . . like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”

1 Peter 2:2

“. . . but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

2 Peter 3:18

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.”

2 Thessalonians 1:3

It is one thing to talk about spiritual growth or maturity; it is quite another to encourage adults to grow spiritually. Recently, I was on a plane trip praying silently for a situation that occurred in our Bible study group. I was burdened for a young couple that was “flirting with the world.” They had made a wonderful commitment to God a year ago and were excited about the possibilities God had for them. I still remember the baptismal service when they held their hands high and sang with gusto, “I have decided to follow Jesus!” It was such an exciting day for all of us and their family. However, over the past month, their attendance in Bible study and other church events had been sporadic at best, and their Facebook page indicated that they were involved again with their old drinking buddies. When I contacted them and voiced my concern, they simply blamed their busy life and said they were under great pressure. I told them I would pray for them and did so consistently for a few weeks. As I prayed on that plane, heavily burdened for these precious people, God clearly reminded me, “Donnie and Sharon are my children . . . don’t you think I love them? Don’t you know I care more than you ever could?” My burden quickly lifted, and while I continued praying for Donnie and Sharon, I now prayed with confidence and hope that the God I served was more than able to care for Donnie and Sharon.

Unfortunately, the story of Donnie and Sharon has been repeated more often than it should be. Instead of growing, as Christians should, the call of sin is strong and people choose to take the path they know best. I am confident that Donnie and Sharon’s story is not finished. God will not forsake them, and we are continuing our contact and prayers. However, I often reflect on Donnie and Sharon’s story and those others who take the wide path of sin. As a Bible study teacher, is there something more I can do to help my students grow spiritually?

Karen is a long time Nazarene in her late 50s. She has been in my Bible study class for more than five years, and she readily provides easy “church” answers to every issue or topic. She frequently states that she doesn’t understand why people sin


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and is often amazed vocally that “No one can be a Christian if they LOOK LIKE that!” when she sees someone covered with tattoos or wearing inappropriate clothing. She also claims that she is just too old to change and she never will get used to the new ways. Most distressing to me are her testimonies . . . and they are always the same, “I am saved and sanctified and on my way to heaven!” Of course, there is nothing wrong with that statement, but when I hear Karen say it I think, “. . . and petrified!” should be added to her testimony. I keep wondering if there could be something more I can do to help my students grow spiritually?

Jerry was a new Christian. He was a newly married, 35-year-old technology expert in charge of all technology in a very large state university. Because of some of his bad habits, he had been suspended from a Nazarene college his freshman year; he went on to receive his undergraduate and graduate degrees from state universities. When I first met him, he didn’t want to talk to me about ever going to a Nazarene church or any church for that matter. One day, Jerry came to my office with his new bride. After a bit of stumbling conversation, he asked if he could come to “my church” because both of them wanted to have an experience of church. I was thrilled, and Jerry and Mary started attending my Nazarene church and my adult class. Both of them accepted Christ as their Savior and they began a new beautiful journey together. Six months later, Jerry was stricken with an aggressive liver cancer. Oh my! Their newly found faith experienced such a trial! Their prayers, openness to whatever God wanted, hunger for the Scriptures, and sharing their faith with everyone was absolutely amazing! Everyone in our class and church noticed their growth spiritually, and all of us grew spiritually as we prayed for them, served their needs as best we could, and watched how God worked in their lives. Two years after the first diagnosis, Jerry’s heaven homecoming was a blessed time as hundreds attended his memorial service. In this example, I have no doubts that Jerry’s faith helped ME grow, but I still wonder if there was something more that I could have done to help my students grow spiritually.

I have been a Christian for more than 50 years. I had committed my life fully to God as a freshman in college at Olivet Nazarene University. I have taught a Bible study for children, teens, or adults at various times over the 50 years. I have paid my tithe, read my Bible, attended church faithfully, and prayed without ceasing at times of distress and daily at times of joy. I have faced trials, hurts, and joys . . . sometimes as a mature, growing Christian, and other times as a doubting Thomas. I have tried to commit my path to Christ every day, but as I reflect on this topic of “growing,” I admit that this past year has been my hardest. My husband’s dementia has placed me in the role of caregiver, and I’m not sure I am “growing spiritually” as much as I should. So . . . I wonder is there something more that I can do to help ME grow spiritually.



These four examples describe four different situations, i.e., people who are at different places on their spiritual journey. A hundred more stories could easily be written about adults in my classes or in your classes and each journey would be different. So, how do we help others and ourselves grow spiritually? What can we do? There is one simple answer. We can't do it! God is the only ONE who can help us grow spiritually. Our job is simply to follow our Lord and Savior, to obey, and to love others as ourselves. Yes, I can encourage my students to read God's Word, to pray honestly and openly to God, to listen to Him, to obey Him, to worship and fellowship with believers, to share His love with others, to serve, to commit every day to Him, and yes, that includes giving of our time, money, and materials. But God is in charge of the growing!

Without doubt, God's role in our spiritual growth is the most critical if we are to mature spiritually. And, our encouragement to obey and worship God is certainly helpful. Let's also look at a few educational frameworks that could give us some strategies for dealing with people at different places in their spiritual journey.

HOW DO YOU DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION?



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Educationally, differentiated instruction is the philosophy for effective teaching that involves providing different students with different paths to learning in terms of acquiring content, processing, or making sense of ideas. It requires that the teacher consider the varied needs of her students, their readiness to learn, their interests, and their learning habits. Wow! What a definition... and one that is certainly difficult to do in any educational setting. In my opinion, except for God, perfection in differentiation is impossible!

With that said, there are certainly some differentiation strategies that I have found to be helpful to encourage the spiritual growth of the adults in my Bible study group.

- Create journey maps. Encourage students to make pictures or diagrams where they can label turning points or events that made a difference in their spiritual life. Remind students of their individual pasts and God's specific blessings. Ask them to include their hurts, their joys, and particular times when their needs were supplied.
- Talk about God's faithfulness despite our differences. Facilitate a discussion about God's faithfulness demonstrated in Christians of varying maturities. Emphasize the constancy of God's presence wherever you are in your journey.
- Provide opportunities for similar or different partnerships. Depending on the assignment, make specific partnership assignments with partners of similar spiritual maturity OR of very different spiritual maturity. (NOTE: Specific partnership assignments will be discussed in Session 12.)
- Build in "consistency" check-ups. Focus on one spiritual discipline at a time (e.g., prayer, meditation, Scripture reading) and ask students to set goals and be accountable to the group or their partner for progress to their goal on a weekly basis.
- Identify some different teaching tools. With the technology revolution, you must be aware of how your adult students learn and communicate with others. For example, for some adults, communication by email is impossible because they don't have access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone. For others, communication by email is ridiculous because



they communicate by text or Twitter or messaging apps. Find someone (probably someone who is younger than you) who can help you identify the newest way to read the Word of God, or communicate prayer requests, or learn new content. In any case, don't forget those adults in your group who still use older (flip) phones!

Finally, I have found that singing a chorus or adopting a class scripture that helps everyone reflect on their spiritual journey are helpful ways to encourage different individuals.

HOW DID JESUS DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION? AN EXAMPLE



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Jesus differentiated instruction perfectly. He knew where His disciples were in their beliefs and commitment. He also knew about the level of faith of those who wanted to be healed or those who asked questions or those who were trying to trap Him with their questions. I think about the time Jesus took just John, Peter, and James to the Mount of Transfiguration. Or, the many times He interacted specifically with Peter or when He intentionally returned after the resurrection to allow Thomas to examine His scars (see Session 7) or His discussion with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and how they differed from many other interactions with unnamed Pharisees.

There are so many examples of Jesus' differentiated instruction. Just a glimpse at the interactions during and after the last supper gives us a small sample of differentiated instruction as recorded in all the gospels (Matthew 26:17-29; Luke 22:7-23; John 13:21-30; Mark 14:22-25). His identification of Judas as the betrayer was direct ("Surely not I, Rabbi." Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."). When Peter boasted about his allegiance, Jesus responded differently and gave him a signal that would remind him of his betrayal ("Jesus answered, ". . . this very night before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."). When the disciples began to dispute who was considered to be the greatest, Jesus explained His principle of serving, modeled the serving by washing each of their feet, and somehow I imagine He was looking pointedly at the disciples who were the least likely to serve others. And when Thomas, Philip, Judas (not Judas Iscariot), and many disciples asked for understanding or clarification about Jesus' last instructions, He responded with specific promises of the Comforter . . . just what they needed to hear (John 14:5-John 16:33). Jesus shared the cup and bread with all of them and yet, while we only know a small part of what He said and did, I think that He was able to look at each of His disciples and say just what they needed to hear at that moment.

CLOSING THOUGHT

I wish we knew more about Jesus' interactions with people of different faith journeys. In fact, my view of heaven includes being able to interact with everyone who walked and talked with Jesus physically. I confess that I love to read the Gospels and analyze Jesus' verbal and physical interactions and how He knew just when to ask questions, or tell a story, or give examples, or listen. As a teacher, interacting with students to specifically meet their needs is the skill that is the most difficult. I know I have so much to learn from the Master Teacher!

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

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

1. Identify two adult students in your group (no real names please). Talk about how each of them responds to hurts, joys, or needs. Talk about their spiritual maturity. Explain how you might help your students grow in grace and wisdom. Use Jesus' words in your explanation.
2. Describe two ways that you can differentiate instruction to your adult students.
3. Analyze Jesus' words to His disciples, pharisees, or to sinners. Explain how He differentiated His teaching to meet their needs.

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. In the same group, you may have students who are _____.
 - A. growing Christians
 - B. new Christians.
 - C. non-Christians
 - D. all of the above
2. Some biblical examples of positive, spiritual growth include Samuel, King Herod, and Saul (Paul).
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. A journey map, using pictures or diagrams, can be a helpful way to gain a visual perspective on the growth in a person's life.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Some people do not want to have accountability and likely do not need accountability to grow spiritually.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Jesus was masterful at offering instruction in unique ways, specific to the person and circumstance.
 - 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. Talk about how you can continue to be a growing Christian and your spiritual journey and maturity. Ask your mentor how he or she continues to grow as a Christian.