

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Jesus the Master Teacher



**SESSION 15**

When and Where Do You Teach?  
Create an Environment for Learning

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# When and Where Do You Teach? Create an Environment for Learning

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**How Do You Create an Environment for Learning?**

**How Do You Model Being a Disciple of Jesus Christ?**

**How Did Jesus Create an Environment for Learning? An Example**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

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

- Reflect on your typical Bible study environment and make at least one change to create a more effective learning environment
- Review your spiritual disciplines, pray, and record how God has spoken to you about your own spiritual growth
- Define incarnation and describe what it means to you as a disciple of Christ

# When and Where Do You Teach? Create an Environment for Learning



## INTRODUCTION

### JOURNALING

Consider the teaching-learning environments where you have learned the most about the Bible. Consider both the formal settings, i.e., the settings that were purposely for Bible study, as well as the more informal settings, e.g., driving or going to school. Think about and record your reflections regarding how the environment contributed to your learning.

### TWO CRASHES IN THE GROCERY STORE

It was just a few days before Thanksgiving and I was dreading the grocery store, crowded lines, shopping cart traffic jams, and the food bill at the end. I was fixing dinner for only seven people, but I still needed lots of groceries, so I braved the crowds. In addition, I hadn't left myself enough time to complete this task, and if I was not finished in time, I would be late for a scheduled conference call. My inner mantra became, "Focus, focus . . . pay attention to your list . . . one row at a time . . . don't miss something . . . you don't have time to go back and forth . . . focus, focus . . ." Suddenly, my focus changed.

As I rounded the corner of the aisle, I witnessed a shopping cart crash. One woman's fully loaded cart hit another woman's cart with fewer items, squashing the latter's finger between the bars. "You should not be going so slow! Can't you see we are all in a hurry?" shouted the former woman as she indignantly traveled down the aisle and turned the next corner. Tears ran down the hurt woman's cheek as she clasped her finger and stood there quite taken aback by the incident.

I quickly went to her to find out how she was and if she needed any help. Of course, her bruised finger was not the issue. After a brief introduction, she explained her hurt. "This is my first Thanksgiving without my daughter. She was killed this year . . . she was only 16 and I am just having a hard time doing anything . . ." There in aisle 13, I listened to Tiffany's story, told her about the God of all comfort, and prayed for her. What a marvelous opportunity to live out the words in our Bible study!

The next day, I returned to that same grocery store (Yes, I missed the ingredients for cranberry sauce that I was supposed to get the day before!) As I was rushing to wait in the checkout lane, I heard another crash, saw a partially turned-over display, and heard two young voices arguing,

“There’s Ms Nita! Let’s go see her!”

“No, I don’t think it’s her. She’s just disguised as Miss Nita. She lives at church!”

I smiled, got out of line, rescued the display, and went over so that I could be identified as Miss Nita. As so often happens with young children, Elijah and Evelyn assumed that because they saw me only in Junior Church, I lived there. After a brief discussion, Evelyn explained to her younger brother, “Miss Nita eats too! She even goes to the grocery store!”

Outside of Sunday church, I was setting an example for Elijah and Evelyn. In the first instance, I was serving Tiffany by comforting and praying with her. For Elijah and Evelyn, I was not “in disguise” but a normal person, much more than the teacher who taught them about Jesus on Sunday. As a Sunday school teacher, I must set an example inside and outside of my teaching tasks. We must model our teachings with our actions; the saying that our “Actions speak louder than words!” has much value.

## HOW DO YOU CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING?



### NOTES

First, let's look at the more formal environments for learning, those which involve specific Bible study settings. From an educational view, creating an environment for effective learning is important and necessary. Many education texts and research journals have reported methods or strategies for "positive and successful" learning environments. I will outline the most applicable strategies here.

**Build a Learning Community.** As we have discussed in previous sessions, a sense of community is particularly important to an effective Bible study. In other words, a shared sense that everyone is learning and living life together will help everyone learn and grow. In this process, the teacher acts as the facilitator. The teacher should:

- Take on the role of peacemaker and remain calm during disagreements in class discussions.
- Work out an open sitting plan with movement possibilities, so the teacher can move and change positions throughout the lesson.
- Smile, laugh, and be positive. Just as joy can be contagious, a miserable spirit can destroy a learning community if not contained.
- Share student successes and value participation by responding to their contributions.
- Respect students by exhibiting confidentiality in confronting any specific issues that may arise.
- Emphasize personal responsibility for learning and each student's choice about the extent of their learning.

**Consider Distractions.** Unfortunately, distractions often occur frequently during Bible studies. Children, cell phones, noise in the next classroom, announcements, eating, personal problems, late attendees, and people leaving early are just a few distractions that may occur.

Think about ways to minimize distractions. For example, move your classroom away from a noisy area, limit food to a certain time frame, or remind the class about turning off cell phone ringers. Whatever you decide, think about possible strategies to decrease distractions.


**NOTES**

Recording Tools: Teachers and students need materials to help them remember ideas or analyze scripture. The following methods can promote an effective learning environment: positioning a white board so everyone can see a displayed outline; distributing note papers so students can respond to a question; having a marker or eraser; making sure Bibles, hymnals, or reference materials are organized so they can be readily accessed.

Music and Color: Research has indicated that a setting with music and colors or artwork can contribute to the learning environment. It can also become a hindrance. I remember when the classroom where we met was painted bright yellow and the discussions about the “brightness” and the “garish color” appeared to distract many students. I also remember when one wall in the room was painted a different color than the rest of the walls. Neutral colors with accents and clean chairs and flooring were important to my middle and older adults. While those were not issues that concerned me personally, I found that I had to address the color of the room with our church maintenance committee. In addition, I had to remind the class members that we were not the only group to meet in our big classroom.

Second, settings where you teach are important. Our Sunday School Bible study group has just finished a study titled *Missional Essentials* (Brisco and Ford, 2012, that emphasized the church’s mission to go out and be missionaries/ teachers/ disciples where we live. As a teacher, I need to realize that wherever I am, I am teaching what it means to be a Christ follower. I have been greatly impacted by the idea that Bible teaching is not just in the church setting. Instead, I am teaching when I am in my first place, the home; in my second place, work; and in my third place, the community (Olenburg, 1998). Why is this idea important to you as a Bible teacher? The authors of *Missional Essentials* state it this way, “Because the vast majority of people in the U.S. are living isolated, relationally impoverished lives, and third places offer an opportunity for missionally minded people to do life in proximity to others.” (p. 81) I admit that as a teacher, I have spent more time inviting people to church or a Bible study than creating relationships in my third place, the community. So what would a “third place” environment look like? Olenburg identifies eight characteristics that “third places share:

- Neutral ground
- Act as a leveler
- Conversation is the main activity
- Accessible and accommodating
- There are regulars
- Low profile
- Mood is playful
- A Home away from home.” (pg. 81)



In my spiritual journey, God has been speaking to me that I am a teacher not just in my church, my home, or my work place. I can also be a teacher in my community. We recently moved to a new community where I have begun to think about practicing Christlike teaching—a new opportunity for me!



## HOW DO YOU MODEL BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST?



### NOTES

Now let's talk about the most important part of the teaching-learning environment . . . the teacher! As a teacher, you set the tone of any teaching event. Your attitude, your passion, your interest and care for students, your love, your prejudices, and everything about you is part of the teaching-learning environment. So . . . is that enough pressure for you? Being a model is difficult and yet it is critical. I continue to be amazed that my students (especially my young students) note what I wear, how I talk, what makes me passionate, and what interests me.

For the past 30 years, I have had the privilege of speaking to many teachers, sharing my experiences along with instructional strategies and supporting research for effective teaching. I also teach weekly in elementary classrooms. People often express surprise about my involvement with students. "You are a university professor. Why do you (*implied*) waste your time with elementary students?" OR "You really understand how kids think and reason. What research supports your ideas?" OR "You have been teaching kids for more than 40 years. Don't you have enough experience by now?" When I hear these comments, I smile on the inside. They are expressing the importance of a model . . . someone who regularly guides students, someone who walks with them and understands their profession. The reason I can speak to teachers with credibility is because I have not just told them how to teach, I have modeled the teaching behaviors that are necessary for students to learn. In other words, my actions should speak louder than my words!

This idea of modeling transfers directly to the role of the Bible teacher. As someone who has successfully *and* unsuccessfully modeled Christlikeness, I have learned some important lessons about my role as a teacher. First, I need to be real. Christlikeness cannot be faked. A person who has a close relationship with Jesus Christ leads a transparent life. Students do not need to see perfection in all our actions; instead, they need to see what it means to grow as a disciple of Christ in our commitments to Him. Second, I need to be willing to admit when I don't know something, when I have failed to meet my commitments, or when I am struggling in my relationship with God. Please know that it is not necessary to give the specific details of a struggle or a failed commitment. However, students need to see a teacher who continues to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ, as one who *forgets what is behind and strains toward what is ahead* (adapt Philippians 3:13). Third, a teacher needs to model kindness, patience, love, forgiveness, and vulnerability. Wow! Aren't you glad I included all those characteristics? Couldn't I

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have left out at least one of them? I have many quotes on the walls of my office. One that I look at every day states, “Just enough grace for today!” Without Christ, it would be impossible to model Christlike characteristics. Thankfully, He provides the grace daily and reminds me of His daily mercies as I practice those attributes. Thus, “I (continually) *press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (Philippian 3:14).

## HOW DID JESUS CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING? AN EXAMPLE



### NOTES

Jesus was the perfect model, fully human and fully divine. The mystery of the incarnation is one that I will never totally understand. Simply put, incarnation means “Emmanuel, God with us!” The incarnation is not only about what Jesus did for us. What Jesus expects us to do is important. Jesus **models** both character and mindset for our lives. As the exact representation of God, He is the picture of what we are intended to be. Thus, His desire for us to unite in love, peace, and humble service are more attainable and urgent because we have seen Him model them. He knows how to do them right.

Amen! Throughout these sessions, we have seen numerous examples of how Jesus modeled the characteristics of a teacher as He lived here on earth. Each of the examples at the end of every session explains how Jesus specifically addressed the topic. This session is no exception. We don’t know much about the exact environments where Jesus taught, but we do know that His attitude, His passion, His interest, His love, and everything about His character were evident to His disciples. What an example we have to follow! How blessed we are that Emmanuel (“God with us”) came to save us and free us from the bondage of sin.

Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, our Wisdom from on high,  
Who ordered all things mightily;  
To us the path of knowledge show,  
and teach us in her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, oh, come, our Lord of might,  
Who to your tribes on Sinai’s height  
In ancient times gave holy law,  
In cloud and majesty and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!


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Oh, come O Rod of Jesse's stem,  
 From ev'ry foe deliver them  
 That trust your mighty pow'r to save;  
 Bring them in vict'ry through the grave.  
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
 Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Key of David, come,  
 And open wide our heav'nly home;  
 Make safe the way that leads on high,  
 And close the path to misery.  
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
 Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high,  
 And cheer us by your drawing nigh,  
 Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
 And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
 Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind  
 In one the hearts of all mankind;  
 Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,  
 And be yourself our King of Peace.  
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
 Shall come to you, O Israel

### CLOSING THOUGHT

“Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel” is my favorite Christmas carol. To me, it expresses my great joy that Christ has come to be with us... with me. He understands me, He created me, and I rejoice in the knowledge of the incarnation even though I do not fully understand the incarnation and how Jesus can be fully human and fully divine. However, what I do know is that I have full confidence in the character of a God who sent His Son to earth to bring salvation. Oswald Chambers says it better than I can, “Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time” ([https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/oswald\\_chambers\\_386812](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/oswald_chambers_386812)). I pray that you will have that type of faith as you model Christlikeness in all your teaching environments!

## APPLICATION

**NOTES**

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

1. Reflect on your typical Bible study environment and make at least one change to create a more effective learning environment. Record the change you plan to make. If possible, implement the change. Then, reflect on the results.
2. Review your spiritual growth as a teacher of the Word. How are you modeling Christlikeness by your actions in your a) family, b) work, and c) community? Pray and honestly reflect on your growth in these three areas.
3. Define incarnation and describe what it means to you as a disciple of Christ and a teacher of the Word.

### 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. Creating an environment for effective learning is not necessary. If people want to learn, the environment doesn't matter.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. When disagreements occur in class discussions, the teacher should side with the person who has the best argument because peacemaking will encourage people to accept the wrong position.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. Which of the following are distractions that may need to be addressed.
  - A. Cell phones
  - B. Noisy children
  - C. Late attendees
  - D. All of the above
4. As a teacher, your attitude, passion, interest, care for the students, and love are essential to the teaching-learning environment.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. Jesus models what it looks like in character and mindset to unite in love, peace, and humble service.
  - 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 your mentor the answers to application activities 1 and 3. Discuss briefly any part of the answers that you want to share or any answers that your mentor wants to discuss.
2. Discuss application activity 2 in detail. Share your goals for growth as a teacher of the Word and be specific about each of the places as described by the authors of Missional Essentials. Ask your mentor to share his or her growth story as well.