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Teaching Christian Biblical Concepts in the Classroom Using an Enhanced Devotional Lecture

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Abstract

There are many great ways to share Jesus and encourage the biblical Christian worldview in the classroom. These include three major teaching modalities: integrating biblical truths directly into the lecture as they relate to the course's subject, giving devotional talks at the beginning or ending of class, and demonstrating biblical concepts by example—inside the classroom and out. This paper looks specifically at the devotional lecture modality. Classroom devotionals are usually, at the basic level, lectures, and therefore suffer from many of the disadvantages of the lecture. But lectures also have advantages. Done well, the devotional lecture can quickly convey a large quantity of information and can directly address topics that are unrelated to the course content and/or are difficult to teach through example, alone. The goal of this paper is to look at techniques that we can use in the classroom devotional lecture to mitigate the weaknesses of the lecture approach, while enhancing its strengths.

Keywords: classroom devotionals, worship thoughts, enhancing lectures, teaching surrender to Jesus

Teaching Christian biblical principles to our students is one of the most important privileges and challenges facing the Christian educator. And there are many ways to do it. One powerful modality, for example, is to integrate into the lecture biblical principles that underlie a true understanding of the course's field of study. Another helpful method is to use classroom devotional talks to explicitly encourage and guide students in their Christian biblical worldview. Still another important teaching modality is to demonstrate biblical principles by example, through our interactions with students inside the classroom and out. All of these faith-enhancing teaching modalities are important. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses. And they all can—and should—work together. The purpose of this paper is to explore ways to enhance the effectiveness of one of these modalities in particular: the classroom devotional lecture. The devotional lecture, when done well, can teach complex biblical topics, in a minimal amount of classroom time, in an engaging and inspirational way.

Should we do it?

Is it our job as professors in a non-religion classroom to seek to enhance the faith of our students? Should I as a welding teacher, or a computer science teacher, or a history teacher, be actively involved in the spiritual education of my students? Would it not be better—and safer—to leave that delicate and, sometimes complex, task to the experts; the pastors, the theologians, the inspirational book and article writers?

I would submit that, yes, it is our job and our privilege to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to draw our students to Jesus, regardless of the topic of the courses we teach. The eternal life of our students is at stake, and no opportunity should be lost to “make disciples of all nations” and to teach “them to observe all things that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20, NASB). Jesus made it clear that “every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.” (Matthew 13:52, NASB).

Paul's purpose in life closely mirrors ours, as Christian professors. “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28-29, NIV). Ellen White agrees with Paul's desire to lead his students to Christ when she writes, “In His prayer to the Father, Christ gave to the world a lesson which should be graven on mind and soul. ‘This is life eternal,’ He said, ‘that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.’ John 17:3. This,” she proclaims, “is true education.” (White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 1900, p. 115).

In another place Ellen White goes so far as to say that,

“our College was designed of God to accomplish the great work of saving souls. It is only when brought under full control of the Spirit of God that the talents of an individual are rendered useful to the fullest extent. The precepts and principles of religion are the first steps in the acquisition of knowledge, and lie at the very foundation of true education. Knowledge and science must be vitalized by the Spirit of God in order to serve the noblest purposes. The Christian alone can make the right use of knowledge. Science, in order to be fully appreciated, must be viewed from a religious standpoint. The heart which is ennobled by the grace of God can best comprehend the real value of education. The attributes of God, as seen in his created works, can be appreciated only as we have a knowledge of the Creator. In order to lead the youth to the fountain of truth, to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, the teachers must not only be acquainted with the theory of the truth, but must have an experimental knowledge of the way of holiness. Knowledge is a power when united with true piety... ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding’ [Proverbs 9:10]. The great work of life is character-building; and a knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education. To impart this knowledge, and to mould the character in harmony with it, should be the object of the teacher's work.” (White, *Christian Education*, 1894, pp. 32, 66).

The eternal importance of our work as teachers, in any field, cannot be underestimated. Each of us has the duty and the privilege of learning how we can effectively collaborate with the Holy Spirit in leading the minds and hearts of our students to their Savior.

But how do we do this? The three faith-enhancing teaching modalities mentioned above can help. Although they do not represent a comprehensive list of ways that we can bless our students in the classroom, they are powerful tools that, when used well, can lead our students to a love-filled, life-changing biblical Christian worldview.

Comparing the faith-enhancing modalities

The purpose of this paper is not to explore these three faith-enhancing modalities in depth, but rather to focus on the importance, advantages, disadvantages, and best practices of the devotional lecture. However, in order to do that it will prove useful to take a quick look at the other two modalities by way of comparison and contrast.

Creating a course on a biblical foundation and integrating a biblical Christian worldview directly into the subject of the course is a powerful way to help our students grow spiritually as well as academically. In this teaching modality, "Faith becomes the foundation for learning and it is connected to forming and shaping a Christian worldview". (Morton, 2016, p. 66). But "Lacking of the foundation of faith, academics becomes merely an educational process instead of a life changing process meant to impact and embrace the whole person" (Morton, 2016, p. 63).

The advantage of this approach is that it makes an intentional connection between the subject at hand and the Bible principles underlying that subject. This connection, when done well, can be a constant reminder to the students of the nature and importance of their faith, even in their own area of study and labor.

The challenge, of course, is to truly make the Bible the foundation of the course and not just an add-on. "Narrow, superficial, and contrived attempts to implement the concept [of integrating faith and learning] have often only confused the issue further and induced a degree of cynicism" (Roy, 2016, p. 613). I have personally talked to students who roll their eyes as they relate the feeble attempts made by their professors to integrate the Bible in their courses, but do so in a way that seems unnatural and superficial. This can cause students to feel manipulated, rather than encouraged and inspired.

Perhaps the one disadvantage of the biblical foundation approach to teaching the biblical worldview in the classroom is that it may be limited by the breadth of material that can be addressed. Any given course lends itself naturally to a certain subset of biblical truth. But attempting to force a connection outside of that subset may do more harm than good. For example, as a computer science instructor, I can quite easily integrate truths such as intelligent design, ethics, and Christ-like interpersonal interactions into my courses, but many other important truths such as true repentance and wholehearted conversion may not fit so well.

If integrating the biblical worldview into the subject matter of our course is a powerful faith-enhancing teaching modality, living that faith by example is even more so. As students watch the instructional video of our lives they are forcefully influenced, for good or for evil, by the way we interact with them and others, inside and outside of the classroom.

"During his days as president, Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river that had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. Each rider was threatened with a very real possibility of death, which caused a traveler who was not part of their group to step aside and watch.

"After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would carry him across the river. The president agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the horse onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, "Tell me, why did you select the president to ask this favor of?" The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the president who had helped him. "All I know, he said, "is that on some of your faces was written the answer 'No,'" and on some them was the answer 'Yes.'" His was a 'Yes' face" (Swindoll, 2003, p. 6).

By God's grace, you and I as professors can have that "Yes" face when dealing with our students. We can have that approachable, loving spirit that attracts our students to God through us. When they see our love, respect, kindness, and patience with them and others, they will see, more clearly, those qualities in the God we glorify.

Jesus proclaims to you and to me, as He did to Israel of old, "'Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'" (Matthew 5:16, NASB). Ellen White recognized the power of our example when she wrote,

"I appeal to teachers in our schools to set a right example to those with whom they are associated. Those who would be qualified to mold the character of the youth, must be learners in the school of Christ, that they may be meek and lowly of heart, as was the divine Pattern. In dress, in deportment, in all their ways, they should exemplify the Christian character, revealing the fact that they are under wise disciplinary rules of the great Teacher." (White, *Christian Education*, 1894, p. 89)

A picture is said to be worth a thousand words, and that is especially true in the multi-media presentation of our godly life. When it comes to influencing our students for good, there is little, if anything, more powerful than our actions. No faith-enhancing teaching modality will be effective unless our life is aligned with what we teach.

There are a multitude of important advantages to teaching our students by example, but are there any disadvantages? I would not say that there are disadvantages, per se. But, like the biblical foundations approach, there are limitations. While our Spirit-filled example can powerfully model behaviors and the *effects* of spiritual truths, it is less effective at teaching the truths themselves. For example students may clearly see the fruits of the Spirit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But seeing those fruits does not automatically translate into an understanding of how they can receive the Holy Spirit into their own lives.

The inspirational lecture

Jesus was and is our great example, but He did not teach by example alone. Much of the Lord's ministry was dedicated to times of inspirational lecture. In that we can also follow His example. Devotional talks in the classroom are basically lectures. They suffer, therefore, from many of the same disadvantages as lectures. But they also benefit from some of their strengths.

Lecture in the classroom has something of a bad name in academia. As one satirist put it, "Most people tire of the lecture in ten minutes; clever people can do it in five. Sensible people never go to lectures at all" (Sherrin, 1995).

A more scientific perspective comes from Bette Case Di Leonardi who notes that,

"As strictly one-way communication, the lecture fails to apply classic research-based principles of good education practice, such as encouraging student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, or active learning, giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)" (Case Di Leonardi, 2007, p. 155).

These are grave failings indeed. But does lecture still have its place? Are there ways that we can ameliorate some of the lecture's weaknesses and build on its strengths in order to use it powerfully in our classroom devotional thoughts? The answer, of course, is yes. "Just because something is done badly by some teachers in some classrooms does not mean that the method as a whole is inherently flawed" (Brookfield, 2006 as cited in Case Di Leonardi, 2007, p. 161).

When done poorly, classroom lectures accomplish little. And researchers have a pretty good picture of what that poor lecture looks like. Among other things, it rambles, moves slowly, is often presented in a monotone, spends too much time on minute details, with little eye contact and few facial expressions (Forsyth, 2003 as summarized in Gross Davis, 2009, p. 153).

But done well, the lecture has some strengths: “A well-crafted, well-delivered lecture can impart information as well as motivate and inspire students by conveying how an expert thinks about complex content, organizes knowledge, and applies the methods of discipline” (Gross Davis, 2009, p. 135).

S. Raj Chaudhury tells of an hour-long lecture he attended by physicist Dean Zollman. He writes:

“Zollman delivered his speech in a large hall attended by several hundred people, all of whom had substantial training in physics and experience in teaching it...Zollman’s lecture was inspiring, effective in delivering a message that I still remember, and at the time prompted further thought on an important issue in student learning” (Chaudhury, 2011, p. 14).

Clearly Zollman did something right. He was able to lecture for a full hour to a group of experts in his field, and do it in such a way that they came away inspired and reflective. But what was his secret? How did he keep their attention for longer than 10 minutes? How did he inspire them and make them think?

Many people throughout history, including Jesus Himself, have lectured and done it well. And so can we. Bette Di Leonardi believes that the key to effective lecture is to enhance them with listener-engaging tools. She writes: “Lecture has the potential to clarify difficult concepts, organize thinking, promote problem solving, and challenge attitudes (Naismith & Steinert, 2001). However, the lecture must move beyond a unidirectional flow of facts to realize these potentials” (Case Di Leonardi, 2007, p. 154).

Enhancing the devotional lecture

A lecture is intrinsically a “unidirectional flow of facts,” so how can we move beyond that inherent limitation in order to enhance our devotional thoughts in the classroom? There are many creative ways that we, as Christian teachers, can enhance our devotional time with our students. Here are some of them.

Use engaging visuals

It has been shown that the use of PowerPoint®, for example, in the classroom can increase student self-efficacy, attitude, and motivation (Susskind, 2005). PowerPoint®, when done well, can help engage the students by bringing a visual element to the lecture. Now, instead of merely an auditory discourse, it becomes an audio and visual feast.

PowerPoint® presentations, like any visual aid, can be misused, of course, and actually distract from the presentation. But if the slides are simple, clean, focused, and visually engaging, they can add a whole new dimension to the devotional lecture.

Limit the time

The challenge when it comes to taking time out of class to have a devotional thought is to do it in a way that minimizes student resentment. Some students will always resent any time taken for devotionals, others will truly enjoy the experience, while still others will resent it if they feel it takes up too much of the class period.

One thing that works very well for me is to have one, longer, devotional thought each week (often on Friday) rather than many shorter talks each class period. In this way, the students do not feel bombarded, and I can spend a little more time developing an idea. The challenge, however, is to use that time as efficiently and effectively as possible; to keep the thoughts focused and concise.

I try to keep my devotional thoughts between 8-10 minutes or less each week. For a 3-credit class, that represents about 7% of the total class time. I do not consider this time to be lost or wasted—in fact, it is value-add for the students. I am privileged to work in a Christian university where the spiritual well-being of my students is of highest priority. It is my privilege to collaborate with the Holy Spirit “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in [God]” (Acts 26:16-18, NASB).

Use questions

Questions are usually a good way to engage students. In fact, “Due to its importance, questioning is one of the most widely studied elements in teaching research” (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011, p. 54). Good questions should “capture student’s attention, arouse their curiosity, reinforce important points, encourage reflection, and promote active learning” (Gross Davis, 2009, p. 118).

One challenge with using a lot of questions in devotional talks is the time crunch. Asking questions and discussing answers takes time. This can be good and useful at times, but often we are fighting the clock. The good news is that “Even when the lecturer does not ask for an oral response, a question promotes thinking” (Case Di Leonardi, 2007, p. 156). So whether we have time for a discussion or not, well thought-out questions can enhance our lecture and further engage our students.

Put in the time to prepare

All these PowerPoint® presentations, and concise, focused talks replete with high-quality, thought-provoking questions take time to prepare—significant time. We normally take large amounts of time to prepare for our regular lectures. We decide on what material needs to be covered. We find ways to organize that material in order to present it effectively. We gather notes, and may even prepare PowerPoint® presentations. All this we do for the regular lecture. But what about the classroom devotional? Do we put in serious time, thought and effort into preparing for them as well?

Provide handouts

Giving handouts for devotional thoughts may seem a little strange, but I believe it can be an important way to further engage our students in the devotional process. I like to give a color one-page (double-sided), optional handout each week along with the devotional thought (see Appendix A for a sample). On the front side of the handout is a half-page summary of the topic, and a half-page list of the major quotations used in the devotional. On the back side of the handout are one or more reflection questions.

I tell my students that the worksheet is optional and they will not need to turn it in. But I encourage them to take some time on Sabbath or during their own devotional times to reflect on the contents of the handout.

At the beginning of the semester, I give them a full-color cover sheet for the handouts, and I hole-punch each sheet so that they can collect the handouts into a complete workbook for the topic by the time that the semester is over.

One great idea that I have not yet done is to form a LifeGroup or other small group on campus for the students to get together once a week, or once a month to give them an opportunity to share with each other on the topic and their answers to the reflection questions on the handouts. Talking can be an important part of learning, and talking together in small groups can help the students structure their knowledge and thoughts and coalesce their ideas (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011, p. 65).

Build on a single topic

When we teach a course, we do not throw out a large number of random thoughts throughout the semester and hope that the students can make sense of them. Nor do we start immediately with complex theories, without laying a foundation of basic knowledge. And yet, in our devotional thoughts we sometimes do just that. We’ll share a thought from Psalms one day, and a completely unconnected thought from Revelation the next. Even when our devotional thoughts try to follow the topic of the course, we may easily find ourselves sharing a variety of biblical ideas with at best a tenuous link between them.

What would happen instead if we focused the entire semester, or even the whole year’s devotional thoughts on a single topic? That may seem a little extreme, but think of how well we could build on that topic. Consider what foundation of basic truth we could lay, and then build on that foundation with more and more complex truths and deeper and deeper insights.

Our students need more than just spiritual milk. They need good nutritious solid truth (Hebrews 5:12). But we cannot give them that solid food immediately. We need time to lay the foundation. Jesus recognized this important principle when He said to His disciples, “I have many more things to say to you,

but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12, NASB). The apostle Paul also showed that he understood this when he wrote to the Corinthians, “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,” (1 Corinthians 3:2, NASB). “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14, NASB).

The only way that we can possibly get deeper with our students than mere superficial spiritual truths is to build gently on a single topic over a period of time. We must not rush them too fast. As someone once said, “The soldier that gets too far ahead of his troops begins to look like the enemy.” (Author unknown) The last thing that we want to do is to share advanced truths so quickly that we leave our students in the dust—and begin to look like the enemy.

Martin Luther understood this concept of “slow and easy” when he proclaimed, “What does a mother do to her infant? At first she gives it milk, then some very light food. If she were to begin by giving it meat and wine, what would be the consequence...So should we act toward our brethren. My friend, have you been long enough at the breast? It is well! But permit your brother to drink as long as yourself” (Merle D’Aubigne, 1846, p. 1009).

Modern research clearly recognizes the importance of building on previous knowledge in order to gain new knowledge. Daniel Muijs, et al. state that “...long-term memory is key to learning, in that a number of studies suggest that learning happens through making connections in the long-term memory and between new knowledge stored in the short-term memory” (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011, p. 38). The only way that we are going to get any deeper with our students than the most superficial truths is to build a strong basic foundation and build on that foundation over time by making these connections between long-term memory and short-term.

Review, Review, Repeat

And that leads us to our last lecture-enhancing tool: connecting the dots. As we build on a topic over a period of time, we must ensure that the students make the connection between the weekly devotional thoughts. It is easy over the week for students to forget what we talked about last time, and to fail to make a connection with this week’s add-on thoughts.

Connecting the dots between the various pieces of information that we share with our students is so important that some researchers define learning as “making connections; seeing patterns and wholeness; seeing a ‘big picture’; and finding meaning” (Roy, 2016).

Susan A. Ambrose et al. states that “Students connect what they learn to what they already know, interpreting incoming information, and even sensory perception, through the lens of their existing knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions. In fact, there is widespread agreement among researchers that students must connect new knowledge to previous knowledge in order to learn (Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Resnick, 1983)” (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010, p. 15).

They go on to make a distinction between the connectedness (or lack thereof) that novices have on a given subject as compared to that of an expert, and the impediments to learning that such lack of connectedness entails.

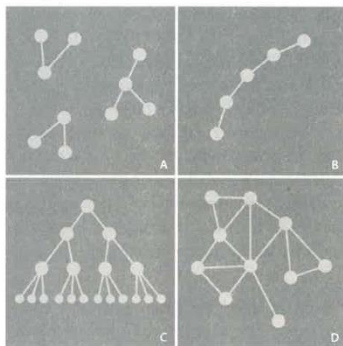


Figure 2.2. Examples of Knowledge Organizations

“Figure 2.2 shows a variety of organizational structures that differ in regard to the connections that exist among pieces of knowledge. In each panel, the pieces of knowledge are represented by nodes, and the relationships between them are represented by links.”

“If we look at panels A and B, we see knowledge organizations that are fairly typical of novices in that they show few connections among nodes. The sparseness of links among components in panel A, for instance, probably indicate that the students have not yet developed the ability to recognize relationships

among pieces of knowledge. This kind of organization might be found in a situation in which students absorb the knowledge from each lecture in a course without connecting the information to other lectures or recognizing themes that cut across the course as a whole. Such relatively disconnected knowledge organizations can impede student learning in several ways. First, if students lack a strongly connected network their knowledge will be slower and more difficult to retrieve (Bradshaw & Anderson, 1982; Reder & Anderson, 1980; Smith, Adams & Schorr, 1978). Moreover, if students do not make the necessary connections among pieces of information, they may not recognize or seek to rectify contradictions” (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010, p. 50).

Clearly if we desire our students to understand solid truths, we must help them make the connections between the basic truths that we share in our devotional talks. Building on a single topic allows us to do that, as long as we faithfully review where we have been so that students can connect the dots and become experts in the subject.

In this section we have looked at some of the advantages and disadvantages of lecture, especially as it is used in devotional talks. We have seen that lectures can suffer from lack of student engagement, but that there are practical things that we can do to enhance that engagement. Lectures have the advantage that they are able to convey large amounts of information in a short period of time. For the devotional talk this means that we can keep our thoughts short and still get across meaningful information. Also, lectures can allow us to address deep spiritual topics directly, which is often difficult to do through the other two faith-enhancing teaching modalities that we have looked at by comparison.

Is it our Job?

At this point it could be reasonably asked if we should even attempt such deep diving into spiritual topics in our classroom. I can only say that I wish someone had done it for me. I am a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist. I was born and raised in a good Seventh-day Adventist Christian home. I enjoyed warm and loving Seventh-day Adventist church families all my life. And I attended high-quality Seventh-day Adventist church schools from first grade through graduate school. I am an ordained elder, my wife and I have served as missionaries overseas, and if you had asked me, I would have told you that I believed myself to be a better than average Christian.

And yet it wasn't until the age of 44 that I was converted, probably for the first time. I lived over four decades of my life misunderstanding the Christian life. And that misunderstanding devastated my relationship with Jesus.

We are told that “At the very outset of the Christian life every believer should be taught its foundation principles. He should be taught that he is not merely to be saved by Christ's sacrifice, but that he is to make the life of Christ his life and the character of Christ his character” (White, Christ's Object Lessons, 1900, pp. 57-58). But that never happened to me. I was taught the doctrines, and I am very glad that for that. But nobody ever sat me down and taught me the “foundation principles” of following Jesus.

Whose job is it to teach our children those foundation principles? Is it only the parent's and the pastor's? Or is it the job of every follower of Christ? Shouldn't we, as godly educators, use our influence and experience to play a part in teaching our children this most important concept?

What topic?

And that leads to our next question, “What spiritual topic should we teach in the classroom?” If we desire to take an aspect of the Christian life and spend some serious time and effort exploring it in our classroom, which topic should we choose?

There are a plethora of good, important, and practical spiritual concepts that our students need to learn, but I would like to submit that one topic, above all others is desperately needed by Adventists and non-Adventists alike in this end-time Christian church. It is the subject of surrendering to Jesus.

Ellen White tells us that “Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ” (White, The Desire of Ages, 1898, p. 523). In other words, there is one topic that you will find underlying every other truth that Christ taught: self-surrender.

And why is this topic so important? It is because

“When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one” (White, *The Desire of Ages*, 1898, p. 324).

Surrendering to Jesus is the key to becoming God’s own fortress, impregnable to the assaults of Satan. Without that whole-hearted consecration to Christ, “we shall be dominated by the wicked one.” For 30 years after my baptism, I was dominated by the wicked one. I wanted to be a good Christian. I longed for victory over sin. I sang the surrender song and prayed the surrender prayer—and meant it. But I did not gain victory over my besetting sins nor grow in love for the Lord, all because I failed to understand surrender. Jesus proclaimed that “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:32, NASB) and that was literally the case in my life. Once God helped me understand what it truly means to give myself wholly to Him, and once He brought me to the place where I was willing and able to make that radical commitment, I gained supernatural victory over my besetting sins. I became God’s own fortress.

The word “surrender” is used a great deal in Christian media. It is extolled from the pulpit and the printed page. But although we talk a lot about surrender, we don’t always say much about it. What, exactly, is it? What does it look like in my life? How can I become surrendered? How can I know if I am surrendered? How can I stay surrendered? All these are important questions that, most of my life, I had no clue how to answer.

How is it possible that a topic that is the “substance of the teachings of Christ” can be so little taught—and so little understood—even by Adventists? Successfully surrendering our lives to Jesus is the key to loving Him (John 15:10), obeying Him (James 4:7), enjoying Him (Job 22:23-27), and glorifying Him (Matthew 5:16, 1 Corinthians 10:31). Whole-hearted consecration to Christ is the key to the Christian life—every part of it (Galatians 2:20, John 15:5).

So, yes, I believe that there are a great many good spiritual concepts that we can teach our children through enhanced devotional lecture, but no topic is more needed than the truth of surrendering our lives unreservedly, unresistingly, and unrelentingly to Jesus—letting Him be Almighty God in us. Surrendering our lives to God is the “substance of the teachings of Christ.” What, then, should be the substance of your teaching and mine? This topic is the core of true education. As John Taylor puts it,

Call to Action

“Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ”

White, *The Desire of Ages*, 1898, p. 523

“Educational programs are comprised of courses, courses are made up of topics, topics of concepts, and concepts of ideas. Consequently, if every thought is in submission to Christ, this means that every class period, every subject area, and indeed the entire educational experience recognizes and embraces the Lordship of Jesus.” (Taylor, 2002, p. 10)

Teaching surrender in the classroom

Over the past several years I have begun to experiment with ways to teach surrender in my college-level computer science courses. This semester I have developed a 14-part series on the basics of surrender, complete with PowerPoint® presentations and handouts. Over those 14 presentations I cover the following sub-topics:

How can I enjoy God?

- The importance of loving God (First and great commandment, transforms the Christian walk into one of joy)
- The seed of love for God is the surrender of self (as seen in the story of the Rich, Young Ruler)
- The great bank transfer - Making God our treasure (Rich, Young Ruler, Job 22:23-27)
- The cost of loving God (Rich, Young Ruler, Pearl of Great Price)

Why is my obedience so important to God?

- Why God wants us to obey Him (the Bible is full of commands, over 1050 in the New Testament alone).
- God just wants to bless us (God’s way is always good. Every one of His commands is an invitation to be blessed).
- Obedience is HOW God blesses us, not WHY He blesses us (avoiding the trap of legalism by understanding the true purpose of obeying God)
- Can we skip a blessing and disobey God? (the consequences of disobeying God)
- Enjoying God to the fullest (walking with Jesus in the center of His will).

What is surrender?

- Defining of surrender (getting out of God’s way so that He can be Almighty God in me).
- Surrender is an event & a process (much like marriage, there is the point of commitment, and a lifetime of growing in that love and commitment)
- Surrender is all-or-nothing I (If we give the devil even one crack to slither through, he will come in and undo much of the good that God is trying to do in our lives).
- Surrender is all-or-nothing II (large chasms are not crossed by a series of small jumps)
- The “little” things matter (it is dangerous to say, “oh, well, it’s not that big of a deal, and besides God isn’t finished with me yet.”)

Each of these presentation takes 10 minutes or less, and each begins with a review of concepts discussed in previous presentations. Together they form a foundation on which to build on the topic of surrender in later devotional lectures. My goal is to create a 4-year curriculum of devotional thoughts for my students on what it means to surrender our lives to Jesus and how we can collaborate with God to accomplish it successfully. Future topics include:

- Why do we resist God's will, even when we know it is so good?
- How can we gain the victory over self? (Holy Spirit)
- How can we collaborate with God in the surrender process?
- How can we know if we are truly surrendered to Christ?
- How does a Christian sin? What does sin look like in the life that has been crucified in Christ (Galatians 2:20)?
- How can we stay surrendered?
- The privilege, peace, and promise of surrender.
- How can we know God's will?
- What happens when we fail?

The results

During the Fall, 2016 semester I shared a series of 13 devotionals on the importance of surrendering to Jesus, and how it works. I did this for one of my own courses as well as for one of my colleague's courses. Both classes had about 36 students. His class was a Freshman-level course (CPTR110) and mine was for Sophomores (CPHE200). Toward the end of the semester I gave an anonymous questionnaire to try and determine the student's overall opinion of the devotional talks. Here are the results:

I have enjoyed the classroom devotionals this semester.

CPHE200: 94% agree or strongly agree

CPTR110: 80% agree or strongly agree

I have found the handouts for the devotionals helpful in my own devotional time.

CPHE200: 34% agree or strongly agree

CPTR110: 36% agree or strongly agree

I would like to see devotionals like these continue in other SAU courses.

CPHE200: 77% agree or strongly agree

CPTR110: 64% agree or strongly agree

I would like to see a Lifegroup or other small group started so that I can discuss these devotional thoughts with my classmates.

CPHE200: 31% agree or strongly agree

CPTR110: 24% agree or strongly agree

I believe that the topic of surrendering our lives to Jesus is an important topic and should be part of our classroom devotional experience.

CPHE200: 86% agree or strongly agree

CPTR110: 80% agree or strongly agree

From these results we can see that most students had a pretty positive attitude about the devotionals and felt that they were an important part of the course. It is interesting to note that, in some of the questions, my course (CPHE200) scored a little higher than my colleague's course (CPTR110). I believe that this is because my students knew me better and we had developed a rapport, whereas the CPTR110 students did not know me well, nor I them. This shows that a stranger can give devotional

lectures in another professor's class, but that some of the force of the talks may be diminished. I will have these CPTR110 students in CPHE200 next year and, by God's grace, we will continue the series on surrender.

Conclusion

Together with other teaching modalities, the devotional lecture can play an important part in the spiritual nurture of our students in the classroom. To mitigate the lecture's inherent weaknesses and build on its strengths, we can use engaging visuals, limit the time, ask reflection questions, prepare well, provide handouts, build on a single topic over an extended period of time, and review constantly. The devotional lecture, used on a single topic, over a period of time, allows teachers to address otherwise difficult-to-teach spiritual truths in a direct, focused, and inspirational way without quickly overwhelming the students with too much information. As professors in a Christian school, working for the eternal well-being of our students is our duty and our privilege, and the devotional lecture, especially on the topic of surrendering to Jesus, is a powerful means toward that end.

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Appendix A – Sample Devotional Handout

How Can I Enjoy God?

1.1

Michael Dant (www.delighting.org)*Review*

Godly love is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. Such love transforms the Christian life from “have-to” drudgery into “get-to” joy. No wonder that God longs for us to love Him passionately. No wonder the Great Commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is not a common love. It is not one love among many. It is a soul-pervading, self-sacrificing, all-or-nothing love for God that makes Him the center around which our whole life revolves.

Points To Ponder

Dick and Rick Hoyt story – A Father’s love. Jacob’s love for Rachel made his 7 years of hard labor seem “to him but a few days because of his love for her” (Genesis 29:20).

The Great Commandment is “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, see also Matthew 22:36-37).

“If Christ be in us the hope of glory, we shall discover such matchless charms in him that the soul will be enamored...**But a profession without this deep love, is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery**” (Spiritual Gifts 2, p.263).

“If we love Jesus, we shall love to live for Him, to present our thank offerings to Him, to labor for Him. The very labor will be light. For His sake we shall covet pain and toil and sacrifice. We shall sympathize with His longing for the salvation of men. We shall feel the same tender craving for souls that He has felt. This is the religion of Christ.” (Christ Object Lessons, p. 49-50)

Continued on reverse side

Appendix B – How can we enhance our devotional lectures?

Use engaging visuals

Visuals take time and effort to create, but they have been shown to be powerful tools for increasing student engagement.

Limit the time

Our challenge is to make devotional thoughts long enough that they say something meaningful and build on previous devotionals, but not so long that students begin to resent this use of class time.

Use Questions

Very little engages the minds of students more powerfully than intriguing questions. And thankfully, this engagement takes place, to at least some extent, even when (due to time constraints) the students do not provide oral answers.

Put in the time to prepare

As professors we all understand the importance and power of preparing well for our classes. Should we put in any less time and effort preparing for our devotional thoughts?

Provide handouts

Give the students opportunity outside of class to review and reflect on the devotionals. These handouts can grow into a full-fledged workbook as we add to them each week.

Build on a single topic

In our classes we start simple and build toward more complex topics. We can do the same thing with the devotional lectures over weeks, months, semesters, even years.

Review, Review, Repeat

Don't let the students lose the train of the devotional thoughts. Keep reviewing and repeating the major concepts along the way.