

COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

The Adult Sabbath School Teacher

There is an expression, “a born teacher,” meaning that such a person has been endowed with native talent for teaching. Most educators do not believe the best teachers are simply born that way. People learn to teach, and we can identify skills to do it more effectively.

Teaching is one of the gifts of the Spirit. The gift of teaching may be natural or acquired, but it is *not* a Spiritual Gift until it is empowered by and surrendered to the Holy Spirit for action. The gift is manifest in action—not only in reception.

The empowerment of the Holy Spirit should not be taken for granted. Jesus received a daily baptism of the Holy Spirit that He might impart the words of life to others. So it may be with us.

Individual Differences in Teachers

Teachers come in all sizes, shapes, and ages. And they come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are just beginning, while others have been at it for decades. Like their students, not all have grown to the same maturity in their ability to teach or in their understanding of the Word of God. It would be unrealistic and undesirable to want all teachers to be the same.

What can be expected, however, is that teachers should grow. They don't have to be the same teacher year after year. They can become more effective—better able to teach and more knowledgeable about their calling.

“Teachers should feel their responsibility, and make use of every opportunity to improve, that they may render the best kind of service in a manner that will result in the salvation of souls.”¹

Are you frightened and apprehensive at the thought of facing a class on Sabbath morning? If so you may increase your confidence by realizing the presence of the Holy Spirit and by reviewing the principles of adult learning in this leaflet.

Teaching is a high calling. The adult Sabbath School teacher or class facilitator may spend more time with members in meaningful education than does the pastor.

The following list characterizes a qualified adult Sabbath School teacher. Characteristics are listed in two categories: general characteristics for all church leaders and specific qualities for the Sabbath School teacher. The order in which the characteristics are listed is not prioritized.

General Characteristics of a Church Leader

- Is committed to Jesus Christ
- Is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Gives time and energy to train for a leadership task
- Attends worship services and church activities
- Is willing to relate to another person's point of view
- Sees the potential in others
- Acts out Christian commitment in all avenues of life
- Helps a group set its own goals and organize to reach its goals.

Specific Qualities of a Sabbath School Teacher

- Has a deep respect for the Word of God
- Shares information in an interesting way
- Involves the group in making decisions about its life and study
- Plans sessions well ahead and has materials ready
- Is able to express his or her own beliefs
- Understands how learning takes place
- Helps members of a group learn from their own experiences
- Is willing to use recommended materials
- Knows how to listen to others

If these lists seem to suggest unattainable goals, the following quotations may bring encouragement.

“When we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment.”²

“To everyone who offers himself to the Lord for service, withholding nothing, is given power for the attainment of measureless results.”³

“In this life our work for God often seems to be almost fruitless. Our efforts to do good may be earnest and persevering, yet we may not be permitted to witness their results. To us the effort may seem to be lost. But the Saviour assures us that our work is noted in heaven, and that the recompense cannot



fail.”⁴

With enthusiasm and confidence you may assume the task. You are motivated from within to teach because Jesus has invited—even directed—you to do so.

Why Teach?

What is it we hope to see happen in the lives of those we teach? What do we want them to learn?

Growth is a fundamental educational concept. Peter exhorts: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:18).⁵

This text is especially appropriate for Sabbath School teachers. It provides a basis for understanding students, teachers, and their relationship with each other. Basically, growth is a concept that recognizes the reality of change. Teaching is a deliberate attempt to give direction to positive change. In the book of Second Peter, that direction is very clear; it is growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In harmony with this goal the Sabbath School is designed and organized to win, hold, and train people for the kingdom of God. The supreme business of the church—and of the Sabbath School—is “to seek and to save” the lost. This is why the church exists. It was the supreme mission of Jesus who said, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Surely then the Sabbath School teacher must relate to the winning of the lost to Christ as an ultimate objective. The inherent sense of connectedness between faith and life is portrayed consistently throughout the New Testament. “By their fruits you will know them” (Matt. 7:20).

The Sabbath School is the evangelistic arm of the church—the most effective instrument for the ingathering of souls. The reservoir of people in Sabbath School classes has great potential, and the Sabbath School teachers will by word and deed teach that the ministry of soul winning is everybody’s business.

Teaching the Adult Group

As a Sabbath School teacher of an adult class, each week you guide your class in the study of the Word of God. For some members of the class, it is the only contact they will have in the study of the Bible. The methods you use in teaching the Sabbath School lesson will determine the effectiveness of the spiritual experience of your class members. Every class period should contribute to the spiritual growth of each class member.

As a Sabbath School teacher you are involved in the process of Christian education which includes more than just what the teacher does. It is a teaching-

learning process that includes how, what, when, and where people learn. Though it is possible for people to learn without teachers, it is difficult to conceive of education without teachers.

At the very heart of this Christian task is the question of purpose. The goal of all spiritual activity is established for us: “Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached.”⁶ “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Sabbath School teachers and class members are to be changed from what they are to what they ought to be. It is the kind of change that takes place as they walk closely in fellowship with God, guided by the Holy Spirit, in the study and discussion of His Word.

Preparation for Sabbath School teaching is very important and requires deliberate attention. It is planning that includes continual and weekly preparation.

In continual preparation the Sabbath School teacher maintains a daily devotional fellowship with God through regular, disciplined study of God’s Word and through personal prayer. The teacher is motivated by a sincere concern to know and meet the class members and their needs.

Weekly preparation involves making specific plans for teaching the Sabbath School lesson. The Sabbath School teacher will find it profitable to consider the following in the weekly phase of preparation.

The Lesson Plan

The concept of a lesson plan assumes that the Sabbath School teacher will carefully study to understand the subject to be taught and will have as an objective to meet the spiritual needs of the class members.

The Adult Bible Study Guide is intended to be just that: a study guide. It is not an end in itself, and it should *never* be the central focus of the lesson plan. The main scriptural passages from the study guide should form the major content of the class period.

The task of the teacher or class facilitator is to motivate and guide learners in the process of discovery under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Teachers and class members must dig deep and make use of exegetical tools to interpret the true meaning of scripture. The effective teacher will facilitate a learning climate in which members are eager to discover and apply biblical principles to their lives.

The best way to share interesting facts and insights about biblical passages is to use them to reinforce thoughts shared by class members. This affirms and thus motivates members to participate. “It is not the best plan for teachers to do all the talking, but they should draw out the class to tell what they know.

Then let the teacher, with a few brief, pointed remarks or illustrations, impress the lesson upon their minds.”⁷ The class facilitator can select which expressions to affirm and thus lead the class to consider the theme of the text.

When you are preparing your Sabbath School lesson plan, remember that you are not preparing a sermon or a lecture. You are planning to lead a group of learners—including yourself—in thinking about and responding to Scripture. Because they have studied the same lesson for which you are making a lesson plan, include ways for class members to contribute to the class experience.

Lesson planning that takes into account the subject, the time, the student, and the teacher must always be conducted in the context of prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Then it is no longer merely a human work, but a divine task carried out for the development of Christian character in every member of the class.

Principles of Adult Spiritual Learning

Adults think differently and face diverse life situations from children and adolescents. They are able to reason in the abstract. They normally want to be free to direct their own education and to be selective in what they learn. They often have attitudes shaped by previous experience. Adults learn to make choices on the basis of reflective thinking. They are able to evaluate the merits of various facts and experiences.

Adults have more life experience than children and youth. They desire to contribute from their wealth of knowledge. They are often resistant to change.

All these facts indicate that it may be more difficult to facilitate learning among adults, yet Jesus spent most of His time mentoring adult disciples. Adults are normally more motivated and focused on learning than children or youth. They have time, however, only for what they have value.

Jesus used methods such as problem solving, critical thinking, adapting to teachable moments, inquiry learning, modeling, and self-directed learning to involve the mind of adult learners.

Motivation

Boundless enthusiasm is still driven by perceived basic human needs. Motivation for learning is first activated by the extent to which the learner perceives that the new information, attitude, or modeled experience directly satisfies a strong physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual need in harmony with his or her beliefs and values. The class member is also motivated to learn by a warm, nurturing environment,

by a need for competence and success, and by the Holy Spirit.

Passion to study the Bible engages when class members develop insight into how the passage meets their present needs. And the needs of adults change, depending upon life situations and stages.

Know Your Class Members

Jesus showed keen insight into human nature. He not only possessed supernatural knowledge of character but also demonstrated up-to-date techniques such as reading facial expressions, adapting His message to the needs of His learners, and selecting the right time and place to share truths. Jesus listened to His disciples and led them through their thought patterns.

Inquiry Learning

Jesus led His disciples to seek their own understanding of essential concepts. He awakened the mind of learners by asking thought-provoking questions and posing challenging problems for them to solve.

Self-directed Learning

Adults are generally resistant to directives on the part of the class facilitator. The teacher should not put students on the spot for answers, should not force ideas or actions upon class members. Consider how Jesus taught Simon the Pharisee. He told a parable then asked Simon to make a judgment as to which one of the individuals in the parable was most loving (Luke 7:42, 43). He allowed Simon to make his own judgment concerning what he should do. Reflective thinking is directly related to positive decision-making for adults.

Changing Attitudes

It is essential to consider existing attitudes of class members when facilitating adult spiritual learning. Attitudes involve a predictable response to intellectual or emotional stimuli.

Jesus facilitated changes in attitudes by modeling, by sharing information, and by serving as a connecting link between people with conflicting attitudes. For example Jesus, in the presence of His disciples, praised the Good Samaritan and the Roman Centurion, calling attention to their fine qualities. The disciples had shared the common negative attitude toward the Samaritans as well as the pagan Romans. Jesus linked them together through His love.

Language and the Learner

One of the greatest barriers to learning is the need

for a common language. Unless there is mutual understanding of the meaning of words, communication does not take place.

Jesus used cues to communicate to His disciples. Cues are objects, illustrations, words, experiences that communicate a common understanding. He taught by beginning with something known to proceed to the unknown. For example the parable of the sower used a known activity to convey a spiritual truth.

Jesus also used "identification learning." He adapted His message to the context and environment of the learner. It is important to consider the social context, work experience, educational level, ethnic origin, and outlook of the various age groups of adults in each class.

Dialogue and Feedback

The class facilitator can determine whether members are speaking in common terms only by utilizing discussion, feedback, and dialogue. Conversational study is the most useful way to do this. Jesus was an artful conversationalist. Classic teaching moments such as His experience with Nicodemus and the woman at the well (John 3; 4) are worthy of study to note the way Jesus engaged in educational dialogue.

Faith Development

The primary task of the class facilitator in spiritual learning is faith development. Class facilitators should assist young adults in developing their own beliefs aided by the nurture of those more mature in faith. Mature believers need to process their faith experiences in connection with other believers and those recorded in the Bible. They need to exercise faith in the context of increasing complexities and their own growing limitations.

Jesus not only modeled and demonstrated faith, but He called attention to those who exercised faith, such as the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Roman Centurion.

Makers of Meaning

A central and essential task of class facilitators is to become "makers of meaning."⁸ "From His lips the word of God came home to men's hearts with new power and new meaning." "The Bible has a fullness, a strength, a depth of meaning, that is inexhaustible."⁹ The class facilitator should constantly strive to probe this depth of meaning.

Community of Practice

The most effective education is that which takes

place in the context of doing. Some would go so far as to say that the only thing that is really known is that which is practiced.

When we take a close look at Jesus the facilitator of spiritual learning, it is clear that Jesus taught others to learn by doing. The disciples observed Jesus in the act of teaching, preaching, healing, and helping, all in the context of real life. He had no classroom except homes, synagogues, gardens, pathways, temple courts, mountainsides, seashores, boats, and the hearts of people.

The disciples went out doing what they saw Jesus do (Luke 9:2). They then came back and discussed with Jesus what they had done (verse 10). He gave them additional instruction (page 50), then sent them on organized missions (10:1). "Jesus taught that the religion of the Bible does not consist in selfish exclusiveness, in personal enjoyment, but in the doing of loving deeds, in bringing the greatest good to others, in genuine goodness."¹⁰

Use Questions

Prepare questions that will help the students see relationships between ideas. Make the questions clear and answerable. Encourage each student to express his or her view of the idea under consideration.

"The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. The fact that this difference exists should not perplex or confuse us. It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate. The sunlight falling upon the different objects gives those objects a different hue."¹¹

Ask questions that relate the Bible to experience. For example, "Is it easy or hard to be a Christian?" This question requires qualification. If a person says, "It is easy," the facilitator can ask the member to explain. Open ended questions are better for adults than those that may be answered by rote. This generates critical and reflective thinking. The Bible should form the foundation for critical thinking.

It is the task of the class facilitator to keep the focus on experience in relationship to the Bible, and to do so in a warm, congenial climate, encouraging all to participate in discussion. For example, as members share experiences in reference to the question above, the facilitator may say, "Share a related Bible text and explain how this works for you." A class member might call attention to the text that says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." "Then he or she could go on to explain that when they are yoked

together with Jesus by faith the Christian life is easy.

It is well to milk questions. For example, in response to the question "Is it easy or hard to be a Christian?" suppose a class member simply answers "hard." This is the time to ask the member to share what they mean if they are comfortable in expressing themselves on the topic. The member may explain that members of their household are persecuting them for their stand for Christ. The facilitator can then encourage other members to share experiences of enduring persecution and call attention to texts that speak of enduring hardship as good soldiers of the Cross.

Teacher's Attitude

The attitude of the teacher toward the lesson and his or her relationship to the class supersedes the method used at any given point. Lecture, questions, discussions, recitation, research, reporting, projects, audio-visual aids, problem solving, and other methods blend together as tools in a kit.

Students are more motivated to learn when the teacher is a learner with them. The teacher then is not like a museum guide who leads the students from exhibit to exhibit, giving a well-memorized spiel at each stop; but the teacher is like the explorer who has made preliminary excursions into the territory to be explored and then leads the expedition into areas beyond which he or she has previously entered.

"Let [teachers] step down and by their manner say to the students: 'I will no longer stand so far above you. Let us climb together, and we will see what can be gained by a united study of the Scriptures. Christ is the One who imparts all knowledge. Let us work together in an earnest effort to learn from God how to understand the truths of His word, and how to place these truths before others in their beauty and simplicity.

" 'Let us study together. I have nothing that you cannot receive if you open your mind to Christ's teachings. The Bible is your guidebook and my guidebook. By asking questions you may suggest ideas that are new to me. Various ways of expressing the truth we are studying will bring light into our class. If any explanation of the word differs from your previous understanding, do not hesitate to state your views of the subject. Light will shine upon us as in the meekness and lowliness of Christ we study together.' "¹²

With this kind of approach to the class, many different methods of teaching can be brought into use in each Sabbath School class meeting. Discussion becomes a sharing of views and will give direction to the exploration. Reporting on research can bring to

the group information about previous exploration by others. Problem-solving can provide to the group readiness to face the problem in everyday life. Audio-visual aids can help in presenting information in an attractive way or can make abstract ideas concrete.

Climate for Learning

Psychologists have shown that the atmosphere that exists in the class has much to do with whether people learn readily. When students feel threatened and defensive, it is difficult for them to concentrate their powers on the learning task. On the other hand, when students feel free to express their own views and concerns, the climate is much more congenial for learning. Teachers' attitude toward themselves and class members is one of the most powerful influences upon the class climate.

Thoughtful Sabbath School teachers plan their teaching with respect and concern for the class members as persons. They are less concerned with their own status as teacher and more interested in what is happening to each member of their classes.

You are in a strategic position to help your Sabbath School class develop Christian community. Real learning takes place in community situations that involve the whole person. This learning is largely by means of models to whom disciples are emotionally bonded. The class facilitator, other class members, as well as biblical characters may serve as models.

Class members need to accept one another and learn from one another. This begins to happen when the group acknowledges that one of its primary responsibilities is to help each class member learn. Teachers and students climb together in united study of the Scriptures.

Resources and Materials

Resources and materials are available to aid in weekly teacher preparation:

- The Bible. The essential resource to be used in study and teaching is the Word of God. The Bible Study Guide, the careful selection of visual aids, and the use of eloquent and fluent language are helpful; but the Word of God forms the center of preparation resources.

All other materials used in preparation and teaching are simply aids in explaining the Word and in leading class members into closer contact with it. There are excellent sources on the Internet like <biblegateway.com>. This free access web site offers scores of different versions of the Bible and some Bible Commentary comments.

- *Adult Bible Study Guide*. Next to the Bible, the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is the key resource

for preparation. It has been carefully prepared and edited. This study material is essential and should, along with the Bible, be made available to every Sabbath School student. It contains the basic study outline around which preparation will be developed. The content of the lesson should be studied in depth in weekly preparation of the Sabbath School lesson.

●Teaching Aids. The teacher edition of the *Adult Bible Study Guide* is designed to provide the teacher with added resources and suggestions: additional understanding and background resources from which you may choose as you build and develop your outline for lesson presentation. They also refer to supplementary passages from the second major source of inspired guidance—the Spirit of Prophecy writings. When using these writings as a commentary, the teacher will receive special blessing and confidence in lesson preparation.

●The Internet provides sites like <abs.g.adventist.org>, which provides the *Adult Bible Study Guide* in several formats with quick links to resources. Another web site, <sabbathschoolu.org> *Sabbath School University* presents a discussion of the *Adult Bible Study Guide*.

Supplementary Resources

There are many books and reference works a Sabbath School teacher may use for weekly preparation. Three important sources are: a good concordance, a reputable Bible dictionary, and the *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*. The *S.D.A. Bible Commentary* is a good source for general Bible background information.

Carefully selected audio-visual aids may be used to reinforce concepts and increase teaching effectiveness. Visual-aid materials may be purchased or created by the teacher or assigned to class members to make. A teaching easel may be used to display printed visual aids and other materials you have selected.

Teaching Materials

These materials may be ordered through The Adventist Book Center:

- Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, Ellen G. White
- LEAD Magazine*
- Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*, Ellen G. White

●*Reinvent Your Sabbath School*, Chris and Yolanda Blake

●*The Sabbath School Handbook* (also available for downloading at <<http://sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org>>

Sources From AdventSource

●*Sabbath School Advanced Level* by NAD Adult Ministries Department (Paperback)

●*Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Basic Level* by NAD Adult Ministries Department (Paperback)

● *Adult Sabbath School Catalog* by AdventSource (Booklet)

● *Leading Adult Sabbath School* by Charles Betz with Jack Calkins (Paperback)

●*Sabbath School Idea Book #1* by James Zackrison (Paperback)

●*Teaching Techniques for Adult Sabbath School (Spanish)* by Charles Betz with Jack Calkins (Paperback)

● *Adult Sabbath School*, Eugene Brewer (VHS with Print)

●*Enriching Adult Sabbath School* by General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department (video with Print)

●*Next Generation of Sabbath School* by Roger Wade and Clarissa Worley (VHS with Print)

Web sites:

- General Conference Sabbath School Personal Ministries <<http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org>>
- Bible Study Guides <<http://abs.g.adventist.org>>
- Sabbath School University <<http://sabbathschoolu.org>>

1. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 94.
2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 363.
3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 30.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 305.
5. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural reference in this leaflet derive from *The New King James Version of the Bible*.
6. *Education*, p. 18.
7. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 116.
8. *Education*, p. 82.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
10. *The Youth's Instructor*, August 6, 1894.
11. *Selected Messages*, book, 1, p. 22.
12. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, pp. 435, 436.

