

Application: The Goal of Teaching **A Tutorial for Teachers**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.*” (Mt 28:19-20a, NASB95, emphasis added)

The purpose of this tutorial is to encourage you to integrate application into every section of your lesson.

Application is the Goal of Teaching

When you teach a lesson to your class, there are two things that you try to do. First, you explain the text; that is, you help the class to answer the question, “What does this text mean?” Second, you apply the text; that is, you help the class answer the question, “What does this text have to do with me?”

The goal of teaching is to help your class apply the text to their lives so they will be conformed to the image of Christ. Although you explain the text, you don’t teach simply to inform your class and make them smarter. You desire that they become doers of the word, not just hearers (Ja 1:22). So, knowing that you have to make the text relevant to your class, where in the lesson might you apply it?

Some teachers wait until the very end of their lesson to apply their text. They might have 25 minutes of explanation followed by 5 minutes of application. Although not inherently wrong, this method runs a couple risks. One, if there is more class interaction than expected, there may not be any time to apply the text. Two, if it’s shoved to the end, the class may perceive that application is of small importance and thus not necessary.

An alternative idea is to weave application into every portion of the lesson:¹

- In the **introduction**, state the purpose of the lesson. The purpose is what God wants your class to understand and obey from the text.
- In the **body**, state every main point as a truth principle that applies to the class (as opposed to a mere statement of some fact). Every main point accomplishes some aspect of the purpose; when your class lives out the

¹ Note that this idea of application correlates nicely with the concepts taught in the tutorial “Teaching with Scriptural Authority,” which helps find the purpose and main points of the lesson from the text.

application of a main point, they are fulfilling the purpose of the lesson. So for each point main you explain the text and then apply it. You can find the application by asking two questions in order:²

- So what? Why must I do this? What do I risk losing if I don't do this?
 - Yes, but how? How can I do what I'm supposed to do? What are the steps to get there? Where do the resources come from?
- In the **conclusion**, appeal to the purpose again, challenging your class to live out the purpose of the lesson.

Examples of Application

As examples, consider two texts that are discussed in the "Teaching with Scriptural Authority" tutorial:

James 2:1-13 is about showing partiality in the church. The purpose of the lesson is, "God wants my class to hold on to their faith in Jesus without showing favoritism."

- You could state this purpose in the introduction like this, "Today I want to exhort you to hold on to your faith in Jesus without showing any favoritism."
- The main points of the lesson are five reasons why I should hold onto my faith in Jesus without showing partiality. The first main point of the lesson is, "I hold onto faith without favoritism because partiality divides." To answer "so what" you might show what it looks like in the church when people allow partiality to exist. The seniors will complain that the young kids with long hair are ruining their facilities, while the teenagers will never seek the wisdom of those who have walked a lifetime with Christ. The Spanish families will sit together in the back of the church, while the Anglo families never consider inviting a Spanish family over for lunch. Sports fans demand more of the budget be spent on the softball fields, while choir members demand more money for new choir robes. The members of an ABF class are quick to sit and talk with their friends, but slow to meet an odd-looking guest and introduce them to their friends. When a couple in the class is having marital conflicts, some love

² These questions were adapted from Dr. Heisler's preaching notes at SEBTS.

- the husband, some love the wife, but few love both. To answer “but how” you might bring up some of these situations and ask your class to discuss how they could unify the church in it.
- In the conclusion you might appeal again to the purpose, perhaps like this, “Friends, hold on to your faith without showing any partiality. Love and show mercy equally to everyone you meet.”

The narrative in Isaiah 38:1-8 is the miraculous healing of King Hezekiah. The purpose of the lesson is, “God wants my class to trust him with their whole heart (even when they don’t see his plan).”

- You can state this purpose in the introduction like this, “Today I want to encourage you to trust God with your whole heart, even when you don’t understand what God is doing or what God’s plan for you is.”
- The main points are three ways that God demonstrates his faithfulness to those who trust him with their whole heart. The third main point is, “Because he is faithful, God strengthens my faith.” This point should encourage your class to trust God with their whole heart. To answer “so what” you could point to symptoms of a weak faith, which might include discouragement, depression, dropping out of church, or straying from the truth. To answer “but how” you challenge your class to consider ways that God strengthens faith. Most have not had the sun go backwards, but they have had answered prayer. They’ve seen miracles and watched God do the impossible. They’ve been encouraged by fellow believers and the amazing promises of God in his Word. They know he has been faithful in the past. You encourage your class to consider what God has done, make a list, share it with the class, and review it regularly. You challenge them to find one person in the class that they can be a Barnabas to, encouraging them once a week.
- In the conclusion appeal again to the purpose, “Brothers and sisters in Christ, trust God! Trust him completely. You may not always understand what he is doing or why, but never stop trusting him.”

The application of God’s word is what conforms people into the image of Christ; it’s far too important to marginalize it. Instead, weave it into every part of your lesson.