

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW, IT'S WHO YOU ARE

Last Sunday was Teacher Appreciation Sunday at our church – the one day out of the year when we actually pay close attention to the almost 30 people at Stockbridge Presbyterian who serve as teachers. We were saying “thank you” to Sunday School teachers, both kids and adult; Children’s Church teachers; Bible study teachers; and Circle teachers. As pastor, I want them all to know how very, very grateful we are for their faithfulness and commitment. There are some folks who’ve been teaching in Children’s Church for probably 10 years, and no one seems to notice. Time to pay attention!

Many people are absolutely afraid to serve as a teacher. We often think we must be Bible experts, have the New Testament memorized, and be able to give definitive answers to the questions people have been asking for 2000 years. But as long as we think of teaching scripture as just a way to convey information, facts and figures, dates of authorship, whatever – we’re missing the point. Certainly, there’s a time for studying historical context and looking at the Bible as literature. But that’s not what teaching a Bible study is all about. Or, at least, I do hope we’re not stopping there.

The truth about teaching is that what’s most important is who you are, not what you know. Do you genuinely love scripture and want to make it real in your life? Is your relationship with God alive and well? Are you committed to allowing the Holy Spirit to transform you as needed, as you live your life as a disciple of Jesus? Are you interested in people and alert for ways to encourage them? Are you non-judgmental and patient? And (just as important as anything else) is your sense of humor intact? These are the qualities that make a Bible study teacher a true point of light in the lives of kids and adults both.

If you’re worried because you’re still a sinner, please relax. Of course you are. So is the teacher in the room right next door, and so is every student in your class. Being willing to share your life and your shortcomings honestly is one of the most freeing and encouraging gifts you can give your students. And if they also see the effects of grace and forgiveness in your life, you’ll give them hope and inspire them to draw even closer to Jesus.

One of my favorite books about teaching is called, [The Seven Laws of the Learner](#), by Bruce Wilkinson. Wilkinson says that the single most important quality in a good teacher is not being able to quote chapter and verse and being the possessor of all knowledge. What matters most is one simple thing: do you love your students? If you do, they’ll know it, and that love will transform all your teaching into meaningful and inspiring moments for each of your students.

Teaching requires courage. It’s courageous to love, to be honest, to be open and encourage others to be open, too. It’s courageous to admit you don’t know everything, but you do know God and believe he can be trusted. And certainly lots of courage is required to walk beside your students as you live your discipleship together as a community.

Thank you, teachers. Thank you for your steadfast desire to serve, and for the love you so faithfully show your students. My prayer is that as you draw others into a closer walk with God, you will experience that closeness in exciting and ever-deepening ways yourself.