

EFFECTIVE TEACHING FOR TRANSFORMATION

MODULE FOUR: “LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY”

Learning Goals

- ✚ What does it mean to be a United Methodist teacher
- ✚ Incorporating the means of grace in the teaching setting
- ✚ Using UM-specific resources in learning sessions

* As needed

If you are using the modules in a retreat format, you will not need to continue to do introductory activities, though some brain breaks or icebreaker activities will vary the pace and allow group members to continue to get acquainted.

Resident Theologian

The important point is that when you present yourself before a class or study group, you may well be looked upon as the spiritual leader and/or biblical expert (at least more expert than the average student), and the answerer of all things biblical. While it's unfair to expect you to know everything, the point is that it behooves you to take the role seriously and to be prepared. If you are a lifelong learner (A Christian never graduates!), you're well on your way. A part of the process is being aware of your doctrine of Scripture and that of your students or group members.

Doctrine of Scripture

Someone may ask which of statements is correct. Other than item 12, all of them have the assent of some Christians of good faith (just not the same ones at the same time). This is not about orthodoxy so much as about understanding the lens through which our beliefs are held and interpreted—which affects how we teach.

1. *Gathering [30]—Pre-workshop time [* as needed]

- ✚ Have a copy of *The United Methodist Hymnal* available for each participant.

2. Welcome/ *Introduction [15-20]

- ✚ Read Colossians 3:12-17.
- ✚ Offer a prayer of welcome.

3. You as Resident Theologian [15]

- ✚ Go around the room at random and have people make theological statements about anything. [“God so loved the world,” “Christ is the light of the world,” “I came that you may have abundant life”, “God is vengeful and wrathful,” “God loves the sinner and hates the sin”]

✚ Theological conversation or thought is what we say or think about God; just that simple. Singing “Jesus loves me” or consigning someone to the Devil are both theological ideas.

- ✚ **Hand out Me? A Theologian?** This is intended to serve as a reference for later.

4. Understanding Your Doctrine of Scripture [25]

- ✚ **Hand out Doctrine of Scripture.** Just as conversation and beliefs about God constitute theology, a doctrine of Scripture includes our beliefs about, approaches to, and application of the Bible. Compare points 1 and 3 or 16 and 17, for example.

- ✚ Take a quick look just at items 1–8 and check the statements with which you mostly agree.

1. Who mostly agrees with statement 1? With statement 3? What will happen in your study class if this is not understood (or even if it is)?

- ✚ Discuss this long enough to be sure everyone understands what doctrine of Scripture is.

UM Specifics


We are Christian teachers who have a tremendously rich heritage from the Wesleyan tradition. There is story after story of persons mature in years hearing something about prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace; the means of grace; or the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and asking why they had never heard it before. This is not only part of our heritage, but something that shapes our understanding of God and how we live out our faith. It is important for us to incorporate the foundations and tools of United Methodism in our teaching. These are just a few items in UM heritage.


The Book of Discipline describes prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, faith and good works, mission and service, nurture and mission of the church; and the “Quadrilateral” in Part II. Be sure you are familiar with all this information.


Handout on UM Specifics

*This passage from Deuteronomy was chosen on purpose precisely **because** it is one that is troublesome for 21st century sensibilities. That we may want just to ignore it plays back into a discussion on doctrine of Scripture—are some passages ignorable while others are central and normative? Who decides? How does one know?*

5. United Methodist Specifics in Teaching [60]

 **If Hymnals are available:** Form small groups of 2-4; Each group will search out two hymns that relate to two different distinctive emphases. (The hymns by the Wesleys are noted in the index, page 922, but you are certainly not limited to them.) Sing a few.

 Review the pertinent information about United Methodist doctrine and theology from Part II of the *Book of Discipline* to be sure that participants understand the Quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience) and the concept of grace.

 **Hand out UM Specifics.** Use the Quadrilateral to get an initial impression of a Scripture passage (Deut 21:18-21). Form four groups and assign one part of the quadrilateral to each group. Group members will work **silently** for a few minutes, then may begin to discuss the passage together. Each group will work on understanding, interpreting, and deciding how to teach the passage through their focus from the quadrilateral. Then do a brief review of responses.

1. How does this process help to mine the text for its richness?
2. How does using a particular slant from the Quadrilateral (and then putting all the sides together) help you to understand and interpret the text? To teach the text?

Spiritual Practices

Christian spiritual practices (sometimes called the *means of grace*) are those activities that help us know about God, understand God, and relate to God. Some we would call works of piety (regarding our own spiritual life and relationships), others, acts of charity (reaching beyond ourselves, relating to justice). These practices enable us to show the fruits of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) that build up the body of Christ (in contrast to Gal 5:19-21). It is important that we not just teach about them, but also demonstrate them and incorporate them in our class session. Some examples:

Prayer
Study of Scripture
Private worship
Corporate worship
Christian conversation
Fasting and abstinence
Matthew 25: feed hungry, heal sick, welcome the stranger, visit the prisoner etc.

By using the different intelligences, you will begin to see that there are multiple ways to pray, worship, and so on.

Age-level groups will work together to think of multiple examples for each Smart so that everyone has a unique list.

6. Integrating Christian Spiritual Practices in the Lesson [35]

✚ Brainstorm a list of Christian spiritual practices. Record them on newsprint or a white board.

✚ Distribute the **handout, Spiritual Practices Through Multiple Intelligences**. You will use the worksheet to identify different ways to engage in Christian spiritual practices.

✚ Demonstrate two practices. (For example, for Body Smart, you can pray the room—travel from place to place; touch the doorway and furniture and pray for those who enter and those to sit in the chairs. Another example: for Word and Music Smart, you can write your own statement of faith and sing it to a familiar tune. This one is sung to the tune of the hymn, “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly.” *God is righteous, God is gracious, God is here and loves us all/ Christ is teaching, Christ is reaching- out to all who hear his call. / Baptized members, we remember, in bread and vine disciples called; Holy Spirit moves us all.*

✚ After the demonstration, ask participants to regroup according to the age level they teach or want to teach. Together, they will fill in their worksheets, thinking of the abilities of their students. Children’s teachers would identify at least one Word smart devotional practice that children could do, and so on through the list of intelligences. Youth teachers identify practices for each intelligence that youth could do. Do not duplicate the practices that are in the list of examples. Each person will have his or her unique list.

✚ Compare notes and record them on **newsprint or whiteboard**.

1. What will help you to incorporate these practices in your lessons?
2. What practices that you don’t currently include could you include?

Learning Hooks

1. Find common ground
2. Build on previous knowledge
3. Establish an emotional connection
4. Ask Questions
5. Expose Misconceptions
6. Clarify Vocabulary
7. Create interest
8. Connect learning to life

7. Wrap Up [35]

✚ Use Learning Hooks to review what people have learned.

✚ Answer any remaining questions.

✚ Evaluate this module using a written evaluation you have prepared or do the standing evaluation continuum.

✚ The left side is “I feel familiar enough with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and the means of grace to use them effectively in my class.” The right side is “I need more information or practice before I can use them in my class.” Stand within the continuum at a place that illustrates your agreement with those statements.

✚ Take a little time to debrief and explore what more might be done to help with familiarity and practice.

✚ Close with a benediction.

ME? A THEOLOGIAN?

The spiritual “There Is a Balm in Gilead” includes advice for those who “can’t preach like Peter” or “pray like Paul” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #375). Perhaps you place yourself in that category. Yet, if you are responsible for a Sunday school class, another Bible study group, or a leadership position in the Christian education ministry of your church, you will probably be considered one of the resident theologians.

Resident Theologian

What does that mean? Let’s consider the teacher or para-professional staff person. (By “para-professional,” I mean someone who is on staff in a leadership position in Christian education and formation, but who does not have a theological degree, certification, or other formal training that leads to official credentialing.)

Your ministry is vital and needed, and you want to do your best. The idea of being a theologian may sound lofty and difficult to attain, but it need not be that way. The famous theologian Karl Barth was once asked about what he thought was the most profound theological truth. His audience, expecting a lofty and difficult response was surprised, and probably delighted, when he began to sing “Jesus loves me, this I know...”

To be a theologian means that you can reflect critically on ideas, concepts, and teachings by and about God. A theologian will examine Scripture, learn from biblical scholars, think about Scripture contextually, and find ways to apply it in real life. This can be a very complex and heady task, yet anyone who has an idea about God formulates some sort of theology. As “resident theologian,” you will do this in your own context. In addition, you will probably be called upon to help others do the same things.

Tools

How do you acquire and sharpen your skill as a theologian? First, you need some proper tools, starting with a good study Bible. There are numerous study Bibles on the market, including the Interpreter’s Study Bible published by Abingdon and available through Cokesbury. The Scripture text includes well-researched footnotes that explain terms and concepts, cross-reference Scripture verses, identify important figures and places, and so on. (I feel like I’m reading the Bible “naked” if I don’t have one with notes in it!)

Other reference tools will be an important part of your personal library and may already be in your church library. While a commentary series is better, there are one-volume Bible commentaries available, also from Cokesbury or other religious publishers. A Bible dictionary and atlas will round out a basic library. We may like to think that God will open up Scripture and reveal to each of us individually just what a passage is supposed to mean, and certainly God can. In addition to this inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we may also realize that what was evident to a community several thousand years ago is not readily evident to us in a different culture and different era. That’s why commentaries are so important. They bring us more up to speed with what the original Bible audience already knew.

Practices

Your own practices will then take you the next step in critically reflecting on the meaning of Scripture and on God's activity in the world. While it may sound simplistic, the first step is to think about what you read or see on more than just the initial, words-on-the-page level. I have heard so many people read the Bible like it was the newspaper—just the facts; what you see is what you get. The Bible is typically much more nuanced than that.

Consider the story of Naaman, the Aramean general in 2 Kings 5. (Stop now, get a Bible, and look it up). What happened? At first glance, we see a powerful man with a nasty disease who went to the prophet Elisha to be cured. This is one story that is rife with detail, yet there is much we don't know on the surface. How far did Naaman travel? How long did it take to get there? How much was all that loot worth that he carried as gifts? Why did he want a load of dirt to take home? What did it mean in the Jewish faith community, for whom this story was intended, that a Hebrew prophet used the power of God to cure a conqueror? What does this story tell us about God, about God's abilities, and about God's preferences for the use of God's power for foreigners? What is there about that context and activity that translates over several millennia to our time and place? What can that story possibly mean to me, here and now?

When you begin to think—and to “think between the lines”—you're on your way. One way to do that thinking is through visualization; that is, to see in your mind just what the action is. Consider the story of Jesus who healed the paralyzed man let down through the roof (Mark 2:1-12). (That's right. Stop and read this one too.) Now visualize every single detail.

As you follow the story, think about how full the room is, what the temperature might have been, what would be the noise level in the crowded house with someone walking on and digging through the roof, how the crowd would react with the debris from the ceiling falling on them from the digging, how the crowd might have felt when they witnessed the miracle, the way in which the Pharisees interpreted events differently from other witnesses, how the healed man left the crowded room.

In addition, consider who is present and who isn't. Who is the subject of the teaching or action, who are the “bystanders,” and who is absent? What is the context and what is the point of this audience being together or being addressed in some way (as in a congregational letter from Paul, for example)?

The next step is to consider the consequences and implications, because these are the life lessons for us that help us see that Scripture addresses us now. This is how we know God and what to expect of God in our own lives. How we view the character and activity of God and how we understand God to work in the world from these experiences of Scripture is theological work and reflection.

Experience

From experience with the Word of God, we move to experience with life (and vice versa). Our essential theology (I believe God to be like ____; and to act like ____) becomes a lens through which we interpret the things that happen to us and to others. For example, I see God offering love, comfort, and strength, so when I am seriously ill, I believe that God will

see me through somehow (even if I die). Conversely, we may also use the things that happen to us as a lens through which we formulate our understanding of God's identity and activity. For example, my seriously ill child died, and I was wonderfully sustained in my grief. Surely God looked out for us because of all the prayers offered for me and my family. Or, that theology can take quite a different turn. For example, my child was seriously ill and died, so God must be either cruel, absent, or uncaring.

The Long and Short of It

Our doctrine of Scripture (what we believe about the Bible as God's word and how we apply that belief) colors our theological thinking in another way that is worth mentioning. United Methodist theology encompasses a very broad spectrum of belief, so we have faithful United Methodist Christians at every stage in the conservative-to-liberal theological continuum. It follows that the way we interpret the same Scripture will vary, depending on our theological bent. For example, someone who holds to a mostly literal interpretation of the Bible as God's direct and unchanging word will generally operate on the principle that the Bible means what it says. Someone who regards the Bible as an evolving word that is open to new activity of God will operate on the principle that the Bible means what it means.

Similarly, various theological views (our doctrine of God) are shaped in different ways. Some persons will understand God as Immutable. God's word and decision is not open to change or negotiation. God has a plan, works the plan, and does not change the plan. On the other hand, some persons will hold a process theology that says that God has (or may have) a plan, but that plan can and will change because life changes. God will make "course corrections" or allow the plan to unfold without a predetermined end because God allows us to have free will and to participate in how that plan unfolds. These theological views will engender sharply different interpretations of God's presence and intent in life events, ranging from "everything that happens is God's will" to "everything that happens is in God's care, but not necessarily by God's design."

Me? A Resident Theologian?

All Christian believers are called to be theologians because if we love God and wish to serve God, we must think about who God is and what God does. We must consider who we are as God's children and who God is as our divine Parent. We must take seriously our call to have the mind of Christ and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, which requires us to have a thoughtful relationship with God as Son and Spirit.

If you are a teacher or other leader in your educational ministry, others will look to you to model theological thinking. Some will rely on what you think (and how you think) to help them determine what they believe and how they act on their faith. In fact, this will happen regardless of whether you want it to, feel prepared for it, or even realize it. If that seems a little scary, take heart that maturing theologically is a process that takes time. We learn from each other and help each other. God is always at work, desiring to be known and empowering us to have that relationship.

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DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

1. The Bible is the authentic, inerrant word of God, complete and true in every respect, “dictated” by God to human writers, and unchangeable.
2. The Bible is the record of God’s activity with humankind. The revelation of our faith story is historically accurate.
3. The Bible reveals God to us, but the canon is never really closed. New interpretation, based on new historical, archeological, linguistic, or other discoveries, continues to change or clarify the meaning or interpretation of biblical text.
4. The Bible is the story of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The value of the OT is in it’s anticipation of the New Testament.
5. The Bible is God’s instruction book to humankind. What is not expressly prohibited is permitted, and the spirit of the law is what matters most.
6. The Bible is God’s instruction book to humankind. What is not expressly permitted is prohibited, and it’s instructions must be followed to the letter.
7. The Bible is primarily a book of prophecy that guides the faithful to an eternal future.
8. The Bible contains our corporate Myth, which reveals Truth, but not necessarily historical data. This means that some figures, such as Adam and Eve, are not historically real people, but archetypes.
9. The Bible is known by the traditional interpretation of the church and does not require new (or other) interpretation by me.
10. The Bible is God’s revelation to me. My understanding, experience, and personal filters are sufficient for understanding whatever God wants me to know at the time.
11. The Bible reveals essentially two Gods to us: the wrathful, warring, law-giving God of the Old Testament and the loving, gracious, forgiving, saving God of the New Testament. The coming of Jesus essentially changed who God is to us.
12. The Bible is a dusty old book of fantastic, and now irrelevant, fables. Something written by ancient peoples cannot have meaning for a post-modern, technologically advanced society.
13. Jesus Christ is the key to Scripture. What coheres to his life, ministry, purpose is accepted; what doesn’t cohere is rejected.
14. Scripture can only be understood when we delve deeply into the history, culture, mores of the time in which the text was lived, not just written.
15. Hardly any of the Bible was written in the time period to which it refers, so its historical accuracy is open to question.
16. The Bible is literally true; not open to interpretation. The Bible means what it says.
17. The Bible is full of varieties of literary forms—poetry, fable, parable, history, prophecy, exposition—and this form determines how literally, or not, the Scripture can be interpreted. The Bible means what it means.
18. It is improper to pick out specific verses to make any point; any one passage must be measured, evaluated, and interpreted in light of the biblical message as a whole.

UM SPECIFICS

Deuteronomy 21:18-21

18 If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, ¹⁹then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. ²⁰They shall say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.

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Scripture

- ✚ How does the image of God and God's requirements in this passage mesh with your understanding of God?
- ✚ Does your own doctrine of Scripture require you to give equal weight to every word in the Bible?

Tradition

- ✚ How has this passage stood up within the church through the ages, and the church now?
- ✚ What is the United Methodist position on the care of children? (Social Principles, for example)

Reason

- ✚ Given the sensibilities of your current culture (without ignoring what your faith tells you) how do you interpret and use this passage?
- ✚ Does this directive seem like a logical and reasonable course of action for the God you know?

Experience

- ✚ What is your own experience of caring for your own child or accepting the caring role you promised to take when you participated in the baptism liturgy for another child?
- ✚ What do you know of the consequences of treating stubborn and rebellious people harshly?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES THROUGH MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

EXAMPLES FOR ADULTS

WORD SMART

- ❖ Devotional Bible Study
- ❖ Write your statement of faith
- ❖ Journal on a Bible passage

NUMBER SMART

- ❖ Identify stages of your own spiritual growth
- ❖ Create a litany of confession
- ❖ Look for patterns in Jesus' life and compare them to your own life.

PICTURE SMART

- ❖ Use maps or graphs in Bible study
- ❖ Use art supplies for focusing on the images and meanings in Bible study
- ❖ Pray about or consider the vision of who you feel God is calling you to be

MUSIC SMART

- ❖ Use CDs (or your own instruments) of Christian music to meditate on the lyrics
- ❖ Write your own psalm to a familiar tune.

BODY SMART

- ❖ Walk a labyrinth
- ❖ Take a prayer and reflection nature walk

PEOPLE SMART

- ❖ Christian conversation on an aspect of God that you would like to understand
- ❖ Guided group Bible discussion

SELF-SMART

- ❖ Fruits of the Spirit review
- ❖ Work on your own personal rule of life as you pray for God's insight

NATURE SMART

- ❖ Observe or use images of the natural world to reflect on matters of faith
- ❖ Take a nature walk for reflection and prayer

EXAMPLES FOR YOUTH OR CHILDREN

WORD SMART

NUMBER SMART

PICTURE SMART

MUSIC SMART

BODY SMART

PEOPLE SMART

SELF SMART

NATURE SMART