

Reflections about my own teaching from reading Gangel and Hendricks' *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching*.

1. I must be dedicated to my own growth in understanding

Gangel made clear that the Christian teacher must be dedicated to growing in understanding of God and his ways: "The premise of this book rests on a twofold presupposition: that the Christian teacher is our best hope for rationality in an irrational age; and, that those Christian teachers must have highly developed and thoroughly consecrated minds in order to meet the challenge of leadership in such an age. Such minds are tuned to the process of constant biblical integration of faith and learning, a spiritual and academic commitment which stretches far beyond the boundaries of content transmission" [Gangel, 74].

I need to allow revealed truth to set me free and control me; I am to think, but I am to accept God's revelation [Gangel, 75]. I am called on to develop an evangelical life view, which I can do by knowing the scriptures well, studying our culture, learning to think theologically, and adopting a set of Christian presuppositions; I need to know scripture well to have a foundation for my analysis and my theology / philosophy [Gangel, 76-78]. When considering an issue, I need to ask these questions in descending order: what does the Bible say about it? are there general Christian principles that apply? have Christian scholars dealt with this issue? does this defy absolute standards of morality? is the Holy Spirit prompting a definitive viewpoint? [Gangel, 77-78].

Paganism and occult forces are strong and prevalent in our culture, so I need to be vigilant about developing my Christian way of thinking [Gangel, 79]. Christian leadership requires disciplined thinking [Gangel, 79]: "The trouble with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry... that is not thought; that is the absence of thought, a failure to think" [Gangel, quoting Stott, 80]. I need to study, not procrastinate, not rationalize sloth; I need to cultivate an attitude of devotion / worship for Christ to stay humble, and keep my mind off of my own achievements [Gangel, 80-81]. "God's Word, meanwhile, continues to talk positively about the man whose mind is stayed on God (Isa. 26:3); who shares the unity of mind with other believers (Rom 12:16); who possesses a willing mind (2 Cor. 8:12); who treasures a humble mind (Phil. 2:3); and who allows God to produce in him the Spirit of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7)" [Gangel, 81].

Scripture shows we need to progress toward maturity, and this can be accomplished by depending on biblical authority, integrating faith with learning in any form and using the Word to judge the world; by learning to link reason and faith together; by creating a Word-centered environment; and by submitting to the Spirit's control in all things [Gangel, 82-84]. "Moo argues that the surroundings in which the Christian voluntarily places himself offer the most important single factor in developing a renewed mind" [Gangel, 84]. "A mind that is exposed constantly to a barrage of secular television, secular advertising, secular literature, and secular ideas is probably going to turn out to be a secular mind" [Gangel, quoting Moo, 84].

2. I must develop my presentations to be more audio-visual

83% of learning is through sight! [Regier, 196]. Audiovisual materials can speed learning, provide clarity, improve retention: there is 65% recall after three days instead of 10% for audio or 20% for visual alone! [Regier, 197]. Word slides can grab attention, providing visual support for main points; using big and bold fonts, slanting, and using graphics makes them more interesting; I can also use photos, comics, or symbolic clipart; charts and diagrams are useful too [Regier, 202-206]. "Eliminate every element that doesn't contribute to the message of the visual. Remove all the clutter so that the visual is easier to look at and to remember" [Regier, 207]. Also, keep it unified in repetition and alignment, but use contrast for fonts, colors, sizes, proximity; keep in mind eye flow [Regier, 207-209]. With all that said, I need to

remember to not rely only on my technology: “We must remember that though machines may do a better job of teaching certain factual information, they do not communicate. People do. There must always be a place for the teacher in Christian education” [Regier, 199].

3. Part of Christian Teaching is Leadership Development

As a teacher within the church, I must realize that I am part of the process of developing Christian leaders: “God is still in the process of dispensing gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-6), but we are not in the process of developing gifts. The primary task of a Spirit-gifted person to the church is to equip the saints for their work of ministry (Eph. 4:7-16).” [Hendricks, 242]. Of course, this is a long-term project: “Interestingly, the influence [of a teacher] is often not immediate but long-range. That’s why patience is an essential garment in a teacher’s wardrobe” [Hendricks, 244].

“Here’s my working definition of a leader: a person who knows where he is going and is able to persuade others to go with him. That is, he has clear-cut objectives and he is a motivator. He is not only enamored of ideas but of individuals; he is task- as well as person-oriented” [Hendricks, 243]. “Leadership is more than a position, it is power; it is not a role but a responsibility; it is not a title but a function” [Hendricks, 243]. Hendricks also says that the teacher himself is a leader: “While it is true that teachers also serve, they serve best by leading. Servant leaders are not passive but active; they are not waiting for something to happen but causing something to happen. We all embrace the concept but fail to understand exactly what is involved. It embraces more than acts; it is an attitude that pervades all that we do... [a teacher’s] highest fulfillment comes in pouring his life out like a drink-offering for his students. He lives to serve them” [Hendricks, 244]. We need to model before them and teach them how to make decisions, how to think, how to become a self-learner [Hendricks, 248-250].

We must choose disciples carefully, after prayerful consideration, then live intensely with them, model before them, train them creatively, build into them, and expect success from them [Hendricks, 251-252]. We need to broaden our own knowledge, know ourselves well, learn to be sensitive to our listeners, and be involved in things [Hendricks, 252-254]. “God is into character, not credentials. He is not impressed with what we do but with who we are becoming, because that is always the product of what He does. When the Holy Spirit outlines the qualifications of a leader in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2, He instructs that the majority of these qualities are reflections of godly character development. They focus on being rather than doing; on what kind of a person we are. But why so demanding? Because a leader is so determinative. He must generate respect” [Hendricks, 245].

We are to develop life in the students, equipping them, not just filling them with information [Hendricks, 248]. “Our young people are born into a society that is huge, impersonal and intricately organized. Far from calling them to leadership, it appears totally indifferent. It does not seem to need them at all. Far from creating the confidence that young leaders require, it is apt to create puzzlement and a sense of powerlessness. It is very hard for young people today to believe that any action on their part will affect the vast processes of their society” [John Gardner, *Leadership Development*, 6; as quoted in Hendricks, 246].

4. I must think of creativity as a cause for discovery in the student

I must help the student discover, help him experience what it was like to be blind and then see, e.g. [Choun, 170]. Jesus used object lessons, points of contact, aims, problem solving, conversation, questions, answers, lecture, parables, scripture, divine moments, contrast, concrete literal examples, symbols, large and small groups, one-on-ones, modeling, motivation, impression and expression in teaching methods [Choun, 166-167]. Should I use any less? I have focused too much on information, falling into this mistake because I value the power of the Word so much. “We are stuffing their heads with the products of earlier innovation rather than teaching them how to innovate. We think of the mind

as a storehouse to be filled rather than as an instrument to be used” [Hendricks, 24, quoting John Gardner]. Choun reminds me, “Your class session should contain a balance between the student’s knowledge of God’s Word, a proper attitude toward what it has to teach, and the willingness to apply the teaching to this life [Choun, 168]. I should always conclude with a call to accept responsibility and show them how to apply God’s Word to life [Choun, 170, 174].

5. I should teach like Christ did, whenever possible

Hendricks points out that Christ was a teacher: “Within the Gospels one of the most frequently used designations is Teacher; it occurs forty-five times... So it is obvious that one of the prominent functions of our Lord during His public ministry was teaching” [Hendricks, 13]. He is also someone worth emulating, when possible: What “Christ said and did were equally inspired by God” [Hendricks, 13].

So what can I learn from him? “To Jesus, all learning relates to doing the will of God (John 7:15-17)...” [Hendricks, 15]. Jesus was interested in reality, not ritual. “All His teaching took place in the settings of everyday life” [Hendricks, 16]. “In the realm of morals He was totally predictable; in the realm of His methods, totally unpredictable” [Hendricks, 16]. “Wherever he went, He produced a crisis. He compelled individuals to decide, to make choices” [Hendricks, 16]. Jesus cared for individuals, knew relationships were important for teaching [Hendricks, 17]. Jesus often taught on questions his students brought up, which ensures their interest, attention, and involvement [Hendricks, 18]. Jesus prayed [Hendricks, 18]. He told his disciples he prayed for them and expected results [Hendricks, 24].

Jesus focused his teaching on revealing God’s message [Hendricks, 19]. Jesus lived out what he taught and made extensive use of imperatives [Hendricks, 20]. Jesus showed his own emotions while teaching, to help reach the student at the real life level [Hendricks, 20]. Jesus taught with authority [Hendricks, 20]. Jesus was effective: he caused “amazement, fear, silence, belief, and violent opposition, but never indifference or neutrality. Lives changed because His teaching objective provided not merely information but transformation” [Hendricks, 21].

Jesus taught to help others, he loved them, but he was willing to bring the tough love [Hendricks, 21]. “Rebuke always depends on the basis of relationship; He loved the disciples as they were, but He loved them so much He would not allow them to remain as they were without intervention. He rebuked but never rejected them” [Hendricks, 22]. “Regardless of His demanding statements regarding the cost of discipleship, He never demanded a fully developed faith at the beginning of one’s spiritual pilgrimage. He never rejected anyone because of his incomplete, faltering faith or failure to live up to God’s laws” [Hendricks, 22]. “Acceptance is the first step of effective teaching” [Hendricks, 22]. “Jesus’ primary concern was not His reputation but His responsibility” [Hendricks, 23]. Jesus used affirmation as a motivational tool, often calling people to a higher level while expressing his confidence in them [23]. He also did not fault them for failures, but rather rallied them [Hendricks, 24].

Jesus was creative. He used questions a lot, some direct, some not; some to illicit information, some to invite expressions of faith, some to cause comparison or analysis [Hendricks, 26-27]. He also fielded their questions well; about one sequence of three stumpers, “Each question was fielded differently and the listeners received so much to explore that they had nothing more to ask at that time” [Hendricks, 26]. Jesus also used parables, stories, overstatement, proverb, paradox, irony, hyperbole, riddle, simile, pun, allusion, and metaphor [Hendricks, 26]. “Every lesson was hand-tooled and chosen to fit the demands of the situation and the needs of the learner.” He also only dispensed what they could receive, never rushing them to learn too much at once [Hendricks, 26-27]. Jesus always started with the concerns of the people, usually everyday concerns; he used his culture in his teaching, used what was handy, and used surprise [Hendricks, 27]. Jesus involved his listeners in the solution process, engaging them by presenting a problem, asking a question, or telling a story [Hendricks, 27]. “Jesus never forced decisions but He encouraged people to make them.” [Hendricks, 28]

6. I must align my efforts with the Holy Spirit

I must realize that my teaching, and the learning of the students, depends in great part on the action of the Holy Spirit. “A spiritual task – involving spiritual truths to meet spiritual needs – requires spiritual power. Effectiveness in service demands salvation and yieldedness to the Holy Spirit. Seeking to serve the Lord in one’s own strength apart from dependence on the Holy Spirit avails little by way of lasting results” [Zuck, 32].

The Spirit led teacher relies on the Holy Spirit for control of his life and for making the Word of God effectual in the lives of students [Zuck, 32-33]. “The goal is to help students come to know God and love Him, not just know about Him. It involves helping them walk in accord with His will, growing in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness – and that requires the Holy Spirit” [Zuck, 33]. The Bible shows God used teachers and gave the gift of teaching [Zuck, 33], which pastors say I have. “The gift of teaching is the supernatural, Spirit-endowed ability to expound (explain and apply) the truth of God” [Zuck, 38]. God might also prepare a person to teach with natural abilities, passions, experiences [Zuck, 39]. Those with this gift must exercise it [Zuck, 39]. I should not rely only on giftedness: “...preparation makes the teacher a better instrument, a sharper tool in God’s hands” [Zuck, 34].

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who teaches believers all things, reminds them of Christ’s teachings, and testifies about Christ [Zuck, 35]. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, revealing God’s will and providing wisdom to believers [Zuck, 36]; revelation would include all spiritual truth relating to the person and work of Christ [Zuck, 36]. God’s teachers communicate with Spirit-taught words, spiritual truth revealed by the Holy Spirit taught in spiritual words taught by the Holy Spirit [from 1 Corinthians 2] [Zuck, 37]. “...the Holy Spirit seeks to provide guidance, power, illumination, and insight to the teachers” [Zuck, 37]. The Holy Spirit motivates and empowers students to appropriate truth, allowing transformation to occur [Zuck, 37]. The Holy Spirit generates love for the students in the teacher and helps in the choice of methodologies [Zuck, 40].

7. I need to be more intentional about designing biblical instruction

I already try to teach and train, show knowledge and application [Edwards, 46]. I have learned in the last few years to begin with identifying needs, then devising solutions, implementing them, evaluating, and starting over [Edwards, 48]. But sometimes I do my planning too much by instinct; perhaps it is time to get more intentional about this process.

“An initial task in planning effective learning experiences for students involves specifying aims...” Goals “establish direction and intent, not means or methods [like objectives]” [Edwards, 49]. Objectives should be brief, clear, and specific, and deal with cognitive, affective, and behavioral [Edwards, 50]. We must know what changes we hope to effect in the students and then consider methods and materials Edwards, 55]. “While the declarative content of scripture is changeless, the specific needs of learners are not. If curriculum is to help students learn and apply principles by which the Spirit of God directs their lives toward righteousness and truth, it must meet critical standards of attractiveness, relevance, and clarity in addition to accuracy of presentation” [Edwards, 52]. Curriculum can be organized by chronology, complexity [from simple to complex], theme, or pedagogy [from personal to remote] [Edwards, 53]. “A written lesson plan should not stifle creativity or inhibit spontaneity between teacher and class. In fact, a good lesson plan should become the most liberating device in his practitioner’s repertoire” [Edwards, 55].

8. I need to consider how different methods work

For some information, drill exercises work, but they work better when the student really wants to learn it or get the reward for learning it [Edwards, 89, 99]. Young people develop in consistent stages; we should be aware of readiness to learn [Edwards, 90]. Immediate positive reinforcement of good behavior [or

removal of some negative element] is effective. Some evidence that such responses to bad behavior are effective exists too [Edwards, 91-92]. Teaching method and context of presentation are both strongly influential on how the student processes the information and whether he retains it [Edwards, 96]. The Bible would suggest that many methods are available to teaching, not just using scripture; but it also suggests we should be firm in our scriptural understanding of man, sin, and redemption [Edwards, 97]. Because we understand sin and fallenness, we know evangelism must occur before nurture, for salvation precedes spiritual understanding [Edwards, 97]. We also see from the Bible recognition of a progressive ability to learn from instruction and support for incentive based teaching [Edwards, 98]. We should base teaching on what the student already knows, and give them information ahead of time that will help in the primary learning activity [Edwards, 99]. To effectively reach different people, I should vary methods and conditions [Edwards, 100].

9. The church must invest in teaching children

Moses commanded parents to teach the word diligently, in a casual and natural way, leading by lifestyle, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 [Choun, 107]. The church should “provide a continual training program for all teachers and parents [for the children’s ministry]” [Choun, 119]. “Children need to see God’s unconditional love modeled by caring, encouraging leaders and teachers” [Choun, 121].

“Children learn best by doing... Participation leads to attitude changes that in turn motivate learners to apply the Bible to life” [Choun, 121]. “It is essential for teachers and parents to teach for application in the lives of their students and children” [Choun, 121]. “Guided conversation is informal but planned dialogue that can take place during learning activities, worship, or anytime. This method conveys attitudes along with biblical content” [Choun, 121]. “Allowing children to make choices of activities helps them to think independently, be motivated, and interested in that learning activity. When all activities in the room point to the same aim from God’s Word, the child can choose any activity and still learn [what you desire; Choun, 121]. “The more involvement and interaction a child has with God’s Word and the teacher, the more effective the lesson will be” [Choun, 125]. Use art, drama, oral, writing, music, research, games [Choun, 126].

“From the minute the first child walks in to the classroom until the last child leaves, everything taught and experienced should point to the aims of the lesson from God’s Word... We need to teach one concept and teach it well” [Choun, 122]. “Large groups can be used for Bible sharing, worship time, games, etc. Small groups can be used for telling the Bible story, learning activities, and developing those crucial teacher-learner relationships” [Choun, 122]. Use a different teaching method every week for children; also, encourage them to share what they have learned before dismissal [Choun, 123-124].

Group counseling sessions should be planned as a regular part of the ministry to children; with the high rate of separation and divorce among adults, and stress in the lives of children, a regular program of counseling should be available; lay counselors could be used to talk and listen to children; providing Christian guidance and direction is crucial” [Choun, 124-125].

Before approving children’s teachers, screen them, then take them to the Elder board, prior to asking them to serve; then interview them to ensure understanding of each other, the ministry, and requirements; allow a week of prayer before they accept or decline; ask them to observe first; allow them to decline, praise either decision if it is for Christ; provide adequate training. [Choun, 127-128].

10. Mentoring is a full-time ministry

We must be committed to being a living sacrifice, which includes devotional time. “The Christian disciple must be consecrated, set apart for God, holy in everything he does, whether eating or drinking, writing or making change, building a bridge or delivering a speech. The disciple does everything for

God's glory" [Slaughter, 259]. "At all times, the teacher-discipler should keep in the forefront of his mind the importance of communicating to and, if possible, discussing with, his students their own consecration to Christ, including the progress of their devotional lives, or perhaps even their need for Christ as Savior if they are not yet believers" [Slaughter, 260]. "As shepherd of his students the teacher must constantly work to expose them to biblical truth and challenge them to consecrated, set apart living [Slaughter, 260]. He also cares for and loves them, accepting them as God made them, but challenging them to be the best they can for Christ [Slaughter, 261-262].