

Connect ~ Engage ~ Grow

Developing Instructional Wisdom for Teaching from the Bible: Strategies for Adult Learners

Similar to the difference of only *reading* about Jesus compared to truly *experiencing* Jesus, to truly *own* and implement Instructional Wisdom it is best for people to *experience* it through a workshop. Therefore, if you are interested in providing a three-hour workshop for people who will be teaching from the Bible, please contact Marc Barlow for training opportunities.

redesignthereality@gmail.com | redesignthereality.com | marcbarlowbeta@gmail.com

Instructional Wisdom:

Whether one is teaching kindergarten through college, a youth group, or a small to large Bible study, it takes a lot of time, energy, and planning to construct a solid lesson. Therefore, it all starts with you – the facilitator, instructor, or teacher. There are many people who possess an incredible amount of biblical knowledge, insight, and revelation that they have acquired through innumerable years of prayer, studying, and research; with their desire being to give away and impart this invaluable and life-changing knowledge to others.

Therefore, understanding that, “divine wisdom springs from *integrity*, and becomes manifest through *creative* expression with *excellence* as its standard” (Johnson, 2006, p. 45), it is imperative for people teaching from the Bible to be aware of various learning modalities and effective teaching strategies, and to know when, where, and how to deploy them. Ultimately, especially as it pertains to adult learners, the facilitator needs to understand and embrace the chief cornerstone found in “The Way of [Instructional] Wisdom” as outlined in Proverbs 9:1, 2, and 9, and not only be knowledgeable about their content, but also be adept at organizing and orchestrating the learning environment to optimize learning.

Instructional Wisdom, therefore, is when the facilitator – through their *integrity* of wanting to give away what they have – knows the content and the purpose and intended outcomes they want to achieve while tapping into people’s individual *creative* expression, and, by doing so, elevates the standard of *excellence*. Any learning environment that teaches Biblical truths and principles should never be something people have to endure. Rather, facilitators of such environments must learn, apply, and discipline themselves in Instructional Wisdom in order to more effectively connect and engage people in growing in the life-changing applications and revelations of the ultimate reality – who Jesus Christ is and who we are in Him.

Johnson, B., *Dreaming with God: Co-Laboring with God for Cultural Transformation*, Destiny Images Publishers, Inc., 2006.

The following information will further equip people who teach from the Bible with concepts and strategies they can implement to more fully connect, engage, and provide growth opportunities for adult learners.

Purpose:

To develop Instructional Wisdom by melding Biblical content with engaging strategies for adult learners.

Intended Outcomes:

Bible-teaching facilitators will understand how adults learn best and, by doing so, will foster learning environments that optimize adult connection, engagement, and growth.

Crucial Concepts:

Facilitator. Facilitate comes from the Spanish word “facil” which means “easy.” Therefore, the role of the facilitator (aka, “instructor”) is to organize and orchestrate the learning environment in such a way as to make learning via engagement amongst participants “easy.”

Less is more. Subscribe to the proverb/paradox/oxymoron of “less is more” – that which is of *smaller* quantity could be of *higher* quality, or that which is *less* complicated is often *better* understood and more appreciated than what is more complicated.

Pacing. When working with children, a good rule of thumb is to plan the duration of one activity based on the age of the children. For example, if your audience is a group of 8 year olds, then you should only do one activity for no more than eight minutes, or six to seven activities per hour. For adults, engaging in any one activity for between 15 to 30 minutes would be appropriate. Such activities may include watching a video, listening to one person speak, reading an excerpt, writing a response, creating something, or speaking with a partner or with a small group.

Adult learners:

When planning a learning environment for adults, it is paramount to keep in mind that adults as learners have a wealth of life experiences (“*Treat me as an adult*”); are time conscious (“*Don’t waste my time*”); are often focused on specific goals (“*I know what I want to learn*”); and, when the learning is relevant, are highly motivated (“*Give me something I can use*”). Consequently, how and why adults learn can be quite different from children.

Difference between Andragogy (teaching adults) and Pedagogy (teaching children)

	Andragogy	Pedagogy
Demands of learning	Learners must balance life responsibilities with the demands of learning.	Learners can devote more time to the demands of learning because responsibilities are minimal.
Role of instructor	Learners are autonomous and self directed. Instructor guides the learners to their	Learners rely on the instructor to direct the learning. Fact-based lecturing

	own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts.	is often the mode of knowledge transmission.
Life experiences	Learners have a tremendous amount of life experiences. They need to connect the learning to their knowledge base. They must recognize the value of the learning.	Learners are building a knowledge base and must be shown how their life experiences connect with the present learning.
Purpose for learning	Learners are goal-oriented and know for what purpose they are learning new information.	Learners often see no reason for taking a particular course. They just know they have to learn the information.
Permanence of learning	Learning is self-initiated and tends to last a long time.	Learning is compulsory and tends to disappear shortly after instruction.

Adapted from Alvarado, J. and Naffziger, L., *Andragogy: Adult Learning Differences and Effective Teaching Strategies*, Fielding Graduate University: TVC 501, 2008.

Based on the above information, the following are key aspects to keep in mind while intentionally creating learning environments that optimize adult connection, engagement, and growth:

Key Aspect #1 – Make learning relevant for adults by providing problem-solving types of activities such as case studies, simulations, and real-life situations.

Key Aspect #2 – Create opportunities for adults to construct knowledge rather than passively taking in information.

Key Aspect #3 – Take time for adults to develop a collaborative environment with time set aside for small group interactions.

Key Aspect #4 – Ensure intended outcomes for adults include tying new information and skills to previous learning with a focus on implementation.

Adult Learning Styles/Modalities:

Pertaining to the Crucial Concept of *pacing*, remember to change up activities every 15 to 30 minutes that alternate between adult learning styles/modalities, or the VAK model – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

The VAK model reveals people do not have one exclusive style or preference of learning; rather, a combination of the three, with one being dominant, or preferred. However, the dominant or preferred style, or styles, may alternate depending on the task at hand.

Visual learning – style involves the use of seen or observed things, including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, videos, flip-charts, and other things seen.

Auditory learning – style involves the transfer of information through listening, including the spoken word, self and others, sounds and noises, and other things heard.

Kinesthetic learning – style involves physical experiences, including touching, feeling, holding, doing, practical hands-on experiences, and other things touched.

- *Important to note:* as one can see, if information is provided solely via lecture, only one style or modality is being utilized. Therefore, be sure to incorporate a variety of activities that tap into visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning.

Know Your Purpose and Intended Outcome/s:

Keeping aspects of adult learning in mind...

- What is the *purpose* of your learning environment?
 - “One and done” versus relationship building
 - Breadth versus depth
 - Disseminate versus apply information
 - “Sit and get” versus interactive
- What is the *intended outcome* of your learning environment, or what do you want participants to walk away with?
 - *Important to note:* the facilitator needs to be very intentional about what they want to accomplish and how to accomplish it. Intentionality takes forethought of resources, guiding questions (and how and when to ask them), and utilization of various visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK) activities that will optimize adult connection, engagement, and growth.

Learning Environment:

Taking time to develop a collaborative environment with opportunities for small group interactions is paramount in fostering engagement for adult learners. And, having people sit in a circle is one of the most powerful ways to accomplish this.

- When people sit in circles it:
 - Honors the community of learners
 - Values each member as equals
 - Increases responsibility and accountability
 - Encourages ownership
 - Elevates community learning
 - Promotes facilitation over lecture
- Circles can be done with groups of three to 100+ people

Elements of Circles:

When utilizing circles, below are elements that need to be considered:

- Opening
- Checking In
- Circle Agreements
- Centerpiece
- Talking Piece
- Closing

Opening. The opening is just a simple and consistent way to begin. It could consist of thanking everyone for being there, assisting people to be present by doing a short and simple breathing exercise so the brain knows all is well and survival mode is no longer needed (i.e., 4 x 4 breathing), reviewing the Circle Agreements (discussed below), and an opening prayer.

Checking In. Oftentimes people will come to the learning environment having had various experiences that day, week, or month. Therefore, it is important to create opportunities for human connection and a caring community by allowing people to “empty their cup” so it may be filled again.

Quick response and 1-5. A great way to accomplish this is after the opening, ask participants to quickly share something based on a question the facilitator asks. For example, “What is your favorite season?” or “What is your favorite restaurant with meals under \$15?” or “What is one thing people may not know about you?” or a simple question that elicits a short and quick response related to the topic of that day’s lessons. Then, before the facilitator asks the quick response question, they also ask participants to express how they are doing on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = terrible, and 5 = amazing).

- *Important to note:* the facilitator may want to have a person designated (e.g., a co-facilitator) to pull anyone aside who reported a 1 and check in with them to see how they are doing. Then, if numerous people report a 1, the facilitator may want to consider pausing the lesson to delve deeper into how people are doing.

Depending on the size of the circle, participants can either answer the quick response and 1-5 prompts as a whole group or with partners during the pair-share activity described next.

Pair-share. Another powerful way to create opportunities for human connection and a caring community is for participants to pair-share (get with one partner) and share one concern they have and one person or thing they are grateful to or for. Then, if time permits, pairs can pray for one another.

- *Important to note:* be sure to tell people how much time they have to make sure both people can share and pray. For example, tell them they have X minutes total to “empty their cup,” and then at the half-way mark, tell them they need to switch. The same should be done while praying.

Circle Agreements. Circle agreements are when the group establishes agreed-upon behaviors while in the circle. During the first meeting, circle agreements should be established collectively. Or, the facilitator can already have a list and then ask the group if they agree or if they would like to add, delete, or edit the list. Then, once agreed upon, at the beginning of each meeting, circle agreements could be quickly reviewed.

Circle agreements may address cell phone usage, being aware of how long and how often one speaks, and other things the facilitator and/or the group deems important to the successful running of the circle.

Centerpiece. A centerpiece is a shared space in the middle of the circle that represents the center of the learning community. The centerpiece may include decorative materials such as clothes, plants, values, pictures, important objects, symbolic items, and circle agreements, and can provide a place for participants to rest their eyes when processing and pondering.

Talking Piece. Once again, the Crucial Concept of *facilitate* comes from the Spanish word “facil” which means “easy.” Therefore, in order to honor the community of learners, value each member as equals, increase responsibility and accountability, encourage ownership, and elevate community learning while in the circle, the role of the facilitator is to make discussions amongst members “easy” by closely monitoring and orchestrating who speaks and when. Consequently, depending on the group, the facilitator may want to utilize a talking piece, or something that designates who will speak next to ensure equal voice and respectful communication.

- *Important to note:* the talking piece should be something relevant to the group or representing the group’s values. Therefore, if being utilized, the facilitator may want to take some time to think about what this communication instrument should be. For example, if the group is composed of married couples going through a series on communication, then maybe the talking piece could be a plastic bride and groom (the type that is placed on top of a wedding cake).

Closing. Similar to the opening, the closing is just a simple and consistent way to end. It could consist of thanking everyone for being there, going around the circle and having each person say one word to describe their experience or briefly describe something they appreciated or learned, and a closing prayer.

Guiding Questions:

Pertaining to the Crucial Concept of *less is more*, and keeping adulting learners in mind, the facilitator should construct their lesson with a small, but intended goal in mind (not try to cover a myriad of topics via lecture) and create opportunities for adults to construct knowledge rather than passively taking in information.

This is most effectively done by presenting a series of well-thought out guiding questions that adults first ponder and then answer in pairs or in small groups. Such guiding questions can be

based on a Bible verse or chapter; a short video clip; an excerpt from a book or article; situations based on case studies, simulations, real-life situations, or any other medium that will allow adults to construct and apply knowledge.

Consequently, guiding questions are a foundation for the Crucial Concept of *less is more* since providing opportunities for adult discussions will take time, but the learning outcomes are far more rich and meaningful than having them passively taking in information. By doing so, the facilitator will have taken the necessary forethought and time to develop a collaborative environment by providing time for small group interactions.

Finally, since a goal for adult learners is to tie new information and skills to previous learning with a focus on implementation, having them reflect on how this information could be applied to their lives and then pair-share what that may look like would be a powerful way to “*give them something they can use.*”

- *Important to note:* the facilitator can pose a guiding question for small groups to discuss and then orchestrate a large group discussion by asking one person from each small group to share what they discussed.
- *Important to note:* the facilitator may want to utilize some sort of device for when they would like people to come back to the large group. Devices could be a chime, whistle, bell, ringer, shofar, tambourine, or other pleasant- or smooth-sounding device.

Resources:

A cornerstone of constructing a solid lesson is knowing what resources you want to use and how you want to use them. Therefore, when thinking about what resources to use, remember the Crucial Concept of *less is more* and be very intentional, utilizing a handful of well-thought out resources so as not to overwhelm people. Below are a few examples.

Bible verses. Creating opportunities for adults to construct knowledge rather than passively taking in information, find one Bible verse or chapter to be the focus of the lesson that will be discussed by participants throughout the lesson (if need be, provide other supporting verses or chapters to back up the main verse or chapter). Then, make learning relevant and provide problem-solving types of activities such as case studies, simulations, and real-life situations that are related to the main Bible verse or chapter, and allow for small group discussions by utilizing guiding questions.

Finally, tie new information and skills from your lesson to previous learning with a focus on implementation by asking participants how aspects of this lesson can be applied to their own lives (depending on the size of the group, this last step could be done in pairs, in groups of three to four, or as a large group).

Videos. With a plethora of videos (literally at our fingertips), interjecting short yet succinct videos are a great way to address the Crucial Concept of *pacing* by utilizing a different activity,

or medium of instruction. Through forethought and having done the necessary prep work, the facilitator should have guiding questions for the video that align with the purpose and intended outcome, and the main Bible verse or chapter for the lesson. Then, in pairs or in small groups, the facilitator poses questions for discussion. Finally, the facilitator can have pairs or small groups share out with the large group.

Other resources. Creating a Google Doc to “house” all the resources for the lesson would be ideal so people can refer to documents, web sites, articles, and other materials via their phones (this also greatly cuts down on printing costs) while also providing people resources to refer back to. These other resources can then be utilized in the same manner as Bible verses and videos by utilizing guiding questions.

- *Important to note:* if you have limited in-person time when meeting with your group, you may want to assign resources to be completed ahead of time (e.g., you have a lengthy video, article, document, Bible chapter/s, or other lengthy resources and do not want to use valuable in-person time watching or reading them as a group). Then, if so, try to provide guiding questions to accompany the resource/s that can then be used for pairs, small group, or large group discussions.
- *Important to note:* while utilizing your resources, be sure to incorporate a variety of activities revolving around adult learning styles/modalities, or the VAK model – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Putting It All Together

The lesson plan template below will provide annotated examples of all aspects previously discussed.

This lesson plan is for a 1 hour and 45 minute class that meets regularly with 20 participants.

Lesson Plan	Time	Annotations
<i>Purpose and Intended Outcome/s:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand what covenant relationships are and how people can use active listening to enhance them. 	N/A	Third lesson in the series titled, “REAL-lationships” which is a relationship-building, interactive, in depth, and applicable study.
<i>Resources:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ephesians 4:30-32 (NIV) ● Video: Covenant Relationships (16:24) ● Article: Greater Good in Action -- Active Listening 		These resources can either be provided ahead of time or during the study. Either way, they should be on a Google Doc for participants to reference later.
<i>Opening:</i>	5 min	Breathe Prayer (<i>Abide</i> is a Christian

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank everyone for being there • 4 x 4 breathing exercise • Review Circle Agreements • Opening prayer 		breathing app.) 4 x 4 Breathing (4 x 4 Breathing is a technique that supports people to slow their breathing, helping their heart rate to drop, thereby telling their body and brain it is OK to relax. People then start to feel more calm)
<p>Checking In:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large group: “How are you doing today (1-5)?” and a quick response question: “Would you rather end on sweet or salty?” • Pair-share: “What is one concern you have, and one person or thing you are grateful to or for?” • Pairs pray for one another 	20 mins	Be sure to check in with people who reported they are at a 1.
<p>Guiding Question #1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What does it mean to be in a covenant relationship?” 	5 mins	People pair-share their responses. Then, the facilitator can ask 1-2 pairs to share with the entire group.
<p>Guiding Question #2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Ephesians 4:30-32 (NIV) • What 1-2 words stands out the most to you and why? 	5 mins	People pair-share their responses. Then, the facilitator can ask 1-2 pairs to share with the entire group.
<p>Guiding Question #3: Video: Covenant Relationships (16:24)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (0:00 to 8:01) “How is Kris Vallotton’s welding analogy symbolic of a covenant relationship?” • (8:01 to 10:37) “Why can you not take suffering out of the Gospel and a covenant relationship (2 Tim. 2:3)?” • (10:37 to 16:32) “After hearing Kris’ story at the end, share an example of how a person you are in a covenant relationship with laid down their life and sacrificed for you. And, how did that make you feel?” 	30 mins	Either during the video and after each part, or at the end of the video, in pairs or small groups, people discuss the three prompts. Then, the facilitator can ask 1-2 pairs/groups to share with the entire group.
<p>Guiding Question #4:</p>	10 mins	Ask for responses from the group and write

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What would be some key characteristics of a covenant relationship?” 		<p>on a whiteboard, looking for someone to mention “communication.”</p>
<p>Guiding Question #5: Article: Greater Good in Action -- Active Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the article, the facilitator briefly discusses each of the seven characteristics of active listening and people rank themselves on a scale of 1-5 of how well they do or do not do each one (1 = terrible, and 5 = amazing). • In pairs, people share one characteristic they do well and one they need to grow in. • Lastly, in pairs, people answer the question: “Why is active listening integral to a covenant relationship?” 	<p>30 mins</p>	<p>Either on their phones or on scratch paper, have people number 1-7 for their 1-5 rankings of the seven characteristics of active learning.</p>
<p>Practice: Article: Greater Good in Action -- Active Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While at home and using the steps provided in the article, practice active listening by each person in the covenant relationship expressing their thoughts about something on their mind. • Then, at the next meeting, be prepared to share how it went. 	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Use the term “practice” and avoid using “homework” since that can elicit negative past memories for some people.</p>
<p>Closing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanking everyone for being there • Go around the circle and each person says one word to describe their experience • Closing prayer 	<p>5 mins</p>	

Until you create your own lesson plan template, use the one below to develop lesson plans to foster learning environments that optimize adult connection, engagement, and growth.

Lesson Plan	Time	Annotations
<i>Purpose and Intended Outcome/s:</i>		
<i>Resources:</i>		
<i>Opening:</i>		
<i>Checking In:</i>		
<i>Guiding Question #1:</i>		
<i>Guiding Question #2:</i>		
<i>Guiding Question #3:</i>		
<i>Guiding Question #4:</i>		
<i>Guiding Question #5:</i>		
<i>Practice:</i>		
<i>Closing:</i>		