

# TEACHING TO TEACH

Three weeks to creating a lesson or lesson series from scratch.

John Young

## 1. From Topic to Lesson

Welcome to the first lesson in this short series on "Teaching to Teach"! Across these three weeks, we will learn how to plan out a single lesson, and then a full series, from a given topic or theme. We will also build in a dedicated workshop session during which you will have time to work on teaching materials and receive feedback and assistance from experienced teachers and fellow students.

The focus of this first lesson is going from a topic or theme to a single lesson, sermon, or devotional talk. For the purposes of this class, we are assuming that you have been given a passage of Scripture, a topic, or a lesson title, and that you need to go from that bit of information to a full lesson of some sort. Keep in mind that this is a very basic approach, not the be-all end-all of preparation, but hopefully it will be enough to get you started on the right road as you become more comfortable teaching.

1. Consider how your assigned material fits into the broader series, if indeed it is part of one. You don't want to step on someone else's topic or passage, so keep the bigger picture in mind as you start to write. (Plus, in addition to being considerate to your fellow teachers, you will also keep yourself from doing unnecessary or unhelpful prep by having a clear sense of what you do and don't need to cover.)
2. If you have an assigned passage, read it several times by itself, then go back and read it in its broader context. Take notes as you go, and look for natural breaks in the text where you can stop for reflection (and discussion if your format allows for it). It can be tempting to just jump straight into the notes, commentaries, or other resources, but it is crucial to know what is, or isn't, in the passage before you consider what others have said about it.
3. Sketch out an outline for how you plan to break down the passage into smaller sections, and jot down your initial impressions from reading the text. Particularly if you are covering one or more whole chapters, you will need to find places where you can pause, share the fruits of your labor, and (if appropriate) open up the floor for discussion.
4. Now, turn to other resources (notes, commentaries, articles, books, and so on) to help expand your discussion and pick up on things that you may not have seen or known. These things can be great aids to our learning and spiritual formation, as long as we don't allow them to push aside our time in the Word itself.
5. If you received a theme, topic, or lesson title without a corresponding verse, the process is largely the same, but you will first need to find a solid passage which can serve as the basis for your lesson. Use Bible software, a concordance, and/or good old-fashioned time in the Word to find the key teaching or teachings, then proceed through the above steps. Don't forget to incorporate discussion of other relevant verses as well, especially if you are the lone speaker addressing the topic.

Putting It Into Practice:

1. Go through the process now for an upcoming lesson, real or hypothetical. Ask a friend or teacher for a verse or idea if nothing immediately comes to mind.
2. Once you are done, reflect on the process and what you created. What worked well? What changes still need to be made before you deliver the lesson?
3. For those who have taught an assigned topic or series using a provided curriculum, what insights can you share about your experiences? How does the process differ when you are adapting rather than generating materials from scratch?

## 2. From Topic to Series

Welcome back for the second lesson in our “Teaching to Teach” series! This week’s focus is on designing a multi-week lesson series for use in a Bible class, especially one with multiple teachers. For the purposes of this class, we are assuming that you have free rein (more or less) to decide on a book or topic to cover, and that you have other teachers, perhaps of varying levels of experience and skill, to help with the actual delivery of content. Again, keep in mind that this is a very basic approach, not the be-all end-all of preparation, but hopefully it will be enough to get you started on the right road as you become more comfortable organizing Bible studies for multiple weeks at a time.

1. Think about your specific audience. What is the age and level of maturity (spiritual or otherwise) of the group? What books or topics have they covered recently? And what kinds of classes are they accustomed to?
2. Think about your teachers. Perhaps you are the only teacher, in which case this step is pretty straightforward. If you are team teaching, however, with different speakers handling different weeks, consider their abilities as well. Will the material chosen be accessible to them with a little effort, or will it be too simplistic or too difficult?
3. If you are selecting a book of the Bible or another book, divide up the material into roughly equal portions based on the number of weeks allotted for the class. Remember that not all chapters are alike in length and difficulty, so be sure to at least skim through the material as you craft your outline.
4. If your series is exploring a theme or themes, you will need to give significant consideration to how you divide up various aspects of the topic across the lessons (and, perhaps, speakers). Again, the goal is to not underfill or overload any one class session, but if you are uncertain, err on the side of giving the speaker too much to cover if they are less experienced (this will help them prepare enough material for the lesson) and too little to cover if they are more experienced (they will be able to develop the material more richly).
5. Get started ahead of time. As with so many areas of ministry, an ounce of prevention (or in this case, preparation) is worth a pound of cure. Having a clear schedule, clearly communicated to all parties involved, will give each speaker sufficient time to study and write in advance of their lesson. Working ahead will also allow you to identify any trouble spots on the calendar--for instance, a week when several of your teachers will be away, or one when your church is doing something special for a holiday--and to make alternate arrangements if needed. Bonus pro tip: always read the passage or material ahead of time in case you have to serve as a last-second emergency fill-in!

### Putting It Into Practice:

1. Go through the process now for an upcoming lesson, real or hypothetical. Ask a friend or teacher for a book or theme if nothing immediately comes to mind.

2. Once you are done, reflect on the process and what you created. What worked well? What changes still need to be made before you start building out the series?
3. For those who have co-taught through a series that you designed, what insights can you share about your experiences? How does the process differ when you are working with others to cover the material?

### 3. Workshopping an Idea

While we have already devoted some time each week to working on lessons and series, the goal of this week's final session is to give everyone an opportunity to dive deeper into the process, hopefully allowing for the completion and review of a full task.

1. Following the appropriate approach from lesson one or two, generate a lesson or series outline for a teaching opportunity, real or imagined. Again, feel free to ask for help with a topic if needed.
2. Pair up or get in groups of three, however the math works out. Each person should tell the other(s) what kind of outline they have created and what kind of occasion it is for. Aim to have at least one person with some teaching experience in every group if possible.
3. Allow each person to offer (constructive!) feedback on the other's outline. The more experienced person can go first, but they should also receive feedback from the less experienced person, since that person will likely have much in common with the audience members for the lesson.
4. When each group or pair is finished, reassemble the whole class and debrief about the exercise and the series as a whole. What have you learned? What was most beneficial? And what is the next step in your development as a teacher?