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Introduction

Relative to the previous six wake-up books I have written: *Shepherds, Wake Up*; *Deacons, Wake Up*; *Preachers, Wake Up*; *Christians, Wake Up*; *Parents, Wake Up*; and *Teens, Wake Up*. I tend to place this book, *Teachers, Wake Up*, at the top of the list. Why? Because the previous six presuppose the place, importance, and power of a teacher and teaching. That is proper and even necessary.

But think about this fact. The previous six wake-up books would not exist without a teacher, me, and teaching done by me. Their content would remain inside the covers if not used for the teaching of self and sharing with others in a class or discussion group. This is true relative to all subjects.

Personally, I think it is ironic that everything we are commanded to do and be, which requires teachers and teaching, finds teachers residing way down the priority list in many congregations. The hierarchy of priorities usually run something like this in many congregations: (1) having a preacher, (2) having a meeting place, (3) having an orderly program agenda for Sunday morning, (4) keeping the finances in the black, (5) appointing elders, and then, somewhere down on the list, (6) teachers and teaching. In many congregations, the emphasis is more on “having classes” than having qualified teachers and relevant curricula. It’s a tradition!

As I observe the state of teaching and teachers in the congregation where I serve as an elder, teacher, and preacher, I continually see the need for prepared teachers who can effectively teach God’s word. As I travel among congregations I am continually asked, “How can we get more brethren to teach?” What is your answer to this question? One answer is, “Train more teachers.”

In this book, I will place the spotlight on the teacher and teaching; especially on the teacher. The heart, attitude, and character of the teacher is the core message he or she is teaching before they actually get into their subject. Their appear-

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ance and body language speak loudly, sometimes contradicting what they are saying in their lesson. It is who and what they are that introduces every lesson.

This book is a wake-up call for existing teachers, past teachers, those desiring to teach, and those who resist being a teacher; thus, every Christian. Above all, it is a wake-up call for church leaders to reexamine, reevaluate, and retool their congregational education program—beginning with teachers. Let's make training a priority.

Studying this book should be the first step in taking the local teaching program to the next level. After this material is studied, the next level of teacher training should occur. Do you agree with me: The heart and character of a teacher are of first importance?

Yes No Not sure.

An answer in any of these three reply areas demonstrates the need to study and teach this material. Never forget that the message is the person—the teacher—first and foremost.

Why I Am a Teacher

Because teachers . . .

1. . . are major influences in the lives of people.
2. . . are molders of minds.
3. . . are inspirations for students to become better.
4. . . are possessors of a sacred trust.
5. . . are not perfect but teach a perfect message—God's word.
6. . . are just and believe in equality for all.
7. . . are challengers and stretchers of mind.
8. . . are under command by God to teach and live the word.
9. . . are managers of what happens in classrooms.

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10. ... are very eclectic and adopters of ideas and truths.
11. ... are students themselves, serving as examples.
12. ... are idea and seed planters.
13. ... are alive and exciting, never boring.
14. ... are change agents—from negative to positive.
15. ... are blessings called and sent by God.
16. ... are planners and goal setters.
17. ... are mindful of their character and heart's role in teaching.
18. ... are not wasters of students' times.
19. ... are leaders exercising influence on students.
20. ... are contributors to the destiny of the local congregation.
21. ... are empowered by God and His word.
22. ... are teaching to transform lives, not just to inform.
23. ... are parents with influence on children and family.
24. ... are lovers of all people—brethren, neighbors, and enemies.
25. ... are extensions of Christ—substituting for Him in classroom.

God bless you as you answer the teacher's wake-up call.

3

Adjust Your Attitude

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food (Hebrews 5:12).

The Challenge

This book is about teachers and teaching. According to the scripture reference in the above passage, after a reasonable time, God is expecting Christians to become teachers. The Hebrews writer noted that when one doesn't become a teacher of what he has learned, there is the danger of forgetting it. Then there is the need to be retaught so we can teach. We learn by teaching! It sticks with us.

When John the Baptist came preparing the way for Christ, He quoted Isaiah 40:3: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'" In our day the voice crying in the wilderness is the word of God—the gospel—trying to be heard. It is being silenced to a whisper by the hundred-and-one voices of the media: cell phones, internet, Facebook, Twitter, iPods, cable channels by the hundreds, caller ID, call waiting, texting, blogs, flat-screens, videos, YouTube, HDTV, et al. Our daily world is being bombarded by voices drowning out the word of God. "R" ratings have been turned into "PG-13," "M" for mature audiences. Sometimes they are even given "G" ratings. This has created an immune system that no longer flinches at sin in every describable and despicable form.

The media, with television leading the way, has turned almost everything in life into entertainment: journalism, sports, education, religion, politics, health and medicine, and family

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life. Television can take any event in life and spin it into entertainment, creating “junkies” for reality shows. The weirder and more outrageous the shows are, the more popular they are, creating stars out of the “no talented.” Throw in a little “religious spice” and you have a hit.

As the pews and classrooms in congregations grow emptier week after week, the Wall Street marketers have convinced the church that she needs to develop methods that turn the mission of the church into programs that entertain. The cross has been turned into a canoe that invites you to smooth sailing instead of suffering. The demand for the “fruit of the Spirit” has been exchanged for Starbucks. The rap and pop music of the world has been invited into worship by adding a few Bible and hallelujah overtones. Supper with the King is more enjoyable with soft drinks and cookies.

The impact of the surging control of what captures our attention, tickles our funny bone and makes us feel good, along with the “information glut,” is burying interest in teaching and studying God’s word. Is it possible to awaken the twenty-first-century church and her teachers to the need to prepare teachers and curricula to bring sinners to repentance and Christians into a new dynamic measure of spiritual growth?

We must restore thinking biblically about the essential and critical role of teachers and teaching in the body of Christ. There are two roles of responsibility that determine the present status of a congregation. These are the role of a leader and the role of a teacher. Ironically, the role of the teacher determines the status of leadership in the local congregation. Therefore, teachers and teaching are of first importance in the church. Tell me what your teaching staff is doing, and I will tell you the state of your congregation. Fruit doesn’t lie: “By their fruit, you shall know them.”

The place of the teacher in the body of Christ is affirmed and illustrated by numerous commands and examples. Here are a few:

1. “Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18–20).

Learn from the Master Teacher

Jesus Used Assignments

Jesus not only used numerous tools to teach and inspire His disciples, but He also gave them teaching and ministry assignments. In Luke 10 we have the account of Him sending the seventy out two by two to do preparatory work for Him to follow. He gave them a specific lesson that related to their immediate mission (cf. Luke 10:1–17).

The seventy returned with a glowing report about the results of obeying His teaching and practicing what He had taught them (cf. Luke 10:17–19). Jesus, as the wise teacher, called them back to reality: “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). A teacher’s relationship to heaven is more valuable than his teaching results.

Jesus Used Modeling

It is easy for a teacher to fall into the trap of saying and not doing. It is easier to tell others what to do and what is true than to live it in everyday life. Jesus’ most powerful rebuke and exposure of hypocrisy was His message to the Pharisees: “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (Matthew 23:3).

A study of what and how Jesus taught reveals His practices and modeling of His messages. Here are some examples:

1. Jesus taught about being social (Luke 14:7–14); He practiced being social by attending a wedding (John 2:1–12).
2. Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Luke 11:1–4); He continually practiced prayer (Luke 5:16).
3. He taught acceptance of people (Matthew 5:44); He practiced it at a well in Samaria (John 4:1–42).
4. He taught forgiveness (Matthew 18:21–35); He practiced it on the cross (Luke 23:34).

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5. He taught the necessity of being compassionate (Matthew 5:4–9); He practiced it by attending a funeral (John 11:28–44).
6. He taught self-denial (Matthew 16:24); He practiced it in many ways (Matthew 8:20; Philippians 2:4–8).
7. Jesus taught love for enemies (Matthew 5:43–48); He practiced it on the cross (Luke 23:34).
8. Christ taught the need for evangelism and mission work (Matthew 9:35–38; John 5:34–38; Matthew 28:18–20); He practiced it by having gone on the longest mission trip ever—He left heaven and came to earth (Philippians 2:4–9).

Jesus practiced what He taught. He broke the mold created by the Pharisees and scribes (Matthew 23:1–5). He was consistent as the “teacher come from God.” If we are going to follow in the footsteps of the Master Teacher, we too must practice what we preach (cf. Romans 2:21–24).

Jesus Taught Change

While it is true that Jesus taught to inform and educate people in God’s will, His major objectives were to teach the truth about His mission to die as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) and change people from a lost state to a saved state. Change is an unpopular word. The only person who likes a change is a baby with a dirty diaper.

Sadly, some Bible class teachers teach only to inform and fulfill an obligation. Changing their students into “more Christ-likeness” and deeper involvement in ministry rarely, if ever, shows up in their lesson plans.

When Jesus walked mile after mile along the dusty roads and over the hills and through the valleys of Palestine with eyes fixed on the cross, His teaching mission to Israel was referenced many times with, “You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.” His powerful transitional message was rejected by Israel, as were most of His calls to change: “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as

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many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:11–12).

Read Matthew’s account of the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5–7) and note how many times Jesus says, “You have heard . . . but I say to you . . .” or some similar statement (cf. Matthew 5:38–39).

Here are some obvious lessons Jesus taught on the necessity of change.

1. Repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5).
2. Believe or die in your sins (John 8:21–24).
3. Accept the word or stay lost (John 12:48).
4. Bear much fruit or be cast out (John 15:1–8).
5. Serve only one Master (Matthew 6:24).
6. Go from selfishness to self-denial (Matthew 16:24–28).
7. Go from disobedience to obedience (John 14:15; Hebrews 5:8–9).

List three additional changes Jesus taught.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

As a teacher sent by His heavenly Father, Jesus was a change agent. We, as teachers and aspiring teachers, need to be change agents. That means that we must wake up!