

Don't Forget, When You Teach, You Also Learn



Working with people is never a one-way street. Years ago, I helped with child care at Annual Conference. I was one of many caregivers in a room full of five-year-olds (yes, we had enough five-year-olds to fill a church fellowship hall size room!). The room was set up with interest centers, and the children moved from activity to activity at will. In one corner there was a record player. I saw a boy go over to check it out. There was a record on the turntable. He reached for the needle arm, pushed it down hard on the record, and held it there. The turntable groaned, and I expected the sound of scratching vinyl. I intervened, and tried to show him how it worked. I tried to explain that pushing the needle down hard would not let the record play. I showed him several times how to put the needle on the record gently, and tried everything I could think of to help him understand, but nothing worked. I was not getting through. Finally, I put a finger in his arm and pushed firmly and said, if you do it like this, it hurts the record. Then I barely touched his arm and said, doing it like this does not hurt the record and you get to hear the music. That worked! I finally discovered how to show him the difference between hard and gentle in a way he understood. Thinking about it now, I realized maybe using touch with the child was rather like the way Jesus used ordinary things people understood in his parables to teach his lessons. He was able to explain the ways of his kingdom to people who needed his good news, but were not 'theological students', were caught up in day-to-day life, or did not realize how much they needed to hear him. If you have worked with young children, you should understand the concept of infinite patience! Do not forget, many lessons need to be presented over and over again before they stick – for the children *and* adults. Children are learning to think and process information at the same time they are learning facts and ideas. A repetitive activity can delight a young child long after it has lost its appeal for an adult who might gladly never do it more than once, except that they learn it gives pleasure and new skills to the child they love. This kind of patient teaching *and* learning is a key parenting/caregiving skill. Adults often forget to take into account the patience required to be a child. Think about what it must be like for a youngster who is trying to tell an adult something when the adult simply does not get it. Adults often miss the lessons children have to teach because they are not listening or do not have the patience or skill to interpret the child's language.

Patience is something our current reality has to teach. People struggle to remain patient with the changes in routine necessary in a pandemic (remember adults & the child's repetitive game?). Impatience interferes with embracing efforts to find and develop new ways of being the church and sharing in ministry (remember figuring out how to teach that five-year-old to play a record?) because of the hope that what we face will be temporary. Parts of what has changed may be temporary, but it is likely this situation will usher in a new way of living that, if we embrace it, could be an opportunity to reach people who are not hearing the message of a loving Christ in the ways we are used to witnessing about it. Where do we need to listen as students, even if the role of teacher is more comfortable?

Jesus was a pro at presenting his message in new ways *and* building on the meaningful traditions and practices people have developed over time. He understood people better than anyone, and was encouraging, open, patient, and challenging all at the same time. Lord, open our eyes to the possibilities that become apparent when teachers are also open to learning. Teach us the value of steadfastness and patience.

This week, remember in prayer:

- **People dealing with COVID-19.** The number of vaccinated people is growing, & there is currently a decline in new cases. We pray that the pandemic may be easing. Help us not to back off on safety measures too soon. The future of this virus is still a work in process.
- **Nigeria – Pastor Bulus Yakura**, who was kidnapped, on Christmas Eve at Pemi village in Chibok Local Government Area, Borno State, was freed on Wednesday, March 3. His Boko Haram captors had threatened to kill him. Share in prayers of thanksgiving for his safety with our Nigerian brethren. Continue to pray for those who live with the threat of violence every day.

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