

Issues in Adult Education

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(Lecture 1)

Our synod's Board for Parish Services recently designated adult education as its number one priority. This is quite a change from thirty years ago. When I attended the Sem in the late 1950's, I did not have any course nor even any class that addressed the matter of adult education. The Sunday worship service, as had been true for centuries, was the way to nurture adults. I also recall that at one of the first pastoral conferences I attended, a roundtable discussion of education did not include adult education because only three of the eight pastors had an adult Bible class.

In the 1970's, the situation had not changed much. Professors Schuetze and Habeck in *The Shepherd Under Christ* lamented the attention being given to adult education. "While various agencies are found in most congregations to teach its youth up to the time of their confirmation, congregations are less committed to providing further education on the adult, that is, post-confirmation level. Unfortunately this can give the impression that confirmation brings all organized group study of the Bible to a conclusion . . . The post-confirmation age group contains the great majority of the congregation's souls. The role of the adult Bible class is to meet the needs for continued Bible study on the part of all age groups in the congregation. This is a broad role that frequently is severely limited in its application" (p. 127).

In the 1990's we see that there has been some change: less than 100 of our congregations now have no Bible class for adults. However, the number of adults attending Bible class is only slightly more than 10%. Several questions we will be addressing in this series of lectures are: Should this small percentage be a matter of concern? Is it true that adult education needs to be one of the top priorities in the education program in our congregation?

If we do emphasize more adult nurture, what happens to our worship services? In addressing this matter *The Shepherd Under Christ* has this to say: "It must not be forgotten that the regular Sunday service does provide instruction in the Word of God for all age levels in the congregation . . . The Bible class has objectives that supplement this teaching of the church as done in the Sunday service and that go beyond it. We may state the specific objectives of the Bible class as follows:

- to provide opportunity for growth in Christian knowledge and understanding; the sermon will also provide for this, but places special emphasis on providing inspiration; the Bible class will be inspirational, but aims more directly at growth in knowledge;
- to provide opportunity for study of the Bible, its various books, and its truths, in a systematic way that is not readily possible from the pulpit;
- to provide opportunity for questions and discussion, which cannot well be included in the Sunday worship.

Are these words written in the 1970's still valid objectives for the adult program of education in our congregations? That is another question we will address.

Although I was one of those three pastors of my first pastoral conference to have an adult Bible class, how I went about that work was another matter. My goal for my Bible class was to go through the book of Romans; my plan was to spend the year reaching that goal; my method

was lecture; my schedule was to have the class meet one evening every other week; my invitation to the class was an announcement each week in the bulletin. I know now that my approach to Bible class then was a classic example of how not to go about adult nurture. My purpose, content, method, meeting time, and recruiting were all seriously flawed in some way. How we go about adult nurture is another matter that we will address in this series about issues in adult education.

Awareness of Purposes

Let's begin where any discussion of a facet of our congregation's program of education needs to begin, namely, with an examination of the reason or reasons for doing what we are doing - or, if you will, the goals or purposes of adult education. Again, we return to *The Shepherd Under Christ* for some initial remarks. On page 100 the three general objectives of a congregation's educational effort are expressed this way:

- First, and basic, is the objective of making people "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). The importance of this objective is evident from Jesus' question: "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mt 16:26). Let the church never lose sight of what God has made its prime educational objective!
- Closely related to this first objective is a second, spiritual growth. Babies in Christ are to drink the milk of the Word so that they may grow to maturity (1 Pe 2:2). The Lord gives His church pastors and teachers and various types of ministries in order that the saints may be perfected, not remaining children readily deceived, and grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:11-15). The educational effort of the church has as its objective a maturing faith.
- The third objective concerns the Christian's life. Education aims at growth in sanctification. Christians have been called to follow in Jesus' steps in this life (1 Pe 2:21). Christians are to learn not to yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness, but rather to yield themselves to God (Ro 6:13). They increasingly recognize that through their actions and especially by speaking God's message of sin and grace they are witnesses of Christ and His gospel to sinners in need (Ac 1:8). In all of life's work or play, they are to learn to live as such who are dead to sin and alive to God (Ro 6:11), who are the earth's salt and a light to the world (Mt 5:13,14).

Without saying a whole lot that is different, I would like to suggest that we take these three objectives and expand them to seven in order to provide a statement of the purposes of adult nurture. What you will note is that the two growth goals (second and third) of Professors Schuetze and Habeck have been expanded and either identified as knowledge or ability goals.

The goals of adult nurture are:

1. That believers are preserved in faith until God takes them to himself in heaven.
2. That to this end believers continue to grow in faith as they grow in their knowledge of God's Word.

3. That the Holy Spirit uses this growth in knowledge and faith also to lead believers to grow in living dedicated lives of praise and thanks to God for his mercy and grace to them in Christ.
4. That in order to grow in faith and knowledge and holy living believers also grow in their ability to do personal study of God's Word.
5. That along with this ability (#4) believers also grow in their ability to apply God's Word to what they encounter daily or on occasion in contemporary life.
6. That along with growth in faith and knowledge (#2) and these two abilities (#4,5) believers also grow in their ability to teach, strengthen, encourage, comfort and admonish one another.
7. That through growth in these various ways (#2,4,5,6) believers also grow in their ability to share God's Word with non-Christians of all kinds.

So that we might be assured that these are all goals which God himself indicates in scripture, let's take a walk through all the books of the NT in sequence and note one or more passages from each book which speak of these seven purposes for adult nurture. What follows are the key words from each passage with a number in parentheses indicating which of the seven purposes is in focus.

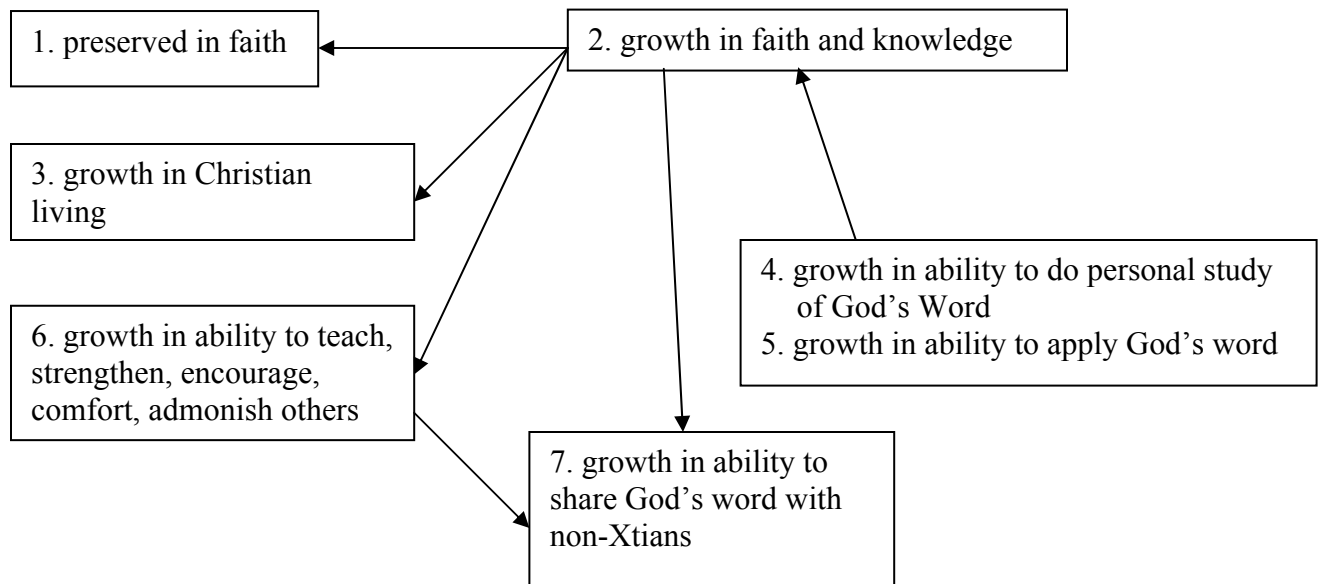
- Mt 5:13f. You are the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world (3,5,6,7)
- Mt 6:25 Do not worry about your life . . . (5)
- Mt 28:20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you [N.B. the word translated "obey" is the Greek word τηρέω which means both to "hold on to" and then also "live according to"] (1,2,3)
- Mk 4:17 troubles or persecution . . . worries of this life . . . wealth . . . desires for other things (1,5)
- Mk 8:15 Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees (1,5)
- Lk 6:49 The one who hears my words but doesn't put them into practice . . . (1,3)
- Lk 11:42 Mary has chosen what is better . . . (5)
- Lk 12:15 A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. (5)
- Lk 12:57 Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? (5)
- Lk 21:8 Watch out that you are not deceived. (1,2)
- Jn 4:39 Many . . . believed in him because of the woman's testimony. (7)
- Jn 8:31 If you hold to my teaching . . . then you will know the truth . . . (1,2)
- Jn 15:5 If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. (3)
- Ac 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching . . . (2)
- Ac 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (7)
- Ac 17:11 They examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (4)
- Ro 1:11f . . . make you strong . . . (2,3)
- Ro 12:2 . . . Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. (3,5)
- Ro 15:14 . . . complete in knowledge (2) . . . competent to instruct one another. (6)
- 1 Co 3:1f gave you milk, not solid food . . . not yet ready for it. (2)
- 2 Co 12:19 . . . for your strengthening. (1,2,3)

- Ga 4:8f . . . turning back, to those weak and miserable principles? (2,5)
- Ga 5:7f . . . cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? (1,2,5)
- Eph 1:17 . . . know him better . . . know the hope to which he has called you . . . (2)
- Eph 3:19 . . . grasp how wide, long, high and deep is the love of Christ. (2)
- Eph 4:14 . . . no longer infants, tossed . . . and blown . . . by every wind of teaching . . . (5)
- Eph 4:15f . . . grow up (2) . . . builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (6)
- Eph 5:8f . . . Live as children of light . . . and find out what pleases the Lord. (3,5)
- Php 1:9f . . . in knowledge and depth of insight . . . discern what is best (5) . . . filled with the fruit of righteousness . . . (3)
- Php 2:12 . . . continue to work out your salvation . . . (1)
- Php 2:15f . . . blameless and pure, children without fault (3) . . . shine like stars . . . as you hold out the word of life . . . (7)
- Php 3:12 . . . press on to take hold . . . (1)
- Php 3:14f . . . press on toward the goal . . . who are mature should take a view of such things. (2)
- Col 1:9f . . . fill you with the knowledge of his will . . . live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God (3) . . . strengthened with all power . . . that you may have great endurance and patience. (1)
- Col 2:6f . . . strengthened in the faith . . . , overflowing with thankfulness (3) . . . no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy . . . (5)
- 1 Th 1:7f . . . model . . . message rang out from you . . . (7)
- 1 Th 3:12 . . . love increase and overflow for each other (6) . . . strengthen your hearts . . . (2)
- 1 Th 4:18 . . . encourage each other . . . (6)
- 1 Th 5:21f . . . Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. (5)
- 2 Th 1:3f . . . faith is growing more and more . . . love for each other is increasing . . . perseverance in all the persecutions and trials . . . (3)
- 2 Th 2:15f . . . stand firm and hold to the teachings . . . (1)
- 1 Ti 4:11f . . . teach these things . . . devote yourself to... teaching(2,3)
- 2 Ti 2:14 . . . keep reminding . . . Warn them . . . (2)
- Tit 3:8 . . . stress these things (2) . . . devote themselves to doing what is good. (3)
- Tit 2:2f . . . Teach the older men . . . older women . . . the young men . . . slaves . . . (2)
- Phm 6 . . . sharing your faith . . . a full understanding of every good thing . . . (7)
- He 5:11ff . . . by this time you ought to be teachers (6) . . . not acquainted with the teaching . . . (2) mature . . . trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (5)
- Ja 1:21f . . . get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent . . . (3,5)
- 1 Pe 2:1f . . . rid yourselves of . . . grow up in your salvation . . . (3)
- 1 Pe 2:9 . . . declare the praises of him who called you . . . (7)
- 1 Pe 2:11 . . . abstain from evil desires . . . (3)
- 2 Pe 1:5ff . . . add to your faith . . . possess these qualities in increasing measure . . . keep you from being ineffective and unproductive . . . (3)
- 2 Pe 1:12f . . . always remind you . . . firmly established in the truth you now have. (1)

- 2 Pe 3:1 . . . stimulate you to wholesome thinking. (5)
- 2 Pe 3:17f . . . not be carried away by the error of lawless men (5) . . . grow in grace and knowledge (2)
- 1 Jn 5:19f . . . the whole world is under the control of the evil one (5) . . . given us understanding . . . (2)
- 2 Jn 2:9 . . . not continue in the teaching . . . continues in the teaching . . . (1)
- 3 Jn 3 . . . your faithfulness to the truth . . . continue to walk in the truth. (1 ,2)
- Jude 3 . . . urge you to contend for the faith . . . (1 ,5)
- Jude 5,20 . . . Though you already know this, I want to remind you . . . build yourselves up in your most holy faith . . . (2)
- Re 2:3 . . . persevered and have endured hardships . . . (1)

This long list of passages might seem like overkill, but, as was said earlier, knowing the purposes of adult nurture and being convinced they are what God wants us to be doing in nurturing adults is fundamental. Unless we are thoroughly convinced that what we are doing is necessary and right, we won't make it a priority or give it the attention it deserves. Hopefully, this list of passages, which is by no means exhaustive - you can perhaps add many more passages without a lot of thought - impresses on us the importance of each of the seven goals for adult nurture.

Perhaps you noticed in the listing of the seven goals, that each of the statements indicated a relationship with one or more of the other seven. A bit more needs to be said about this by way of preparation to the next several lectures. Perhaps the following diagram can demonstrate this point best:



These interrelationships are important to note since closely tied to these goals is the fact that the content of what is taught, the method of teaching used, and the type of group in which people learn are all basic to accomplishing these seven goals. This is true because one kind of content will be better than another for reaching a particular goal. For example. Romans 4 (the chapter about Abraham's justification by faith) is a good chapter for the study of faith rather than a guide

for Christian living. Or one method of teaching will be better than another for reaching a particular goal - questioning can be an effective way of working toward the goal of growth in knowledge but it will not be the most effective way of working toward growth in the ability to share God's Word with those who don't know Christ. The size of the group also plays into working toward a goal - working toward the goal of growth in Christian living can often be done as effectively in a large group as in a small group, but working toward the goal of growth in the ability to teach, strengthen, encourage, comfort and admonish fellow Christians can be done much more effectively in a small group as opposed to a large group. This raises all kind of questions such as this one: Do we let our goals determine the content we teach or do we choose the content and let it determine our goal(s)?

We will be looking at content, method, and group size and their relationship to these seven goals in the next lectures. The only point I want to make here is that these seven goals need to be a part of our thinking and planning in order to carry out a good program of adult nurture. The old saying is true: if you don't aim at anything your sure to hit it.

On the other hand, trying to accomplish all seven goals in every Bible class means none of them will be done well. When Paul said, "All Scripture . . . is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness," he didn't mean one does all four of these every time one shares God's Word with another person. With one person on a given occasion rebuking may be in the foreground, in another situation training in righteousness may be the special focus. So it should also be with the seven goals for adult education.

One final thought. Do these seven goals address the spiritual needs of people living in the 1990's? Yes they do. These are the basic spiritual needs which Scripture identifies. They are universal and do not change with time. The prime educational objective today is still to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ. The attacks Satan makes on faith and his temptations to sin may be more sophisticated than ever, but the armor we have to overcome them is still the same. The ability to do personal Bible study, to apply God's Word, to speak God's Word to fellow Christians and non-Christians are all skills that are still basic for every Christian. On the other hand we might be inclined to think that in our day they are unrealistic goals. But it is God's Word that sets these challenge before us, and it is his Spirit who uses us as his agents to work toward them.

(Lecture 2. Content)

The first lecture the focus was on seven scriptural purposes or goals for adult education. Today our attention will turn to the content or the curriculum of a nurturing program for adults. The content of adult education, as it is for the nurture of youth, is God's Word, especially its two main doctrines, law and gospel. In this way adult nurture is the same as youth nurture. In other ways (the particular type of content, the way the content is used) the content of adult nurture is different.

We will spend part of our time looking at six typical ways of approaching Bible content with adults: Bible history, Bible books, selected key portions of the Bible, Bible topics, Bible doctrines, and the Bible in the past and present history of the church. The rest of our time will be devoted to considering four premises about Bible content and adult education: 1) Choosing content in view of the seven scriptural purposes or goals is important; 2) Choosing content to match people's knowledge of the Bible is important; 3) Sequencing is an important factor in choosing content; and 4) Application and retention of content are important factors in developing each lesson.

Before we look at these items in more detail, let me place a number of ambiguous (neither totally right or totally wrong) statements before you. I'm not promising you that I will answer all of them in detail. But perhaps they will help to highlight some additional considerations that relate to content.

1. Course content is the key to getting people to study the Bible.
2. The pastor is the best person to determine what the course content of adult education should be.
3. Much of the course content in adult education is abstract.
4. Children and teenagers need to be grouped in classes with different course content because they are at different levels of physical and mental development. Since adults are fully developed physically and mentally, the course content can be the same for all and they can be taught in one group.
5. We can train lay people to be Sunday school and youth group teachers, but the course content for adults requires a pastor to teach it.

Six Different Types of Content in Adult Bible Study and Some Observations About Each

A. Bible history:

1. It is fundamental because it presents God's plan of salvation which centers in Christ.
2. It provides essential background for two other types of content: Bible books, selected Bible portions.
3. It can be a very interesting course since it is all concrete material (use of visuals is natural).
4. The variety of historical events allows the teacher to include each of the seven goals of adult education at regular intervals in his lesson plans.
5. Because of the basically historical nature of the material, it is the easiest kind of course that a mature Christian who is a gifted teacher could be trained to teach at repeated intervals.

6. It covers a massive amount of material. As a result a number of bad things may happen:
 - It may become a long course lasting a year or two during which none of the other five types of Bible study are done.
 - In order not to have it last so long the course may be shortened so much that it doesn't accomplish #2.
 - To keep the course shorter, applications may be minimized or even neglected.
 - It can become a course which deals with so many details that the theme of God in mercy working out his wonderful plan of salvation gets lost.
 - To cover the material the pastor may be tempted to resort to all lecture.

B. Bible books

1. It is a natural follow-up to the study of Bible history because it gets people into those books of the Bible that are not historical.
2. Depending on the nature of the book (psalms, proverbs, prophets, epistles) it provides an opportunity for a sustained emphasis over several lessons on one or two of the seven goals for adult nurture.
3. It can be very abstract unless the teacher consciously works to make it concrete. (cf. lecture 3)
4. Depending on the book, it can become a long course lasting a half year or more during which none
5. of the other five types of Bible study are done.

C. Selected Bible portions

1. It is a natural follow-up to the study of Bible history because it allows the teacher to use the Bible history framework to relate other portions of scripture to key events in Bible history and the lessons we learn from them. (cf. page 1 of accompanying material)
2. It provides the opportunity to study some of the key chapters of the Bible that teach doctrine (Romans 3-5 = sin, redemption, objective justification, faith, subjective justification, peace, hope), or are so comforting (Psalm 23), or teach sanctification (Matthew 5-7).
3. It provides the opportunity to study selected chapters or portions of the Bible that focus on one or more of the seven goals for adult nurture, for example, to help people grow in their ability to do personal Bible study (reading Hebrew poetry or Jesus' parables), to apply the Bible to contemporary life (Ephesians 5, 1 Thessalonians 4), to share God's Word with others (John 4).
4. Depending on the chapter or portion chosen, the content can be very abstract unless the teacher consciously works to make it concrete.

D. Bible doctrines

1. It is an approach that uses selected Bible passages to teach a biblical doctrine more in depth than is often the case in the three approaches above (A, B, C).
2. It is important in using selected passages that the context of each passage is not neglected.

3. It can be a course that covers the main doctrines of Christianity as in a Bible information course, or it can be a course that studies in more detail a smaller group of related doctrines (election and conversion; redemption and justification; the last day and judgment and eternity; etc.)
4. The basic doctrinal course is another that a mature Christian who is a gifted teacher could be trained to teach at regular intervals.
5. It is essentially all abstract material.

E. Bible topics

1. It is an approach that uses selected passages to teach what the Bible says about issues the Christian faces in contemporary life (capital punishment, divorce, euthanasia, social gospel, dishonesty, smoking, poverty and homelessness, abortion, homosexuality, birth control, etc), or other religions (both Christian and non-Christian, the historical-critical method of interpretation, New Age religion and other cults, etc.).
2. It is often the kind of study that holds high interest and importance in our day when urbanization and television expose our people to things for which they desire answers and/or guidance from God's Word.
3. It is an approach that uses selected passages to teach different aspects of personal living (personal and family worship, congregational worship, making choices involving the use of time and talent and treasure, etc.), or sharing God's Word with others (recognizing opportunities, using opportunities, following up on opportunities).
4. Though it may be easier to get into a discussion in this kind of study than any of the other five, it is essential that the discussion follow and be based on a thorough study of God's Word in regard to each topic.

F. The Bible in the past and present history of the church

1. It gives people a broad perspective of Satan's attacks on the church (by force, false doctrine, and the attraction for the things of the world) as well as God's preservation of his Word and his church in spite of Satan's attacks.
2. It gives people an appreciation for their Lutheran heritage and the work being done under God's grace by our synod today.
3. It can easily focus only on what happened in the past and details that are of little concern to a layperson instead of on biblical doctrine and what is pertinent to the contemporary religious scene.

Four Premises in Regard to Content in Adult Education

A. Choosing content in view of the seven scriptural goals is important.

1. Choosing content with the seven goals in mind will happen quite naturally as has been noted already in A-4, B-2, C-2, E-1 and 3 above.
2. The interrelationship of the seven goals means more than one will usually be part of any of the six typical ways of approaching content in adult Bible study.
3. Still, in order that none are neglected during each year of Bible class, it is important to have this as one of the factors guiding the choice of content.

4. In a given setting at a given time, one of the seven goals may become especially important and so become the sole deciding factor in choosing content. (e.g. hymnal introduction & adiaphora)

B. Choosing content to match people's knowledge of the Bible is important.

1. Choosing content that has already been studied in some depth (even if it may not have been registered with total recall by people) will not stir much interest.
2. Choosing content for which people lack the necessary background will often result in their not getting much out of what is being taught and so cause them to be discouraged. (Cf. the assumption basic to *Training Christians for Ministry*)
3. Bible history is basic to the study of most Bible books and Bible portions. It is also excellent background for any study of Bible doctrine. (Cf. the arrangement of material in *Training Christians for- Ministry*)
4. Bible history and Bible doctrine are often very helpful as background for the study of Bible topics.
5. Bible history and Bible doctrine are two types of Bible study that might well be offered on a regular basis (every year, every other year) for all members to take.
6. The other four types of Bible study might be offered with an indication of the degree of difficulty indicated (simple, advanced = one of each every week, or on an alternating basis, etc.).
7. Offering "electives" allows people to match content to their knowledge and/or interests. (Cf. page 2 of the accompanying material: they are attractive to some people; they promote accountability; they can be trans-generational; one elective a year is a start, and that one elective could be a rerun of a course from a year or two before.)

C. Sequencing is an important factor in choosing content (goal, frequency, order, length - cf. G. Peterson, *The Christian Education of Adults*, Moody Press, 1984; cf page 3 of the accompanying material)

1. A sequence of Bible classes for a given period of time (six months, a year, 18 months, two years) that is organized by design will be more likely to use content to work toward the seven goals for adult education than Bible classes that are conducted haphazardly based on convenience and whim.
2. Keep a regular list of possible courses to offer (suggested by other people and/or one's own thoughts).
3. Identify which of the six kinds of content each course fits into and which goal or goals of the seven would be in the foreground in each course.
4. Determine the frequency that a course of each of the six types of content should be repeated in your congregation: Should some types (Bible history, Bible doctrine) be offered every time period? How often should each of the other six types appear? How long has it been since the last class of each type was offered?
5. Establish an order in which the classes planned for the given time period will be offered based on such factors as: Does one course provide some helpful background for another course? Which arrangement of courses gives the best change of pace (abstract followed by concrete, NT followed by OT, non-visual followed by visual, 8

week course followed by a 3 week course, etc.)? Which courses have top priority for this time period and which could be postponed to a later time period?

6. Establish the length of each course given the amount of material to be taught and the number of weeks in the time period to teach it: Can one of the courses be shortened to get them all in? Should one of the courses be dropped in order to have the necessary time for the other courses which seem to take priority? Can one elective be offered during the time period to enable all the courses to be offered?

D. Application and retention of content are important factor's in developing each lesson.

1. In elementary nurture the biblical content focuses primarily on events in God's plan of salvation or developing catechism truths. The application does not really drive the choice of the content or how that content is developed. Instead, the application follows out of the development of the content. Once a person's ability to do logical thinking is developed fully (during the high school years usually), seeing the practical use of learning the content is as important to the person as the content itself. Thus in adult nurture, application (the lesson for faith and/or life) is an important factor in choosing the content and an even more important factor in how the content of a lesson is developed. (Cf. page 4 of the accompanying material)
2. Retention of some of the content is an obvious goal of every Bible lesson. The chart of the seven goals of adult nurture introduced in the first lecture noted how growth in faith and knowledge is the goal which is basic to all the other goals. One doesn't grow in knowledge without retaining something that was taught in a Bible lesson.
3. Most people can retain only two or three things (at the very most four) from a given lesson, therefore:
 - Good teaching means identifying two or three things one wants the students to retain from a lesson.
 - Good teaching means planning the development of the lesson so that it focuses primarily on those two or three things.
 - Good teaching means getting the students to think and talk about those two or three things rather than about any of the "minor" points involved in the lesson. Asking a lot of questions is not good teaching; rather, asking good questions about the two or three points one wants the student to retain is good teaching. - If one has five or more key points to develop from the content of a lesson, it would be better to drop the least important one, or else divide the lesson into two lessons. - If the two or three key points can be gathered under a general theme or heading, it will also contribute to retention.

4. To summarize: - In planning the development of the content of any kind of Bible lesson, identify two or three key points (and thus two or three key verses) that will be the major focus of the lesson. Also develop a theme or heading, if possible. - Let application be an important factor in choosing these two or three key points (verses). - Cf. pages 5-9 of the accompanying material for several examples.

BREAK OUT EXERCISE (cf. page 10 of the accompanying material)

- Identify two or three (or four?) key verses in Acts 3.
- Capsulize the major truth taught in these key verses.

- Does each of these key verses lead naturally to an important application (or would another verse lead more naturally to application)?
- Is there a common thread in these key verses that can serve as a theme or heading?

(Lecture 3. Methods)

In lecture one we reviewed the seven goals of adult nurture: persevere in faith; grow in faith and knowledge; grow in ability to do personal Bible study; grow in ability to apply the Bible; grow in faith-born living; grow in the ability to comfort, admonish, and strengthen fellow Christians; and grow in the ability to share God's Word with non-Christians. In the second lecture we reviewed the six types of Bible content (history of the plan of salvation, books, selected portions, doctrines, topics, and church history) and four premises in working with Bible content (covering all seven goals, matching people's knowledge, a sequencing chart, and focusing the content of each lesson on two or three key points).

Today we will address the matter of methods. Again, I'll place a number of ambiguous statements before you, only this time each one of these will focus on one of the major points of this lecture.

1. The method we use in teaching adults isn't as important as being well-prepared and then teaching the lesson in a lively manner.
2. Using two-thirds lecture (telling) and one-third questioning is a pretty good mix of methods for developing an adult lesson.
3. Asking a lot of questions is not good teaching. Rather, good teaching is asking a couple fact questions about each of the two or three main points of the lesson.
4. If the class members are able to answer 50% of the questions we ask, then we know that the questions we're asking are neither too challenging nor too simple.
5. For the sake of variety, it's good to change the method used from one course for adults to the next.

The Relationship of Methods to the Power of God's Word

Because the power of bring about results in the hearts and lives of people lies in the Word of God and not in the teacher, the methods used by the teacher are sometimes considered unimportant. But that is a mistaken idea. Scripture does say that the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Ro 1:16), but it also says that one of the qualifications of the pastor is that he is to be able to teach (1 Ti 3:2). The ability to teach does not mean he must have a charismatic personality that makes people hang on every word he speaks. Nor does it mean that he must be a gifted speaker-one whose every word goes home to the hearts of the hearers. Rather, the ability to teach means that he can communicate God's Word to others in a way that does not destroy its power. The teacher of God's Word is not expected to make God's Word powerful. It is that already. His ability to teach means that he doesn't get in the way of its power.

That is what good methods help the teacher of God's Word to do. They don't make the Word powerful. They just help the teacher to do his work in a way that is not detrimental to the effect of the Word in his students' minds and hearts. You've undoubtedly heard the comparison of the teacher to the farmer planting seed. How the farmer plants the seed-at the right time rather than too early, at the right depth rather than too deep, in well cultivated soil rather than in hard ground, in good soil rather than in a place full of weeds-will not add to the power God placed in each seed by his word at creation. But doing one or more things wrong certainly can reduce or destroy any chance that seed has of producing a harvest. As it is with the farmer and how he plants the seed, so it is also with the pastor and how he teaches the Word.

Three Basic Methods Used Equally in Teaching God's Word to Adults

Books on teaching speak of many different kinds of methods. One of the best I know of lists 24 methods and in five or six pages on each method tells you three things: the strengths, the weaknesses, and (as a consequence) the best use for each method (*24 Ways to Improve Your Teaching*, by Kenneth Gangel -Victor Books, Wheaton, Illinois). However, all the methods that are used by a teacher when interacting with a class of students can be reduced to three basic categories or techniques: lecture (telling), questioning, and discussion.

Although there can be numerous exceptions for several valid reasons, an average Bible class should be roughly one-third telling, one-third questioning, and one-third discussion. This will make the best use of the strengths and weaknesses of each. If there are three major points being developed in a given lesson, each major point is developed by using all three of the techniques. Thus the pattern of the lesson would be: telling/questioning/discussion on point 1; telling/questioning/discussion on point 2; and telling/questioning/discussion on point 3. If the Bible class is 45 minutes long, each of the three parts would take 15 minutes with each 15 minute part of the lesson divided into 5 minutes of telling, 5 minutes of questioning, and five minutes of discussion. Seldom if ever will a lesson divide up so neatly (if a pastor were able to do this regularly every Bible class, he might well be called a Methodist instead of a Lutheran). But it is a general pattern to keep in mind in order to use the three basic methods to best advantage. (Cf. The top of page 1 in the accompanying material.)

Telling: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Uses

Today we are going to concentrate on the first two methods: telling and questioning. We will deal with discussion next time since it is basically a group activity and since our focus next time will be items that deal with various aspects of the group in a Bible class.

Before we look at how to use telling and questioning in a Bible class, we need to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each. Lecture [telling] has some serious weaknesses:

1. Very few people are able to maintain the interest of the class for more than ten to fifteen minutes by lecturing. Some studies on methods used in various kinds of adult classes question whether telling can hold interest for even ten minutes.
2. Since retention by the class increases in proportion to how active the students are, and since telling is entirely teacher activity with no student activity, what is retained by the class after a lecture is only a very small percentage of what was presented. Even if a lecturer is one of those exceptional speakers who can hold the interest of a class for a half hour, what the class actually retains is only a few percentage points more than the average lecturer. The exceptional lecturer will, of course, be praised more than the average lecturer because he is more interesting to listen to. But studies show that this interest does not translate into a whole lot more retention.
3. Telling is all teacher-talk so there is no check on how well the class understands what the teacher has presented. Even if the teacher asks the class if they have any questions, he may easily be deceived about what they have understood. A lack of questions can just as easily mean that they understood little of what he talked about as it could mean that they understood everything he told them.

Along with these weaknesses, telling also has some great strengths, and each of these strengths can be used to good advantage at various points in a Bible class.

1. Telling allows the teacher to cover a large amount of ground in a short period of time since there is no stopping to ask the class questions, to give them the time to think about and come up with the right answers, or to resolve a problem by class discussion.

Therefore, telling is the best way to handle all the background material in a lesson. The verses which provide the background for the two or three key verses are not what you want the class to think about and remember. Telling allow the teacher to cover the background verses quickly in a short period of time so that the majority of the time (about two-thirds of the time, cf above) can be spent on questioning about and discussion of the two or three main points (verses).

2. Telling is the best way for the teacher to guide the class to see the progression of the lesson. As the lesson moves from the first main point to the second, and from the second main point to the third, the teacher needs to make this obvious so that class can follow the structure of the lesson as the teacher has planned it.

Therefore, telling is the best way to handle the transitions in a lesson. Rather than asking the class, "Where do you suppose we are going to go next?" the teacher tells the class that the first point has been completed and gives a general idea of what the next point will be about. Transitions are vital to good teaching. The teacher may know where he has come from and where he is going because he planned the whole lesson. But without transitions, many in the class will feel like they are going through a maze since they may not immediately catch on when one major point has been completed and another begun. Good (obvious) transitions in a Bible class may not be as critical as in a sermon because in a Bible class the students can always ask the teacher "Did we begin a new point now?" But it would be better if the class never had to ask that.

3. Telling is the best way to incorporate illustrations into a lesson. Illustrations are also vital to good teaching because:
 - They enable the teacher to take abstract material (NB five of the six types of content used in adult Bible class are abstract, cf lecture two) and make it concrete.
 - They enable the teacher to take a complex idea and make it easier to grasp.
 - They enable the teacher to record the appropriate emotion (e.g. joy and thankfulness, or sorrow and dread) along with each fact (e.g. Jesus redeemed us, disobedience to superiors is a sin that deserves God's eternal punishment) he teaches a class.
 - They enable the teacher to fix a key idea (major point of an adult Bible class) in the memory of the class so that it is retained better and longer.

Telling enables the teacher to present an illustration in a sentence or two (short), to make it serve the purpose intended (concrete, clear), and to bring the major point to an effective climax. Therefore, telling is the best way to provide a climax to each major point in a lesson by

way of an illustration. After a set of questions used to develop each major point of the lesson, an illustration in the form of telling will help make the point just developed more clear and concrete.

Questioning: Strengths and Weaknesses

Like telling, questioning also has some serious weaknesses:

1. Questioning takes almost twice as long to cover the same amount of material as telling does. Thus unless the teacher has a lot of time to waste, this weakness of questioning means the teacher has to choose carefully how and when to use questioning in a lesson.
2. Good questioning requires students in an adult Bible class to do some comparing or evaluating of Bible verses instead of just repeating what they see written in a verse. Only two or three such questions can be asked in a row, otherwise the class members will find questioning to be mentally exhausting instead of mentally rewarding. Just as a runner needs a little rest after running a hundred yard dash before running another dash, so class members need some mental rest after doing the thinking necessary to answer a couple good questions.
3. Questioning is not a good way to incorporate illustrations into a lesson. Asking the class to provide an illustration of a major point of a lesson is seldom advisable. Often the class won't be able to think of an illustration. If they do it may be such a poor illustration (weird, a tangent, etc.) that it may detract from rather than help the development of the point under consideration. Using questioning to develop illustrations in a lesson is seldom a good idea. The student who answers your question about an illustration may miss the point either partly or entirely and so destroy what you wanted to be a climax to a major point.

Along with these weaknesses, questioning also has some great strengths. When these strengths are used to their best advantage, questioning becomes a major factor in contributing to a lesson that is truly effective.

1. Questioning requires mental activity on the part of the class members. Since retention increases in proportion to the students' activity, questioning contributes to a better retention of the major points of the lesson on the part of the class members than if the lesson were all telling.
2. Questioning about each major point in the lesson allows the teacher to check on the students' understanding of each major point before moving on to the next major point. If the teacher discovers any weakness in understanding, he can take care of that problem right away. Discovering the problem at the end of the lesson or in a subsequent lesson (or perhaps not at all?) makes the teacher's task of dealing with the problem considerably more difficult.
3. Questioning allows the teacher to guide the class in the use of Scripture to develop each major point. Telling the class each major point means they don't have to think it through for themselves and so retention of that point will suffer. Asking the students to find the point on their own may frustrate those who have not grown in their ability to do so. Questioning allows the teacher to avoid both of those negatives. With good

questioning, the teacher can guide the class to the words in the passage which are the key to the development of the point. Then by good questioning, he can also guide the class to the proper understanding of those words and the proper use of those words in dealing with the subject at hand.

When one considers these strengths and weaknesses of questioning, it is obvious that its only proper use is to develop the major points of the lesson. You don't want to waste time asking questions on the material that is background in the lesson. You don't want to ask too many questions in a lesson, otherwise the class will be exhausted mentally. The only thing you really want the students to think about and remember are the major points of the lesson.

Although this is the only use for questioning, it is obvious that good questioning will either make or break a lesson simply because you are dealing with the major points of the lesson. At the same time, it is equally true that using telling effectively is also very important. Telling sets the stage for good questioning (background), enhances the result of questioning (illustration), and puts the major points developed by questioning into a logical relationship with each other (transition). (Cf. the bottom of page 1 and pages 2 and 3 of the accompanying pages.)

Good Questioning: Comparing and Evaluating

A number of times in the previous section, the expression "good questioning" was used. Questions that do not require any great amount of thinking are not really good questions. Good questions always present a "problem" for the class to solve. The problem may be a very simple or challenging one. Since the proper way to study God's Word is to let Scripture interpret Scripture, the two types of thinking that the "problem" should most often require of an adult Bible class are comparing and evaluating.

Questions that merely ask the class to repeat some words from a verse really require only the ability to read. Questions of this kind are necessary at the grade school level. Before the ability of a child to do logical thinking has fully developed, you have to be sure that everyone in the class is focused on the particular part of the passage you want them to think about. Otherwise some children may be looking at another part of the passage and be confused by the whole question and answer process. Also, asking a question that asks one person to repeat a key phrase or clause from a verse may be the only kind of question some children will be able to answer. Asking adults this kind of question often results in silence simply because the answer is so obvious that for most of the members of the class there is no challenge in giving the answer. But to save the pastor the embarrassment of continuing silence, someone will repeat (read) the words the pastor asked about.

Comparing questions require the members of the class to take two parts of a verse (or part of one verse and part of another verse) and use them to answer the question. The "problem" placed before the class by a comparing question might be to show how one part of a verse explains the other part, or says something more than the other part, or contrasts with the other part, etc. The class may need a little bit of time to think about the "problem" before being ready to answer, so the teacher may need to allow a moment of silence (which at first may seem unnatural). Or the teacher may need to repeat the question so everyone has the "problem" straight in their mind. If the class struggles unsuccessfully to solve the "problem", the teacher—after a couple wrong or incomplete answers—may need to make the "problem" simpler to solve by rephrasing the question or by highlighting a key to the answer. When first faced with such a "problem", people who have never been challenged to do some thinking may be a bit frustrated.

But with a bit of persistence and a lot of patient coaching, the class members will grow in their ability to solve such “problems”. In the process they will not only retain more from each class but also take a step forward in their ability to read the Scripture on their own with understanding.

Evaluating questions require the class to use the words from a verse to explain:

- Why a summary of the verse or part of a verse is correct or incomplete or wrong;
or
- Why a statement about the meaning of a verse or part of a verse is accurate or not;
or
- Why a contemporary application of the verse is proper or not; etc.

As was the case with comparing questions, you need to give the class a little time to think about the “problem” before expecting an answer, or some additional help may have to be given to assist the class in solving the “problem”. At first a class that has not been used to doing this kind of thinking may struggle with it. But as they grow in their ability to solve “problems” like this, their retention of what was taught will increase and they will take a big step forward in their ability to apply Scripture in evaluating things they meet daily in contemporary life.

Let’s look at two series of questions used in connection with 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. One set uses questions that require the class to read a phrase or clause from each of the verses. The other set uses comparing and evaluating questions. The latter are the better type to use in developing the major points of a lesson. Normally, this is not the way a person would develop a Bible class lesson-with questions on every verse. The example is given only to illustrate the kind of questions best suited to developing the major points of the lesson from the key verses of the lesson. [Cf. Next page]

<p>V1. What does Paul want the Corinthians to know about the Macedonians?</p> <p>V2. What two difficulties were the Macedonians facing?</p> <p>V3. How much did they give?</p> <p>V4. What plea did they address to Paul?</p> <p>V5. What two things did they do that Paul had not really expected?</p> <p>V6. What did Paul send Titus to do?</p> <p>V7. What does Paul urge the Corinthians to excel in?</p> <p>V8. How does Paul say he wants to test their sincerity?</p> <p>V9. What happened as a result of Jesus' becoming poor?</p>	<p>And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.</p> <p>² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.</p> <p>³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,</p> <p>⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.</p> <p>⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.</p> <p>⁶ So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.</p> <p>⁷ But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.</p> <p>⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.</p> <p>⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.</p>	<p>V1. The Greek construction indicates that v.2 spells out what the grace was that God gave the Macedonians. Explain.</p> <p>V2. How does extreme poverty contribute to rich generosity?</p> <p>V3. Evaluate this statement: The Macedonian example is what God expects of all Christians. (Compare also v. 12)</p> <p>V4. Evaluate. The reason they had to 'plead' with Paul was because he tried to discourage them from giving since they were in extreme poverty themselves.</p> <p>V. 5 Agree or disagree? Paul's statement that "they gave themselves first to the Lord" was an indirect criticism of the Corinthians.</p> <p>V.6 The fact that Titus had earlier made a beginning was the reason Paul now sent him to help them complete the offering.</p> <p>V. 7 Evaluate: In view of all the problems Paul had to address in 1 Cor., it is hard to see how he could say they 'excelled' in everything.</p> <p>V8. Agree or disagree? A good way to test the giving of all WELS congregations would be to compare their giving with one special congregation.</p> <p>V.9 Compare use of the word "rich" and "poor" in this verse. Then explain what is meant by these words in this verse.</p>
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A few observations about these two sets of questions:

- Unless Bible class teachers consciously plan the use of comparing and evaluating questions, they often lapse into asking mostly questions that ask the class to do nothing more than to read.
- One should not use all comparing and evaluating questions to begin with if they have not been used frequently in previous Bible classes. Perhaps a 50/50 mix of questions on the left and those on the right would be the way to gradually move toward using mostly comparing and evaluating questions.
- Some of the evaluating questions used require the class to recall some facts about Paul and the Corinthians that are not found in these nine verses. Such questions (e.g. those for verses 6 and 7) should be preceded by a question which asks someone in the class to recall the necessary background facts. If no one can do that, the teacher will have to supply the necessary facts.

Several Related Considerations

It is important to use comparing and evaluating questions that challenge a class without frustrating them. Comparing and evaluating questions can range from those that are fairly simple to answer to those that challenge even a very knowledgeable person. A rule of thumb is that a class should be able to answer 90% of the questions that are asked. If they can solve only 50% of the “problems” that are placed in front of them, they will soon give up answering questions altogether because they become discouraged when many of the answers they give are wrong. If this happens the teacher will need to ask simpler comparing and evaluating questions until the class grows in their ability to do “problem-solving.” On the other hand, if the class is able to answer the comparing and evaluating questions you ask them without much thinking, it is time to make the “problems” you give them more challenging.

Is it good to change the type of questions one uses from time to time? No, for several reasons. There aren't that many types of questions that give people “problems” to solve. Also, as one changes the content of the Bible material among the six types of content, there will also be a considerable change in the content of the questions even though they continue to be comparing and evaluating questions for the most part.

Should the method used in Bible class (cf. One-third lecture, one-third questioning, one-third discussion) change from course to course in order to introduce some variety? No, for several reasons. Changing the method constantly makes the preparation time needed by the teacher greater than if the same basic method is used from course to course. Variety can be achieved by changing the content, the length of each course, the use of video or filmstrips in some courses, etc. One of the problems returning vicars cite with synod-produced material is the constantly changing methodology that threw them for a loop at times because either they or the class had to make constant adjustments in the teaching/learning process. Also, if the three basic methods are not used in the ways that take advantage of their strengths and avoid their weaknesses, it takes away from the effectiveness of the lesson. This is true because the strengths and weaknesses of lecture and questioning are numerous, as we noted earlier, and this in fact places severe limits on how each can be used effectively.

Summary: A Basic Way to Develop a Bible Lesson Using Telling and Questioning

Now it's time to pull everything that has been said into a summary that does two things: 1) Demonstrates how the basic principles of good methodology can be incorporated into a lesson; and 2) Indicates how this can be done in a way that does not require an inordinate amount of time to prepare such a lesson. Here's one suggestion:

1. Choose two or three verses that will be the major points of the lesson.
2. If possible, develop a theme or aim (in the form of a question) for the lesson.
3. Plan how the background verses in each part of the lesson will be covered by telling.
4. Plan a couple comparing or evaluating questions on each of the key verses to develop each major point of the lesson.
5. Plan an illustration in the form of telling as a climax to #4.

Lecture Four

In lecture one we noted that *The Shepherd Under Christ* says that one of the objectives of Bible class that sets it apart from the worship service is "to provide opportunity for questions and discussion, which cannot well be included in the Sunday worship." The more informal setting of the Bible class allows for give and take between the teacher and the class and also between the class members as well. It is this give and take that makes the group another important issue in adult education. How the teacher interacts with the whole group and each individual member of the group, how the members of the group interact with each other, how the size of the group impacts on this interaction, how the make-up of the group effects the interaction - these and few other related matters will be the center of our attention today.

Discussion "Problems"

Lecture is all teacher-talk. If you would chart each sentence spoken in the class, there would be a continuous succession of T's (TTTTTTTT etc). Questioning changes the chart. Basically each sentence changes off between the teacher and one of the students (TSTSTSTS etc). Questioning is an interaction between the teacher and the person who answers the question. The class is involved only in the sense that anyone of them could have answered the question. But only one of them answers, and that person directs the answer to the teacher, not to the other class members. The class again participates only in the sense that they hear the answer.

Discussion is different. That is, *true* discussion is different. Sometimes a teacher might say, "Next time we will discuss Matthew chapter 3", even though what he intends to do is lecture on Matthew 3 or to talk about the chapter along with asking a few questions. Charting a class in which true discussion takes place would look like this: TSSS TSSS TSSS etc. In true discussion, the teacher poses a "problem" which is complex enough that it can't be answered with one sentence by one of the class members. A statement that is ambiguous (i.e. if you understand it one way you could agree with it, but if you understand it another way you would have to disagree with it), a situation from everyday life in which a Christian thinks or speaks or acts in a way that is partly God-pleasing and partly not, a list of things from which the class has to choose those that meet a certain qualification and why-these are the kinds of problems that lead to discussion. The teacher places the problem before the class and then remains silent until at least

three or four class members have had a chance to react. In this way the members of the group are allowed in a limited way to react with one another.

Before exploring this technique in a little more depth, perhaps it would help to give a couple examples of each of the kinds of discussion problems mentioned above.

1. An ambiguous statement:

In a study of Acts 3 focusing on “Jesus the Healer”, after questioning on Peter’s words that the lame man was healed by his faith in Jesus’ name, the class could be asked why we could both agree and disagree with this statement depending on how it is understood: Jesus will also heal anyone in our day who has faith in him like the lame man did.

N.B. This kind of discussion leads people to realize that one has to be very careful in summarizing a biblical truth to make sure that it says exactly what God says. It also teaches people to evaluate statements made by other religions about what the Bible says.

2. A situation from a Christian’s life:

In a study of 2 Thessalonians focusing on “The Three Enemies of Our Faith”, after completing the questions in the section dealing with the Antichrist, the class could be asked to evaluate this situation: at work, John spends a lot of time with Paul who is a Roman Catholic. Paul likes to talk religion, but John prefers not to do this because he doesn’t know Lutheran doctrine enough to be able to argue with Paul. So he’s afraid that his faith may be weakened if he talks religion with Paul all the time.

3. A list requiring the class to choose and then defend their choice(s):

In a study of Romans 3 focusing on “Three Key Truths of Our Christian Faith”, after completing the questions on the section dealing with Christ’s righteousness becoming ours by faith, the class would be asked to choose which of these statements is (are) wrong and why: 1) I am not righteous in God’s sight until I come to faith; 2) God declared me righteous when Christ died and by faith that gift becomes my own; 3) Faith is an act of mine that pleases God and so God declares me righteous.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Discussion

In using real discussion, one has to be acutely aware not only of its strengths but also of its great weaknesses. The strengths of discussion are:

1. Its structure (i.e. TSS TSS TSS) gets the class more active in the learning process than any other method. Since understanding and retention are greatly enhanced by the class being active, the benefits of discussion can be great.
2. It gets members of the class speaking to each other, rather than just to the teacher. As a result, as members of the class begin to grow comfortable with this method, they will naturally begin to explain things to one another, and also encourage, comfort, admonish, and strengthen one another (cf. Goal 6). And as they grow comfortable

with talking about God with one another, they will also become more comfortable with talking about God to those who are not members of the congregation (cf. Goal 7).

3. It demands exactness on the part of each member of the class who speaks. Answers to questions can often be given with a word or two or an incomplete sentence. Discussion leads the class to speak in full sentences because in speaking to the other class members they will want to make a point, and they will want to make their point in a way that is exact as they are able.
4. It gives the pastor greater insight into the understanding the class has of the major point he is aiming at getting across to the class. When the people speak in sentences to one another, he will be able to tell better than he could be asking questions (TSTSTS) how well the class has understood.

The weaknesses of discussion are:

1. It is very time consuming. Even with skillful guidance on the part of the teacher, it will take a class longer to arrive at the goal planned by the teacher than if the teacher has used direct questioning (i.e. TSTSTS).
2. It may very easily get off track and so lack progression. Because the teacher allows three or four people to speak before he intervenes again, the class may have veered off on a tangent by the time the teacher enters the discussion again.
3. It may easily become argumentative instead of being cooperative. One member of the class may see this as an opportunity to put another member of the class down by showing how foolish that person's statement was. Or one member of the class who has made a faulty statement may be inclined to defend that statement to the end rather than admit he might have been mistaken in what he said.
4. It will be nothing but shared ignorance or (what is even worse in a discussion of religious subjects) a sharing of human opinion if the class does not keep what God's Word says front and center in the whole discussion.

In order to avoid the great weaknesses of discussion and capitalize on its great strengths, the teacher will use discussion only in the application of each major point. Only when the scriptural foundation for a discussion has been laid, will he open the point up for the class to talk about as a group. Yes, one or more persons in the class may still be unclear and may express themselves in a way that is not scripturally correct. But that is the very point of discussion, to uncover any unclarity and to straighten them out. Hopefully this will be done by the other class members, but if not, then by the teacher.

Guiding Discussion to a Desired Goal

In addition to limiting real discussion to applications, the teacher of an adult Bible class will want to use what might be called a "controlled" discussion instead of a "free-for-all" discussion. Two things are necessary to accomplish this:

1. The discussion starter (cf. the three examples given at the bottom of the previous page) must deal with the major point just developed from Scripture. If it goes off on a tangent from that major point, it suggests to the class that we are not sticking to the

- lesson any more. Also, it might be that the class does not have the necessary scriptural background to handle that tangent, and the discussion might degenerate into human opinion or argumentation rather than using the verses just studied to guide the whole discussion.
2. The teacher needs to have a definite plan how to guide the discussion to the desired goal.

Some Typical Concerns About Using Discussion

Two concerns that teachers often have about using discussion are these: What if I can't write good discussion starters? and, What if I try to discussion technique and it bombs? Both are valid concerns, but the only way to overcome them is go ahead and do both.

Few people are able to write good discussion starters to begin with, but the more they do it the easier it becomes for them to develop the kind of discussion starter that works best with their own particular group. Another suggestion is to begin using the discussion starters with your catechism class. In the catechism handbook that is a companion to the blue catechism you'll find a number of suggested discussion starters for every part of the catechism. Using discussion starters written by someone else with a class of children might be a good way of gaining some experience before you begin to write your own discussion starters for an adult Bible class.

And yes, you are liable to bomb a number of times when you first begin to use the discussion technique. In spite of having a good discussion starter and in spite of planning how to guide the discussion to the goal you desire, it may not go real smoothly. But like everything else, the times it bombs out on you will become less and less the more experience you gain in guiding a discussion. Few of us were good question makers or question users to begin with. But as we realized the benefits of using questions in our teaching (better understanding and better retention on the part of the class) we continued to do it until we became comfortable with it and could do it well.

But is the trouble of learning to use discussion effectively worth the trouble one has to go through to get to that same point? Is the extra time it takes to plan a discussion and the experience of having it fail on occasion to begin with worth the effort? I guess it comes down to:

- how important one thinks it is to get the class involved in Bible class so that they understand and retain more;
- how important one thinks it is to accomplish the sixth and seventh goals of Bible class (Christians growing in their ability to talk to one another and to those who are not Christians about their Lord); and
- how important one thinks it is to find out whether people really understand and can apply the major points you teach in Bible class.

One other concern is, of course, whether the class members will like using discussion and whether they will be able to do it well enough to make use of its great strengths. The teacher will not be the only one to be a bit on edge when he first tries discussion; the class will also be hesitant to do something new and different. But as is the case with the teacher, the only way for the class to grow in its ability to do good discussion is by doing it.

One thing that the teacher can do to ease into discussion is to begin by using breakout groups. But breakout groups too can be a bust unless they are done right. There are four basic guides to using breakout groups successfully:

1. Three to five people per group.
2. One discussion leader per group.
3. Define roles.
4. Limit time (3-4 minutes).

If breakout groups are used well, they will lead members of a class to begin discussing things with two or three other fellow Christians. When people are comfortable doing this, it will be easier for them to discuss things in the presence of the whole group. Another thought about breakout groups: although they can serve a good purpose, they can be overused. If they are used judiciously to highlight a key point in various Bible classes, people will begin to enjoy them and also welcome their use by the teacher. The size of the group will also have some bearing on how often one uses breakout groups-the larger the group, the more often they should be used.

The Size of the Group

Does the size of the group limit the use of discussion? Not really. It may be harder to get people to react to a discussion starter in a group of 20 people or more. This is true simply because it is less likely that the people in a larger group will know each other as well as those in a class of a dozen people. Thus someone who is somewhat timid by nature will be less willing to say something that might not be absolutely correct in the larger group. The larger the group, therefore, the more necessary it will be to use breakout groups to build a group rapport that leads people to be more willing to react to discussion starters.

Is it better to have a couple smaller groups than one large group of 20 or more for Bible class? The answer to that question will vary with several factors such as the setting in which the Bible class is held and the feeling individual people have toward group size. Some people enjoy the “safety” there is in the number of people in a large group. There is a lot less “pressure” to answer questions asked by the teacher or to give a reaction to a discussion starter in a large group because there are lots of other people present to do those things. In a smaller group, where most of the people talk from time to time, you feel uncomfortable if you sit and say nothing. Other people who have an outgoing nature will prefer the small group just because they can be more involved.

The setting can also be a factor to consider when dealing with group size. If Bible class is of necessity conducted with the people sitting in the church pews, it is far more difficult to get a large group of people to answer questions or to react to a discussion starter. Those in front have no way of knowing how the people in back are reacting to what they say and may feel a bit intimidated by that fact. Those in back may not be able to hear what the people in front are saying if all the people are sitting on one side of the church strung out from the front to the back. Although it is not always possible, a much better setting for a large group is in the church basement or the parish hall where chairs can be arranged in a semicircle or around some tables placed in a U formation. Then they can see each other and hear each other better even though the group may be fairly large.

Home Bible Study Groups

If small, active, informal groups are preferred by some people, isn't the best setting for them a group of a dozen or so members meeting in one of the homes? It all depends on why and how such a group is formed.

One can point to the reason why such groups have been formed on occasion in the past history of the church and find cause for concern. We probably think first of such groups coming into being in the late 1600's in connection with pietism. Spener promoted them as a vehicle by which pious laypeople could be a leaven for good in reforming the "dead orthodoxy" of a congregation and its pastor. More recently, in the 1960's and 70's, such parachurch groups and InterVarsity, Campus Crusade, Navigators and others promoted small group Bible study outside the congregational setting-often in reaction to the "institutional church structure".

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, the small group approach took a decided turn when men such as Lyman Coleman (of Serendipity fame) conducted workshops across the US and produced materials to promote small group Bible study. His goal was to make home study groups an integral part of a congregation's educational program instead of something outside of and perhaps even a rival to that program. The Church Growth Institute of Fuller Seminary and the American Institute of Church Growth have added another twist to the whole matter of small groups. They see these groups as a primary means of lay evangelism-Christians conducting Bible study in their homes to which they invite unchurched friends and neighbors.

Has the reason for having home Bible study in small groups shifted from the pietists' or parachurch groups' goal of creating cells of people who will reform the church? Are small groups becoming more and more a part of a congregation's work of nurture and outreach? If so, should that change influence how we react to them? Although this change may satisfy the concern of why they are formed, don't we also need to address the how?

Why a home Bible study group is formed will also greatly influence the how. If the group is formed for some reactionary reason (don't like the pastor, don't like the people in the Bible class, don't think the WELS fellowship practice is right, don't think women are being given enough influence in the church, don't think our church is active enough, don't think our members are really living their faith, etc) then the small group most likely will not want to have any guidance from the pastor or the elected lay leaders of the church. The group will want to set its own agenda, choose its own materials, and operate as a special church within the church. Such a why and how clearly does not follow Paul's admonition and encouragement given in Eph. 4:2, 3, 16, "Be humble and gentle in every way, and be patient-putting up with each other in a loving manner. Do your best, through the peace that ties you together, to maintain the unity that Scripture gives...He makes the whole body fit together and unites it through the support of every joint. As each and every part does its job, He makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (NET)

On the other hand, if the home Bible study group is formed as a part of the congregation's nurturing program and its goals are the same as those of the congregation, the how will be different. The group will welcome the guidance of the pastor and church council or board of education. It will welcome materials supplied by the congregation and the training of the group leader or coordinator for each meeting by the pastor. In short, its why and how will both be following the words of Paul to the Ephesians.

An Additional Rationale for Contemporary Home Bible Study Groups

Why have such small groups meeting in the home become so popular that Lyman Coleman has continued for more than ten years to conduct workshops all over the US attended by representatives from scores of congregations at every workshop? Why have some WELS congregations made home Bible study groups a part of their nurture program? It is only the "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" reaction, something like the Pioneers organization which began as

a way of countering the tremendous attraction that Scouting had in the 1950's and 1960's? Or is there something more involved?

My acquaintance with this current phenomenon is somewhat limited. I attended one of the workshops held by Lyman Coleman. I have read about a dozen books in the last ten years coming from evangelical sources that deal with small groups either wholly or in part. I've also inquired about why a number of WELS congregations have begun having small groups and how they have structured them. There is one common thread that seems to run through all the contemporary home Bible study groups. These groups started for fellowship purposes as well as for spiritual nurture.

Today's society often isolates families and individuals. Young people, middle-aged people, and retired people, either as individuals or families, leave the community where their children, parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles live and move to places far from "home". The sense of community that came from living close to relatives is not that common any more. Many people work at jobs that are very impersonal-you go to work for eight hours, have little to do with the other employees other than exchanging a few pleasantries during a break, and then go home. The average person changes jobs every 5 to 10 years which often means moving to a new place to live and learning to know a whole new group of people at the work place. The sense of community that existed when people worked together over long periods of time for the same company is not that common any more. As a result of people changing jobs and moving, many neighborhoods have a constant turnover of people. The sense of community that came from having the same neighbors for decades is not that common anymore. A concern for security often makes people living in adjacent apartments total strangers to each other. When people have enough income to buy a good home, they prefer something in the suburbs, preferably not close to anyone else, where they can have some privacy. In city and suburban churches, people seldom stop after church to chat with one another. When some group in the congregation attempts to organize a social gathering only a handful show up (often those people who already know each other fairly well since they have been members for a time). Even in rural congregations where the social activities of the people once centered in church fellowship activities (mission festival and annual meeting dinners, ladies aid and men's club meetings, youth group ice cream socials) the sense of community is not what it was. People who lose a spouse by death or by divorce are especially lonely and insecure if they have no close friends or relatives nearby.

Call it a support group, call it having a sense of community, call it friendship, call it being able to spend a little time with others who care a little bit about you-in any case small groups of Christians gathered for the purpose of studying God's Word together supply the fellowship which a growing number of people hunger for, living as they do in an increasingly impersonal and pagan society. This is a rationale given by many, if not most, of the congregations in our day (non WELS and WELS) that are organizing home Bible study groups as a part of their adult education program.

How Are Home Bible Study Groups Organized to Avoid Potential Problems?

There are a number of concerns that have been voiced about having such groups in a congregation. Though groups may have been started originally for fellowship and Bible study, how do you avoid having the group become a clique which begins to find fault with things in the congregation and adopts its own agenda for "changing things"? The literature I have seen suggests a number of ways this problem can be headed off: 1) The members of the church council serve as the leaders for those groups that are organized; 2) The church council chooses

the leader of each new group and indicates that one of his responsibilities is to keep the group from gossiping and fault-finding sessions; 3) The groups meet for one year and then a certain number of people from each group rotate to the next group; 4) The pastor and elders of the congregation visit the groups regularly on a rotating basis and as part of each meeting where a pastor or elder is present, some facet of the congregation's or the synod's work forms part of the agenda for that meeting.

How do you keep the group from going off the deep end theologically if the pastor is not there? The suggestions that are given to avoid this problem all point to using inductive rather than deductive methodology (i.e. good material that presents biblical truth in a fairly comprehensive form rather than material that requires an "expert" to lead the class in the development of Biblical truth): 1) The study material to be used by the group is provided by the pastor, the pastor meets with the leaders and prepares them to use the material, and any questions that the group raises which go beyond the material are discussed with the pastor at the next leader's meeting; 2) The study material is chosen by the group from courses produced by Northwestern Publishing House that have a teacher's manual for the leader to use in guiding the class as they work through a lesson; 3) The Bible study consists in working through one of the volumes of the People's Bible (using the study guide if one has been produced for that volume); 4) The pastor gives the group the text for the sermon on the Sunday that follows the group meeting, some guide questions and/or parallel passages for the people to discuss at the meeting, and then they hear the pastor's sermon on that Bible text the following Sunday; 5) The groups are formed as monthly breakout groups from the pastor's weekly Bible class and the material to be studied in the small groups is something that they do in preparation for the next Bible class.

What if some people prefer not to be part of a small group? The answer usually given is that this should only be one part of the congregation's nurture program. Then nobody should feel any more "pressure" to attend a small group than they do to attend the women's guild, fellowship meals, the pastor's weekly Bible class, etc. People in each group will naturally extend friendly invitations to others to join them, (especially if the groups are organized on an area basis, or if new members join the congregation, etc.) but they need to be warned not to use any pressure in the form of guilt or put downs to get someone to accept the invitation.

What if a group wants to invite someone who is not a member of the congregation to join their group? A number of things would have to be true in order for this not to become a problem: 1) The group should be one that is quite well established in its pattern of study of good material so that the non-member does not divert them to some less desirable pattern or material; 2) The non-member would have to be one who is not a member of some other church so that this group is not viewed either by that person or a member of the group as an interdenominational study group; 3) The group needs to have at least a couple Christians who are mature in their knowledge of Scripture and basic Christian doctrine so that a clear law/gospel witness can be given this person at all times. If these three conditions are present, there shouldn't be any more danger in the group witnessing to this person in its Bible study than there is when an individual Christian discusses his/her faith with a non-Christian on a one-to-one basis.

These are some of the most common concerns raised with small groups. There may be others that you might want to raise in the discussion which follows. Taking everything said so far into consideration, are home Bible study groups something that we should all feel duty bound to institute as part of our congregation's educational program? No, not at all. As we will note in the final lecture in this series at our next meeting, each congregation needs to assess its own program of education and plan accordingly. Home Bible study groups might just as easily be a negative in

the adult education program as the are a positive for others. Are there some conditions where it might be good to consider home Bible study groups? Yes, if any one or more of these conditions are present: 1) There is a group of people in the congregation who have asked that this approach to adult education might be considered; 2) If the why and how concerns (cf. above) are dealt with in a way that makes the program one that supports rather than undermines congregational unity and growth in spiritual maturity; 3) If members of the congregation are being drawn into interdenominational small groups and the only way to counter this problem is to start congregational home Bible study groups; 4) If there are enough leaders to guide the small groups in a responsible way; 5) If this is one way to multiply the number of people in the congregation doing more Bible study; 6) If there is a real need for a growing number of members in the congregation who are isolated or lonely to have an opportunity for fellowship and spiritual growth in the company of a small group of fellow Christians.

Conclusion

As Professors Schuetze and Habeck noted several decades ago in *The Shepherd Under Christ*, Bible class does present some opportunities and challenges that differ greatly from the corporate worship services of the congregation. As we have seen in the four lectures so far, the opportunities and challenges involved in conducting Bible classes are as diverse as the goals, the content, the methods, and the size and setting of the group(s). How all of these can be used in a positive way to possibly involve more and more people in regular Bible study will be the focus of lecture five.

(Lecture 5. Growth)

“Like newborn babies, thirst for the pure milk of the word. Do this so that it makes you grow and leads to your salvation (NET).” These words from 1 Peter 2 speak to Christians of all ages. The people to whom Peter was speaking faced a “painful trial” (4:12) including abuse heaped on them for not following the lifestyle of the people around them and perhaps also imprisonment and death. Peter knew that the only way they would be able to withstand this onslaught would be if they kept growing in faith by continually drinking the pure milk of the word.

We Christians today also face a terrible onslaught on our faith. We live in a time of unparalleled prosperity. Economic prosperity surrounding us can become a deathtrap for our faith no matter whether we have a high, middle, or low income. Instead of being satisfied with having food and clothing, the wealth around us can also begin to fill our hearts with the love of money. In 1 Timothy 6:10 Paul says “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” The truth of these words is all too evident to us as we look not only at what is happening around us but also as we examine our own hearts and minds.

We live in a time of social and moral decay. What Peter said about Lot is also true of us, “...a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.)” (2 Pe. 2:7, 8) We also see all around us the kind of society described by Peter’s words in the following verses: those who follow the corrupt desires of their sinful natures and despise authority, they blaspheme in matters they do not understand, their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight, their eyes are full of adultery, they are experts in greed, they promise people freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity (2 Pe 2 passim). We also see people like

those Paul describes in Romans 1: people whose sexual depravity has sunk to the indecent acts of homosexuality and lesbianism, who are “filled with every degree of wickedness...invent ways of doing evil...not only continue to do those things but also approve those who practice them.”

In Romans 16 Paul also warns Christians of all time to watch out for and keep away from those who cause divisions “contrary to the teaching you have learned.” It seems there are more and more such false teachers to watch out for and keep away from than ever before.

But Peter and Paul, I’m sure, never in their wildest dreams imagined a day when Christians would have the advertisers’ stimulation of the desire for material things, the moral filth of the world, and the yeast of false doctrine brought right into their homes day after day, and often hour after hour, in living color and digital sound. But that is the kind of world in which we Christians live today. Certainly it is more important today than it ever was for Christians to follow Peter’s words of encouragement, “Like newborn babies, thirst for the pure milk of the word. Do this so that it makes you grow and leads to your salvation.”

We know that the spiritual life of our people will be exactly proportionate to the amount of time they spend in the Word. We know that children are the church of tomorrow, but we know that there won’t even be a church of tomorrow if the parents of today are neglecting the Word. What can be done in the adult education program of our congregations to get more people to be newborn babes thirsting for the pure milk of the Word?

This is an attitude that can only be brought about by the Holy Spirit through the Word. There are basically three different ways we have of bringing our people into contact with the Word so that the Holy Spirit can do his work: the corporate worship services, family and personal Bible study in the home, and Bible classes of various kinds as part of a congregational adult education program. Though the third is the primary focus of our attention in this series of lectures, perhaps a brief work about the first two is in place. If people are not worshipping regularly or doing some kind of family or personal Bible study, there is not much likelihood that they will attend any kind of Bible class either.

There is an old adage which suggests that a house-going pastor makes a church-going congregation. There is good reason to believe that there is still a lot of truth in this adage because it has a biblical precedent. In Acts 5:42 we are told that the apostles taught and proclaimed the good news “day by day, in the temple courts and from house to house.” Paul, in reflecting on how he conducted his ministry at Thessalonica, speaks of the personal touch that was characteristic of his work as their pastor in these words, “You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children.”

Now if a church-going people are more likely to be home-devotion-people and Bible-class-attending people (as was suggested two paragraphs ago), then a house-going pastor is one of the basic steps in getting people into the Word. That personal touch-the personal concern the shepherd shows for each of his sheep-is still a key to effective shepherding. We can develop all kinds of programs and committees to do the work of outreach and nurture that our Savior commissioned us to do, but if we forget the most effective “program”, something very basic is missing.

But then when people come to corporate worship, they must be fed the pure milk of the Word in a way that they truly “taste that the Lord is good” as Peter went on to say. I’ll never forget the words of a sainted pastor whom I helped on occasion during my senior year at Sem. He was a house-going pastor and his people’s attendance at Sunday services was exemplary. During that year he accepted a call to a much larger congregation, and at his farewell I said to him, “Well, now you are really going to be busy with all those homes to visit.” His answer,

words that have always stuck with me, was, “Yes, but I’m also going to have to work harder than ever in preparation for the Sunday service so that nobody ever says, ‘That service really wasn’t worth attending.’”

People who come to corporate worship and leave without getting a good drink of the milk of the Word and tasting that the Lord is good are not very likely to go home as newborn babes thirsting for more of the milk of the word. A well-planned service with scripture readings, hymns, and a sermon that center in a single, important truth from God’s Word clearly communicated in an attractive bulletin and highlighted by the pastor’s comments at various points in the service; a sermon that contains several well-polished nuggets of gold that come from the pastor’s careful mining of the text; a liturgy that pastor and people speak from the heart and not by rote; prayers that speak the requests and thanks of those assembled-these are the elements of a corporate worship service that send people on their way with the words of the hymnwriter on their minds if not on their lips: From your house when I return, may my heart within me burn. And at evening let me say, “I have walked with God today.”

The connection of the foregoing to adult education is this: a good place to begin building better Bible class attendance is with the corporate worship service of the congregation. In addition, people who are also doing family and/or personal Bible study at home, are more likely to be participants in the congregation’s program of adult education because use of the Word leads to a thirst for more of the Word. One can’t demand that people have home devotions, but constant encouragements are in place. Suggested Bible readings for each day of the week printed in the Sunday bulletin along with a question or two as a study guide for each reading, sending suggested Bible readings along with the Sunday school children for the parents to read to their children, providing Meditations or Wellspring booklets for members or distributing subscription blanks for Meditations and Wellspring a couple times every year with the encouragement to members to subscribe, making home devotions a part of an annual every home stewardship visitation (encouraging home devotions by citing the spiritual benefits of some time spent each day in God’s Word, teaching people how to do family or personal Bible study), giving people some written suggestions for Bible reading as a follow-up to the weekly Bible class, the pastor’s personal encouragement in his home visits-these are some ways of holding home Bible study constantly before our people so that they can’t miss the message that this too is important for their spiritual growth.

But our major focus today is growth in the program of adult education. In a one-week summer quarter workshop on adult education about a half-dozen years ago, the 20 pastors in attendance were asked to identify what they thought was the biggest roadblock to their attempts to get more people to attend Bible class. Fourteen of the responses cited tradition as the culprit. The basic attitude these pastors heard expressed, though not in these exact words, went something like, “My parents and grandparents never went to Bible class and they were pretty good Christians, so why should I go?” or “We never had Bible class in this congregation before, why do we need it now?” Tradition in a goodly number of WELS congregations, it seems, keeps people from seeing any great need for Bible class attendance. And this in spite of the fact that the economic, moral, and spiritual conditions in which Christians live today has changed drastically from only a generation ago-as was noted at the outset of this lecture today.

If tradition in a congregation is a major factor in blinding people to the need for more Bible study in our day, then working at removing the blinder of tradition so they see the need will be high on our list of things to do. Not unlike what was noted earlier in regard to family or personal Bible study at home, encouragements which gently hold the need constantly before the

congregation are in place. The announcement of a new Bible class course in the bulletin (or a bulletin insert) could identify the spiritual need(s) that this course will address. The announcement might also invite those who see this need in their lives to be sure to attend. The personal encouragement of a pastor in his every home visits would be another opportunity to present the need. A different encouragement might be an every home stewardship visit that shows people the seven goals (cf. lecture one) of the weekly Bible class, explains to them each of the Bible classes that will be held over the next 9 to 12 months, and asks them to attend at least one of these courses. Attending at least one and maybe two courses a year would be a giant step forward for people who have been kept away by tradition. It is appropriate to remember that they need to learn to walk before they can ever be expected to run. Hopefully the Spirit can also use their exposure to another way of studying the Word to bring them closer to being babies who begin to thirst a little more for the pure milk of the Word.

Having a schedule that lays out what the Bible class will cover over the next 9 to 12 months is important not only for the pastor's planning but also in order to encourage people to attend. We'd like to have every member attend every Bible class, and some will do that. But some people will choose to attend only a few courses for numerous reasons: because it does not have a high priority in their weekly schedule, or because of family obligations, or because they are occasionally gone on trips, etc. For either group, those who attend every course and those who choose the courses they attend, having a schedule of what is coming helps sustain interest and so can help encourage attendance. In lecture three a planning chart which incorporates good sequencing was presented (cf. p. 2 of the accompanying material). Using a chart like this and constantly updating it allows a pastor every two months or so to hand out a new schedule for the next 9 to 12 months with a minimum of time spent on planning. Updating every two months also allows one to add or subtract courses regularly in response to class requests or subjects that come up that are best addressed right away rather than half a year later.

For a Bible class to sustain constant interest for most people, no course should be longer than four to six weeks. On occasion a course may have to run 7 to 8 weeks for some good reason, but even then one might take a good look at the possibility of making it two courses of 3 or 4 weeks each. This does not mean that you can't take a book of the Bible and spend 12 to 16 weeks on it. You probably noted in the sample tentative schedule that 15 weeks are devoted to the study of Romans, but never more than 5 consecutive weeks at a time. Why such short courses? Simply because variety is not only the spice of life, but also the spice of weekly Bible classes.

Doing something different every four to six weeks helps sustain interest. Some of those who attend Bible class regularly might prefer to have longer courses, but most likely they are going to be a minority of the "regulars". Even more important is the fact that those who do not attend regularly are more likely to commit themselves to come to a four to six week course than they are a 10 to 15 week course. The hope is that getting them to come to a couple four to six week courses in one year will increase to a couple more four to six week courses each succeeding year. If building Bible class attendance is one's goal, it's just good sense to do what encourages the non-regulars to come. Whether you have a week or two off between each course as is done in the sample tentative schedule would, however, depend on your regulars. If they are used to coming to Bible class every week and would miss it if there were no class from time to time, leaving gaps between courses would not be wise.

This might be the point to repeat three items mentioned in previous lectures that are important in encouraging attendance. Indicating those courses that are going to be basic rather

than challenging might be as important for some people to know as the content of the course. The content might attract their interest, but if they feel the course may be too tough for them to handle, they may not come. Offering electives from time to time might also help. Two courses might be offered at the same time: one a basic course that is repeated from time to time (Bible history or basic doctrine) and the other a challenging course; or one a repeat of a popular course offered earlier in the year and the other a new course. The third item is that in addition to keeping the courses short there should be a constant change of content from course to course. In the example tentative schedule you may have noted how it begins with a Bible book, goes to a topical course, to a church history course, to a Bible book, to doctrine, to current church work, to a Bible book, to a topical course. Changing the content adds even more spice to the change of courses every four to six weeks.

Quite a bit has been said in the previous lectures about using good methodology. There are two things that need to be mentioned about methodology in this final lecture. The first is the importance of concluding each of the two or three major points in a lesson with an application. If those who attend class are going to leave having tasted that the Lord is good, it is important that they see how each major point applies to their personal life and faith (cf. the chart on the top of page 3 of the accompanying material).

The other point about methodology is that each Bible class be a complete lesson. A Bible class that ends with the teacher saying, "Well, I think that's about as far as we'll go today", and begins the next time "Today we'll pick up where we left off last week", doesn't help stimulate interest. Neither does a Bible class that begins with the last third of one lesson and goes through the first third of another lesson, leaving the last two-thirds of that lesson to be completed in the next class or the next two classes. How can people be expected to be able to retain much of anything from a lesson that is broken into pieces over a two or three week period?

The teacher can set a clear course for a lesson by giving the class a handout that indicates what the lesson for the day is and what the two or three major points to be developed are. The teacher then needs to have a "methodist" schema in mind to complete that material in 45 to 50 minutes. If he does those two things, the people of the class will quickly realize that each Bible class is a unit, and they will work with the teacher to complete that unit in the assigned time. Continued progress toward a clear goal each lesson is almost always more important in teaching than allowing students to ask endless questions about something or to continue a discussion until every last detail has been covered.

It will take a little discipline on both the part of the teacher and the class to complete the full lesson each time. That is also why it is best to plan for 45 minutes if the time period for the class is 50 or 60 minutes. If you're done in 45 minutes, no one will complain. But if you often go five to ten minutes over the assigned time period, don't be too surprised if people start to drop out. It's a simple fact of life that it's better to have the people leave at times wanting more than to have them constantly wishing they'd gotten a little less.

How long should a Bible class be? As was just indicated, this too can have an effect on attendance. The length of a class will be something each teacher will have to answer for himself. I have learned that 45 minutes is about as long as I can expect a class to work with me even if I change from telling to questioning to discussion at regular intervals. I have also been a student in Bible classes fairly often during the 20 years I've been at the Sem, and I find that my attention in class wanes considerably after 45 minutes of Bible study. I suppose that could be a unique characteristic of mine, but in observing people around me I see pretty much the same thing happening. This is not to say that 45 minutes is the maximum. But if you go beyond that amount

of time, it might be good for you to try a 45 minute class and see what kind of attention you have compared to a 55 or 60 minute class. See if more people start coming because they know the class will be 45 minutes at most. Some pastors have classes that are 30 minutes or less just because in their situations they know they will get twice the people, especially for a Sunday morning Bible class which has to be held in the pews in the church following the worship service. More on this later.

Speaking of the pews, sometimes I wonder who designed many of the pews we have in our churches. Perhaps this too can be blamed on the Reformed preachers who like to emphasize the law and make people uncomfortable. The pews surely will do this physically if not spiritually. But seriously, I am really uncomfortable after sitting in pews for an hour for church and then another hour for Bible class. Personally, I would much rather drive back to church a second time each week for Bible class rather than have it on a Sunday morning. But again, I'm the kind of person who finds it hard to sit anytime more than half an hour at a time without getting up and moving around a little bit before sitting down again.

How many other people there are like this in your congregation might well be worth testing out sometime if you have only one Bible class a week on Sunday morning. Furthermore, having a second (and perhaps even a third) class which is a repeat of the Sunday Bible class might not be bad stewardship of your time and efforts. If you spend a half dozen hours or more each week preparing for Bible class, isn't it a good use of your time to spend an extra hour or two teaching what you prepared if that can double or triple the number of people you nurture with that lesson? Though it is not a major reason to have two classes a week, there are those young couples with little children who can't attend a Sunday Bible class unless a nursery is provided. With two classes a week, the wife/husband can stay for Bible class on Sunday and then the other spouse can come to the evening Bible class during the week. A little thing, but it may allow a few more people to attend Bible class each week and get them into the habit of attending Bible class early on in their marriage rather than getting into the habit of not attending Bible class.

A couple of other attractive things about having Bible class during the week instead of in the pews of church on Sunday (if that is the only way you can do it on Sunday) is that the class can sit at tables facing each other in the church basement or parish hall. This avoids the necessity of holding a Bible in one hand and a handout in the other (or more likely one on top of the other since it is hard to sit for an hour with both hands occupied.) This avoids the necessity of picking up your pencil from the pew and trying to find some place to put your handout so you can write something legible on it (if the teacher gives the class a handout with blanks to fill or words to highlight or a discussion question for them to jot down a number of thoughts raised in breakout groups). Instead you can place the Bible, the handout and the pencil on the table. You can write easily and legibly on the handout. And when you are in a breakout group, it is much easier to turn and discuss something with your partners. Little things it is true, but anything that helps make a class comfortable also contributes to interest and retention and so may also contribute to increased attendance.

A second attractive thing about such a Bible class is that you can also share some food and drink in connection with the class. People who share a meal with each other often break down whatever barriers there may have been between them (white and black skin, common laborer or farmer and professional person, young person and older person, timid and outgoing, etc). Sharing coffee or juice or soda pop and a few snacks either before, during, or after the Bible class is not sharing a meal, but it can help break down barriers and lead to an increase in the

rapport among class members. Using questioning and discussion techniques requires that members of the class have some of those barriers broken down. A little fellowship can go a long way toward making people less afraid of being looked on as ignorant or a fool if their answer to a question is not perfect or if a question they ask doesn't come out quite right. A simple, little thing, but it can also contribute in a way to better attendance.

The following are a number of ideas that have come to my attention of how pastors have tried to introduce Bible study to more people in a congregation where a long-standing tradition of not having weekly Bible classes makes it hard to get people to attend:

1. One pastor conducts a 25 to 30 minute Bible class about 10 minutes after the close of the Sunday service. I've attended there a number of times over the past few years. As the people file out after the service, the pastor greets them at the center aisle as they leave the pew. Those who are staying for Bible class walk to the front pews and are seated there instead of going to the rear of the church. As soon as the pastor has greeted the people in the last pew at the rear of the church, he returns to the sacristy to take off his gown and then comes right out to begin the Bible class. Half the people in this 100 year old congregation of about 250 communicants stay for this Bible class. The pastor told me he tried a number of things, and this short, weekly Bible class was the only thing that led to a class of more than a dozen people.
2. Another WELS pastor conducts a monthly Bible class in four homes that are strategically located in four different areas of the congregation. He has a class in one of the four areas each week during the month. He also has a weekly Bible class at church, but was unable to get a lot of people to come. A couple members volunteered to have the pastor hold classes in their homes to which they would invite others in their general area. The people who come to these Bible classes attend only one a month, but the pastor feels this is better than none. Some of the people who at first attended only this class once a month, now also come to the weekly Bible class for some courses from time to time.
3. Some pastors conduct a Friday night and Saturday retreat in which members share meals, fellowship and Bible study at a nearby resort or hotel. They have enough one-hour Bible study sessions (scattered throughout the retreat) to complete a four to six part Bible course on any one of the six types of Bible class content. In other cases pastors from four or five congregations conduct a joint retreat, and the people who attend them from their congregations have a choice of one or two Bible courses that they can attend during the retreat.
4. If a congregation has a camcorder, some of the Bible class courses can be taped. A six part course could be put on one tape, several copies could be made, and the tapes offered for people to watch at home. In this way elderly shut-ins can enjoy the Bible class in addition to a video or audio tape of the Sunday service. Husbands and wives with small children can take the Bible class together instead of attending separate Bible classes during the week. People who miss a class because they are gone one Sunday can pick up what they missed. People who would like to go through a class a second time to get even more out of it can do so. In short, some have found that the video tape is a way to get more people involved in Bible study. Won't the fact that videotapes of the Bible class are provided lead many people to stay home from Bible class and watch it at home on their VCR? A few people might be inclined to do this,

- but the opposite is more likely. Watching a class on videotape is never as satisfactory as being there in person, so people who begin with videotapes more likely are going to be drawn into the regular class rather than continuing to watch it at home. If a Bible class is videotaped, there are a number of things that should be done: a) There should be a person running the camcorder rather than just setting the camera in the back of the room and letting it run; b) Because video is a small screen, the person running the camera should use a lot of closeups moving out to wider views of the class on occasion; c) A microphone should be set up close to the pastor to provide better sound than the mike on the camcorder will provide; d) The pastor may decide that he does not want certain discussion questions recorded on tape because he might feel that it will keep some people from being willing to speak if they know that what they say will be recorded for others to watch. The person running the camera can shut the camera off for those discussions or when the class is working in breakout groups.
5. Some pastors have taken advantage of the fact that people like to get together for breakfast or lunch to conduct half-hour Bible studies with them once a week. They meet at a local restaurant that has a small room for a dozen or more people to have some privacy.
 6. Ladies' and men's groups that meet once a month provide pastors with an opportunity to conduct a half-hour Bible study each month. Rather than have something different every month, a couple courses a year on any of the six types of Bible content can be taken with the people who attend these fellowship/service groups in the congregation.
 7. Family vacation Bible schools conducted for five evenings in one week is another way that parents of the VBS children (and other members also) can be introduced to a five part Bible course. The adult VBS classes can either study a course that parallels what the children are taking in their classes, or any one of the six types of Bible content that the pastor feels would be most profitable for the adults.

More could be said, I suppose, about using visuals (the Bible text and diagrams or maps on the overhead, portions of the Bible available on video, etc) or about giving suggested home activities as a follow-up to a Bible class (Bible reading, a copy of the NPH course you are using for the people to read at home, a worksheet with matching and/or fill-in-the-blank exercises, or true-false statements, etc), but time does not permit.

Hopefully, a few of these thoughts shared in these lectures about goals, content, method, groups, and growth in adult education have given you some ideas to use in your ministry as you deal with the challenges and the God-given opportunities you have to nurture your members. I pray that God may bless the few hours we have spent together these past weeks to that end.