

KEEPING IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT:
HIS FRUIT IN THE LIFE AND CLASSROOM OF A CHRISTIAN
TEACHER

by

Noah J. Herrmann

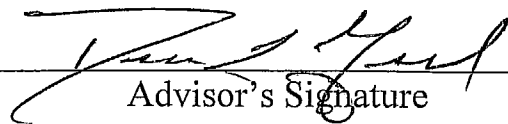
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This is a brief paper establishing the purpose and reasoning for creating a series of devotions for a high school faculty. In it are discussed the benefits of Scriptural study both in the personal life of the believer and then especially in the life of a teacher, both individually and as part of a faculty. At the end there is a review of several books and Bible studies which are available as devotional material intended for teachers. Following the paper, a series of devotions is attached which was produced in light of a need felt by this writer to produce a tool specifically aimed at a high school faculty. The series takes its basis from Paul's letter to the Galatians. In perhaps one of the more well-known verses of Scripture the apostle sets out a list of the fruit of the Spirit. Each devotion, therefore, focuses on a single characteristic from that fruit. Following the brief devotion there is a series of questions to encourage further discussion.

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Introduction

It was the experience of this writer during his vicar year and his first year in the ministry as a high school teacher and dorm supervisor, that there was little material for teachers to use for devotion as a faculty. What was used often seemed to fall on one of two sides: It was either of poor quality or did not help relate spiritual life directly to teachers of a specific age group. There were no books that spoke specifically in application to teachers of a particular age group (e.g. high school, elementary, preschool, etc.). It was the latter side of the perceived problem which gave birth to the idea for this project. It was felt that a series of devotions could be produced which spoke directly to a faculty of high school teachers.

The research for such a project led, quite obviously, into Scripture to establish the purpose for study of God's Word in the life a Christian teacher. If a teacher hopes to deal in a spiritually mature way with his students and hopes in turn that they live in a spiritually mature manner, that teacher must be maturing through his own time spent in the Word. And it follows that what is true for each part (the individual teacher) must also be true for the whole (the faculty).

After establishing the biblical basis for such a study on the part of a faculty, a search was made of the available resources to that end. There were a total of six such resources. Three were devotional books, and the remaining three were Bible Studies which focused on teaching and teaching aptitudes. One of the Bible studies served more as tool for growth of the faculty in their relationships as part of the congregation. It was less about the actual day to day import of bringing Scripture into the classroom, and so it is referenced but not given as thorough a treatment as the other sources.

Finally, as a result of the research mentioned above, a series was produced. The goal was to keep each devotion brief, but it also provided several follow-up questions in an effort to allow further study.

The completed series, I believe, meets all the goals set at the beginning. The devotions are solidly based in Scripture and apply both Law and Gospel to the reader. The questions following each devotion allowed me to sidestep any temptation to get caught up in my own anecdotes, and they allow the reader to dig deeper into the topic and to grow spiritually. The questions also allowed me to fulfill the last goal mentioned—keeping the devotions themselves

brief. A high school faculty will find it useful, if for no other reason, since it will quickly get them taking God's Word and applying it in their classrooms and in their school.

The Biblical Basis for Christian a Teacher to be a Student of the Word

It is hopefully not a surprise to hear that a Christian teacher should know Scripture and know it well. After all, no one would want to learn any skill from someone who does not know it himself. Yet, beyond that simple logic, the Bible makes its reader aware of the need to know what it is saying. Time and again references are made to the fact that believers ought to go back to the Scriptures to see if a prophet's message were from God or not (Isaiah 8:20). The fact that this is doubly true for teachers is plainly seen in Jesus' shocked question aimed at Nicodemus—"You are Israel's teacher...and *you* do not understand these things?" (John 3:10, emphasis added). It is with that in mind, that this paper turns its attention to one of the standout examples from the Bible of people who were in the word.

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11) Indeed, it is a noble characteristic to be immersed in God's Word every day, and it is a practice which God promises to bless. But why should someone set aside time every day to read the Scriptures, let alone enough time to *examine* what is being told the reader in that Word? Certainly the Bereans had more cause—they didn't know about Christ! They needed to verify what this Paul guy was telling them about their religion so they could safely put their confidence and trust in Christ and with clear consciences worship him as God. But does that apply to someone who has already become convinced through Scripture that Jesus is the Christ? Is there further benefit to be sought from examining the Scriptures? God's answer in his Word is a resounding yes! While it undoubtedly true that all Scripture is written to the end that all people may come to a knowledge of the truth that Jesus is the Christ—the Savior of the world—and through faith in him they might have life in his name, there is a plethora of other benefits which come from studying the Word.

First and foremost, it is in God's Word that we are shown what we are and what he has done for us. It is the chief purpose of God's Word to show sinful man that a) he is sinful, and yet b) God has done something to save him from his sinful ways. It is through the hearing of the law

that we become conscious of sin (Romans 3:20) and it is through the hearing of the Gospel that saving faith is created in our hearts (Romans 10:17). No matter what the circumstances in life may be, it is a great comfort to read from or hear from God's Word each day because God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22,23). Each and every day the Christian wakes up as a redeemed child of God. The Word which affirms this is the still waters and rich pasture where our Good Shepherd feeds Christians daily to restore their souls (Psalm 23). And in his infinite grace, God doesn't just tell them that they are forgiven and then leave them to fend for themselves against sin and temptation. His Word also serves as guiding light on the path of life (Psalm 119:105).

Frequent study of Scripture is of great use in the believer's struggle to say no to sin and yes to sanctified living. There is not much to argue with when David calls that man blessed "who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers" (Psalm 1:1). Who in all of Christendom would not want to be as free from the influence of a sinful world as the man about whom David speaks? But how does a believer get to that point when by nature "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5)? Each and every day the believer battles with the original sin that still inheres in the sinful flesh. But David knows the way for the believer to keep that Old Adam's head under the baptismal waters and drown him out each day. What way is that? It is by meditating day and night on the Word of God and finding delight in doing so (Psalm 1:2). Certainly David is not here advocating that reading the Bible is all that one should do in a day. Although that would seem a most blessed practice, it could only be done at the expense of other duties which God has given us and expects us to do (e.g. duties to family, neighbor, society etc.). Understand David this way: Think of the many things that occupy the days and nights of the average person. How gladly, for some of them, does one at times tarry at those practices or pursue them a little further into the night than he might agree was necessary the next morning. Everyone does it—whether it is watching Sportscenter, catching the end of a movie already seen, or simply watching mindless, late night television. And everyone justifies it as being worth it in one way or another. The truth is that many times it isn't worth it. But what if that person were tarrying in God's Word past the time he had set for himself, pursuing it a little further into the night than his heavy eyes were telling him is necessary? Worth it? God promises it will be.

Through David he promises to make such a person into a fruitful tree, someone whose works reflect the strong God in whom he is rooted. God will keep him strong for his task and, whatever he puts in his mind to do according to God's will, God will cause to prosper (Ps 1:3). The blessed result is a spiritually mature Christian.

Such maturity is the goal of every Christian. To remain only a child in the faith is to remain "unacquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13b). This is not a jab at childlike faith but rather an encouragement—using the metaphor of God's Word as food for the Christian—to move from milk to solid food, for "solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14). The writer to the Hebrews in the context of the passages quoted makes a passing reference to the fact that such mature people are the ones who are able and qualified to teach about God—a fact that will be taken up more directly a little later in this paper.

For now we will suffice to say that a study of God's Word isn't done in a vacuum. That is to say, there is much value in studying God's Word together and sharing study of the Word with others. The advantage of studying the Word together with fellow Christians is twofold. On the one hand, there is the mutual encouragement received from the gathering together of believers around the Word. This is not only encouraged in Scripture but one also finds believers rejoicing in such activity. David rejoices with those who invite him to go to the house of the Lord (Psalm 122:1), and the writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers to not give up meeting together so that they may be encouraged and encourage others as the Last Day approaches (Hebrews 10:25). On the other hand, there is the logical benefit of multiple minds studying Scripture—multiple insights are gained. It is an obvious fact that different minds approach Scripture from different directions and ask different questions. The result is that everyone involved can see a text more fully and appreciate everything that a specific passage is saying. Solomon recognized this fact when he recorded the proverb: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 22:17).

This idea of iron sharpening iron is perhaps the greatest strength in studying with fellow teachers. There are some problems and situations that arise in the classroom for which a teacher

might want some outside help or outside ideas of how to deal with such situations. What better place to find them than in a room with his colleagues gathered around God's Word! Here that teacher can gain valuable insight from a colleague that is perhaps more experienced or, at the very least, can help glean a useful insight from God's Word.

Using one's colleagues is therefore an additional, not to mention extremely helpful, way to continue to grow and mature in the faith. If the teacher keeps in mind the opinion of the writer to the Hebrews which was mentioned above (namely, that it is assumed that those who teach are mature), he will not neglect to use every resource (including the experiential knowledge of his fellow teachers) that is available for growing in the faith. This is true not only because of the fact that those who teach in the church will be judged more strictly (James 3:1)—which may be the first reason that comes to mind—but also because it is an important facet of professional growth as a Christian teacher.

Teachers are encouraged (hopefully!) to grow professionally in their trade. If they are Christian teachers, they ought not to neglect the fact that they are capable of growing professionally in a way that is impossible for the educators of the world.¹ The Christian teacher can grow in his ability to teach the Bible as he himself grows in his understanding. He is thus aptly suited to instruct his students not only in the secular realm, but also in the spiritual. No secular² teacher can, let alone wants, to grow in this area of teaching. Certainly there are other areas in which growth is possible and important. But this one is essential and can bring light and life into the other dimensions of a teacher's growth as well.³ But growth in spiritual life doesn't necessarily have to show itself in other "professional" dimensions. The most important area of growth is in the Christian teacher's personal faith not only because God encourages Christians to grow in faith, but also because that faith is what will be on display at all times in his classroom. Or to say it as Jesus does, the teacher does not want to be a blind guide in the classroom (Lk 6:39). In preparing lessons for class (specifically, religious classes) this is as simple as realizing

¹ Johne, Harold R. "Professional Growth—The Wondrous Dimension." *The Lutheran Educator* XXIII (May 1983): p. 2.

² It should be noted that by "secular" the author is referring to a non-Christian teacher and not to a Christian teacher who happens to teach in a secular setting.

³ Ibid. p. 2, 3.

that every “Bible lesson is first for [the teacher], for [the teacher] to listen and learn, for [the teacher] to understand and apply to [him]self.”⁴

And don't forget the forgotten side benefit—the teacher will then actually be practicing what he preaches. Teachers encourage students in various ways to learn outside the classroom. They want their students to use the principles they learn in the classroom and apply those principles in their own lives. Especially when it comes to the spiritual lives of their students, the desire of the Christian teacher is that the students are not just learning and growing while inside the classroom. The students should be able to see that their teacher has the same attitude. Such a Christian teacher takes the Master Teacher as his example. Jesus practiced what he preached and that attitude rubbed off on the disciples in many ways.⁵ Whether he likes it or not, some of a teacher's traits will end up rubbing off on his students. Let one of those potential traits be captivation with the Word. Let students catch their teacher reading the Word in his down time. Let them see their teacher at church *often*. Let them see him at Bible class. In short, let them see their teacher active in and making use of God's Word somewhere outside of the classroom because as much as a teacher might hate this conclusion, when he is in the classroom, they only see him doing his job. Only the teacher can change that conclusion. So that the condemnation which Paul levies against the Jews in Romans 2:21ff never falls against the Christian teachers of today, let every teacher practice what he preaches.

As a way to encourage this type of behavior, the Christian faculty ought to set time aside regularly to get into the Word with each other. It has been shown above how great of a benefit this can be. But the time spent pondering the possible benefits should not exceed the time spent experiencing those benefits. Let the experience begin as soon as possible.

A Review of the Available Resources from Northwestern Publishing House

Seeing the importance of time spent in the Word, it is also good for a faculty to know what is available to it by way of devotions or Bible studies to aid them in study of Scripture. But it is also good to know what is worthwhile (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The following is a list of such

⁴ Isch, John R. “Are You Listening?” *The Lutheran Educator* 44 (October 2003): p.3.

⁵ Krueger, William. “The Christian Teacher and His Person.” *The Lutheran Educator* IV (May 1964): p. 11.

materials available from Northwestern Publishing House followed by a brief overview and evaluation. There are both devotions and Bible studies available for teachers. This review will start with the devotions.

There are three devotional books which are directed specifically toward teachers. They are listed below in no particular order.

It's About the Students

This book by Edward C. Grube has 40 very brief devotions, with each devotion based on a different character from the Bible. The idea behind each devotion is to imagine the specific person in the classroom and then imagine how the teacher might deal with the various characteristics they display.

Several weaknesses hurt this tool—the foremost being that it is not all that strong on Law and Gospel appropriation. Although a very quick, often generic, statement of recognition of sin and forgiveness through a Savior is mentioned, the devotions are more heavily geared toward how to deal with certain personalities/behavioral patterns in the classroom. An example of the passing glance Law and Gospel receives more often than not is found in the devotion about Jonah which is found on pages 13-15. “God lavishes His grace on all. He is equally merciful to all who sin (p.14)...You deserve death, but God, through Jesus Christ, has saved you (p.15).” At these two places Grube points very briefly to salvation as being the possession of the reader, but the effect is lost in what his greater concern seems to be—what to do with what God has done for you.

Secondly, the devotions are not based on the passages selected as much as they are simply talking about the person whose name appears in the passages. For example, the devotion which centers on Jesus on page 40 has as its passage the words of an angel announcing that Jesus is not in the tomb. From there the devotion talks about original sin and how our actions should be Christian even when Christ is not around.

Finally, the devotions seem to serve more as an outlet for the writer's creativity or thoughts and less importantly as a spiritual boost for a teacher. There are far too many cutesy puns, forced alliterations, and parenthetical asides for the book's own good. An example of at least one of these is found at the end of the devotion entitled “Martha” and really distracts from the point of the devotion. It reads as follows: “You are a servant. You are a leader—at least in your classroom. Serve well and lead well, with the help of God...By the way, are you sure you made enough snacks for the gathering at which this devotion is to be read? (p.118)” After “ending” with a solid encouragement to serve and lead well, Grube attaches a needless joke as though there’s a need to break some tension that the reader does not feel.

On a positive note there is much background reading proposed at the end of each devotion which directs the reader back into Scripture. One example of this would be the suggestion to read Luke 10:38-42 after the devotion about Martha on pages 116-118.

God in My Classroom

This book by Ralph Beikmann takes its commission, as stated in the first devotion, from an encouragement the author received from an apparent colleague. There is no real continuity throughout the book. Although the title seems to indicate that the reader will be learning how God is present in the classroom, after reading the book it seems more likely that God’s *Word* is what is meant—and that, only by extension of God’s Word being a regular part of the teacher’s life. The devotions are mostly anecdotes from his teaching career or life that are then related to the work of a Christian teacher.

The use of Law and Gospel is not very clear in this book at all. In fact, it does not even seem to be the focus. The times it does come through in the readings are the exception. The daily readings feel much more like a third use of the Law (i.e. an encouragement to the teacher’s new man from the Law) as opposed to a refreshing reminder to the reader of God’s grace and forgiveness of sin. Each of the devotions is more of a discussion on sanctified living in the classroom (or outside of it) than an actual meditation on God’s Word. The author talks about certain attitudes or actions which a Christian teacher can exemplify in the classroom. They are

good thoughts and hopefully the biblically literate reader can sense the solid, scriptural foundation of the author's thought because it is not always explicitly stated.

Although it does not make up for the lack of a starting verse, after each devotion there follows a list of several Bible passages for the reader to peruse. The goal of this list seems to be to give the reader an idea of where the author is coming from based on God's Word. Sometimes it seems more like a mixture of passages that have a word which relates to the main thought of the author in his devotion. Though this may indicate a broad knowledge of Scripture in his thoughts, with no text given at the start and often an unclear list of passages at the end, the reader is lost during the devotion in the author's own thoughts. Rather than starting with a specific passage and going from there, the author starts with his thoughts and assumes that his reader will be on the same page as he draws his conclusions.

That They May Have Life

This book by David J. Bangert provides devotions for every week of the school year and a few for the weeks leading up to the school year as well. They follow the flow of the school year and the church year, speaking of homecoming and graduation as well as Christmas and Easter to name a few from each.

The use of Law and Gospel is evident in nearly all of the devotions. This is helped by the fact that he starts with a Scripture verse and then builds on it. Sometimes it is a little weak in connection. At times it appears that the author had a thought and then found a passage that had a word matching the key point in his thought. A good example of this is his devotion entitled "Walk in Wisdom" (p.77). He offers two different passages, but really only expounds on one of them while the other just seems to be there because it talks about wisdom. This was not the norm by far, however, and the book gave good insight into how the love we experience from Christ (i.e. his sacrifice for sin on our behalf) fuels us to reflect that love in our lives.

Of the three books here presented, my highest—and perhaps only—endorsement would go to the last one for the reasons stated above.

On a side note, one thing that was noticeably lacking in all books was any type of prayer or encouragement thereto. As one meditates on Scripture, it is good to ask God's blessing from the start so that time spent in the Word may prove beneficial. It is also beneficial to pray at the end either to ask that God grant whatever the devotion leads the reader to desire or to thank God for what the devotion says he gives.

Besides devotional books there are also a couple Bible study series directed at teachers that are available from Northwestern Publishing House. They are listed below beginning with the most recently published.

He Gave Some To Be Teachers

This study was put together by Paul T. Prange, and each lesson looks at a different apostle (excluding Paul). The individual studies look at the passage(s) of the Bible where the particular apostle is mentioned and then build questions off the text.

The application of Law and Gospel in this series is clearly evident, though the Gospel is the more dominant subject matter. This is done not so much by the writer applying it, but by having the reader focus on a section of Scripture and then answer a few questions. Which leads to the great strength of this series: There are great application questions in each lesson. A great example of both these strengths is the second study entitled "Peter" which begins on page 3.

The great thing about each lesson is that it is brief so that it could be used at the start of a longer meeting without spilling over into time allotted for other matters. It is not meant to be an in depth study of each apostle but simply uses what Scripture says about them to springboard into a discussion of teaching aptitudes exemplified by them or to them by Christ. In contrast to the devotion books, this series also offers suggestions for prayer at the end of each lesson. One negative is that the lack of direction/leader's manual made tracking the direction of a question or two difficult.

They Called Him Teacher

This study was assembled by Jason M. Nelson and looks at various instances where Jesus is addressed as teacher. From there the study digs into how Jesus responded in each situation as a teacher. At the end there is application to the personal teaching ministry of those going through the study.

The Law and Gospel presented were again very basic but clear, and the Gospel dominated. The lessons were brief and easy to follow. Whereas the first series had application throughout the lesson, this one focused on the text first, then moved into application later. At the end of the study there is a “homework assignment” of sorts where one can identify ways to exemplify the teaching characteristic of Jesus from the lesson in his own classroom. I refer to it as a homework assignment because it is found after the closing prayer. Technically it could be done as group work during the study, but it’s placement after the prayer makes it seem like a personal exercise to be done afterward on one’s own. For example, after the first study there is a page allotted for a prayer list to be written down (p.3).

It is the estimation of this writer that these would both be very beneficial to a Christian educator. They both suggest that they can be done individually or in groups, but in a group setting is where they would work the best. There are many times where questions of application and reflection would get more mileage in a group setting as opposed to individually.

Christian Teachers and Their Relationships

A third Bible study series to which I was directed served more as an aid to teachers outside the classroom and dealt with the many relationships a teacher has outside of teacher to student. The title is *Christian Teachers and Their Relationships*. In this study LeDell D. Plath examines the relationship of teachers on two levels: 1) their relationship with the Lord and 2) their relationship with people. It then has a third portion in which it puts the teacher in hypothetical situations with various relationships (e.g. with a pastor, principal, parent, etc.). This is definitely a beneficial study to do with a faculty (perhaps over the summer months), but since it is not focused directly on the inside of the classroom, I have left off an in depth critique of the series. Whereas this study looks at the relationship between the teacher and parents, pastor, and

principal, I intended to give teachers a study that helped them bring God's Word into their classrooms.

What Now?

After reviewing the scriptural basis, being renewed in zeal to study God's Word in light of the benefits derived from such study, and seeing the added benefit of studying together with fellow faculty members, the writer thought of several different ways to approach his project from a subject matter standpoint. At first, the idea was to focus on a specific portion of the church year (e.g. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, etc.). Then, the idea was that perhaps following events of a typical high school year might be beneficial. There were practical problems with both of these.

The idea of focusing on a portion of the church year was certainly one that would have been edifying. But it often would have lacked a direct connection to the classroom unless the writer forced, for example, a portion of the passion history into a classroom when there likely was not a good reason for doing so. Following the events of the average school year seemed tenuous for the same reason but in reverse. It would lend itself all too easily to forcing some part of the school year on a text that has nothing to do with that event.

It was only after quite a bit of searching and thinking when the writer came across Paul's words to the Galatians in chapter 5 and thought "Eureka!" What better way to bring God's Word in a directly applicable way to the classroom than a series of devotions on the fruit of the Spirit? For here the apostle talks about characteristics that a Christian teacher will not only want to display in their own life, but also teach to their students. Once the subject matter was settled upon, there was simply the matter of deciding how to go about making the devotions. To decide on that, this author looked for what was good about the devotions he reviewed rather than dwelling on what made them poor.

To that end, the many devotions which were reviewed served as a great aid. One realization that struck home throughout, whether by absence or presence, was that the Law and

Gospel ought to be clearly proclaimed in each devotion. For the Christian, everything centers around Christ. The salvation he won on the cross is the source of all faith and life—indeed, it is the source of all the fruit of the Spirit.

A strength present in some of the devotions was the inclusion of a prayer or at least a suggestion to the same. It is important for the Christian to allow God to speak to him through the Word. And in that Word God makes it clear that he wants Christians to speak to him—to share their joys, cares, requests, and thanks with him in prayer.

One other strength was brevity. While in personal study this might be seen as a weakness, when it comes to beginning a faculty meeting, this is clearly a strength. There are many things that dominate a weekly meeting's agenda and often there is little time to deal with all of them thoroughly. Bearing that concern in mind, a brief devotion offers a chance to refresh and renew a teacher's vigor for the up-coming week while refraining from spilling over into time relegated to dealing with other matters.

Some of the devotions were more personal than others. The author's personal anecdotes were used to draw a familiar picture for the teacher reading/hearing the devotion. It was here where this author felt what may be a weakness in the devotions of his series. He is not long on experience. In an attempt to remove any negative effect this might have on the devotion the following style was used.

Each devotion begins with a verse or verses which either define or exemplify a particular fruit of the Spirit. A brief devotion follows (300-500 words) which expounds on the verse with presentation of Law and Gospel. In this portion the goal was not so much to apply the particular fruit of the Spirit to classroom life as it was to convict the sinner (Law) and then point him to the Savior (Gospel). The application was left to the second part of each devotion.

Following each Law and Gospel portion, there is a series of questions which apply the fruit of the Spirit to the classroom both personally for the teacher and also communally for the students. This is the particular area in which the author tried to alleviate the weakness perceived

from lack of experience. Instead of drawing on his own personal store of experience, the author asks the teacher to think of his own situation and apply God's Word to that situation.

Each devotion then ends with a consistent suggestion for prayer. This was also thought to be helpful so that the teachers using the devotion could use words specifically applicable to their situation rather than a generic prayer to "grant us this or that fruit." Instead, the teachers are given opportunity to bring before the Lord not only that request but also whatever else may be on their hearts in relation to the devotion.

These appended devotions, then, in their entirety represent what I hope is a collection of the better traits of the devotional material reviewed above, and, more importantly, a clear reminder of the love God has shown us through his Son. God grant that through their use the reader may mature in his own faith and be encouraged to help his students grow in theirs as well. To that end, may God graciously impart his Spirit to enlighten hearts, sanctify thoughts, and help all who search the Scriptures keep in step with his will.

SDG

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Love

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”

1 John 3:16

If you are going to learn what love is, you have to look in the right place. John points you to that right place in these verses. If you look for love anywhere else, you will be let down. A husband or wife does love their spouse, but that love doesn't flow without an interruption, a bump in the road so to speak—whether great or small. A brother or sister loves their sibling(s), but that doesn't mean the father or mother never had to settle disputes. Christian friends love and care for each other, but sometimes you might find yourselves settling just to be cordial. Teachers love their students, but there are times when you might find it downright impossible to have anything good to say about that one student on a given day. No. If you want to learn what love is, you must look with John to the Savior of the world hanging on the cross.

Jesus gave his all for you. You had not loved him without interruption. You had not failed to fight against him. You were less than cordial, in fact, you were his enemy. And enemies don't speak well of those against whom they fight. So read again and understand what love is: “Jesus Christ laid down his life for [you].” God demonstrated what love truly is by dying on the cross for those who did not love him back. He took away your sins and gives you eternal life instead. Love is having deep concern for the welfare of another and the willingness to defend, to maintain, and to restore that welfare even at great cost to you. That's love. That's your God. And because he loves you, you love others.

Compare and contrast how God demonstrates and defines love with the way our sinful flesh often does.

List ways God reminds you daily of his love for you.

You teach high school students in an age where the world is right at their fingertips every second of every day. In what areas does the world teach them something about love that is contrary to how God describes love?

As you “lay down your life” for fellow believers by taking care of their needs, consider this: God has given you 5 days a week with these young people. They need to know what love really is. List ways you can demonstrate God's love to them and ingrain his definition of love on their minds in your classroom? ...in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Give thanks to God for his demonstration of love for you in Christ. Ask him to increase the fruit of love in your life and in the lives of your students.

Joy

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

1 Peter 1:8,9

It doesn't take very long for the joy in our lives to run out. The excitement that we can get from so many situations certainly does put joy in our hearts. The joy of a mother or father as they get to hold their newborn child isn't artificial. You don't wonder if it's manufactured joy on the face of the girl who just said yes. The optimistic joy for a new year of school certainly isn't forced—especially for a new teacher who is ready to be a positive force in every student's life. But joy runs out. It's hard for parents to maintain the joy they have because of their children when those very children rebel against the simplest and most well-intentioned rules. It's hard for that newly engaged or married couple to maintain the joy of their beginning as they come face to face with the sinful nature in each other that likes to rear its ugly head every now and again. And it's hard not to see that optimistic joy quickly wane as the problems you anticipate are joined by problems you didn't see coming.

That's why it's important for us to take Peter's words to heart here. When we look at his words we see why the joy often runs out of our lives. It runs out because we are often trying to draw all our joy from the wrong source. Peter reminds us that we are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy when that joy comes from our Savior—joy comes from our knowledge that through Christ we are already possessors of eternal life. Peter says we aren't looking forward to the time when salvation is ours. No! It is already being received through faith. So be joyful! Heaven is already your home

through faith in Christ! Because that fact is always true you have a source of joy that will never run out of your life.

Think about the last time you felt deflated like there was nothing joyful in your life. At that time what did you believe would bring you joy if you had just that one thing (or maybe several things)?

Give some examples of things that don't bring the lasting joy we are looking for.

During those days when joy seems a distant thought, what are some ways you can refocus on Christ, the ultimate source of unending joy? List them.

What things bring joy to the teenagers in your classroom?

How can you model Christian joy in your classroom? ... in your school?

How can you help your students stay focused on the source of unending joy?

Suggestion for prayer: Rejoice before the Lord in prayer. Ask him to increase the fruit of joy in your life and in the lives of your students.

Peace

“I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace. Peace to those far and near,” says the Lord. “And I will heal them.”
Isaiah 57:18,19

With all the things that can dominate the week in a high school schedule, it's easy to see a lack of peace in life. In fact, it's not just in the school setting that this fact bears itself out. People of all professions and in all settings can all find common ground in the exasperated phrase, “I'd just like a little peace and quiet for just one minute.” The need for things to run smoothly—peacefully—is one that runs deep in every human because if things are peaceful, it means that everything is alright. It's kind of our little system of control. Since we can't control our spiritual peace, we want at least to be able to control our physical peace. Which is why it can be so unsettling when there is anything but peace in our physical lives. We often let the correct flow of peace get reversed and try to let the peace in our daily lives dictate the peace in our spiritual lives, when actually it should be the direct opposite.

“Peace,” God says to you, “I will heal you.” These are words spoken to revive the contrite heart. When you fall before God on your knees with tears of shame and of guilt and of frustration and of regret filling your eyes, hear him comfort you. He has seen your ways. He has sent his Son. You are forgiven. You have peace. Your relationship with God, your walk of faith with him, is not a hectic one. It is one characterized by peace. And that peace flows into your whole life because God is watching over your whole life. The reality of your forgiveness is no less real in one situation than in any in which you will find yourself. So be at peace in all things. Your sins are forgiven. Your God has healed you.

When does your life as a teacher seem to be anything but peaceful? Identify and list the reasons it feels this way.

How does knowing you have lasting peace with God change how you handle those situations?

If your attitude lately hasn't been characterized by that peace you have with God, how can/do you make it so?

What things cause a lack of peace in the life of a high school student?

How can you impart to your students the peace they have with God in your classroom? ... in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Thank Jesus for the peace he has brought between you and God. Ask him to increase the fruit of peace in the relationship between you and your students.

Patience

“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.”

Proverbs 19:11

Patience is a virtue. It seems that the only time we hear that phrase is when we are being impatient. There is a very good reason for that, too: By nature we are not good at being patient. That is probably not an earth-shattering revelation for anyone. We live in a world that makes it possible to see someone’s face and hear their voice while they are thousands of miles away from us. We have news sources at our fingertips keeping us updated to the minute on the biggest news stories happening. We have social networks that keep us up to the second on the most trivial information about people to whom we rarely speak and even people we will never meet. It is fair to say that we are not only naturally disinclined to patience, but we also are nurtured to wring every last ounce of patience out of our system.

This doesn’t have very positive effect on our relationships. When someone is treating us poorly, it is an immediate reaction that we ought to have nothing to do with that person, or worse, that we should return the unkindness. It is human wisdom that says we must carry out our own justice and judgments when things are done against us. And often we don’t fail to do so.

But it is divine wisdom that overlooks an offense, that is, it is divine wisdom to be patient. We see this in our God, whose patience means our salvation (2 Peter 3:15). By nature God was our enemy and we treated him as such. The whole of humanity since the fall has treated him as such. But patiently he waited until that moment when his justice could accentuate his love. And on the cross God demonstrated the source of his patience. He is not patient with us because he is hoping that we will right our own ship and come

back to him. He is patient because he has removed our sin. He is patient because he wants all people to come to the knowledge of that fact and put their trust in him. As you imitate Christ, be patient with one another. Be patient with all. For God is patient with you.

The word for patience in both Hebrew and Greek expresses the idea of “long suffering” or “putting off anger.” Why is it so hard for us to be patient (to put off our anger)?

How is it “to your glory” to overlook an offense?

Is it possible to teach patience or is it something that can only be modeled in one’s life?

How will you model patience in your classroom? ... in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Thank God for dealing patiently with you. Ask him to increase the fruit of patience in your life and in the lives of your students.

Kindness

“At one time we too were foolish...enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

Titus 3:3-5a

Sometimes kids can be downright mean. Some will use words to sarcastically dig at one of their peers. Others might physically bully those smaller or weaker than they. Still others might just stand by as all this happens and, far from stopping it, either join in or laugh at what is taking place. It is really no secret why this type of behavior happens. Every single person has a sinful nature. And that sinful nature only looks out for one person—*itself*. It does not care about anyone or anything beyond what they might have to offer that may be of benefit. Its actions are all driven by the bottom line of self-promoting, self-seeking love. And while we might not see it materialize in the same bullying tactics of a high school student, we know that the same self-serving ego is present in each and every one of us. We are not always kind. We can be mean, hateful, and hurtful. And we sometimes take pleasure in doing so.

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done.” What a difference between God and us. His ego is not self-serving. It isn’t even self-seeking. He did not stop to think about what benefit he might receive from us. Rather, he determined to do something that would benefit us. He sent his Son to deliver us from our sins and the death which they merit. Why? Because he loves us. And that’s what kindness is, isn’t it? It is decency without cause. Oh the riches of God’s love! His love results in the kindness of taking the penalty we had rightly deserved and placing it on his own Son. And in exchange

he gives us his own righteousness which leads to eternal life. But he doesn’t stop there! Now we not only *can* be kind, we can take pleasure in doing so, too.

Why does God do anything for you?

The point here should be obvious. We want our reason for showing kindness to be the same as God’s reason. What are ways in which you can daily reflect the love of God to others through acts or words of kindness?

How can you give students opportunities to demonstrate kindness in your classroom? ... in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Thank God for the kindness he has shown in Christ. Ask him to increase this fruit in your life and in the lives of your students.

Goodness

“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”

Psalm 34:8

God is good. It’s such a quick, simple sentence. But what a profound truth! There are many things that might come to mind when we imagine our God as being good. One might think of all the blessings he showers on us daily. Family, friends, clothing, food, homes—all are significant indicators of the goodness of God. But interestingly enough, not one of those is mentioned by David in the 34th Psalm. What he *does* mention is deliverance. And it is here where our God really stands out as good. It is here where we see “good” as something that runs profoundly deeper than just supplying daily needs.

Good is more than giving out of abundance. In the same way we might sneer at a billionaire for dropping a single, one dollar bill on the table at a nice restaurant as a tip for his waiter or waitress, our sinful nature often finds a way to call God stingy with his blessings. “Since the whole world is his,” it reasons, “how could he not give me more?” And somehow it keeps a straight face. But God’s giving of gifts to his children really isn’t where he’s intent on displaying his goodness to us. Kindness maybe. But when we need to shut the mouth of our sinful nature as it blasphemes the goodness of God, we need to look only to one place—the cross.

It is on the cross where God shows us what it truly means to be good. He had no outward motivation. There was no compelling argument to be made on our behalf. While we were still powerless yet hostile enemies of God—he died for us. Why? Because he is good. It’s not something he needs to be compelled to be. It’s not something he needs to receive a benefit from being. He simply is good. And because he is good, we are delivered—delivered to praise

him, delivered to be with him in heaven, and delivered so we can be good to others that they in turn might take refuge in him and be just as blessed as we are. And this isn’t empty ambition on your part. You can be good because you are good as the Spirit works in you “to will and to act according to his [God’s] good purpose.”

What normally comes to mind when you hear the words “good teacher” or “good student?”

What usually motivates a teacher or a student to be “good”?

Compare/contrast that with how God is good and why he is good.

What is the real reason why you can be a good teacher and your students can be good students?

How can you demonstrate goodness in your classroom? ...in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Thank God for being good. Ask him to increase your eagerness to be good in your classroom and ask him to cause your students to grow in their eagerness to be good as well.

Faithfulness

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

1 Corinthians 10:12,13

There are many different venues for a person to demonstrate faithfulness: marriage, study habits, workout routines, etc. We admire people who exemplify that trait and we might even stand in amazement at their level of faithfulness. There’s the husband and wife who have been married for decades. There’s the student who pours over his homework and works hard to learn everything expected of him and more. There’s the athlete who spends countless hours in the gym working out and practicing sport specific skills day after day after day. In every aspect of life, faithfulness is valued. This is especially true when it comes to our spiritual lives. Faithfulness to God is something we all desire in increasing measures.

At times we are happy with our level of faithfulness, at others, complacent, and at still more, downright dissatisfied and possibly ashamed. We wonder how there can be such fluctuation in our faithfulness to God. How can I be so good at reading the Bible one week and then go days without even thinking about opening it? How can I fight so well against my pet sin for so long and then plunge into as though I had no choice? The answer is simple. It’s painful, too. The reason this happens is because you and I are still battling our sinful flesh, which is always at war with our new man. And sometimes it is just easier to give in than it is to keep fighting. As long as we look to ourselves for strength to overcome, so long will we fail. Because when it comes right down to it, we cannot be as faithful as we should be.

But God is faithful. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about God’s faithfulness. He made a promise to you that he will never break—he promises to deliver you. We see the greatest fulfillment of this promise in the perfect life, innocent death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Through that act of love, God delivered you from your sins and their eternal consequences. But that’s not the end of God’s faithfulness to his promise of deliverance. As your loving Father in heaven, he also watches over you and promises to deliver you in the day of trouble. “Call upon me,” he says, “and I will deliver you.” As you strive for faithfulness to God, remember first that God is faithful. He will not allow you to face a single temptation which he has not already prepared you to defeat. He will provide a way out for you—a way for you to remain faithful to your faithful God.

As a teacher, in what areas do you struggle most to be faithful? Why?

In what areas do your students struggle most to be faithful?

What areas does culture elevate to high school age students as areas in which to be faithful? Where does culture say it does not matter?

Is culture wrong with the areas it emphasizes? Why and Why not?

How can you model faithfulness to the students in your classroom? ... in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Thank God for being faithful to his promises and ask him to increase your own faithfulness and that of your students.

Gentleness

“...The third time he said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time...He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep...”

John 21:15-19

Discipline is an unfortunately necessary part of your classroom. If assignments are late or incomplete, students have to face a deduction in grade. If disrespect is shown to fellow students or teachers, detentions and possibly even suspensions are enforced. All these things are necessary because the sinful nature in every student does not want to be told what to do or when to do it. But we cannot forget about the sinful nature that lurks inside each of us as well. As teachers we always want to be careful about how we enforce such discipline. It is easy to be heavy handed, that comes naturally to us because our sinful flesh doesn't just love *having* power. It loves *wielding* that power too. We want to make sure that anyone who crosses the line knows just how terrible they have been. We overdo it because in some way we feel we have been slighted when we are disobeyed. But this flies right in the face of how Scripture teaches us to deal with others. We are to restore. We are not to exasperate.

Jesus gives a beautiful example of this type of discipline in the verses above. He is beyond gentle with Peter. Do you remember what Peter had done? He did. He told a maiden that he didn't even know that man with whom he had previously promised to die. Not once. Not twice. But three times. Not subtly, but with curses and swearing he tried to defend his lie. But now was not a time to be heavy handed with Peter. Just one simple question repeated three times. With each question you can see that Jesus isn't simply dismissing Peter's sin, but making him confront it in a gentle way. By the third time Peter understood what was going on. It hurt him. But it did not destroy him. With each affirmative answer Peter is

reclaiming what he had thrown aside. With each response of “feed my lambs” Jesus is proclaiming forgiveness while simultaneously pushing him back into the harvest field. It was not a self-serving use of power with which Jesus brought Peter back into the fold. It was with gentle discipline and forgiveness.

God deals this way with you and me as well. The writer to the Hebrews talks about this in chapter 12. God's discipline hurts just like one would expect it to hurt. But we should take comfort in the fact that God's discipline always turns out for our good. When his discipline hurts us as it once hurt Peter, let us see the gentle hand behind that discipline and know and trust that through such discipline the Lord is bringing us closer to him. Let us then show such gentleness as we deal with others.

Did your parents ever tell you that punishing you hurt them more than it hurt you? How could they say such a thing with a straight face?

What are some ways you have noticed the Lord disciplining you lately? (In other words, how is God helping you put to death the sinful flesh with its desires?)

Are you gentle as you discipline your students? How can you still be gentle, even when the discipline needs to be strict?

How can you model gentleness to the students in your classroom? ...in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Thank God for dealing gently with you through Jesus and ask him to grant the fruit of gentleness in your life and in the lives of your students.

Self-control

“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”

Proverbs 25:28

It’s not a very familiar reference, is it? The idea of city walls isn’t something that draws a concrete picture in our mind. The only remnant of this cultural reference we have is across oceans in some cities that have been around much longer than American ones. To understand the full impact of this proverb, one must keep in mind that back when cities had walls, it was for one very important purpose: to keep the enemy out. If it helps, think of city walls being broken down as being the same as the doors to your home having broken locks and being unable to be closed. Anyone who wants in to your home could get in easily enough. It’s an unsettling picture. But how is a man without self-control like a city with broken walls? Well, he’s defenseless.

A person who lacks self-control is defenseless against whatever assails him. When we think of self-control, perhaps we think of things like dieting or taking it easy when someone brings snacks into the office. But given the source of this proverb, it is obvious that the writer is aiming at a deeper issue. Those who lack self-control in spiritual matters are defenseless—defenseless against the attacks of the sinful nature. God isn’t concerned about whether or not you can hold yourself to two or three cookies when a full tray is before you. He is concerned about whether or not you can hold yourself from lashing out in anger with hurtful words, actions, and thoughts when they flow in abundance from the sinful nature’s urge to retaliate. He is concerned about whether or not you can hold your tongue when the only thing your flesh wants to do is talk and talk about someone. It is unfortunate that all too often we are that city whose walls are broken down. For all the times that we can think of when we exerted some level of self-control, we know there

are many more when we did not. With our walls as broken down as they are at times, we need someone to protect us, someone to save us from the enemy.

And we have just such a Savior. By nature we are defenseless—helpless to do anything for ourselves spiritually. But Christ took on human flesh to be our Rock. He is the Cornerstone upon whom the walls of our defense are built. He met our enemies on the field of battle and won the victory for us. And now he stands ready to defend those whom he has won for himself. And he encourages us not to be afraid any longer. In this life we will have trouble as we fight against sin and our natural inclination toward it. But take heart. Your Savior has overcome! And his victory fuels your victory!

What are some situations in the classroom when you have to practice self-control?

What does the culture in which your teenage students are immersed tell them about self-control? In what areas of their lives does that manifest itself?

Students often are disciplined for showing a lack of self-control and acting in ways that are not acceptable. For lack of a better term, we can call this negative encouragement. How can you also positively encourage self-control in your classroom? ...in your school?

Suggestion for prayer: Ask your heavenly Father to grant an increase in this fruit in your life and in the life of your students.