

# A Taught Faith

## Changing lives Through the Bible School

By Dr. Brad Walden

Every effort of a faithful church falls under the authority of the Lord who said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always even to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20). Clearly, the Christian faith is a taught faith.

Many may catch the emotion of the moment from a powerful sermon or get swept up in the feeling of a song. But one of the most effective ways to impact the health and effectiveness of the body of Christ is through dedicated Christians who teach the faith. God has revealed himself to us in his written Word. We must learn it and we must teach it to all generations.

### The Challenge of Our Time

Over 40 years ago, while serving as an editor with *Christianity Today*, Dr. James DeForest Murch wrote, “The church’s paramount need is to become aware of the changed world situation in which it functions . . . . The church is making serious compromises with humanism and secularism.” His words continue with prophetic insight. “Like the men at Babel, our modern world, claiming to be wiser than God, finds release in animal passions . . . . There is a rapid increase in pre-marital and extra-marital sex . . . . Frank pornography and obscenity mark this horrible subversion.”

In our postmodern culture, truth is what you make it. Good and evil are negotiable. In these times, the church must make disciples—learners who follow the Lord.

### Relevant for Today?

Writing about the Sunday school, Daryl Eldridge observes, “Time has replaced money as a value. Many church attenders would rather have worship and a class on the same day instead of scheduling another time during the week for Bible study. The Sunday school is also an effective tool for assimilation of new believers into the life of the congregation.”

### Substance

We must take care that the Bible school hour is not just a social time of good folks who enjoy each other’s company. We have a body of truth to

pass on from one generation to another and for persons of all walks of life. Concerning teaching children, James Montgomery Boice warns that there is more than one way to cause one of these little ones to stumble. He says, “We have children memorize large blocks of Scripture. We believe that it is a serious mistake to waste precious Sunday school time with mere games or trivia.”

### Our Story

At Tates Creek Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, we make our strongest effort in teaching through the Sunday morning Bible school. Although teaching is offered in small groups throughout the week, our main emphasis is on the traditional Bible school. Our congregation averages 600 in morning worship and 450 in Bible school classes. Although this 75% ratio is above average, we keep pressing to move it higher.

Yet, our principal goal is to teach God’s Word.

### Effective Organization

Our elders give direction to the total church program and approve the most qualified men and women for the important role of teacher. The Bible school functions under the leadership of our Superintendent, Larry Adkins, and the Christian Education Ministry Team. Four ministers on staff supervise the four departments: children, youth, young adults, and adults.

### Our Best Tool

The most effective training aid in any class is the teacher. Computers, modern equipment, and pleasant surroundings may help, but nothing means more than the well-prepared teacher. We look for teachers who are knowledgeable, dedicated, personable, and whose lives reflect the Lord Jesus Christ. From time to time, we provide equipping seminars to help teachers improve their skills.

### Ministers Involved

We make the assumption that each minister on our staff will be involved in the Bible school. It’s a high priority with us. Our staff ministers will be found teaching most Sundays.

### Variety in Curriculum

Under the oversight of the elders, many adult

classes have the option of choosing their curriculum. Three adult classes use a book-by-book of the Bible approach. One large class for couples uses a curriculum that coordinates with the lessons their children receive on the same day; follow-up teaching is encouraged in the home during the week. Most classes use Standard Publishing's *Standard Lesson Commentary* and *Bible Teacher and Leader* material. A class may depart from the norm for a special reason, such as offering the video series, "What We Believe" by Bob Russell, Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky.

### **Class Breakdown**

A 1992 church growth study revealed that our congregational demographics showed a weakness in the younger adult ages. Therefore, we have added three new young couples classes, one singles class, and one college-age class.

Currently we offer 14 adult Bible classes and 10 age appropriate classes for children and youth. We conduct a weekly Bible school class off-site at a nearby retirement home. This home is not church sponsored, but has welcomed our class for over 30 years. This extension class teaches 10 to 14 people each week.

### **Elective Classes**

From time to time, our Bible school offers elective classes. One recent elective class studied the end times. The fascination of many Christians with prophecy and the second coming of Jesus produced a large class which continued for several weeks. Currently, we offer an elective class called "How to Study the Bible."

### **Attendance Promotion**

Each year, we designate the month of March as "March to Bible School Month." We also call it "March Gladness." Each Sunday has a special designation, such as "Bring a Friend Day," "100 percent day," in which each class goes after a goal equal to their total class enrollment, or "Beat Your Best Day," in which each class sets a goal of one more than their previous high attendance of the past 12 months. Sometimes, classes enter into friendly competition over a six-week period.

### **Appreciation**

As a part of "March Gladness," we recognize one person for outstanding service to the Bible school and induct that person into our Bible School Hall of Fame. In the fall, the church sponsors a teachers' appreciation banquet for teachers, assistants, and their families.

### **Personal Interaction**

We want each person in the church to feel connected. Our motto is "One Family, One Faith." Bible school is vital in making that theme a reality. A first-time visitor in one of our classes told me, "I knew I was in the right place when I was introduced as a first-timer. The lady across the table reached out and patted the back of my hand." Each week, our fellowship hall is filled before Bible school begins. Our Fellowship Ministry Team provides coffee, juice, and snacks. This helps create a casual atmosphere and encourages people from various classes to interact. Many of the adult classes have an active social life with regularly scheduled events. Several of them have strong mission involvement with local and international programs.

### **Facilities Use**

At times we have asked classes to relocate for the good of the whole. Over the past 12 years, one class has met in six different rooms without complaining. We have frequently torn down walls and reconstructed our facilities to adapt to changing needs. Only load bearing walls are considered "sacred." We have in the past offered "Early Bird Classes" for adults who find it convenient to study before our first worship service.

### **Well Done!**

Your Bible school can be an effective tool for reaching out in these confusing times with a solid message of God's unchanging truth. Begin with what you have, make the most of it, and keep pressing forward.

Jesus gave his followers the responsibility of making the most of what they have. He spoke about a man who went on a journey and entrusted three servants with a certain number of talents. To one he gave five talents; to another, two talents; and to a third, one talent. When the man returned, he expected results. To those who made the most of what they had, he said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

At the end of the day, may it be said of our churches, "You have been faithful." Surely that includes faithfulness in teaching God's Word to all generations in this challenging time. ■

*Dr. Brad Walden is the Senior Minister at Tates Creek Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky.*