

Are You Teachable?

by Staff

Forerunner, "Ready Answer," December 2005

*"Now therefore, listen to me, my children,
for blessed are those who keep my ways." —Proverbs 8:32*

Are you teachable? Are you learning? Do you have a burning desire to learn? Do you know the keys to being teachable? Why is it so difficult for Christians to learn? What does God have to say about His children's need to acquire knowledge?

Not surprisingly, God has a great deal to say on this subject. For instance, He laments in Hosea 4:6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because *you have rejected knowledge*, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." God is serious! The penalty for rejecting God's teaching, for not learning, is that we will be barred from becoming priests, the Christian's promised vocation if he enters the Kingdom of God (see Revelation 5:10).

God says something similar in Leviticus 26:23-24: "If after all of this punishment *you still do not listen to me*, but continue to defy me, then I will turn on you and punish you seven times harder than before" (*Today's English Version*). The key phrase here is "if you still do not listen to me." We must not fail to heed God. What can we do to make sure that we do not fail?

Listen!

Notice the admonition in Proverbs 8:32-36:

Now therefore, *listen to me*, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways. *Hear instruction* and be wise, and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who *listens to me*, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death.

Three times in this short passage, God commands us to listen to Him! This divine emphasis tells us that many of us have a serious problem with listening. If we are not listening, we are not learning—and as Hosea 4 and Leviticus 26 say, this will lead to our destruction.

In the Cowboy's Code of Conduct, one maxim states, "Never miss an opportunity to stop talking!" When we are talking, we are not listening—and thus not learning!

In Proverbs 8:34-35, God commands us to watch, wait, and search for Him. These are all action words, and He instructs us to do this *daily!* He wants to teach us every day, and our job is to be watching daily for those teachable moments from God. "Watching daily at my gates" is not about keeping a lookout for Christ's return but about looking for opportunities to learn from God. He then promises, ". . . whoever finds me finds life," implying that we need to search for it. Amos later reiterates, "Seek Me and live!" (Amos 5:4).

In Ezekiel 3, God commissions the prophet to teach Israel. His experience stands as a warning to us: "I am sending you to the people of Israel, and they won't listen to you any more than they listen to me! For the whole lot of them are hard, impudent, and stubborn" [verse 7, *The Living Bible*, (TLB)]. God is speaking just as directly to us, as spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16), as He was to physical Israel. God's people have a terrible habit of not listening!

Just in case we think Ezekiel's message was only for unconverted Israelites, verse 10 disabuses us: "Then he added: 'Son of dust, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first; listen to them carefully for yourself'" (TLB). The prophet Ezekiel will most definitely be in God's Kingdom, and God urges him to listen carefully to the warning message and to let the words sink deep into his heart. God wants Ezekiel—and us by extension—to internalize His message until it becomes a conviction.

One who teaches human relations and morality desires to see evidence that his students have truly learned from his instruction. The proof appears when a student's life changes. When that happens, it is easy to see that he was redirected from the wrong path of thinking and living to the right way.

Do we have a burning desire to learn? Are we curious about knowing how God thinks? Do we want to know what He knows? Are we motivated to become wise? Wisdom is skillful application of what we learn. If we are not curious, we will not be paying close attention to our teachers, and we will be passing up opportunities to learn. We must feel a real *need* to understand.

Many people have a curiosity toward God, but it is usually short-term. A sustained desire for understanding, a keen curiosity to know more about God so as to have a closer relationship with Him, comes from Him, as Philippians 2:13 says: "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

Fearing God

If we find ourselves sagging in our desire to learn, as evidenced by not listening, not studying, praying, and meditating daily, then we must pray fervently for God to give us a greater desire to obey Him, learn from Him, and have the proper fear of Him. Proper fear of God is paramount to learning: "Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses" (Psalm 25:12).

God has unique instruction for each of us that He desperately wants to teach to those that fear Him. We cannot properly fear God if we do not include Him in every aspect of our lives. If our world is framed by God, then we will be highly sensitized to His work within us. He uses every part of our daily lives to teach us, including how we relate to our mates, children, co-workers, friends, neighbors, and brethren. We are judged by how we respond to the situations in life that God specifically arranges for us.

A few good questions that we ought to ask ourselves are:

» How do we respond to our mates when they do not meet our expectations? Are our solutions anger, bitterness, fatalism, depression, insolence, and disrespect—or even divorce? We have to realize that the nature of the trial is ideal for us. God formulates the perfect lesson plan for us individually that will yield the maximum growth from us. If we do not pass this particular test, God does not just skip the lesson but brings it back later so that we will yield and truly learn the lesson. The later trial is usually more severe

because learning occurs best when the student's attention is focused, and when there is pain or loss associated with failure.

» How do we respond to our children? Children are our first tests in being teachers like God. Are we molding and instructing them, or are they raising themselves—or worse yet, is Satan's world raising them? Do we communicate well with them? Do they love, respect, and honor us? Do they come to us for advice and counsel? Or are they afraid, sullen, rebellious?

» How do we respond to a bad boss or co-worker? Do we murmur against him? Do we beat our chests and say that we could do a much better job?

» How do we respond to people in God's church? Do we avoid certain ones? Do we hold grudges against those who may have offended us?

God uses our little worlds to teach us how to live His way. The trials of life are really pop quizzes that God gives us to see how we are doing. A few tests come pre-planned for each of us: the travails of growing up, the death of our parents, choosing a mate, dealing with children, becoming old and sick, etc. We know that these big trials are coming.

The apostle James admonishes us in James 1:2-4:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [or *perseverance*]. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect [or, *mature*] and complete, lacking nothing.

Our testing through trials comes from God, so we should feel happy to know that God is working with us in such an individual, personal way. Testing is a natural consequence of His teaching and brings us to spiritual maturity. His teaching gives us the critical skills necessary to do the work He has in store for us.

Keys to Being Teachable

What are the characteristics of a teachable person?

1. A teachable person *studies God's Word*.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20: Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book. . . . And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom.

Acts 17:11: These [in Berea] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

2. A teachable person is *attentive*.

Isaiah 51:1: Listen to me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord. . .

Matthew 13:16-17: But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear. For assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

3. A teachable person *seeks God*.

Jeremiah 29:13-14: "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you," says the Lord. . . .

Proverbs 2:3-6: Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. . . .

4. A teachable person is *humble*.

Psalms 25:9: The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way.

Proverbs 11:2: When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.

5. A teachable person is *meek*.

James 1:21: Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 3:13: Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

People are rarely truly interested in learning from others; they are more interested in defending their position. Most will staunchly defend their position in the face of all of the evidence to the contrary. That is pride at work. Such people cannot learn because they are always trying to convince others rather than receive instruction.

Our Cup—Full or Empty?

Consider the insight of Dr. Scott Baker, a psychologist, which he learned from many years of teaching martial arts:

The student's attitude is the most significant aspect of their nature which contributes to either their success or failure in learning this complex system of skills. Attitude has a greater impact upon a student's success than natural ability, and physical capacity. One can build capacity and endurance, and one can teach skills and abilities even to the untalented, but one cannot teach the un-teachable!

There is an old Taoist story about a student who comes to a master and asks him to teach him. The master invites the student to sit with him and have tea. While they are sitting,

the master starts to converse with the eager young student. But every time the master starts to explain a point, the student would interrupt him and say, "Oh, I know that, I do this when that happens, or I don't have that problem because. . . ." Soon the master stopped talking and picked up the teapot. He began pouring tea into the student's cup. As the cup filled, he continued pouring until the cup overflowed and spilled out. The student shouted, "Stop! It is enough! My cup is full!" With that, the old master smiled and replied, "Yes, your cup is full, therefore I can teach you nothing until you empty your cup."

The moral of the story should be clear. The student had an un-teachable attitude. Instead of listening to the master, he wanted to show how much he already knew. He was not open to learning anything new that he believed he had already learned. His cup of knowledge was full. He had to empty that cup before he could learn from the new master. Emptying your cup does not mean you must give up all you have learned, forget all that you know. That would be absurd. To empty your cup simply means to adopt a teachable attitude. To put what you know about something out of your mind and listen to a new explanation, a new insight. If you are asked your experience or opinion, then by all means share it. Otherwise, hold what you know in abeyance so that you can benefit from this new learning opportunity.

All your natural talent, your eagerness and hard work, your willingness to pay the price to master a skill, all of this amounts to little or nothing if you do not have an attitude that enables you to be taught. Most of the great instructors I have seen deal with the un-teachable student in much the same way. They leave them alone; let them spout off their great knowledge, and often do not correct what is wrong or confirm what is right. Remember this, if you are talking, then you are not learning, that is, with one exception: If you are asking questions, then you are in a learning dialogue with your teacher. Most competent teachers encourage students to ask questions.

Asking questions is not the same as questioning the validity of an answer. Although most instructors have a permanent cure for that skeptical attitude: They simply do it on you! There is no substitute for experience! Once you have experienced it, you will accept the validity of your teacher's explanations.

Dr. Baker's final statement that believing one's teacher comes from practicing or applying his teaching in life is perhaps the most important. The same holds for us spiritually: If we apply God's teaching, we will also come to see the validity and greatness of God.

Is our cup empty, or do we know so much that we say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17)? We must approach learning from a humble and meek disposition. Have we put what we think we know aside long enough for God to put His instruction in? Are we really teachable?