

Teaching Like Jesus: Learning from the Master Teacher

Teaching, at its core, is meant to bring about change. If no change occurs in the life of the listener, can we really say that true teaching has taken place? In addition, Sunday school teachers often wrestle with how to engage their classes. Pastors struggle with how to keep their congregations attentive. Leaders want to know how to reach children, teens, and adults all at once. These challenges are not new, and they are not unique to us. Fortunately, Scripture provides us with a model. Jesus Himself was the Master Teacher, and by studying His example, we can learn how to teach in a way that engages our audience and leads to transformation.

Jesus: The Master Teacher

- His Message was a Revelation of God Himself

When we look at the teaching of Jesus, the first thing that stands out is His message. His teaching was not His own invention—it was the revelation of God Himself. Jesus declared, “I speak nothing of Myself. I do exactly what My Father has commanded Me” (John 5:19). He told His hearers that knowing Him was the same as knowing God, that seeing Him was the same as seeing God, and that receiving Him was the same as receiving God (John 8:19; 12:44–45; Mark 9:37). His message was clear: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

- His Message was Relevant

But His message was not only divine; it was relevant. Jesus never answered the questions no one was asking. He always addressed the heart of the matter. He “scratched where people itched,” speaking directly to their needs, fears, and struggles.

- His Message was Authoritative

Unlike the religious leaders of His day, Jesus spoke with boldness and certainty. The crowds marveled because He did not teach tentatively or apologetically.

- His Message was Effective

When people sat under Jesus’ teaching, they did not walk away neutral. His words brought amazement, belief, opposition, and even fear but never indifference. His teaching always led to a response, often resulting in changed lives.

Jesus' Teaching Methods

- His Teaching was Creative

Beyond His message, Jesus' teaching methods were profoundly effective. He used creativity in His teaching.

Parables (Earthly Stories with Heavenly Truths)

- Jesus often used simple, relatable stories to communicate profound spiritual truths.
- Example: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) turned cultural expectations upside down by showing compassion from an unlikely character.
- Example: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) used family dynamics to illustrate God's mercy and forgiveness.
- Why it worked: Parables invite listeners to think, apply, and remember truth through imagery and narrative.

Questions that Prompt Reflection

- Jesus frequently asked probing questions to stir thought, convict, or redirect.
- Example: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).
- Example: "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor?" (Luke 10:36).
- Why it worked: Instead of giving easy answers, questions engage learners in self-discovery.

Use of Everyday Objects and Situations

- Jesus drew lessons from seeds, lamps, coins, bread, water, and sheep—items people saw daily.
- Example: The mustard seed (Matthew 13:31–32) symbolized faith and kingdom growth.
- Example: The woman with the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10) illustrated God's joy in repentance.
- Why it worked: Tangible examples grounded spiritual truths in real life.

Hyperbole and Exaggeration for Impact

- Jesus often overstated to drive home a point.
- Example: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).
- Example: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out" (Matthew 5:29).
- Why it worked: Shocking language forces attention and highlights seriousness.

Metaphors and Word Pictures

- Jesus called Himself the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35), “Light of the World” (John 8:12), “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), and “Vine” (John 15:5).
- These images connected abstract truths with vivid mental pictures.
- Why it worked: People remember concepts better when tied to imagery.

Object Lessons and Symbolic Actions

- Jesus sometimes acted out a teaching point.
- Example: Washing the disciples’ feet (John 13:1–17) modeled humble service.
- Example: Cursing the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14, 20–25) illustrated fruitless faith.
- Why it worked: Actions reinforce words and leave lasting impressions.

Use of Silence and Timing

- At times, Jesus used silence to teach.
- Example: Before Pilate, He remained silent (Matthew 27:12–14), fulfilling prophecy and modeling submission.
- Example: He paused before responding to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:6), heightening the tension and impact of His words.
- Why it worked: Silence draws attention and creates space for reflection.

Repetition and Restatement

- Key truths were often repeated in different ways.
- Example: Jesus asked Peter three times: “Do you love Me?” (John 21:15–17), Each repetition both mirrored Peter’s earlier three denials and drove home the seriousness of his renewed calling.
- Example: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matthew 23:13–29)
Jesus repeated this phrase seven times in one discourse, underscoring His condemnation of hypocrisy.
- Why it worked: Repetition reinforces learning and ensures retention.

Contrast and Paradox

- Jesus used opposites to highlight truth.
- Example: “The last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).
- Example: “Whoever would save his life will lose it” (Mark 8:35).
- Why it worked: Paradox makes people wrestle with meaning, deepening understanding.

Real-Life Encounters as Lessons

- Many teachings arose out of real events.
- Example: Calming the storm (Mark 4:35–41) became a lesson on faith.
- Example: Feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1–14) transitioned into teaching about the Bread of Life.
- Why it worked: Immediate context made lessons unforgettable and applicable.

Storytelling that Engaged Emotion

- Jesus appealed not just to the mind but also the heart.
- Example: The lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7) evoked compassion and joy.
- Example: The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) stirred fear and urgency.
- Why it worked: Emotional connection makes truth personal and transformative.

- His Teaching was Unique and Hand-Tailored to Each Situation

Consider His interactions with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the nobleman of Capernaum. In each case, His method was different, but His goal was the same: to bring the person to faith.

- His Teaching was Engaging

He didn't simply lecture; He involved people in the process. He presented problems to be solved, asked questions, told stories, and even used silence to create space for reflection.

- His Teaching was Developmental

Jesus always took people from where they were to where they ought to be. Good teaching does not just transfer information; it moves the learner toward growth and maturity

Jesus Understood How People Learn

If we want to teach like Jesus, we also need to understand how people learn. Educational theory identifies four primary learning styles: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. Visual learners absorb information best through pictures, diagrams, and charts. Auditory learners process information by hearing and speaking. Read/write learners prefer written text, lists, and notes. Kinesthetic learners thrive when they can learn by doing—hands-on experiences, activities, and problem-solving.

As teachers, one of the dangers we face is teaching only in the way that we learn best. If I am primarily a visual learner, I may rely too heavily on slides or charts and neglect those who

learn better through discussion or hands-on activity. Jesus demonstrated flexibility and variety in His methods, and we can follow His example by teaching in multiple modes, engaging all types of learners.

Research also suggests that men and women often learn differently. Surveys show that men often prefer logical, fact-based, and visual learning with practical application, while women tend to thrive in relational, discussion-based, and detail-oriented environments. These are, of course, generalizations, but they remind us that balance is important. Our teaching should include both facts and relationships, both visuals and dialogue, both problem-solving and personal application.

Jesus Differentiated His Instruction and Used Active Learning

To reach different learners, we need to embrace differentiated instruction and active learning. Differentiated instruction means recognizing that not everyone in the room learns in the same way. Active learning goes a step further, emphasizing involving the student in the process. Research tells us that passive listening often leads to forgetfulness, while active participation leads to retention. As Mel Silberman has said, “What I hear, I forget. What I hear and see, I remember a little. What I hear, see, and discuss, I begin to understand. What I hear, see, discuss, and do, I acquire knowledge and skill. What I teach to another, I master.”

This is exactly what Jesus did. He asked questions. He let people wrestle with truth. He engaged them in dialogue. He placed responsibility on His listeners to think and apply. For us, this means building in moments of reflection, discussion, and participation in our teaching. Even small activities—like think-pair-share discussions, short case studies, or asking students to summarize what they’ve learned—can move a lecture from passive listening to active learning.

Jesus Engaged the Audience

Engaging the audience is not just about keeping people awake; it is about drawing them into the learning process. Jesus used tension, questions, silence, and stories to maintain engagement. We can do the same by making our teaching relevant, practical, and interactive. Adults in particular need information that connects to their daily lives and can be applied immediately. If what we teach remains abstract, it will not stick. The goal is transformation, not just information.

Jesus Masterfully Handled Different Types of Students

In teaching environments, we also face different kinds of learners with different personalities. Some may be hostile, others overly vocal, others disengaged. Jesus encountered all of these types, and we will too. For example, when faced with hostility, it is often best to avoid public confrontation and instead address the matter privately. For the vocal “know-it-all,” you can redirect their contributions by asking them to summarize or connect their thoughts to what others have shared. For the silent observer, it may help to prepare them in advance or provide alternative ways to participate.

Practical Application

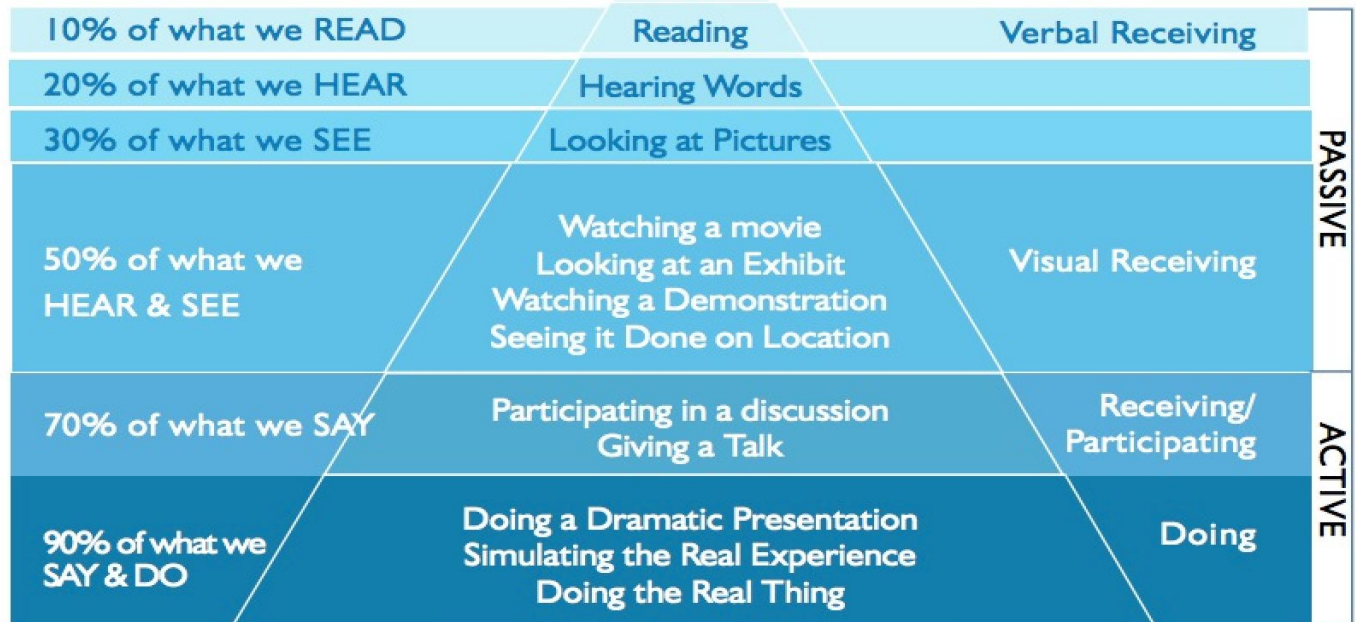
When we put all of this together, what emerges is a powerful model for teaching. Jesus taught with authority grounded in God's Word. He was creative, adaptive, and engaging. He spoke in ways that connected to His audience and led them toward transformation. As teachers, we should aim to do the same. By incorporating multiple learning styles, using active engagement strategies, and teaching with clarity and conviction, we can help our learners not just to know truth, but to live it.

Jesus' teaching always demanded a response. People either believed Him or rejected Him, but they could not ignore Him. Our teaching should have the same goal; not simply to pass along information, but to lead people toward change. The question for us is: how can we teach in such a way that our students are not merely informed, but transformed? That is the heart of teaching like Jesus.

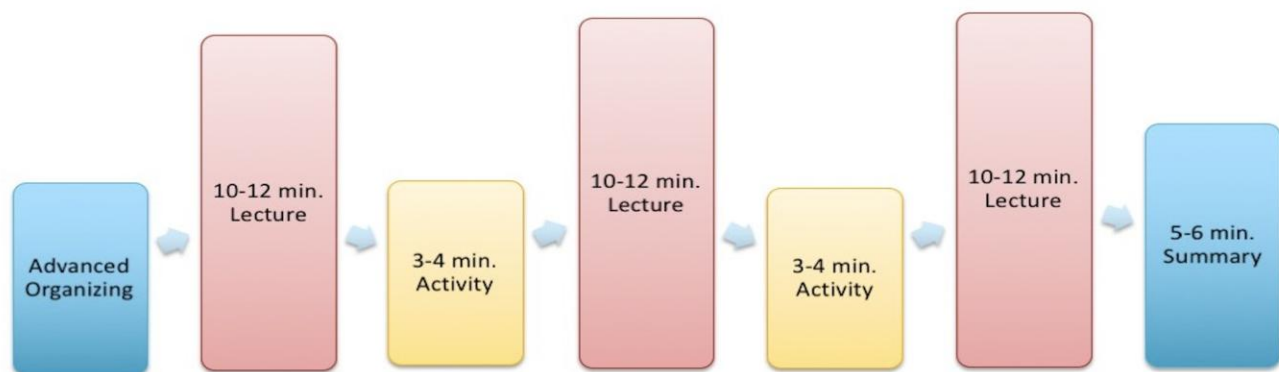
CONE OF LEARNING (EDGAR DALE)

After 2 Weeks
we tend to remember

Nature of Involment



Making Time for Active Learning



Adapted from Thinking Together: Collaborative Learning in the Sciences – Harvard University – Derek Bok Center

How can you incorporate active learning into your classroom?

The following list summarizes some of the many approaches.

- ◆ **Clarification Pauses:** This simple technique fosters "active listening." Throughout a lecture, particularly after stating an important point or defining a key concept, stop presenting and allow students time to think about the information. After waiting, ask if anyone needs to have anything clarified. Ask students to review their notes and ask questions about what they've written so far.
- ◆ **Writing Activities such as the "Minute Paper":** At an appropriate point in the lecture, ask the students to take out a blank sheet of paper. Then, state the topic or question you want students to address. For example, *"Today, we discussed emancipation and equal rights. List as many key events and figures as you can remember. You have two minutes – go!"*
- ◆ **Self-Assessment:** Students receive a quiz (typically ungraded) or a checklist of ideas to determine their understanding of the subject. Concept inventories or similar tools may be used at the beginning of a semester or the chapter to help students identify misconceptions.
- ◆ **Large-Group Discussion:** Students discuss a topic in class based on a reading, video, or problem. The instructor may prepare a list of questions to facilitate the discussion.
- ◆ **Think-Pair-Share:** Have students work individually on a problem or reflect on a passage. Students then compare their responses with a partner and synthesize a joint solution to share with the entire class.
- ◆ **Cooperative Groups in Class (Informal Groups, Triad Groups, etc.):** Pose a question for each cooperative group while you circulate around the room answering questions, asking further questions, and keeping the groups on task. After allowing time for group discussion, ask students to share their discussion points with the rest of the class.
- ◆ **Peer Review:** Students are asked to complete an individual homework assignment or short paper. On the day the assignment is due, students submit one copy to the instructor to be graded and one copy to their partner. Each student then takes their partner's work and, depending on the nature of the assignment, gives critical feedback, and corrects mistakes in content and/or grammar.
- ◆ **Group Evaluations:** Similar to peer review, students may evaluate group presentations or documents to assess the quality of the content and delivery of information.
- ◆ **Brainstorming:** Introduce a topic or problem and then ask for student input. Give students a minute to write down their ideas, and then record them on the board. An example for an introductory political science class would be, *"As a member of the minority in Congress, what options are available to you to block a piece of legislation?"*
- ◆ **Case Studies:** Use real-life stories that describe what happened to a community, family, school, industry, or individual to prompt students to integrate their classroom knowledge with their knowledge of real-world situations, actions, and consequences.
- ◆ **Hands-on Technology:** Students use technology such as simulation programs to get a deeper understanding of course concepts. For instance, students might use simulation software to design a simple device or use a statistical package for regression analysis.
- ◆ **Interactive Lecture:** Instructor breaks up the lecture at least once per class for an activity that lets all students work directly with the material. Students might observe and interpret features of images, interpret graphs, make calculation and estimates, etc.
- ◆ **Active Review Sessions (Games or Simulations):** The instructor poses questions and the students work on them in groups or individually. Students are asked to show their responses to the class and discuss any differences.
- ◆ **Role Playing:** Here students are asked to "act out" a part or a position to get a better idea of the concepts and theories being discussed. Role-playing exercises can range from the simple to the complex.
- ◆ **Jigsaw Discussion:** In this technique, a general topic is divided into smaller, interrelated pieces (e.g., a puzzle is divided into pieces). Each member of a team is assigned to read and become an expert on a different topic. After each person has become an expert on their piece of the puzzle, they teach the other team members about that puzzle piece. Finally, after each person has finished teaching, the puzzle has been reassembled, and everyone on the team knows something important about every piece of the puzzle.
- ◆ **Inquiry Learning:** Students use an investigative process to discover concepts for themselves. After the instructor identifies an idea or concept for mastery, a question is posed that asks students to make observations, pose hypotheses, and speculate on conclusions. Then students share their thoughts and tie the activity back to the main idea/concept.
- ◆ **Forum Theater:** Use theater to depict a situation and then have students enter into the sketch to act out possible solutions. Students watching a sketch on dysfunctional teams, might brainstorm possible suggestions for how to improve the team environment. Ask for volunteers to act out the updated scene.
- ◆ **Experiential Learning:** Plan site visits that allow students to see and experience applications of theories and concepts discussed in the class.

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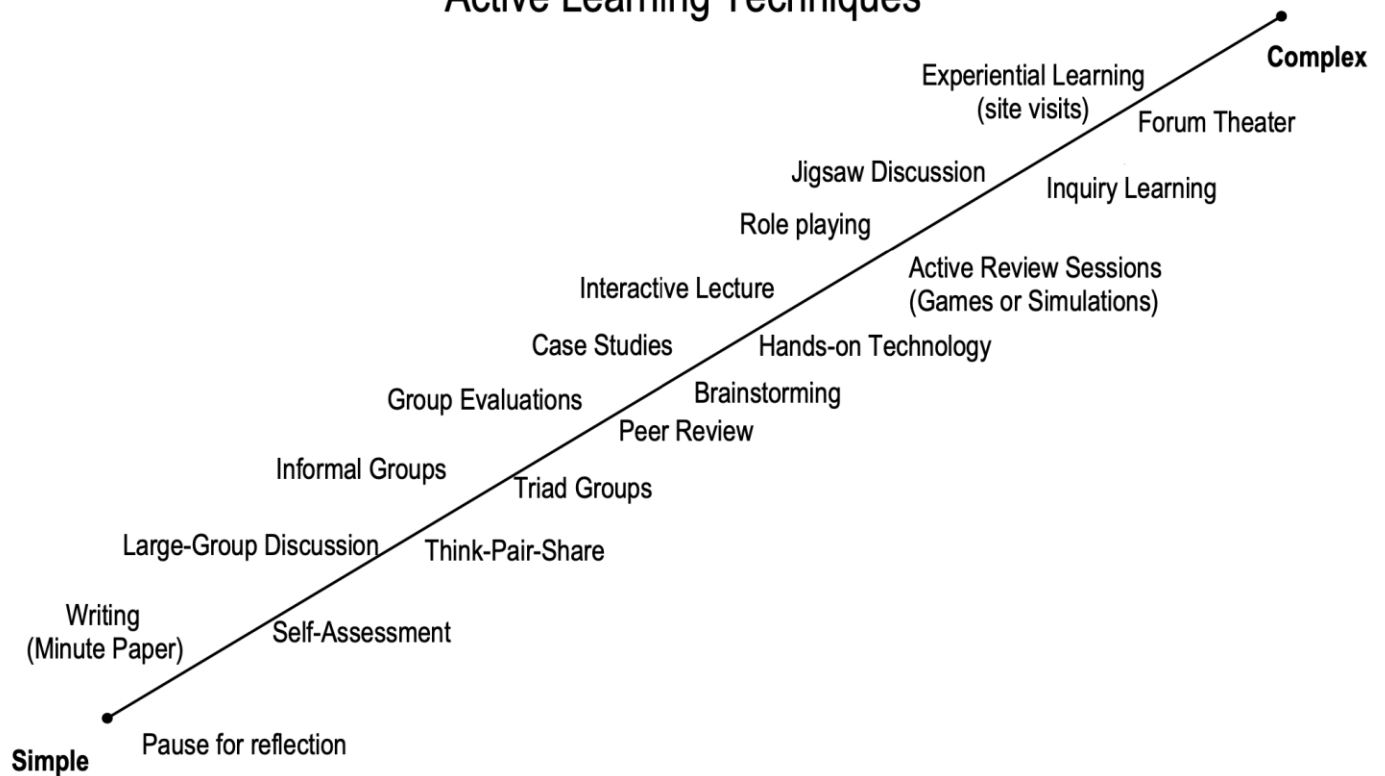
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Active Learning Techniques



This spectrum arranges active learning techniques by complexity and classroom time commitment.

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