

Teaching for Application — Youth and Adults

There is a process through which learners are transformed from the inside out. Read the following article and answer the reflection questions to help you think about how we go from being just hearers to doers of God's Word.

Seven Phases of Transformational Learning (Lifeway Christian Resources)

Acknowledge Authority - Every learner comes to study God's Word with some authority, some power, assumption, presupposition, or rule that controls his or her life. Who or what is the authority that is in control of my life? Acknowledge this authority so you will recognize that the question is not whether something will control you, but who or what will control you.

It's here that you begin to see that your perspective shapes the way you live. When you acknowledge an authority in your life, you are acknowledging that you are driven by some worldview or faith system. You think, believe, and act on the basis of your beliefs. You also are acknowledging that you can change the way you think and believe. You can learn and live in a new way. You are making yourself vulnerable to change.

Reflect: Do you see God as your absolute authority? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to be transformed by His Word?

Search the Truth - If you are going to study the Bible, then you must, at some point, open and examine the content of the actual Bible text. What historical setting and key words are reflected in the content of this Bible text? To answer this, you need to know the intended meaning of specific words and phrases. Literary factors (poetry, sermonic, and so forth), historical factors (customs, geography, events, and so forth), and the broader context of Scripture should be considered.

Here you will encounter the objective Word of God as an external reality. You will discover that God has spoken. You may not like what God says, but you can't dismiss it as though it's not there. In time, this alone will have an impact on your worldview. Searching the Scriptures consistently reinforces the truth that God is personal and He speaks objectively.

Reflect: In preparing to teach, do you spend time reading and studying the scripture? Do you spend time reading and studying the scripture when you are NOT preparing to teach?

Discover the Truth - It is not enough to explore only what the Bible content actually says. You need to ask, so what? What eternal concept is the Holy Spirit revealing to me from this Scripture? This concept should be applicable for anyone, anytime, anywhere. What does God want to communicate through this text to people living today? What abiding biblical truth is the Holy Spirit teaching about thinking, feeling, and living today?

This is the point at which it becomes clear that the Bible is not a dead book with no relevance to people today. Here you are exposed to the idea that truth is absolute and timeless. What was true for people in the Bible is true for people today.

Reflect: Are you constantly surprised and amazed when you look into God's Word? Do you allow the Holy Spirit to teach you anew every time you open His Word, no matter how familiar the verses?

Personalize the Truth - You need to take the universal truth or concept and begin to make personal application to your own life. Sooner or later, you need to bring it into your own particular world or context. What is God teaching me personally from this Scripture? You should consider generational, developmental, and life-stage factors in personalizing the truth.

Reflect: Do you hear God speak to you personally through His Word? How do you bridge what you are reading to your own life?

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Struggle with the Truth - When confronted with God's truth (concept) in a personal way (context) , you will experience a degree of conflict as you see the gap between what God desires and the way things really are in your life.

Struggling with the truth may be the single most important essential in transformational learning - and probably the most difficult to control. This raises the intentional and life changing influence of the Holy Spirit as the real Teacher of God's Word. In most instances, the struggle may begin during your actual study, but will take place primarily beyond the session. This is where you must depend on prayer and God's power to bring about conflict in your own life.

Reflect: How do you respond to God's conviction?

Believe the Truth - As you struggle with the truth, you naturally will deal with certain questions: What new biblical conviction is God leading me to integrate into my life? How is the Holy Spirit leading me to repent or to change my mind, my values, or the way I live? Conflict is hard to live with, so you will seek to resolve the struggle one way or another. You may choose to reject the truth and continue believing as you have. On the other hand, you may accept the truth as valid and choose to believe it as a matter of personal conviction. You cannot program how or when this will occur. Personal conviction may develop during the Bible study experience or may occur several weeks or months later. This shows once again the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit in learning the Truth of God's Word.

Reflect: Are you willing to spend time wrestling with this conviction until God has the right of way in this area of your life?

Obey the Truth - Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). In the final analysis, our conduct demonstrates our love for Christ. If you fail to obey the truth of God's Word, then no real transformation has occurred. You will need to identify ways you will act on the lesson in obedience. How is the Holy Spirit changing my conduct in how I think, what I value, and the way I live? In some instances, the lesson may actually provide opportunity for obedience during the encounter itself. In other instances, obedience will not be possible until after the session.

This element poses the question, To what extent will you love, trust, and obey the Lord in what you think and value and the way you live?

Reflect: Think back to the last Bible passage you studied. Ask yourself, "in what ways does my life reflect a greater love, trust, and obedience to the Lord in this area of my life?"

