

Teaching Dispensationalism: An Address of Priority and Pedagogy

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Contents

Teaching Dispensationalism: An Address of Priority and Pedagogy	1
Traditional Teaching in Church.....	2
Useful Educational Advances.....	3
Priority in Dispensational Teaching.....	5
Perception of Dispensational Teaching	6
Addressing the Perception of Dispensational Teaching	7
Hermeneutics as a Response to Critical Theory	8
How Youth Read Information	9
How to Begin.....	11
Pedagogy When Teaching Dispensationalism.....	12
A Shift Because of Critical Theory	12
Effective Use of the Lecture	13
A Caution on Student-Centered Learning	14
Active Learning as a Benefit in Church	15
Suggestions to Get Started.....	17
Conclusion	19
Bibliography	20

Teaching Dispensationalism: An Address of Priority and Pedagogy

Secular influences, the rise of critical theory, and the movement away from tradition are a few of the reasons that the field of education has been troublesome for not only the dispensationalist but for the Christian in general. As the educational landscape evolves, effectively communicating theology has become more complex. Cultural influences flood younger generations and lead them to approach Scripture from a self-first perspective, disregarding the authorial intent and contextual meaning essential for a dispensational hermeneutic. The problem magnifies when churches do not have a structure for teaching hermeneutics.

At the same time, many Christian families are turning away from public education with concerns over the unbiblical and secular culture of the classroom and its influence on subject matter.¹ As a result, the number of students in Christian schools and homeschools is increasing.² However, the shifts in education choices have not halted the decline in church attendance, particularly among younger generations, and churches of many denominations continue to experience this decline.³ This decline may lead parents and educators to resist modern educational advances as they associate them with secular ideology. The cultural influence of pub

¹ Adam Wittenberg, "Christian School Boom Continues as Parents Seek Faith-Based Alternatives," *The Lion* (July 29, 2024), <https://heartlanddailynews.com/2024/07/christian-school-boom-parents-faith-based-alternatives/>.

² Heather Tomlinson, "Why More Christians are Homeschooling their Children," *Premier Christianity* (September 26, 2023), <https://www.premierchristianity.com/features/why-more-christians-are-homeschooling-their-children/16351.article>.

³ Shahaboddin Vahidi Mehrjardi, "Factors Leading to Decline in Church Attendance in the Present Age," *Religious Inquiries* (April 2022), 221-225., https://ri.urd.ac.ir/article_159483_436be667eee67174ea91aefdf61d79ce.pdf; "Small Churches Struggle to Grow Because of the People they Attract," Barna Research Group, September 2, 2003, <https://www.barna.com/research/small-churches-struggle-to-grow-because-of-the-people-they-attract/>.

lic schools may cause some parents and Christian educators to shy away from advances in education typically developed in public schools.

The dispensational church should prioritize teaching hermeneutics while adopting effective contemporary educational methods to counteract these educational trends and the associated approach to Scripture. Addressing the priority of proper hermeneutics along with updated pedagogy that utilizes contemporary active learning methods will lead to enhanced engagement and comprehension. Aligning dispensational hermeneutical accuracy with modern, effective teaching strategies can better equip younger generations to learn Scripture within their cultural and educational setting. These suggestions are beneficial for dispensationalists to maintain theological integrity while youth grow and stay in the church. In a world increasingly influenced by contradictory ideas like relativism and critical theory, passing on the objective truths of Scripture and sound doctrine is essential.

Traditional Teaching in Church

The church has, at least for the past couple hundred years, operated primarily on a model of standard lecture-style sermons preceded or followed by Sunday school courses that also operate in a predominately lecture-style format.⁴ The educational methods within Sunday school courses vary but primarily rely on lecture-style learning. There are distinct benefits to this teaching style and format. For example, centralized teaching with an authority figure in the church can help ensure that the theology and doctrine communicated are unified and dispersed accurately and consistently maintained across a congregation. However, while clear and c

⁴ Elmer L. Towns, *How to Grow an Effective Sunday School* (Accent Books, 1979), 60. Towns argues that student involvement should follow effective lecturing. His suggestion is to ask follow-up questions or have a group discussion. In this model, the majority of each meeting is a lecture-style lesson.

onsistent, the structured and authoritative style utilizes passive learning methods where the youth receive the teaching rather than participate in their learning.

The answer to reaching younger generations with dispensationalism is not to entirely replace the sermon or lecture with student activity but to suggest that more robust opportunities for active learning complement the sermon. Giving all lessons in lecture-style format with minimal follow-up may cause younger people to struggle to engage as they are more accustomed to the participatory learning environments of their formal educational settings. Leaders should explore effective modern educational techniques that encourage active learning and critical thinking to bridge this gap and ensure that dispensational thought passes to younger audiences. Incorporating modern educational techniques while preserving the theological hermeneutics of the dispensational church will help build a broad-reaching curriculum that is more accessible to youth.

Useful Educational Advances

As educational field study has evolved, several helpful advances are worth consideration in a church environment. Detailing every advantageous educational strategy would exceed the purposes of this paper, but going over a few primary strategies will help introduce ideas for initial implementation. One area to consider in the church is inquiry-based learning. Lee defined inquiry-based learning as an "array of classroom practices that promote student learning through guided and, increasingly, independent investigation of complex questions and problems, often for which there is no single answer."⁵ Inquiry-based learning focuses on the student who receives a question to solve and resources to solve it. The student uses the materials to answer the q

⁵ V. S. Lee, et. al., "What is Inquiry Guided Learning?," in *Teaching and Learning Through Inquiry: A Guidebook for Institutions and Instructors*, ed. V. S. Lee (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2004), 9.

question and submit a response. In practice, a leader could assign a question to the youth, give them several passages and secondary sources to use, and ask them to produce an answer to the question. For the dispensationalist, inquiry-based learning may be a strategy to teach students basic hermeneutics; they can read and learn the Bible for themselves, independent from any creeds or systems.

Another potentially beneficial educational method for dispensational churches is project-based learning. Project-based learning is typically done in a group setting and gives students a real-world scenario problem to solve.⁶ Project-based learning often encourages collaboration, critical thinking, and application of material. In a dispensational church, a leader could assign students a problem topic or theme to explore throughout the narrative of Scripture and then creatively present their conclusions in a presentation, skit, or other activity. The benefit of project-based learning for the church is in the students' direct engagement, which builds a deeper understanding of biblical content.

A flipped classroom model may also present unique opportunities for a church. In a flipped classroom, learners watch videos or read at home and then come to class to discuss the material.⁷ In the school setting, the lesson occurs at home instead of regular homework, and then teachers and students discuss problems in class. For the church, the flipped classroom could provide a significant opportunity for independent learning and biblical study followed by any correction or problem-solving with the church leader. The younger church members would p

⁶ Ai-Jou Pan, Chin-Feng Lai, Hsu-Chan Kuo, "Investigating the Impact of a Possibility-Thinking Integrated Project-Based Learning History Course on High School Students' Creativity, Learning Motivation, and History Knowledge," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 47, (March 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101214>.

⁷ Lanqin Zheng, et. al., "The Effectiveness of the Flipped Classroom on Students' Learning Achievement and Learning Motivation: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 23, no. 1 (January 2020), <https://www.proquest.com/publiccontent/docview/2515019590?accountid=12085&pq-origsite=summon&source=Scholarly%20Journals>, 1.

participate in what they are learning on a more personal level than they would by showing up and listening to a lecture. The flipped classroom model's downside may be in participation; a youth member would have to be committed to completing a study on their own. Review guides, reading prompts, or other structured support could alleviate the problem. Many adult book study groups already use this learning model in churches.

Each of these educational methods offers benefits that align with the broader goals of dispensational teaching. All learners engage with theology and thinking through Bible passages at a level beyond a traditional lecture. Many assignments using these methods provide unique opportunities for collaboration where members can work together to solve problems with peers. The instructor still plays a vital role in guiding the learners and providing live feedback while the students work. This feedback can help students focus on learning goals or correct mistakes before they compound depending on the project, goals, and student work.

Priority in Dispensational Teaching

To best address the learning needs of younger generations in dispensational churches, dispensationalists should consider what takes priority within their teaching and the pedagogical methods employed. In a modern environment where secular ideology and critical theories shape young minds in their educational settings, the priority of establishing dispensational hermeneutics is necessary. The perception that dispensational churches focus on the results of theology, such as eschatology, before addressing the foundational principles of hermeneutics needs to be corrected.

Perception of Dispensational Teaching

Right or wrong, there is a perception of dispensationalists only caring about eschatology, prophesy, and the distinction between the church and Israel.⁸ While these matters are important and carry significant weight in a believer's understanding of Scripture, those outside of dispensationalist churches often categorize dispensationalists with obscure heretics and nonsensical tomfoolery.⁹ A criticism of dispensationalists' use of literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics is that it is inconsistent in applying its hermeneutic and illogical in its conclusions.¹⁰ To the non-dispensationalist, the dispensationalist cares little for a believer's initial steps and is quick to reject someone in their theological infancy who has yet to nail down the finer points of eschatology, ecclesiology, and prophetic interpretation.

The negative perception of dispensationalists is not limited to theological thought. Another accusation is that dispensationalists are both overly and underly political.¹¹ The Christian nationalist groups who seek to turn their country into a Christian political nation criticize the lack of involvement from dispensationalists who have a defeatist eschatology.¹² To many other non-di

⁸ Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023); Kevin Bauder, "Indefensible Dispensationalism," *Sharper Iron* (August 2016), <https://sharperiron.org/comment/86158>; Bonnie Kristian, "The Surprising Staying Power of Dispensationalism," review of *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, by Daniel G. Hummel, *Christianity Today*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/08/rise-fall-dispensationalism-daniel-hummel-end-times/>.

⁹ Philip A. F. Church, "Dispensational Christian Zionism: A Strange but Acceptable Aberration or a Deviant Heresy?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 2 (Fall 2009), https://www.academia.edu/6011082/Dispensational_Christian_Zionism_a_strange_but_acceptable_aberration_or_a_deviant_heresy_WTJ_71_2009_375_398. This article aligns dispensationalists with Christian Zionism and attempts to answer if the theology is heretical. The conclusion is that Christian Zionism is not heretical but is obscure.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kristian, "The Surprising Staying Power of Dispensationalism; Mike Stallard, "Is Dispensationalism Hurting American Political Policies in the Middle East?," *Our Hope*, 2009, <https://our-hope.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Dispensationalism-and-Middle-East.pdf>.

¹² David Orton, "End-Time Fads & Defeatist Fantasies: Studies In Eschatology," LifeMessenger, February 28, 2019, <http://lifemessenger.org/end-time-fads-defeatist-fantasies-studies-in-eschatology/>.

dispensationalists, dispensationalists are too defeatist in eschatology, believing that things will get worse before they can get better. The theological focus on Israel has led to the belief that dispensationalists put the needs of modern Israel before the needs of other nations. Christian Zionist is a label that the dispensationalist may accept, but opponents lob it as an insult.¹³

Addressing the Perception of Dispensational Teaching

The perception of dispensationalists is often unwarranted. Dispensationalists have a thorough theology that includes unique eschatological, ecclesiological, and prophetic points but does not operate solely in those theological categories. While in practice, most dispensationalists are theologically well-rounded and apply their interpretive method to the entirety of their theological thought, the perception of dispensationalists is worth addressing as it may have some origins in reality. Dispensationalists should not give up their theology for the sake of camaraderie; rather, dispensationalists should be careful not to lead on the wrong foot and approach relationships with believers in the wisdom and honor Christ exhibited during his life (Matt. 11:25–30, Luke 10:41–42).

To address the perception of dispensationalists, particularly with youth and younger generations, leaders ought to approach conversations with well-rounded theology while also maintaining an understanding of who the audience is. Some younger people are certainly experienced and capable of holding deep theological conversations; others do not know foundational biblical facts. The dispensationalist should be cautious of immediately engaging in deep eschatological conversation with youth who do not first have a solid hermeneutical

¹³ Mark Tooley, “Dissing Dispensationalists,” *Providence*, July 11, 2019, <https://providencemag.com/2019/07/dissing-dispensationalists/>.

framework. Without the hermeneutical agreement, the interpretations of Scripture cannot align as people approach the text from opposing perspectives.

Hermeneutics as a Response to Critical Theory

One of the primary difficulties in contemporary education for Christians is the influence of critical theory in various fields of learning. Critical theory “refers to a family of theories that aim at a critique and transformation of society by integrating normative perspective with empirically informed analysis of society’s conflicts, contradictions, and tendencies.”¹⁴ Critical theory tries to reform and reinterpret social philosophy through the lens of a subject's experiences.¹⁵ Critical theory applies in various social, political, religious, and historical fields. Critical theory often challenges the notion of objective truth across disciplines when used in education. For example, critical historical theory uses ideas such as Lessing's ditch to suggest that it is impossible to know objective truth in history, as modern historians cannot bridge the gap to the reality of the ancient without biases of the victor, social, economic, or other influences.¹⁶ The influence of critical theory is felt in nearly every discipline of education,

¹⁴ Robin Celikates and Jeffrey Flynn, “Critical Theory (Frankfurt School),” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/#CritPrac>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Walter Wyman, review of *Lessing's "Ugly Ditch": A Study of Theology and History*, by Gordon E. Michalson, Jr., *The University of Chicago Press* 66, no. 4 (October 1986), <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/487454>.

resulting in students who are quick to question and slow to accept objective reality.¹⁷ This skepticism presents several problems for the church, particularly in reading historical narratives in Scripture and understanding some of its exclusive theological truths.

To counter the relativism of critical theory, the dispensational church has an advantage in hermeneutical method. The literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic allows the reader to seek objective truth in a passage by understanding the context of the passage.¹⁸ The literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic emphasizes authorial intent and contextual meaning over the reader's perspective. The emphasis on authorial intent even addresses the issue of understanding a writer's culture, a concern that critical theory claims to address, while maintaining the possibility and reality of knowing objective truth.¹⁹ Teaching and imparting strong dispensational hermeneutics equips younger generations with a foundation that allows them to understand more complex theology while avoiding the pitfalls of applying a critical approach to Scripture.

How Youth Read Information

In light of the preceding discussion on critical theory, it is vital to recognize how younger people approach reading literature and information in their educational context. The pervasiveness of the critical approach is not limited to classroom assignments and textbooks. Students spend hours daily on the internet and consume an ever-growing majority of their

¹⁷ Celikates and Flynn, "Critical Theory (Frankfurt School);" Trevor Maddock, "The Nature and Limits of Critical Theory in Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 31, no. 1 (January 1999), 43., <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1469-5812.1999.tb00373.x?needAccess=true>. The essay presents the comprehensive approach of critical theory to produce autonomous individuals. Maddock suggests critical theory is only part of the solution as the suggestions are often abstract and overly prescriptive to unique school situations.

¹⁸ Richard Alan Fuhr and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 180.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

information from online sources.²⁰ Scholes found that middle-aged students approach reading information from the internet with a general skepticism.²¹ Further, Scholes posed that “the idea of universal truths has been replaced with many truths, many knowledges and many forms of reason, requiring sophisticated literacies to navigate potentially conflicting, controversial sources laden with disinformation or misinformation.”²² Processing information online is an example of youth approaching information with skepticism. There are many truths, some conflicting, and some lying; it is easy to see where a person would give up on literal meaning. This skeptical approach would be dangerous when carried over to Scripture interpretation.

Feinstein and Waddington explored how the field of science education teaches in the “post-truth era.”²³ In their conclusion, Feinstein and Waddington suggest that rather than emphasize how the field of science uses tools to tell what is true, science educators should focus on how they can help people use science appropriately in the social context.²⁴ Even the field of science must acquiesce to the post-truth era. The dispensational church has work to do to ensure that younger people know they can find objective, singular truth in the pages of Scripture. The way youth read information and literature, with skepticism and a belief that objective truth is impossible, can be partly corrected by literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutics.

²⁰ Patricia Hilliard, “Screen Time in School: Good, Bad, or to be Determined?,” *Digital Learning Collaborative*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.digitallearningcollab.com/blog/screen-time-in-schools>.

²¹ Laura Scholes, et. al., “Many Truths, Many Knowledges, Many Forms of Reason: Understanding Middle-School Student Approaches to Sources of Information on the Internet,” *British Educational Research Journal* 50, no. 1 (September 2023), 72, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3909>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Noah Weeth Feinstein and David Isaac Waddington, “Individual Truth Judgments or Purposeful, Collective Sensemaking? Rethinking Science Education’s Response to the Post-Truth Era,” *Educational Psychologist* 55, no.3 (June 2020), 155, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00461520.2020.1780130#abstract>.

²⁴ Ibid.

How to Begin

There is a disconnect between how the dispensational church says Scripture should be read and how younger generations are trained to read. While the perception that dispensationalists focus on complicated theology may be exaggerated, it represents a real challenge in teaching dispensationalism to youth. If a dispensational church begins educating younger people in complex areas before establishing proper hermeneutics, the youth may approach these areas with the same skepticism as other subjects. A student may see a complex issue of theology as an area for misinterpretation or misapplication, or they may give up on a passage if they read it from their generation's critical and skeptical lens. There is a difference between wanting students who think and question information as part of an inquiry and those who think and question because there is no truth; leaders can recognize this difference and plan around it. Youth leaders in dispensational churches should be motivated to build the first things of hermeneutics, which will address negative perceptions of dispensationalists and foster the transmission of faithful teaching to future generations.

Starting with a hermeneutic that believes in absolute truth within a passage will help to ensure that dispensationalism continues to thrive in subsequent generations. To do this, dispensational churches should bring hermeneutical training into youth programs in ways that appeal to the students to show that they can find absolute truth in the pages of Scripture. Addressing the priority of hermeneutics over the topics of eschatology, ecclesiology, and prophetic interpretation not only helps the perception of dispensationalism. Every believer should have a proper hermeneutical framework to study any passage of Scripture. Teaching hermeneutics first is not a novel idea, but it requires renewed emphasis in youth programs because of their critical world. Ensuring that the church is teaching proper hermeneutics to youth

will strengthen the church's teaching and provide a resilient foundation of faith in the contemporary educational setting.

Pedagogy When Teaching Dispensationalism

Teaching dispensationalism from a hermeneutics-first perspective to younger generations will help to address the concerns of the critical generation of the modern world. How dispensational churches teach dispensationalism can also benefit from an update. The rise of critical theory and increasingly secular culture within the field of education may lead to a temptation to shy away from advances in education in favor of tradition. However, ignoring helpful teaching strategies within the church could further drive people out.

A Shift Because of Critical Theory

Critical theory has shifted the focus of teaching and learning, moving from seeking foundational truths within a text to questioning the reliability of the text because of underlying assumptions, power dynamics, and socio-cultural biases. The shift toward critical theory has produced students who strive for critical thought, question first, and develop arguments as outcomes in their academic work. Concurrently, education has shifted from traditional lecture and recitation to student-produced work that puts discovery on the student. A few contemporary active learning methods, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and the flipped classroom method were discussed previously. These educational advances developed partly because of critical theory but are not bound to critical results. Utilizing the student engagement benefits of modern teaching techniques helps ensure that dispensationalism is taught effectively to younger generations.

Effective Use of the Lecture

A shift in how dispensational churches approach lecture utilization may produce desired learning outcomes. While the church is not a school, youth programs operate with academic and spiritual goals as they strive for knowledge retention and to rightly apply Scripture for spiritual growth. Loughlin and Lindberg-Sand studied the effectiveness of lectures at the university level, finding that while lectures are often used out of budgetary and space constraints in large lecture halls, they remain effective in disseminating information even at the university level.²⁵ The study also highlighted that students believed peer interactions in the hallways and during breaks helped to solidify lecture content.²⁶ A youth group that meets regularly for a weekly lecture can expect to achieve comparable results. Students come to the lecture to learn and benefit from peer interaction and collaborative problem-solving. Lectures have their place in education, and students communicate a desire to continue learning from lectures in academic settings, but it is beneficial to complement them with other educational tools.²⁷ By combining practical lecture or sermon-style teaching with active student learning techniques, churches can help students learn to study Scripture at a more personal and lasting level.

²⁵ Colin Loughlin and Åsa Lindberg-Sand, "The Use of Lectures: Effective Pedagogy or Seeds Scattered on the Wind?," *Higher Education* 85, no. 2 (February 2023), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2763975837/fulltextPDF/457BD5B06C5A4D85PQ/1?accountid=12085&sourceType=Scholarly%20Journals>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁷ Safaa El Bialy, et. al., "To Lecture or Not to Lecture, That is the Question! Modern Medical and Nursing Students' Perceptions Regarding Lectures and Lecture Attendance at the University of Ottawa," *University of Ottawa Journal of Medicine* 11, no. S5 (January 2022), <https://doaj.org/article/73d5433c35034cd08600aa9331bf1579>. Many students considered lectures beneficial and preferred in this study and the previous one.

A Caution on Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered learning has been a buzzword in educational discourse over the past several decades, with claims that it may seemingly solve every imaginable learning challenge. It is reasonable for the church to approach the buzz with a more than healthy amount of caution. Student-centered learning and active learning strategies are sometimes used interchangeably, and they do have some overlap. Student-centered learning "empowers students to actively drive and engage in the learning process" and contrasts teacher-centered learning, where the educator is the "giver of knowledge."²⁸ The idea that students should be "independent, have self-regulation...and manage themselves" within a student-centered learning approach might present problems for a dispensational church.²⁹ Student-centered learning can lead to a model where students grow in "autonomy and self-reliance, even to the point of denying that anything exists beyond the individual."³⁰ Dispensational churches should be skeptical of this learning model because it elevates the individual by making students the drivers of the learning process and managers of their independent education. The concern is that elevating the individual makes truth relative to them, leading to the forsaking of Scriptural truths and reducing theology to opinion. This concern is valid as churches consider implementing active learning techniques in youth programs.

²⁸ Adam B. Wilson, et. al., "Breaking with Tradition: A Scoping Meta-Analysis Analyzing the Effects of Student-Centered Learning and Computer-Aided Instruction on Student Performance in Anatomy," *American Association of Anatomists* 12, no. 1 (February 2019), 61–73, <https://anatomypubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ase.1789>.

²⁹ K. Agustini, et. al., "Student-Centered Learning Models and Learning Outcomes: Meta-Analysis and Effect Sizes on the Students' Thesis," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 1810 (2021), 1, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1742-6596/1810/1/012049/pdf>.

³⁰ Hikaru Komatsu, Jeremy Rappleye, and Iveta Silova, "Student-Centered Learning and Sustainability: Solution or Problem?" *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 65, no. 1 (February 2021), 7, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/711829>. This article analyzed student-centered learning from a sustainability perspective and suggested that the overreliance on the individual was a problem that deserved further discussion. While not a directly related idea, the concern of individualism within student-centered learning is relevant.

However, it is important to look beyond that concern and recognize the tangible benefits of active learning strategies, particularly when developing the long-term skills that a Bible student needs to handle Scripture in their own study. Active learning methods are not necessarily bound to the extremes of student-centered learning. The individual student does not need autonomy in managing the learning process to engage in active learning strategies.³¹ A teacher can maintain control of a curriculum plan while encouraging students to engage actively. Promoting active involvement in student learning fosters critical thinking and understanding, crucial for teaching complex theological systems and giving students skills they can use for life. Lecture-based teaching leaves students with information they can hold and retain, while the active learning approaches to Scripture help students use and apply what they have learned in practice and develop skills. Christian youth can benefit from both lecture-based listening and active strategies to gain information and develop the personal study skills necessary for a lifelong believer. The lecture passes on information, and the guided active learning helps take and use the information to learn how to personally interact with Scripture responsibly.

Active Learning as a Benefit in Church

Modern active learning teaching strategies like inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and the flipped classroom model are some of the methods that can benefit a church. These methods enhance whole-group engagement and comprehension in the classroom and can also enhance engagement and comprehension in Bible study. A teacher can use each method to

³¹ Petra Kranzfelder, et. al., “Undergraduate Biology Instructors Still Use Mostly Teacher-Centered Discourse Even When Teaching with Active Learning Strategies,” *BioScience* 70, no. 10 (October 2020), <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/70/10/901/5875251?login=false>. This study found that biology teachers utilized active learning strategies while remaining teacher-centered in their discourse. The authors argued that the result was negative and had room for improvement. It is presented here as support for the possibility of doing so rather than as to agree with the negative implication.

encourage personal study and critical thought. Developing critical thinking is valuable in the dispensational framework as the students encounter other approaches to Scripture, such as other hermeneutical methods and biblical criticism, and must be able to interact with them.

Active learning activities provide practical and engaging ways for all students to interact with biblical studies under the guidance of a church leader. Allowing students in youth programs the time to complete their biblical study and present their findings in various formats gives the youth leader valuable insight into how the students interpret and apply Scripture. After students present their findings, the youth leader can address or correct any questionable methods or content as the students present their material. The result of active learning within the church has the potential for long-term benefit for the student who is better equipped to handle the word of God confidently and has learned how to do so from a dispensational framework.

No matter what active learning technique is selected, utilizing these approaches in church education can give youth a significant advantage in their biblical studies. These models are effective in more than just secular education; there is scriptural support for using a multiple-approach model for education. In the Old Testament, God's interactions with Israel included a multifaceted approach, notably as God demonstrated his patience and long-suffering while teaching the Israelites lessons of faithfulness through direct prophetic instruction along with the lived experiences of the nation. On the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–35, Jesus did not immediately reveal himself to the disciples but allowed the disciples to discuss their thoughts before correcting their conclusions. The teacher-disciple relationships are seen in Jesus' ministry with the disciples as Jesus frequently lectured the group and gave them opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Luke 10:1–23 is an example where Jesus taught about the workers and the harvest, sent out the seventy-two, and, upon their return, the disciples reflected on their

lived experience, and Jesus taught them more. The method is also seen in Paul's mentorship with Timothy, reflecting a multifaceted approach involving instruction, demonstration, and feedback.³² While the context of these examples may not be directly comparable to modern church youth programs, they provide a theological basis for using multifaceted teaching methods in churches today. Integrating active learning approaches into youth instruction can help students learn Scripture and apply the lessons to their lives while receiving direct feedback from more mature Christians.

Suggestions to Get Started

Implementing more active learning opportunities in a church requires thoughtful planning and a gradual approach. In most cases, it would not be practical or wise for a church to overhaul its entire youth ministry in favor of an active learning curriculum overnight. Instead, a more practical first step is to explore what it would look like to implement a strategy for including active learning opportunities in regular meetings. Churches can begin by seeking relevant educational research, speaking with teachers within the congregation to gain their input, and asking the youth what strategies help them learn. This collaborative approach can help gain ideas for effective strategy while building unity and buy-in from church members. Weighing the benefit of student learning and engagement against the potential time and financial commitment will help determine the best approach. The church should also decide whether it wants to come up with a specific curriculum or leave decisions to the discretion of the youth leader.

³² Andrea Luxton, "The Bible and Pedagogy" (presentation at the Second Symposium on the Bible and Adventist Scholarship, Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic, March 15-20, 2004, https://christintheclassroom.org/vol_31B/31Bcc_211-238.htm). This lecture generated some of the ideas presented in this paragraph. It is an interesting discussion on the role of community in learning and ultimately approaches ideas from the Adventist perspective of the symposium.

Part of being informed about active learning techniques is understanding the challenges that will undoubtedly arise. The primary challenge within a church will likely be gaining buy-in from the students who would not be graded on their work as they would in school. Without grades, report cards, or accountability measures that schools take, motivating students to complete the activities may be challenging. To address this, youth leaders should consider how they present the idea to parents to build support from parents and members of the church. The leaders should also consider dedicating adequate time during regular youth meetings to accomplish the tasks. The tasks should also be engaging and distinct from regular schoolwork. For example, students could read a passage in a small group and prepare a skit summarizing and applying the lesson they share with the whole group. This example gives a fun task to students and allows the leader to learn how the group interprets Scripture. A skit or similar strategy would likely go over better than handing the students a packet of documents and asking them to write a paper at home. Other challenges may include curriculum acquisition and development, providing effective student feedback, and maintaining participation.

After gathering information, building active learning approaches creatively, and assessing potential challenges; youth leaders should try a strategy out in practice. Just as teachers experiment in the classroom, youth leaders should be open to new methods even if they do not work well immediately. It is important to remember that not every attempt at active learning will produce the most effective results. If a project idea does not work as planned, it does not need to be categorized as a failure but seen as an opportunity for refinement. Sometimes, one element of a project works and can be used differently in the future. Integrating active learning into a church's youth environment will be a refining process that improves over time as the program gets closer to its goals with each iteration.

Conclusion

Churches often wonder how to reach the youth in the congregation and prevent the consistent phenomenon of younger generations leaving the church as they age. Integrating strategies from the field of education may sound like a dangerous idea to the cautious ear because of the influence of secular thought and the prevalence of ideas like critical theory in education. However, to ignore the field of education entirely leaves out some tools that can help solve the church's lifelong attendance question. Active learning strategies such as inquiry-based methods, project-based approaches, and the flipped classroom model that include more student engagement offer significant potential for enhancing biblical education among youth. The traditional lecture or sermon-based approaches still have value in disseminating information and should not be tossed aside in favor of a fully active learning plan. Modern pedagogical strategies can encourage deeper engagement, critical thinking, and long-term retention to help younger generations learn and apply Scripture. A gradual incorporation of modern pedagogical techniques can help churches equip young believers with the skills to navigate Scripture independently and confidently. Confident independent study is beneficial for dispensational churches as the younger generations interact with a critical world outside the church. The dispensational literal, grammatical-historical approach to hermeneutics relies on an understanding of objective truth and the single meaning of a text. Fostering the foundational knowledge and skills to live out their biblical studies from a dispensational approach will allow them to remain steadfast in a skeptical world.

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