

## SHOW THEM JESUS — Denver area, February, 2020

Three things to notice in the story about Olivia:

1. “Wow!” is our goal. Help kids see that Jesus is “wow!”
2. Notice that getting the wow didn’t take anything extra clever: all it took was to tell about Jesus, and keep telling more. Jesus himself is “wow” enough. We need to resist our tendency to stop short and just say something safe and standard about Jesus when we actually know something spectacular.
3. It also made *me* wonder at the gospel. This too is needed. Students will remember the things their teacher is excited about. We should spend enough time looking at Jesus that we get excited first—and then go and teach.

One more thought... About that awkward silence after I told Olivia about the resurrection of the dead and she said “Wow, no one ever told me that before,” and then we looked at John 11, and after that I was stuck over what to say... The silence wasn’t really because I didn’t know what to say. I did have something to say. What I thought to say was to ask if I could pray with her and thank God for being so good to us—ask that he would help us both to always believe it and love him for it. But I didn’t say that because I had a fear it might sound hokey. I had already told her twice that dead people won’t stay dead, and she was buying it, and I didn’t want to push my luck. I was worried about my image. And so, I knelt there next to this delightful girl and passed up an opportunity to encourage her more in the gospel—and to show her how to practice faith. The point: We need to get over our hesitations, and be all about the gospel and faith in Jesus.

Some assumptions behind this talk:

- We aren’t interested in just making “good kids,” but rather Christian kids whose hope is in Jesus rather than their own goodness. Our goal is FAITH.
- To the extent we do want kids to learn godly behavior, telling them *how* to obey is not enough; we must also wow them with Jesus so they *want* to obey.
- And we must teach them to go to Jesus for the power to obey. Teach them to exercise faith, not to summon more willpower. You see, very little of this is ultimately about them. We must teach them to turn to Jesus for every need.

Show Jesus to be the Savior from sin.

**You can’t have Bible stories worth telling without a need for rescue.** No Savior without a need for salvation.

- *We need to be saved* from the guilt of sin and the punishment we deserve.
- *We need to be saved* from the way sin separates up from God.
- *We need to be saved* from the effects of sin seen in our behavior.
- *We need to be saved* from the effects of sin seen in the world—oppression and sadness and loneliness and death.

There is no way to apply Bible lessons to kids’ lives (except mere moral lessons) unless they see that they are part of the salvation story. They need to be saved from sin.



These two traits are very common in kids. Sometimes you even get some of both in the same kid.

One way to think of them is that he is an anxious kid, she is a smug kid.

He needs faith. She needs “the fear of the Lord.”

He needs to have the accusing voice of the devil silenced. She needs to hear the convicting voice of the Spirit.

He needs to know that Jesus is a friend of sinners. She needs to know that Jesus is of no use to anyone except to sinners.

Both need to *see sin and see Jesus*. Both need to *look outside themselves* and turn to Jesus as their Savior. Both faith and fear of the Lord are outward looking actions.

If Jesus is just an example...

Charlie Brown will feel condemned every time he learns more about Jesus.

Lucy will feel self-justified every time she learns more about Jesus.

If Jesus is just a moral teacher...

CB will feel condemned.

Lucy will be insufferable. (“Yup. That’s the way to live. Way to go, Jesus! Everyone should be like that.”)

If Jesus is just a nice guy who helps with life’s little problems when you need him...

CB will spend his life trying to manipulate Jesus instead of serving him.

Lucy will ignore Jesus most of the time. She’ll find him boring and unnecessary.

Neither will change unless they see Jesus as their Savior from sin.

*Then* Charlie Brown gains confidence and comfort.

*Then* Lucy gains humility and thankfulness.

Then both have some hope *outside of themselves*.

Give kids what they need—something that changes everything—Jesus, the Savior from sin.

Teach a “full” salvation.

Too often we end up saying the same half-dozen things about Jesus and salvation, over and over, and our lessons become flat. We need to present a big salvation and a big Savior. See more of Jesus—and teach it. Get out of our ruts. Be amazed!

We need to keep a **robust definition of the gospel**, one that keeps the crucifixion and resurrection at the core but also acknowledges other elements included in salvation. To keep it manageable as a basic framework in our minds, I like to think in terms of four broad elements. These are the blessings shared by those who have faith and are in Christ.

The four “-tions” I like to keep in mind:

- Justification – saved from the guilt of sin
- Adoption – saved from the way sin separates us from God
- Sanctification – saved from the effects of sin in our behavior
- Glorification – saved from the effects of sin seen in the world and in our bodies (I’m including the restoration of the world in this)

Work on putting each of these into your brain, practice saying them, rehearse and rehearse again until you can roll out a summary of it at any moment, in front of any kid or group of kids—in kid-friendly language.

Justification: We do bad things. We deserve to be punished by God for our sin—with death and by being apart from God forever. But Jesus never did any sin. He’s the only person in the history of the world who doesn’t deserve to be punished. But he let himself be punished in place of us when he died on the cross. He got the punishment we deserve so now we won’t get punished. Instead, all of his goodness counts for us.

Adoption: Jesus shares his Father with us. God makes us his children, so that we have everything you’d expect a child of the King of the universe to have. We have God’s love—forever. He takes care of us so that everything that happens to us will work out to be good for us. He trains us to live like one of his family members. He speaks to us through the Bible and lets us speak to him when we pray. And we will live in his house—forever—and eat at his table—forever. We are inheriting every good thing from him.

Sanctification: God doesn’t just make us stay yucky, selfish, sinful people. He helps us change to become more like Jesus—just like we were created to be! The Holy Spirit has made our hearts able to trust and obey God. Now he helps us to do that every day, and to keep getting better at it.

Glorification: Jesus is coming back to fix everything that’s wrong in the world (like death and evil) and to finish beating sin, including sin in us. If we’ve died, our bodies will come alive again. We will live without any more sadness or selfishness—won’t that be great?! But best of all, we will live with Jesus forever.

Avoid getting too focused on just one of these salvation elements. Each of these, if it's all we say, turns the gospel into much less than it truly is.

- **Harp only on justification, and there will be no thrill.** You might get kids who appreciate what Jesus has done for them and have a sense of gratitude (or at least they realize they *ought* to have a sense of gratitude). But there's no real ongoing life with God in justification—there's just something that happened long ago. Life with God is the goal of all this, knowing him as Father, serving his Kingdom, practicing now for heaven. Don't leave out the thrill and the closeness to God.
- **Only teach adoption, and you turn the Christian life into Jesus-and-me.** What about living for a bigger cause, loving others, serving Christ's kingdom?
- **Talk all the time about sanctification, and no matter how careful you are to present it as a good gift from God, kids will feel burdened.** They'll end up thinking the Christian life is just a struggle to measure up to God's demands. There will be no joy, and much anxiety.
- **Focus your attention only on glorification, and your students will come to see Jesus as someone to use to get to heaven.** They'll never love him that way. They'll just see him as a valuable resource—a smart move in life.

But teaching all these gospel elements together leads to **many powerful motivations** for kids to obey God.

- Yes, **Gratitude** for the cross.
- But also **Comfort** — if you don't know you're justified, there's no comfort.
- **Love** — if you don't know adoption, there will be little love.
- **Confidence** — if you don't know it's God who works sanctification, you won't have confidence.
- **Hope** — if you don't know glorification, your hope will be too small to really motivate you.
- Even motivational warnings. It's okay to include some warnings, like Jesus did all the time. When you have these blessings set before kids it's only right to show them the stark contrast between life *with* these blessings and life *without* them. Outside of Christ there is no hope, no confidence, no comfort, nothing to be thankful for, no one truly worthy of our unguarded love. We should warn kids about this even as we set before them the marvelous alternative offered in the gospel. The gospel is that we're *saved from sin and death*. We must be honest about what we're saved from and present the contrast, lest the whole grace thing become a bunch of sappy happy-talk.

When you present the gospel offer, don't just offer heaven. Don't just offer life. Don't just offer forgiveness or the power to become a better person. Don't offer the *benefits* of being joined to Jesus at all. Offer Jesus himself. The whole person. We don't call kids to *something*, but to *someone*. Come to Jesus and take him whole. Get it all.

### Other frameworks for thinking about your lesson content:

Ask yourself as you prep: What will my students learn (1) about God and (2) about themselves?

This comes from the opening of the *Institutes*. Calvin asserts that seeing God must come first; it's how we learn to properly see ourselves.

- Only by seeing the holiness of Christ do we clearly grasp our desperate need for him—and cling to him in faith.
- And only by gasping at his beauty and his impossible-but-true promises do we see what changed people we are when joined to him—and live for him daily.

So, *knowing ourselves also consists of two parts*: knowing who we are without Jesus, and knowing who we are with him. Ask yourself: How will this lesson show the difference?

Also for seeing the big picture, think of the Bible as presenting four stages of salvation. Salvation is *anticipated* in the Old Testament, *accomplished* by Christ, *applied* today by the Spirit, and *consummated* in the age to come. This is another framework that helps keep our view large and gives us more to say about various aspects of Jesus' work than we might otherwise say. We can point out how it was anticipated, how he accomplished it, how it still is working in us, and how it will be completed one day.

- Anticipated: When I teach kids, I usually say *God got ready to save us*. Or I say *he taught his people to expect it*.
- Accomplished: Then *God came as Jesus, and saved us*.
- Applied: Now *God the Holy Spirit works in each of us to make us saved people*. He gives us faith. He trains us to live for him.
- Consummated: One day *Jesus will come again to complete everything he's doing to save us*.

EXAMPLE: A lesson that brings up how we are guilty when we sin.

- I will tell how the Old Testament sacrifices showed God's plan to take guilt away.
- I will surely tell how Jesus took the guilt and its punishment when he died on the cross.
- But I might also take it further, telling how we are free of guilt today when we have faith in Jesus.
- And if I want to say still more, I can teach how one day we will no longer even do things deserving of guilt.

EXAMPLE: A lesson about God's glory—how God wants his glory to be among his people.

- I will tell how this was *anticipated* in the Old Testament as God's people saw glimpses of his glory in the cloud, the tabernacle, and the temple.
- It was *accomplished* when Jesus came to live among us, showing us God's glory in how he lived, died, and rose again.
- It is *applied* to us today as the Spirit trains us to live in ways that reflect Christ's glory.
- And it will be *consummated* on that day when the children of God are revealed and we are glorified.

Whatever salvation theme you're teaching, you can teach all four stages to give a big picture.

See Jesus in every part of the Bible.

Too often we end up saying the same half-dozen things about Jesus and salvation, over and over, and our lessons become flat.

There are lots of possible methods to still see Jesus even when you start in the Old Testament. Not surprisingly, they all require us to look beyond what's happening with the human character in the story and be aware of what the main character, God, is doing. To get to Jesus from an Old Testament story, I especially like to use one of three sets of questions:

What is God doing for his people in this passage? How does he do the same for us—but even better—in Jesus? Believe it! How will this change how we live?

EXAMPLE: David fights Goliath.

**What is God doing?** God is giving his people a king who will stand up to the enemies of God's people (not with sword or spear, but one who comes in the name of the Lord).

**How does he do the same in Jesus?** God has given us Jesus who comes in the name of the Lord and defeats the devil. We trust not our courage, but the courage and victory of our King.

**How might it change us?** It makes us bold to do all sorts of things, but not because of our power; rather, because Jesus has defeated the biggest giant of all.

How does God show his character and goodness in this passage? How do we see the same in Jesus? Believe it! How will this change how we live?

EXAMPLE: God makes his covenant with David and promises that David's son will have an everlasting kingdom.

**How does God show his character?** David had said, "I want to build a house for God" and God came and said, "You have it wrong. I'm going to build *your* house." We learn that God doesn't need anything from us—rather, it is part of his character to give and to bless.

**How do we see it in Jesus?** We see that same giving nature everywhere in the gospel accounts, and especially at the cross.

**How might it change us?** It changes us from being uptight people, who go out looking to impress God and others, into people who first receive and then share and act out of the fullness we've received.

What tension or problem is left unresolved in this passage? How is it solved in Jesus?

EXAMPLE: David with Bathsheba. (Now, that story is a warning, and I teach it as one. It's also an example of repentance, and I teach that too. But I also teach about Jesus.)

**What's the tension or problem?** That story jolts us as it comes just as David seems so incredibly successful and such a perfect king. It leaves us disappointed. David isn't the great savior after all.

**How is it solved in Jesus?** Not until Jesus do we get a King who is faithful to all of his people all the time.

**What's the application?** The application is not just to be warned, not just to repent, but also to put your faith in Jesus alone.

Caveats:

- It doesn't have to be the *only thing* you teach from that passage. Often it shouldn't be.
- These aren't the only ways to get to Jesus from an Old Testament passage—they're just some I find work well for people who teach kids.
- Another good method is to see how the New Testament itself comments on an Old Testament story. So use your reference notes and commentaries and find out what other parts of the Bible have to say about the passage you're teaching.
- What about *types* for Jesus—that is, patterns of Jesus? God arranged many things, people and events in the Old Testament to be patterns foreshadowing Jesus. If you recognize one and feel confident teaching it, good for you. But it's not my favorite method because I teach kids and kids are concrete thinkers. They often struggle to understand types.
- But wasn't Jesus already at work in the Old Testament? You don't have to take the story forward to be talking about him. Very true. But again, with kids it really helps to tell about the walking, talking, fully human Jesus rather than the pre-incarnate one.

So, I'm not saying you have to do it my way.

But also, don't miss Jesus. We ignore him at our peril.

And I think the best method for teaching kids is story-based. Each of these is a strategy where you start in the Old Testament and expand the story, take it forward, completing it with Jesus.

EXAMPLE: Noah

If you're not careful, you end up with just a cute story about smiling animals on an ark.

What is God doing for his people in this passage?

He saves his people from certain death.

**How does he do the same through Jesus?** He saves us from sin and eternal death. That one is simple. It's also how 1 Peter 3 handles it.

How does this passage show the character and goodness of God?

I start with creation and how God made the animals and people, breathed life into them. Get around to asking, "How could God destroy them?" (It's always good with the really tough questions surrounding a passage to deal with them directly and ask the kids to think about them.) The answer is that *God is determined to deal with sin, even if the cost to him is enormously high.*

**How does he do the same through Jesus?** The greatest cost of all. The sacrifice of the dearly, eternally loved Son who is of infinite value.

**Application?** Believing that will both make us both grateful and help us to see the seriousness of sin.

What tension or problem is left unresolved in this passage?

Is the sin problem really solved at the end of the Noah account? No, the next thing we read about is sin. Then there's a curse, just like in the beginning with Adam and Eve and Cain.

**How is this solved in Jesus?** Our sin is finally erased without us being erased because it is put on Jesus—and he brings us to holiness.

Teach both “what Jesus does for me” and “who Jesus is.”

They build on each other. The power of each is multiplied by the other. The power of the combination of teaching who Jesus is and what he’s done for me. This is where truly powerful confidence comes from. It is especially helpful when teaching from the gospel accounts about Jesus—like the raising of Lazarus.

The Western world decided, a few decades ago, that confidence comes from self-esteem. So the world tries to build self-esteem in kids, in the mistaken notion that this will give them confidence. Well, looking at yourself only gives you confidence if you’ve got it all together, so I have no interest in building self-esteem in kids. I want to build Christ-esteem. Christ-esteem gives them a confidence that comes from looking at Jesus and seeing that...

He is the compassionate, ever-loving, bully-confronting, sin-defeating, all-powerful, risen and eternal King of the universe... who loves *me*, and died for *me*, and calls himself *my* brother, and gives *me* his Spirit, and prays for *me*, and gives *me* strength to obey God, and is coming to take *me* to be with him always. Both who Jesus is and what he has done for me. *That* gives us confident kids. And also humble ones. And joyful ones. And obedient ones. Grateful ones. Kids who live for Jesus and his kingdom.



Notice the details of who Jesus is.

Let's do one together: the account of Jesus healing a leper in Luke 5:12–14.  
I never just tell. I ask questions to get kids to *think* about the account and the characters.

So while Jesus is in one of the cities, the man “full of leprosy” comes up and begs him to heal...  
“Jesus stretched out his hand” \***What does that tell us about Jesus?**

I would pull back. Jesus goes to him.

Jesus closes the gap.

\***Why doesn't Jesus scold the man for coming so close, or for being in the city?**

The rules do seem to matter to Jesus, but the rule that matters most to him is faith. Jesus responds to faith! This should be very encouraging if we ever feel too repulsive to come to Jesus. He isn't looking for us to be clean first, but for us to throw ourselves at him in faith. Jesus moves toward such people.

When sinners come to Jesus in faith...

Jesus DOES NOT scold them for their sin.

INSTEAD he welcomes them and helps them.

EVEN THE WORST CASES—like this guy.

“Jesus touched him” \***What does that tell us about Jesus?**

Jesus doesn't need to touch in order to heal, but he gets involved with his whole person.

Perhaps he sees what the man needs most—maybe the guy hadn't been touched in years.

Jesus sees that the man needs to feel love.

Jesus shows compassion.

Jesus is personal, not distant.

Jesus does *what no one else will do*.

\***But why didn't Jesus heal him first, then touch him?**

Jesus loves us *in our misery, at our worst, while we are still not lovely*.

It's as if Jesus says to us, “Yes, I can see how bad you are. Here, let me touch you.”

“I am willing, be clean.” \***What does that show us?**

Jesus is eager to make people clean—us too, in our sin (remember the spiritual component of being unclean).

And immediately the leprosy left him.” \***What does that show us?**

Jesus gives comfort.

He backs up his compassion with action and power.

His power is amazing—to heal so completely, right away, so that the man is ready for the priest to look at him.

The mix of compassion and power is very rare. Most powerful people become overbearing—the get proud and power corrupts them. And many compassionate people are wimpy—not the people you'd pick to be on your side in a fight. Jesus is both kind and powerful.

**\*Why didn't Jesus become unclean when he touched the leper?**

- With anything else in the whole world, if something clean touches something dirty—now they're both dirty.
- But with Jesus, it works the other way! He's clean, and if he touches anyone unclean, they become clean too.
- Or maybe Jesus *did* become unclean when he touched the leper. That would also fit with what we know about Jesus. He came to take our uncleanliness on himself at the cross, and this incident could be a preview of that. (It's okay to puzzle with your students over what might be happening when we aren't sure.)

You might TAKE IT FORWARD TO THE CROSS:

Every one of us has been spiritually unclean.

We all sin and do wrong:

- We aren't kind to others like Jesus. We put ourselves first.
- We aren't humble like Jesus. We get proud.

That's a problem:

- We deserve to be punished for our sin.
- We deserve to be left like the miserable, dying, stinky people we are.

But Jesus is eager to make us clean. Like the way Jesus saw that leper—and just moved to him.

- This is why he came. It is his great desire.
- That desire is *so strong* in him that he went to the cross.  
     He's the only perfectly clean person in the history of the world...  
     and he has so much compassion for you and me that he took our stink and  
     yuckiness on himself...  
     and he took the punishment we deserve...  
     so his clean can transfer to us.

Now, what did I do to get those insights about Jesus?

- Partly I listened to you. Got you involved. The class itself will come up with some good answers.
- But a lot of it came because I prepared, too. I spent time beforehand looking for details and thinking about them. My method is to force myself to fill up a full page in a large notebook with details noticed from just a small section of text. Just start writing. Usually I'll get about 10–15 minutes into the exercise and think I've noticed everything there is to notice. The trick is to keep going. Force yourself to spend at least 30 minutes. Fill up that whole page. The best insights often come at the end, when you've been forced to look more closely and ponder further. That's when you might see:
  - How Jesus does something in an order you might not expect.
  - How Jesus has a combination of characteristics we don't normally see in one person.
  - How Jesus does it very differently than you might have done it.

Do this every time you teach about the life of Jesus. It *will* pay off.

How does all of this this work in real classroom situations where we are dealing with hearts—both our hearts and our students’ hearts—that are wired not to believe the gospel?

We must *create an environment* where our focus remains on Jesus and the gospel rather than on ourselves. There are two general things to be aware of:

**First, this is critically important for kids.** The whole world is teaching them to be performance-oriented. They’re taught to be the best, and their instinct is to try to be the best Christian. Perform for God (and their teacher or mom or dad), and if they find they can’t perform well enough, then pretend. Fake it, and hope no one notices, or that God will be lenient.

This pressure to achieve, so common in America today, must be turned on its head when a kid walks into a class about the Bible or grows up in a Christian home. Jesus’ definition of achievement is so different from ours: “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn.” So our time together must fit what Jesus said faith in him ought to be.

Humble in ourselves yet confident in Christ is how we roll if we’re Jesus people. This has huge implications not just in lesson content but also in:

- How we hand out praise
- What we pray for
- How we reward excellence (and even what we think excellence is)
- How we think about outsiders and act towards them
- How we discipline bad behavior and promote good behavior

This creates a completely different environment, one where all that pressure fades away and sinners rest in grace. *That* is how kids will see that belonging to Jesus is different—and they will want to be part of it forever.

**Second, this is a hard topic for me—probably for all of us—because it starts with the teacher.** Much of the reason we lose sight of Jesus is we have a shallow devotional/prayer life that fails to get to know Jesus or want to know him better. We just aren’t very interested in him because we’ve kept him distant.

And even if we manage to teach lessons that look perfectly good and Christ-centered, our own lack of a faith-filled life *will* show up in the environment we create in our classrooms and homes.

So I realize that my failures in what I’m about to talk about are not due to my inability to master the material but rather due to my coldness toward God. I have to pursue more intimacy with him, personally, if this is all going to work.

That said... here are three ways to create an atmosphere that keeps the focus on Jesus.

Point back often to God’s absolutely free salvation that is ours in Christ

Justification in particular is quickly forgotten. Keep coming back to it, because it is not natural, and even if kids learn it, they will be inclined to forget it.

Acceptance, meaning in life, reputation, identity... must be in Christ and what he gives, not in what we’ve managed to achieve.

People are surprised that I post the Ten Commandments on the wall of my classroom. How is teaching the law being a *gospel* teacher?

Well, the distinction between gospel and law doesn’t mean the two aren’t connected. Part of the gospel is that we are changed into people who keep God’s law—not perfectly, certainly *not to earn* status as God’s children—but we still find it very important to obey God for many good reasons.

- We understand the terrible cost of sin and its dangers on the one hand, and the glory of the love of Jesus on the other hand—and we want to be on the side of what is good and lovely. Of all people, we who know the gospel see the unflinching starkness of the difference between sin and love—and we dare not be on the wrong side of that.
- **Gratitude** propels us to obey God.
- The **hope** of heaven and knowing who we will be one day propels us to start living that way now.
- **Love** for our Father makes us eager to serve him.
- The **confidence** that we have God’s help makes us dive right in.

So, we were made for keeping God’s law—and we can make progress now! Because of Jesus.

This means that I teach the Commandments. I teach them in detail, with emphasis on the heart and on Jesus. I make much of the honor that’s ours in being people who live for God.

But I know how easily it leads to thinking we have to perform for God. So I also keep coming back to the free grace that is ours in Christ.

I add the Titus 2:14 verse on the wall. But the kids probably hardly notice it. The main reason I know I can keep teaching the Commandments is the “longest list” on the other wall: “Jesus is better than anything else because...” It contains that powerful mix of who Jesus is what he has done for me. It keeps us grounded. It shows that being in him is the best thing, the thing that drives everything else.

Be sin-aware, and value true repentance

The problem with the candy rewards at Bible camp was they sent the message, “We expect you to be good here, and we’re going to make that happen.” But the message we ought to be sending is, “We know that sometimes you’ll be bad here, but we also know where to turn for help.”

Being sin-aware drives us to Jesus.

- To be forgiven
- And to find help in repenting

So we want our classrooms and homes to be places where we’re honest about sin—where we drag it out into the open where it can be killed—instead of places where we feel we need to hide our sin in order for others to think well of us.

Aim below the surface if you want to be fighting sin honestly. If you don’t aim below the surface, you just end up like another kid many of us know, named Calvin.



Calvin’s plan for repentance has no chance of working because his heart is still the same.

- True repentance is NOT about “how can I change my behavior?”
- Rather, it is all about “how can my heart change its direction?”
- This happens by the power of the Holy Spirit who works through God’s word and the gospel, creating faith in Jesus—creating people who are reoriented toward Jesus at the heart level.

One way to help build a sin-aware, repenting environment is to recognize common obstacles to full repentance. Watch out for sin-discounting habits like:

- Just saying “I’m sorry.”
- Just learning correct behavior.
- Limiting the sin I admit to what I did that time I got caught.
- Thinking stronger resolve might solve the problem.

Be grace-aware, and practice faith

Calvin again. This is where his approach takes him.



Putting Santa in the place of God here... Calvin's problem is that Santa is nothing but his judge who will reward him for good or bad. Santa has not reached down to change Calvin or to help him in any way. Calvin is on his own. It's Calvin *against* Santa. This is one way we're tempted to think of God—if we neglect grace.

When I speak of grace here I'm not just speaking of the common definition of grace as undeserved favor in saving us when we were justified. In the Bible, part of God's grace is *his continuing help*.

This means we are very different from what the world expects in *how* we work for holiness. The world thinks Christians are just trying to gut it out and prove how good they are. Well yes, we do work hard at daily repentance. But we do this in a trusting-in-God's-grace way:

- Relying on the Word
- Relying especially on prayer
- Humbly helping each other rather than comparing ourselves to see who's better
- Conscious of the Spirit's work (and praying for it)
- Looking at all the blessings we have in Jesus
- Content with the Father's timing

This means:

- God gets the credit when a kid does well.
- What progress we make is nothing we get proud about. We don't earn God's version of Christmas presents because we've proven we deserve them. We're in this *with* God more than performing *for* God.
- There is no more need for one-upmanship. There is no comparing to see who's better behaved or who knows more. Whatever you've achieved is from God, not from yourself. So we can all just help each other and be glad for progress and watch God work.

Most of all it means:

When you understand that the power lies with God, and comes to you by his grace, the most obvious thing that happens is you pray about everything.

Any problem that comes up, any difficulty that's mentioned... you stop and pray.

Especially encourage prayers for repentance to be part of a kid's prayer life. This makes repentance not just something they have to work at and achieve in order to perform for God—but something they work at *with* God, in reliance on him.

So let me summarize a “good day.”

A “good day” or a good class isn't a day when everyone behaved decently well. It's a day when students were quick to recognize their sin, eager to go to God with it, seeking deeper repentance and faith from him. Sometimes these are actually the most outwardly troublesome days—because desperation helps us turn to Jesus. Sometimes, a good day is one when the teacher was quick to recognize sin, go to God with it, seek deeper repentance and faith.

Tips:

- Be honest before God (and others) about sin.
- Pray much, asking God not only to charge behavior but to change the heart.
- Don't look to willpower so much as to the Spirit's power. And believe *in Jesus*, rather than believing (in effect) in your own active righteousness. Treasure his atonement above all else. Treasuring your own progress will end in discouragement.

Then *as a result of having looked at Jesus*, what happens to us as teachers? Jesus draws us to look to some other places, as well.

- We look into our own hearts and repent of sin—and not just outwardly. We also repent of the unbelief and the idols that drive sin.
- We look to others and are able to love them. We are freed from our self-obsession and fears. We don't feel a need to look good. We don't feel a need to perform. We know we don't have to be the best—instead we belong to the Best. This eliminates most of the barriers that keep us from giving our lives in service to others and to God's kingdom.
- We look in hope to the future. In hard times, we look to the hope of heaven and this keeps us going. But we also look to the near future. We know Christ is at work in us and through us, and so we expect great things from our teaching and our parenting despite our many inadequacies. This means we carry on. We do the good work God has given us—because we know it is his work that he will use for his glory.