

WHAT JESUS KNEW

about

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

by Sam Van Eman

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BIG IDEA

We grow in our bike-riding skills by riding a bike. We learn our way around the kitchen by cooking. In a similar way, we mature in our faith by having our faith tested. In other words, we learn by experience. Jesus knew this. He loved to teach through experience, and he used this method frequently. In this lesson, we'll look at how he did it and what we can learn by watching him at work.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

There are many examples of Jesus using out-of-the-ordinary teaching methods to get a lesson across. Just think about the time he drew on the ground as he addressed Pharisees who had caught a woman in adultery (John 8:1-11). Or how he healed the crippled woman on the Sabbath day instead of the day after or the day before. She'd been like this for 18 years—couldn't he have picked a different day? Not if he wanted to heal her and the religious elite.

Let's turn to another story where Jesus demonstrates his knowledge of experiential education.



READ: *Luke 24:13-35*



ASK: *What teaching methods does Jesus use in this story? See if you can come up with at least five.*



ASK: *How does his style engage the two disciples?*



ASK: *What role does the Holy Spirit play in his interaction with them?*

ARTICLE

JESUS AS EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATOR

BY SAM VAN EMAN

By all accounts, Jesus was brilliant. That much is clear. It's *how* he carried out that brilliance that often makes me shake my head. No matter what challenge came his way, he proved not only to be on top of things, but to be clever in the process. First, he could turn any challenge into a teachable moment, which made him an unrivaled educator. Second, he loved to teach through experience.

Here is an example. Jesus could have said to his disciples, "You need my help." Instead, he waited until late one afternoon when a large crowd grew hungry and the disciples asked him to send the people away to buy food. He replied, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37).

Do you see what he did? It's quite brilliant. He forced the disciples into an impossible situation in which they needed his help. He didn't have to tell them with words. They felt it, and then they saw it when he fed the crowd himself. Their experience proved that they needed him.

Let's look at another example, this one involving Jesus' brilliance in how he cares for us in hard times.

There are moments in life when faith falls out of its old container. Heading off to college can cause this. Being unemployed can cause this. Losing a loved one can cause this. What once worked—comfortably, I might add—suddenly doesn't. The neat little box that held all of faith's parts in one organized place cracks across the bottom and the pieces spill onto the floor. It would be fine to simply grab another box and stuff it all back in, but now that it's sprawled out in plain sight, you're able to make several observations: 1) there seems to be less there than you assumed; 2) it's clear that pieces are missing; and 3) you don't know how to proceed.

Ronald Rolheiser, author of *Sacred Fire*, says, "In the discouragement that ensues we will be tempted to walk away from our faith...toward some place of consolation" (103).

Here's the thing. You need something to hold life together when life falls apart. Even if what you're going through isn't a crisis, the lack of control and inability to predict the future can have a similar effect. These tough moments send you looking (quickly, desperately, foolishly) for anything to resemble what you once had. That "anything" is what Rolheiser calls "consolation."

This is precisely what happened after Jesus' crucifixion. The long-awaited Messiah had finally come, and with promise, healing, and hope, too. He filled faith boxes to the brim and more, and now, just like that, he was gone and the pieces were beginning to fall out. Disciples hid, doubts set in, opposition rejoiced. Nobody really knew what to do.

The scene picks up in Luke 24:13, on a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. Two disciples, with "faces downcast," talk "with each other about everything that had happened." The resurrected Jesus joins them, but they do not recognize him. This is key, so keep it in mind. When asked for more information, they demonstrate a mixture of sadness and confusion. On one hand, they are amazed by the women disciples who said "they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive." On the other, they confess, "[W]e had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Pieces all over the ground.

Rolheiser calls Emmaus their consolation. It is their home, their familiar, their place of relative semblance of order. Maybe life is predictable in Emmaus for these two. They have a place to stay and food to eat. They know it. And it is en route to this place that Jesus joins them—full of grace and generous in his practice of leaving the 99 to find the one.

It's interesting to watch how Jesus joins them, because he doesn't do it all at once. Why not? Well, remember that they do not recognize him. We might even say they could not recognize him. Rolheiser says, "Their faith had trained their eyes to see and recognize only a Christ who fit their understanding and imagination." The old container. "A crucified Jesus did not fit into that understanding and thus was unrecognizable to them, even as he was chatting with them." So what was he to do? Israel's hope and their Savior had just died. Recognizing him—here and now and raised from the dead(!)—would exceed their capacity. Jesus would have to take it slowly.

Verse 28 reads, "As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther." What a fascinating phrase. Maybe it was societal etiquette that he didn't invite himself over. I believe this bit of acting was for a different reason. Following a compelling and lengthy conversation along the road, acting "as if he were going farther" created a moment of separation.

Perhaps you know the feeling from an evening with friends, when one of them announces their departure and you recognize immediately whether it feels too early, delayed, or just right. This feeling also tells you whether (and how much) you were having a good time, a boring time, or a just-right time. "But they urged him strongly" (24:29) indicates they'd been having a very good time. The separation announcement had its desired effect. They were beginning to recognize something. Not Jesus yet, but something.

Jesus plays on this growing curiosity and proceeds to disclose himself even more during the breaking of bread, until “their eyes were opened.” It was after he had gone that they finally put it all together. It was then that they could see the new container he had left there on the table.

“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.”

DISCUSSION



ASK: *Think about a time when your “eyes were opened.” Did it happen in the classroom or through an experience?*



ASK: *Did you agree or disagree with the author about why Jesus “acted as if he were going farther”? Are there other reasons you think Luke may have been inspired to include this phrase?*



ASK: *Jesus called us to be disciples as well as to make disciples. What is your preferred method for teaching, instructing, or influencing others? How does Jesus’ method(s) encourage your growth in this area?*

EXERCISE

1. Divide the larger group into smaller groups. Each group choose one of the following teaching methods. Try to use at least three:

- Classroom lecture
- Post-modern conversation (“Truth is relative, so believe what you want and I’ll believe what I want.”)
- Puppet show
- Socratic method (“a series of questions formulated as tests of logic and fact intended to help [people] discover their beliefs about a topic”)
- Personal storytelling

2. Each group takes three minutes to prepare a re-telling of Luke 24:13-35 according to their assigned teaching method. The point isn’t to re-write every line, but to provide a taste of how the story might have gone if Jesus had chosen a different method.

3. Each group takes two minutes to present their re-telling.

VOTE: Which group offered the most compelling re-telling.

ASK: Why did Jesus choose the method he did?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for showing yourself to the disciples along the road. Their faith was falling apart and you walked with them in their pain and then healed their pain. Sometimes we need to walk a lot farther before you show up. In those times, and even in the good times, help us to be ready for whatever experience or experiences you need to use in order to restore us. You are a brilliant and caring teacher and we ask that we would be willing and patient students. Finally, we pray, inspire us to pay attention to how we teach others, showing the same care and creativity that you did. Amen.

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