

Lesson #23: The Triple Crown of Teaching

The Triple Crown is considered by many to be the greatest accomplishment in thoroughbred racing. And rightly so, only twelve horses in the last one-hundred years have been able to do it. It takes pedigree, training and versatility...not to mention being at the right place, in the right weather, at the right time, experts say. It is a summary of greatness as the same horse, in the same year, wins the Kentucky Derby, then the Preakness, and finally, the Belmont Stakes.

I think there's a Triple Crown of teaching, too--a summary of great teaching. I'm putting this lesson at the end of the curriculum and teaching section because of that. And the good news is, this Triple Crown is fair more attainable; you can try for it every time you teach; and there's no horse to clean up after (though probably quite a few children).

Here's my Triple Crown:

Crown #1: Teaching that is Faithfully Understandable

Here is my Kentucky Derby: the sort of first race of the Triple Crown. This is teaching that is true to the God's Word. And, that is presented in a way that the children can grasp. You won't even get out of the starting gate if you leave God's Word behind. We have to make sure we aren't just teaching moralism or what we would like the Bible to say. The children (like us) need the gospel if they are to be saved. That means teaching them about the Great and Good God who created them and is king over them and is worthy of all their worship. That means understanding they are sinners who rebel against this Great and Good King and face His eternal judgment. That means knowing about Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect Savior who came to pay for the sins of all who turn from their sins and trust in as their Savior. Who died on the cross and who rose from the dead in victory on the third day. And this means, hearing the call to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus, themselves. And, as they do so, to live the rest of their lives, not their own way, but God's way and with His help. Yes, we must be faithful to teach all of this, displayed through every page of the Bible.

But to be faithful AND to present it in a (usually simplified) way that children can understand is the half to this challenge. It is something that takes prayer, and practice...and some training certainly does not hurt! Like Lesson #16 reminded us, we might know truth, but we have to think about who we are telling it to, if we want them to know it, too. Children, especially preschoolers and younger elementary-aged children, don't understand abstract ideas like we do. They are very concrete thinkers. That makes some ideas tricky to get across to them. Appendix G and H, mentioned in Lesson #16, can be helpful in reminding us how these little children think.

Crown #2: Teaching that is Enjoyably Rich

Winning the Kentucky Derby is just the first trophy need. Next comes the Preakness: teaching in a way that the children enjoy, yet is deeply rich with Biblical truth. "Enjoyable" is usually not so hard to come by. Most every curriculum has it. Most every teacher can figure that out (even just bring cupcakes to class and see if that doesn't up the enjoyable factor!). But enjoyable that is rich in truth take a bit more forethought. It means thinking about what those children enjoy doing AND what you want them to do and marrying them right there in your classroom. These are the "Conduits of Truth" from Lesson #18. Don't settle with being everyone's favorite teacher because you are fun or funny! Use all that is enjoyable in you and all that the kids enjoy to display truth and bring them back to it again and again.

And that thought, of course, brings us to the crunch race, the Belmont Stakes:

Crown #3: Teaching that is Deeply Rememberable

We cannot be the Holy Spirit. We cannot save the children we teach. But, by God's grace, we can leave a testimony and a trail in their hearts. The testimony of the truths of God's Word. The testimony of His work in the lives of person after person after person through every page of the Bible. And, the testimony of His work in our lives, who He is living in right before them, right now. And the trail of how to come, find and know this great God through faith in Christ.

We want to teach children truths today in a way that it might stay in their minds the rest of their lives. Who knows what day is the day of salvation for any child in our class? How wonderful to think God can use us to plant seeds ready to spring up into salvation, in His perfect timing!

How do we do this? Well, like the Triple Crown, you won't get to the Belmont Stakes and get to try for the Triple Crown if you didn't first win the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness first. So, you need to strive to teach in an understandable way. (You cannot believe that which you do not understand). And, when you use enjoyable activities to help reinforce those truths they are learning, that repetition will help cement the ideas in place. And lastly, you need to keep on persevering in these things and in prayer.

By the time those three-year-old thoroughbreds get to the Belmont Stakes, tiredness is becoming a factor. Athletes train to peak for the "big race." These horses have to train to peak for three big races that take place over six weeks. So with us, perhaps we can pull off these wonderful, enthusiastic ideals for one or two sessions, but what do we do to stay the course to the end? It is by God's grace! So we must pray for ourselves and pray for the children. Ask God to help you to be faithful week after week you teach. Ask Him to help you better understand the children and better understand His truth..and how to make a connection. Ask Him, by His Holy Spirit, to be making that connection, even when you are not sure that you know how to. Ask Him to show you how to make good conduits of truth with enjoyable activities. Ask Him to use your time with the children to plant many seeds...and plant them deep and securely. Ask Him to bring them to life.

There's a wonderful way this analogy breaks down. Any horse that attempts the Triple Crown and fails is forgotten. But with our Triple Crown of teaching, we know that God is Himself at work in us to will and to act according to His good purposes. We know that He has given us good works He prepared for us in advance...even teaching these children. We know that He can do imaginably more than we can think or ask for the glory of His name. We know that all things work for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes. We know that all our righteousness is as filthy rags. Our work with the children may never reach full Triple Crown proportions... or at least not every week. But God is faithful and He is at work! Yes, we should continue to strive for the prize, but we can be confident that because of who God is, He will use even our most feeble attempts to do great things, for His glory, for our good and for the good of the children we teach! Press on!

Lesson #23: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting:

1. Do your parents/teachers have a good understanding of the Bible truths they are called to teach to the children? If not, how could they learn them better? How could you help them?
2. Do your parents/teachers feel confident in conveying Bible truths in a way that is understandable to their children? Are there resources that could help them grow in this skill? How could your curriculum help your teachers improve in this?
3. Are there key, Biblical truths that you, your teachers or your curriculum avoid? If so, why? What benefit would it be to include them? What harm does it do to leave them out? How can you add them into the curriculum in a way that is appropriate for the children?
4. What do your children enjoy doing?
5. Do the teachers know what the children they teach enjoy doing? How does know this/would knowing this help them teach the children better?
6. How could you use the things the children enjoy doing to help reinforce the truths you teach?
7. Does the curriculum you use incorporate the enjoyable things the children do? Does it do it in a way that is only enjoyable, or that makes it a conduit of truth?
8. What helps you to persevere in your work in children's ministry?
9. What is hardest for you to keep persevering in doing in children's ministry? What about your volunteers, in general?
10. How does your curriculum help you persevere?
11. How do the church leaders help you persevere?
12. How has God been faithful to answer your prayers for perseverance?
13. How likely are you /your teachers to pray for the children's families and teachers during the week?
14. How has God been faithful to answer your prayers for the families? teachers?