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TEACHING PRACTICES THAT TESTIFY *(louder than words!)*

Section 1: Your Classroom

Fruit: Creating a Peace-Filled Place

Working in a public school, it can feel difficult or even impossible to share the Gospel but implementing the Bible-based teaching practices shared in this resource will surely testify *even louder than words!*

ANDREA N. LEMON, ED.D



Andrea Lemon, Ed.D.

First and foremost a follower of Jesus Christ, Dr. Andrea Lemon is also a wife, mother, ministry leader, life-long learner, and champion of educators. Dr. Lemon taught English for twelve years before transitioning to state-level leadership for six years as a coordinator at the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE). Collaborating on numerous public school improvement initiatives led to the realization that what students and educators needed more than anything, was more of Jesus. In 2022, God's calling to teach took a new direction - designing and delivering Bible-based professional learning for educators and writing devotions and encouragement with the intent of equipping others to walk more closely with Jesus. In addition to working with educators, Andrea serves as a children's ministry leader for her local church and as a member of the praise team and director of the children's seasonal musical programs.

Note from the Author:

Scripture quoted throughout this free resource is from the Christian Standard Bible. The words within this resource are my best effort to transfer the message God has placed on my heart for educators to the written page. As you use this resource for yourself, with your colleagues, as a small group, however the Lord leads, please leave the logos and web address so that others will know where additional installments and biblical encouragement for educators may be found.

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CONTENTS

1
SERIES INTRODUCTION

2
THE GREAT COMMISSION IN YOUR CLASSROOM

3
FRUIT INTRO: CREATING A PEACE-FILLED PLACE

4
4 PRACTICES THAT PRODUCE PEACE

5
CONCLUSION AND COMING SOON!



SERIES INTRODUCTION

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (CSB)

INTRODUCTION

On a mountain in Galilee, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission to His disciples. Though these words were spoken to only eleven on that mountain, as followers of Christ, the Great Commission applies to us too. After all, you and I are the product of those first disciples making disciples who made more disciples.

To ensure we can follow Christ's direction to make disciples, God equips each of His Sons and Daughters with the personality, talents, skills, and spiritual gifts specific to the Kingdom-building tasks He has in mind for us to complete. While it is the charge of all Christians to be a disciple of Christ and to disciple others, God calls and gifts some of His Sons and Daughters specifically to become teachers, giving them a thirst for knowledge and a passion for helping others grow.

You, dear Christian educator, are one of those Sons or Daughters. You've opened this resource because you have a thirst for knowledge, a desire to grow in your craft as an educator and in your ability to nurture the growth of your students not only academically, but most importantly, spiritually.

You recognize that the most important thing you can teach them is how to experience the joy and peace of walking with God. You have this same desire for your students' families as well as for your colleagues and your overall community.

You wouldn't be a teacher if you didn't want to see others succeed, and what better measure of success is there than victory in Jesus!



**CAN A FELLOW
TEACHER TESTIFY!?**



Just as Jesus directed His disciples to go into Judea, Samaria, and then out into all the world, your mission field starts within the four walls of your classroom and then expands outward to your school and to the overall community you serve. As a fellow educator with 12 years of experience teaching middle school and 6 years of experience in state education leadership, I know as well as you do that you may be the only witness of Jesus Christ that some of your students, families, or colleagues will ever know. I also know the uncertainty you may feel about verbally sharing the Gospel of Christ in your publicly funded profession and the concern you may have about negative professional consequences that could come as a result of doing so.

In truth, the further into my career and the higher in administration I rose, the more frequently I thought to myself, ***“More than a new reading program or higher test scores, what this school and these students and teachers really need is Jesus!”***, and the more aware I became of the professional censure I could face as a government employee if I said that out loud.

Now, let me be really clear on a point that we'll explore more deeply in this resource: *If you have received confirmation from the Holy Spirit that you are to work in public education, then God absolutely can and will make sure that you are secure in the position that He has set aside for you. He will guide you in how and when and to whom to verbally testify of His loving kindness and will safeguard your career as you do.*

In full transparency, I could not have said that so boldly to you in 2022. At that time, I truly did not see a way to keep my position and openly proclaim that knowing and following Jesus was more important for teachers and students than any initiative coming out of the state department could ever be. I suffered from the sin of unbelief in that area, a sin that gave me great anxiety, gluing my mouth shut, tying my stomach in knots, and creating a sense of frustration in the projects I was assigned and those that I designed for myself.

BUT GOD - two words I really love to see together - God took mercy on me in my unbelief and in His grace and infinite patience, He invited me to leave a full-time career in public education and then spent an entire year growing me up in His Word, drawing me closer to Himself, and giving me experiences that increased my trust in Him and my ability to act from a place of faith instead of a place of fear.

So dear friend, if you're struggling to see how you can follow Christ's command to disciple others and keep your position or keep advancing in your career, know that you are not alone. Take heart in the fact that God loves us even in our unbelief, and He is kind to teach us how to walk in His way at a pace specific to our current level of faith-fitness.



Speaking of our faith-fitness, let's dig into God's Word for a moment and consider some aspects of our spiritual health and our ability to testify to and disciple others:

In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus shared that many people may say they know God or are prophets of God, but that their heart is shown through the fruit their life produces. Throughout the Word of God we see an emphasis on bearing fruit.

In Galatians 5:22-24, we read about the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is often described by Bible scholars as a fruit basket, with the term "fruit" being collective rather than individual.

So, acquiring the fruit of the Spirit is not like moving through the lunch line when we were kids and a simple "No thank you" would keep that dreaded canned spinach off our trays. No, my friend, God serves up the fruit of the Spirit modern federal guideline style – you get it all on your tray like it or not, and when you get back to your seat, you can engage with it or toss it in the trash when you think God isn't looking.

Spoiler alert: We may struggle to keep eyes on 300+ students in the cafeteria, but God sees all of His creation, all of the time. Trust me, He knows when we pick through the fruit of the Spirit and choose to leave one or more of them on the "leftovers" table when the bell rings.

Through obedience to God's Word, we also develop other types of fruit such as the fruit of allowing Jesus to have Lordship of our finances (*faithful tithing, giving to the less fortunate – even when your paycheck looks less than fortunate*) or the fruit of a ministry (*salvations, baptisms, closer walks with God*).

In John 15:1-8, Jesus presents Himself as the vine and His Father as the vinedresser. Brothers and Sisters, the Vinedresser doesn't simply demand that we bear fruit; He facilitates it, taking away the attitudes and actions that do not bear good fruit and pruning and shaping attitudes and actions that produce fruit so that we can be even more fruitful.

Our Savior ends the analogy by stating that, "My Father is glorified by this, that you produce much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

How do we make our teaching practices testify louder than words?

By becoming fruitful educators!

Reflecting on the mercy and grace and patience that God has shown me, I have come to the conclusion that God has a two-fold plan for this resource and future installments of it:

ONE: To support educators who feel anxious about verbally sharing Jesus Christ with teaching practices that testify so they can fulfill the Great Commission at their current level of faith as God grows them into greater faith.

AND

TWO: To support educators who are already comfortable verbally sharing Jesus Christ with teaching practices that testify so their actions are able to speak even louder than their words.

Brothers and Sisters, as the day of Christ's return draws nearer, it is increasingly imperative that the teaching practices of Christian educators in public education serve as undeniable proof of the transformative, life-giving power of Jesus Christ.

It is my heart-felt prayer that through these truth- and grace-filled pages, you will be inspired and equipped to root your daily professional practice in the vine of Christ and in doing so bear the good fruit of increased student achievement, a nurturing learning environment, and relationships that open doors for you to share the Gospel of Christ with your students and their families as well as with your colleagues and greater community.

Before you jump into this journey with me, please allow me to speak this blessing over you, your practice, and your mission field.

May this day and each day find your heart open to the tending and pruning of the Vinedresser. May the gentle hands of the Lord reveal to you the roots of worldly teaching practice that need dug up and tossed away. May He plant new seeds of Christ-like practice in the garden of your heart and bless them richly with living water and the light of truth. May you reach always toward growth in Jesus Christ, allowing the Vinedresser to prune and prop each area of your practice to bring forth the most fruit. May your students, colleagues, and community benefit richly in this life and in all eternity because you have chosen to be a fruitful educator.





TIPS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE

- AND -

HOW THE GREAT COMMISSION APPLIES TO YOUR CLASSROOM

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THE GREAT COMMISSION IN YOUR CLASSROOM

As I examine the Gospel, I always feel like Jesus taught based on the concept of, “Start with what you know”.

We see this in His use of familiar scriptures and parables related to everyday living.

We also see it repeated in the work of the apostles as Matthew opens his account with a genealogical record tracing Jesus’ lineage to God’s covenant with Abraham and to the words of the prophets that the Messiah would be the Lion of Judah and from the line of David. It is likely that Matthew wanted his Jewish community to remember God’s promise of a Messiah so he started with the details that would connect Jesus to what they knew of prophecy.

God inspired Matthew to start with what the people knew.

We’ll explore the concept of God’s tendency to meet us where we are throughout this section as we look at other ways in which God, Jesus, and those God inspired to write His word start with the familiar.

Dear Colleague, let’s start with what we know because ***nobody knows teaching like teachers.***

In the Great Commission, your classroom is your Judea; the “land” in which you have invested the bulk of your time and resources.

It is also the “land” where you are most influential over the “citizens” of the land.

Answering the sense of urgency that God has placed on my heart to get these resources into your hands, Section 1: Your Classroom is divided into three installments: **peace**, hope, and perseverance. In each one, we’ll dig into classroom management, instructional planning, and classroom culture as we ask God to reveal to us the practices that bear the most fruit and to remove from us the barren branches of practice that sap our energy and fail to feed our students.



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TIPS FOR SUCCESS



1

SET A ROUTINE TIME TO ENGAGE
WITH GOD THROUGH THIS
RESOURCE.



2

FIND A QUIET PLACE WITH
MINIMAL DISTRACTIONS WHERE
YOU CAN COMFORTABLY READ,
REFLECT, STUDY, AND PRAY.



3

HAVE YOUR BIBLE HANDY AS
WELL AS A CONCORDANCE OR
BIBLE APP IF YOU WANT TO DIG
DEEPER INTO SCRIPTURE.



4

CONSIDER USING A JOURNAL OR
NOTEBOOK TO WRITE OUT KEY
SCRIPTURE VERSES, CATCH YOUR
THOUGHTS, AND RECORD
BREAKTHROUGHS.



5

SHARE WHAT YOU ARE LEARNING WITH COLLEAGUES. EVEN BETTER,
INVITE COLLEAGUES TO JOIN YOU IN STUDYING THIS RESOURCE AND
APPLYING GOD'S WORD TO YOUR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE.

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BEARING FRUIT: CREATING A PEACE- FILLED PLACE

**“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Become mature, be encouraged, be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.”
2 Corinthians 13:11 (CSB)**

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A PEACE-FILLED PLACE

Join me in an exercise. Read the directions below and then begin:

1. Picture your current or most recent group of students in your mind's eye.
2. Keep your students in your mind's eye and really look at each one.
3. Then, consider these questions and jot down your responses:
 - a. Who stands out to you as anxious or fearful?
 - b. Who stands out as typically angry or bitter?
 - c. When you think of chaos or turmoil which students come to mind?
Why?
 - d. If I asked you which students need more peace in their lives, to whom does your mind instantly jump? Why?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal black ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Whew. Does anyone else need a stronger cup of coffee now? A tissue maybe? Some time to pray for your students?

(Take it if you need it. I've done my share of praying for my former students and for your current students while writing this chapter.)

When you're ready, read on.



I've been out of the classroom for a few years, so when I completed that exercise I ran through twelve years worth of middle schoolers with my current ministry kiddos popping up occasionally too. From five-year-olds through fourteen-year-olds, I saw a mix of anxious frowns, tired eyes, angry fists, and chips on shoulders. As I sifted through faces, I also watched my best and worst de-escalation efforts replay before my eyes and I wondered, as most of my former middle school students are now adults, how many of them are living in peace today and how many are still caught up in the chaos and turmoil of their own making or someone else's.

Precious Colleague, there's a lot of emphasis in education right now on mental health and social-emotional wellness for a reason. I am not an alarmist by any means, but I can't deny the change in classroom management challenges that I either observed first-hand or heard about while coaching and training educators over the past 18 years. I also cannot overlook the truth of God's word that as time progresses mankind will become more selfish and less loving, resulting in children who are more disobedient and less self-disciplined than previous generations (2 Timothy 3:1-3). Educators and educational organizations around the country speak to a significant lack of peace and unity in the classroom; a factor that has led to a startling number of public educators leaving the profession in recent years. Wherever you teach, I think it's safe to say that you've both seen your share of students whose attitudes and actions are shaped by the storms they live in daily: broken homes, parental addiction or substance abuse, homelessness, poverty, chronic illness, and more. I'm sure you've also seen your share of students from what would be considered "stable" homes who still struggle personally with anxiety, anger, bitterness, or lack of self-control.

To offset the storms that students may bring with them and to help them stay calm throughout the day, many schools have started mindfulness practices like morning quiet time, deep breathing exercises, or yoga breaks. There's nothing wrong biblically - as far as I can tell - with mindfulness practices and there are plenty of studies showing the mental benefits of learning to control our breathing and increasing circulation through yoga or other fitness movements. Unfortunately, you know as well as I do that these practices can only do so much to counterbalance the storms in our students' lives or to calm the storms in their hearts and minds - and - the gains made from such practices can be quickly lost when students return to a less-than-peaceful environment either at home or in the very next class period. In the face of such storms, it's easy as an educator to fear things will only get worse, to feel discouraged or even defeated.

Do you remember when Jesus' disciples cried out to Him on the stormy sea? What did He say to them?

He said, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40, CSB).

Oh Brothers and Sisters, let us not be found with little faith in the storms of our classrooms. Let us not be among those who jump ship in fear or frustration, leaving the profession - and our students - in troubled waters.

What can we do as Christian educators in the face of such stormy seas?

If you're like me, there are days you're willing to try pretty much anything, but you and I might not get very far by standing at the front of the classroom and commanding loudly, "Peace. Be still!". Well, no farther than the principal's office anyway...

How do we create a peace-filled place when so many of our students are drowning in the storms of the times we live in and taking others in the classroom with them, including us?

We turn our classrooms over to the One who has the power to calm every storm.

Dear heart, remember, our God is not a God of confusion, discord, or chaos. Our God is a God of peace and unity. As Paul reminded the early church of Thessalonica, the Lord of peace himself will give us peace at all times and in every way (2 Thessalonians 3:16a, emphasis mine). Working in unison as part of the Trinity, Holy Spirit gives us peace as a fruit of the Spirit so that we can develop unity with others (Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:3).

Direct and to the point, James shares with us that those who sow peace, reap righteousness (James 3:18). A fruitful educator creates a peace-filled place and reaps a harvest of right student attitudes and actions.

In preparation for the teaching practices we're about to explore, use the space below to reflect on and answer the following questions:

- How has God given us or others peace even in the wildest storms?
- What does His Word say about how to live in peace and unity with others?
- Do you believe God can use your teaching practices to bring lasting unity and peace to your students? What questions or requests do you have of Him in this area of your faith?



4 PRACTICES THAT PRODUCE PEACE

Leading with Authority



Teaching Students to Self-Regulate



Promoting Community Over Competition



Implementing Restorative Practices



PRACTICE 1: LEADING WITH GOD'S AUTHORITY IN THE CLASSROOM



The examination of this first practice may seem obvious to you or it may feel a little too direct, but it's so necessary to discuss because it sets a foundational truth that must be in place to develop or refine the fruitful practices presented throughout this resource and future installments in the series. There's a good chance you'll feel validated in your current practice and there's an equally good chance your toes are about to be stepped on a bit (*or a lot*).

Please hear the words below spoken in deepest love and encouragement as from a mentor or a dear, old friend who wishes you only success and knows that success often grows out of discomfort. After all, to embrace growth, is to wrestle through discomfort.

Here we go!

Peacemakers are not push-overs or people-pleasers.

Read that again.

Now, say it with me: *Peacemakers are not push-overs or people-pleasers.*

Christian, many of us have grown up with a misunderstanding that a peaceful person is a passive person, that having humility means we should just accept being humiliated.

In the classroom, this often translates into the “doormat teacher” or the “cool teacher”. We may fool ourselves into believing we have a “student-centered approach” which - when done properly - is highly effective, but in reality, we may have a “student-controlled classroom”. This approach is not only ineffective in meeting learning goals, but also destructive to teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships.

Friend, our great and mighty God did not call us from the grave to become teachers who grovel for students' attention; our Lord did not display His authority over death to watch us give up our authority as leaders in the classroom. As someone whose professional appointments have undoubtedly been hand-picked by the Lord, trust me when I say that if God did not select you to lead that classroom, you would not be the teacher in it.

Allow me to speak this truth over you today in love.

Whether this is your first year teaching or your fortieth year, whether your students are three-years-old or eighteen-years old, you, Christian educator, are the God-appointed authority in your classroom. You are a joint heir with Jesus Christ, empowered by Almighty God, led by Holy Spirit. Your leadership is supported by access to an infinite supply of wisdom and strength, patience and peace. As God's appointed leader of learning, you have the authority to set the expectations for your classroom. In Christ, you possess the fortitude to maintain those expectations. You are called to be kind, gentle, and patient with your students, but you are not called to be your students' friend. God has granted you the blessing and the responsibility of being the single most influential person in your students' lives for however long they are in your classroom each day. ***You have the authority to create and maintain a peace-filled place.***





You are the God-appointed authority
in your classroom.



You are a joint heir with Jesus Christ,
empowered by Almighty God,
led by Holy Spirit.



Your leadership is supported by access to an
infinite supply of wisdom and strength,
patience and peace.



You have the authority to set the expectations
for your classroom. In Christ, you possess the
fortitude to maintain those expectations.



You are called to be kind, gentle, and patient
with your students, but you are not called to
be your students' friend.



God has granted you the blessing and the
responsibility of being the single most
influential person in your students' lives for
however long they are in your
classroom each day.



You have the authority to create and maintain
a peace-filled place.

How do I know this to be true?

Because God has authority over all things in heaven and earth and He continually seeks peace with us without giving up His authority. When Jesus walked the earth, He spoke the truth gracefully and boldly (John 1:14 and 14:16). Christ rebuked sin and loved the sinner, speaking firmly but gently (John 8:11). God makes clear His expectations of us throughout His word. In our daily walk with Him, He points out when we fail to meet His expectation (aka, sin) and He corrects us so that we can continue to grow more like Him; He helps us maintain the expectations that He has set for us (Hebrews 12:7-11). Where there is no vision, no expectation, students erupt into chaos; the storms of life blow right into the classroom. God shows us how to be strong leaders who bring peace to those we lead.

As you dig into the considerations on the next few pages, I encourage you to have your Bible or your favorite Bible app open and read God's guidance directly, framing your take-aways as they relate to your position in the classroom.

I encourage you also to remember that we are all of us a work in progress (Philippians 1:6). Some of the barren branches of practice that you will read on the next few pages are practices that I had in my classroom at some point - *maybe even when I left the classroom to begin leading professional learning (eep!)*.

As you read each barren branch and the biblical reasoning for why it doesn't produce peace, give yourself grace for what you did not know before and thank God for the mercy of being able to apply new learning today.

As you read each tip for pruning a practice to produce more peace, don't feel like you have to embrace every pruning tip right away. Reflect on your current capacity to apply something new and ask Holy Spirit to guide you to the tip that you most need to apply in the near future and what can be revisited down the road.



BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Being the “cool teacher”, students’ friend/buddy,
or overly passive (aka, doormat)

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- When adults surrender their God-given responsibility to provide consistent expectations and structure, students struggle to grow in the time and manner that God desires (Proverbs 13:1; Proverbs 29:15).
- While the Bible consistently refers to parents in relation to discipline, during the school day parents are not present (in loco parentis); the teacher is the adult responsible for training up students in the way they should go, even if the teacher isn't much older than the students (Proverbs 22:6).
- When educators do not set and maintain expectations and structure, they are like parents who fail to discipline their children, creating folly and spite (Proverbs 12:1; 13:18). *Note that discipline is not the same as punishment; discipline is teaching how to behave rightly whereas punishment is a consequence of not behaving as instructed.*

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths about authority are presented by the Scripture verses above?
- What evidence do I see that my current approach to setting expectations and creating structure stands on the truths of these verses?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Take up the authority that God has granted you to set clear expectations for student behavior, daily learning goals, and overall classroom culture.
- Through Christ, lead with confidence, being a peace-filled leader of those He has entrusted into your care (2 Timothy 1:7; Philippians 4:13).
- Set appropriate social boundaries to demonstrate your authority in the classroom, including how students are expected to address you, how you present yourself professionally, and how you interact with students in and out of class (Titus 2:6-8; 1 Corinthians 13:11).

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths about authority are presented by the Scripture verses above?
- What evidence do I see that my current approach to creating and maintaining authority in the classroom stands on these truths?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

Does my current relationship with students classroom honor God's placement of me as the authority there? What am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Allowing a student-*controlled* classroom

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Students, even high school students, do not naturally possess the wisdom to consistently do what is best for their growth or the growth of others (Proverbs 22:15a; Ephesians 4:14).
- Similar to being the doormat or cool teacher, allowing students to determine what will happen in class or giving them the ability to “opt out” of learning creates a lack of structure. Lack of structure leads to power struggles around what will get done that day, sowing discord between students and the teacher or between individual students or groups of students (Matthew 12:25).
- Consider taking a dive into I & II Kings and I & II Chronicles for more insights into what happens when more than one person seeks to be the authority over a group of people. *Spoiler alert:* kingdoms split, cities burn, people suffer; it's bad, friend .

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses above?
- What evidence do I see that my current level of providing student choice/control stands on the truths of these verses?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Create a student-centered classroom by providing teacher-determined choices.
- Teacher-determined choices allow you to exercise your expertise and use evidence of student learning and student interest to provide students with a manageable set of options, allowing their decision-making skills to grow while ensuring alignment to learning goals.
- Teacher-determined choices allow you to create multiple points of entry to the lesson and meet students where they are, ensuring every student can opt in whether they are behind, on track, or advanced in skill or knowledge related to the lesson.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses above?
- What evidence do I see that my current level of providing student choice/control stands on the truths of these verses?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

Who currently determines what will happen in class each day? Me or my students? What am I doing well to maintain control and grow student decision-making skills? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Focusing on the negative

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- God is very clear that approaches focusing more on punishment or consequence than on instruction are not effective (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).
- Drawing attention to what not to do often plants seeds of wanting to try to do that very thing, especially in students who are naturally prone to test boundaries or who feel compelled to prove others wrong.
- Publicly calling out students' misbehavior often creates shame instead of repentance, in turn creating a stumbling block in your relationship. *I don't know about you, but I'm glad God removes my shame instead of broadcasting my misdeeds (Zephaniah 3:18-20)!*
- Publicly calling out students' misbehavior also creates an environment where students can gain attention by going against your expectations, a strong temptation for students who crave attention and a sure-fire way to have greater instances of misbehavior from these students.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my current disciplinary practices stand on the truths of these verses/observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Model desired behaviors for students, focusing on positive outcomes for following expectations.
- Create expectations with a positive focus.
 - Instead of “Don’t speak out of turn”, use “Raise your hand and wait politely”.
 - Instead of “Don’t plagiarize”, use “Do your best work and give credit where credit is due”.
- Publicly recognize students’ positive behavior and thank them for contributing to the well-being of the learning community.
- When it is necessary to provide correction for inappropriate behavior, do so in a publicly-private setting by quietly speaking at his/her desk or asking the student to another part of the room, still in sight of others, and speak quietly yet firmly regarding the expectations. *Remember to focus on the positive benefits of following expectations, reteach how to meet the expectation in question, and target the behavior as the issue, not the student him/herself.*

ROOM TO REFLECT

- How do the practices above align to the scriptural truths provided so far? *Consider reviewing the verses provided earlier if needed.*
- What evidence do I see that my current disciplinary practices have a positive focus?
- Are there areas in my disciplinary practices where the focus could be more positive?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

Do I tend to have a negative focus? Might I be tempting students to misbehave or push boundaries? Am I creating any stumbling blocks for them? What am I doing well? What needs work?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

In my reflection, I noticed that students I identified as needing greater peace exhibited many of the same traits or behaviors.

I'm betting yours do too.

Let's see if these resonate with you:

- **Avoidance of Challenging Tasks**

- Sudden onset of headache or stomachache (cured by the nurse's magical ice pack or the miraculous power of a hard candy from the secretary)
- Lengthy restroom breaks (other students ask to text them to see if they need TP)
- Engages in an endless cycle of pencil sharpening, computer rebooting, or locker searching
- Seemingly unprovoked outbursts that require removal from the class

- **Self-Criticism**

- Referring to self as stupid, dumb, worthless, hopeless case, etc...
- Referring to your efforts to teach them as useless, waste of time, pointless, etc...
- Makes statements like:
 - I'll never be any good at (math, science, reading, etc...).
 - I'm not good enough to go to college, get a good job, or be successful.
 - No one wants to work with me. No one likes me. No one can help me.

- **Drama, Drama, Drama**

- Every issue, no matter how minor others may deem it, is HUGE in their eyes
- Frequently in disagreements or arguments with other students, often over petty, trivial, or inconsequential matters
- Requests to leave class and see counselor over every perceived slight or offense

I am sure there are many other tells, but it's likely you came up with a name from this year's roster or recent rosters to match each behavior or trait above.

As you think about these students, it is possible that the storm behind their actions or attitudes is something beyond your control. Dear friend, I don't say this to be discouraging, but to be realistic. In a profession where it feels as though the weight of the world is on our shoulders, it's important to our peace of mind that we have an accurate perception of our control.

What we cannot control: *what happens when students are not in our care.*

What we can control: *the level of peace that students can experience when they are in our care.*

How we can create peace: demonstrate self-regulation and teach our students to self-regulate.

In psychological terms, self-regulation operates in three areas: affect, behavior, and cognition. In other words, it is the ability to manage how we feel and control or maintain our behavior and thoughts without external assistance. Specific elements of self-regulation include using positive self-talk, setting goals, and applying strategies to process emotions and manage behavior/tasks.

In biblical terms, the Apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi to manage their feelings and thoughts by thinking about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). To Timothy, Paul wrote that the Spirit of God gives us power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). James taught self-regulation by instructing Christians to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19). Peter shared that we should give our worries and fears to God, stay alert, and have a sober mind (1 Peter 5:6-8).

As a Believer, you have an added boost to your ability to self-regulate, the Holy Spirit and the mind of Christ within you (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Holy Spirit in you also gives you the added responsibility of demonstrating self-regulation to your students. Your professional demeanor should stand out because you speak and act with the mind of Christ consistently (not perfectly) and give God the glory for your ability to maintain composure in challenging situations (1 Peter 3:15).

Christian, next to an introduction to God's gift of salvation, the greatest thing we can do for our students is teach them the skill of self-regulation. If they can learn to apply and maintain it, self-regulation will bring greater peace in the classroom and in the rest of their lives as well.

As shared earlier, when you dig into the considerations on the next few pages, I encourage you to have your Bible or your favorite Bible app open and read God's guidance directly, framing your take-aways as they relate to your position in the classroom.

I encourage you also to remember that we are all of us a work in progress (Philippians 1:6). I've spent the past 8 years studying self-regulation, but before that...whew, my practices did not produce it very well.

Remember to embrace grace. Ask Holy Spirit to guide you to the tip that you most need to apply in the near future and what can be revisited later.

Now, let's take a look at some barren branches to cut away and some practices to prune to produce greater peace for our students (and ourselves!) in the classroom.

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Coddling, dramatizing, or dismissing

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Coddling creates dependence on *you* for protection from negative thoughts, feelings, or interactions.
 - Remember to keep your perspective of control accurate - you can't always be there to smooth every conflict or situation over for students and you'll exhaust yourself if you try.
- Dramatizing - oh friend - the Bible has a lot to say about drama.
 - Figuratively, God tells us that rushing into drama is like grabbing a stray dog by the ears; you're just asking to get bitten(Proverbs 26:17)!
 - More directly, God tells us that it is wrong to listen eagerly to gossip or to pay attention to slander (Proverbs 16:28). It's one thing to provide a safe place for student expression; it's another thing to feed the fire.
- Dramatizing gives attention-seeking students much needed attention, meaning they'll create more drama so you will engage with them. Yikes!
- Dramatizing gives anxious students greater reason to be anxious; after all, you - the adult - are in a tizzy too, so it must be a very big deal indeed.
- Dismissing student concerns tells students you don't care about their feelings or issues or that their concerns aren't important and should be kept to themselves; this creates distrust and leads to students bottling up how they feel.
 - Contents under pressure eventually explode causing classroom management issues or implode causing mental and emotional trauma for the student.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations on the previous page?
- What evidence do I see that my approach to student concerns encourages and equips my students to self-regulate?
- Are there areas in my approach to student concerns where I am coddling, dramatizing, or dismissing instead of emphasizing self-regulation?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to avoid negative approaches; how to develop students' self-regulatory skills*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Teach students the importance of growth mindset, grace, and positive self-talk.
- Growth mindset, based on the work of Carol Dweck and others, is the belief that we can improve our abilities and attitude regardless of our natural aptitude. This mirrors God's teaching that He is continually working in us (Romans 12:1-21).
- Grace can be a difficult concept for students; so much of school is about performance (grades, test scores, sports); Extending grace to students focuses them on progress and honors God's extension of grace toward us (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- Positive self-talk is an integral part of self-regulation. Teaching students to talk to themselves in encouraging, progress-oriented ways instead of critical or condemning ways helps them make progress on current efforts and future goals rather than dwell on past mistakes (Philippians 4:8).

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that I am teaching growth mindset, grace, and positive self-talk?
- Are there areas in my approach that need development?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well am I teaching students to self-regulate? Are there areas of my practice where I see signs of coddling, dramatizing, or dismissing student concerns? What am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Relying on external reward systems
(the emphasis is on what can be gained rather than on internal satisfaction of doing what is right)

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- God's word has a lot to say about rewards (Colossians 3:23-24; Revelation 22:12; Matthew 6:1-34; Psalm 37:4). Just from this sample of verses we see that God rewards obedience, but that He does not promote obedience for the sake of attention or reward. Instead, He emphasizes obedience out of love for Him and others and because of a desire to do what is right.
- External reward systems often don't produce fruit because:
 - the desired behavior is only present so long as hope of the external reward is present.
 - the reward only works if it is seen as being greater than immediate satisfaction of undesired behavior.
 - reward saturation or dissatisfaction with current reward often occurs causing an increase in reward quality, quantity, or frequency to maintain behavior.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my current management practices stand on the truths of these verses/observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Emphasize internal growth over external reward.
- Help students take ownership for their success by teaching them to set and monitor measurable, achievable goals for self-regulating actions and attitudes.
- Remind students that one bad moment does not derail the entire goal; setbacks happen (see Practice 4 for more on this thought).

ROOM TO REFLECT

- How do the practices above align to the scriptural truths provided so far? *Consider reviewing the verses provided earlier if needed.*
- What evidence do I see that my current management practices stand on the truths of these verses/observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

Is there an emphasis on external reward for good behavior in my classroom? Do my students tend to ask, "What do I get for doing X, Y, Z?" What am I doing well to support the internal reward part of self-regulation? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Expecting a behavior without modeling it

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Students encounter diverse expectations throughout the day. It's never safe to assume that students understand appropriate attitudes and actions for every environment or situation in which they are placed. God is patient to teach us how we ought to behave; we should extend the same grace to our students (Hebrews 5:2).
- Many students define successful behavior as the actions and attitudes *that get them what they want*. Failing to demonstrate appropriate attitudes and actions in advance leaves students to fall back on default or reactionary modes of operation.
 - If throwing a fit usually gets them what they want, then they'll try it in your classroom until it's proven it doesn't work.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my current expectations for student behavior stand on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where grace or modeling could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Share examples of desired attitudes and actions with students (Hebrews 13:7). Consider drawing inspiration from the Fruit of the Spirit and giving students concrete examples of what peace, patience, kindness, etc...look like in action during recess, during group work, during test time, etc...
- Model appropriate attitudes and actions for students (Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 2:21) and then have students take turns modeling them for each other and discussing why/how following the expectation creates greater peace for everyone.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my current expectations for student behavior stand on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where grace or modeling could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well are you modeling expected actions and attitudes for students? Is it clear what is expected and why? When it comes to modeling expectations, what am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Abandoning expectations or
removing scaffolds too quickly

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Behavioral theory teaches that undesired actions will often escalate before a person conforms to desired expectations.
 - Students will test you to see how serious you are about the expectations. *Consider how often the Pharisees challenged Christ's teaching hoping He would slip or justify their attitudes...(Matthew 16:1-4; 19:3-9; 22:15-22)*
 - Lowering or abandoning your expectations during this critical window not only decreases the likelihood that the current expectation will take hold, but also undermines your future attempts to help students self-regulate.
- Removing scaffolding too quickly (taking down visual cues/reminders, inconsistently correcting undesired actions/attitudes) leaves students unsupported before they have begun to self-regulate and may cause them to believe you have given up (and therefore given up on their ability to meet the expectation).
 - Consider Exodus 13:17 - God knew the Israelites needed more support and took them on the longer road. The way out of Egypt was quick; getting the ways of Egypt out of them took much longer.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my current expectations for student behavior stand on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where expectations or scaffolds could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Implement a strategic process for teaching and supporting expected attitudes and actions.
- Consider mnemonics or other memory aids. Incorporate positive self-talk statements in classroom decor and use them frequently aloud for yourself and others.
- Continue to model desired actions and attitudes and self-correct where students can see and hear when you realize you've missed the mark (*it happens to us all some days!*).
- Have students continue to model correct actions even if it means pausing a lesson for someone to model an expectation or make a second attempt at meeting the expectation. The extra time it takes to teach expectations will be well worth it when class begins to run more smoothly and peacefully later.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my current expectations for student behavior stand on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where expectations or scaffolds could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well am I supporting students in self-regulating actions and attitudes? Do I tend to abandon expectations or remove support too soon? What am I doing well? What needs work?

PRACTICE 3: PROMOTING COMMUNITY OVER COMPETITION



Competition is really fun...when you're winning.

Three years into my teaching career, I decided that I wanted to coach our high school's volleyball team. Most of the players were girls I'd recently had as eighth graders and I just adored them.

Such wonderful girls.

Such kindly parents.

It was going to be an amazing experience!

And it was - when we won. But it wasn't always so great when we lost. The bickering. The backbiting. *And that was just the parents!* The girls were at odds with each other - those who played most and those who played least - and it tested their loyalties as friends and teammates. I couldn't stand what the competition for playing time was doing to my girls. I had very little peace, avoiding parents in the grocery store, waking up at night and wondering which girls had hurt feelings from not receiving much playing time in the evening's game. Truly there was little peace for any of us, but at 24 years old, I didn't really know what to do about it. At one point, I remember sitting down in a circle on the gym floor with my girls and saying,

"Girls, you can't keep resenting each other over playing time. You're damaging friendships you've had since elementary school and, in some cases, the friendship between your parents too. So, I'm going to give you some options: You can all play equal time during the games, but we probably won't win very often. Or, you can trust me to determine the amount of time each of you will play based on your skillset and who we're playing, and we'll be more likely to win. What you have to decide as a team is if you want to play more as individuals or if you want to win more as a team. I'm going to walk over to a corner of the gym and let you girls discuss it. I'll come back in 5 minutes. You let me know what you decide to do."



Then, my assistant coach and I walked over to the corner and prayed. Honestly, for me, winning was nice, but win or lose, I just wanted my girls to learn the value of teamwork and the power of perseverance. After all, God made us for community, but more on that and on what my girls decided in a minute.

Now, a classroom is different from a sports team, but I think we'll find that there is still quite a bit of competition between students (*and maybe between teachers!*).

Some forms of competition are presented as external rewards for academic habits or understandings we want students to develop. A common competition involves reading X amount of books, passing X amount of tests or doing X amount of activities with said books, and winning "money" for the school store or maybe a trip at the end of the school year. Students may compete against a set score and try to get higher than the bar, or they may compete against each other - top three readers in the school get the biggest prize. Classrooms or grade levels may compete against each other for rewards getting the teachers in on the competitive drive as well.

Other forms of competition are classroom based. I had a professor in college who graded essays by ranking the papers from best to worst, giving the top performer a 100% and using that paper as the "rubric" from which to score the rest of the papers. Nothing says community like being cornered by your classmates in the parking lot and told to bring your writing down because your papers were making their papers receive poor marks, right? A slightly less destructive form of that grading game is timed mathematics sheets where students compete against a clock or against each other to demonstrate their math facts and receive rewards for being the fastest or punishments-- like more math practice during recess -- for being the slowest.

Then of course, there's the competitive needs that students bring with them. Some students are just competitive by nature. They have an internal need to get the highest grades, the best reading score, to be the first to learn their multiplication tables. Other students are competitive by nurture. They've learned either at home or at school that adults can't possibly find everyone valuable or loveable and so they compete for your praise - or just your attention (the root of many "bad" behaviors by the way!).

So, how do we promote community in the classroom when so many systems, as well as our natural tendencies, drive us toward competition?

We dig into God's design for us, a design that heavily emphasizes living in community.

- In Hebrews 10:24-25, we read that we are called to “spur one another toward love and good deeds”, fellowship with and encourage one another.
- Paul wrote to the Church at Galatia, “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2).
- Speaking of the Body, to the Church at Corinth Paul wrote, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26).
- We take our cue directly from our Triune God. Jesus does not compete with the Father, but being equal with the Father does His will (Philippians 2:5-8). Holy Spirit does not compete with Jesus, but came on His behalf to dwell within believers and speak the words of God to them (John 14:15-17 and 26).



On that fateful afternoon years ago, my girls decided that the success of the team was more important than the floor time of the individual player. Over the next few weeks of practice I noticed an increase in stronger players coaching struggling players (making my job easier) and a decrease in conspiratorial huddles during breathers and break times. During and after games, I received fewer parental complaints and heard more parents cheering for students other than their own. What exactly happened in that circle I'll never know. I like to imagine I inspired them to think more as a team, but I'm more confident that God stepped into the question I left dangling between them and pulled them together through the Holy Spirit in the girls who believed on Him.

My dear colleague, if God can pull 14 highly competitive teenage girls together in a common desire to see each other succeed, He can do the same for your classroom.

How can you open the door to see Him work?

By pulling barren branches of practice away and creating room and resources for God to build community.

As you review the following barren practices and tips for pruning them. Remember again to embrace grace so that you will be better able to extend it to students. I'd love to take another crack at coaching; I think I'd be much better at it at 41 than I was at 24.

Developing fruitful teaching practices takes learning and time and support. Keep pressing forward!



BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Competing for rewards

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Academic reward programs aren't inherently bad (*keeping in mind the cautions set on external rewards in the previous practice*). However, they can be framed or displayed in a way that creates a less than peace-filled learning environment (James 3:16).
- Reward programs designed to pit students against a universal score fail to acknowledge that all students progress differently. It may be a great deal more challenging for some students to receive 10 points than others, creating a feeling that the odds are stacked against struggling students (Galatians 6:4-6).
- Reward programs that pit students against each other - only the top performer receives a prize - create rivalry between students and emphasize external rewards over the intrinsic benefit of the academic habit or skill developed (Philippians 2:3-4).
- Reward tracking displays that are designed as rankings with student names or class names give a very clear visual of who is doing well and who is not, which is great if you're doing well...but not so much if you're struggling. Ranking-style displays do not honor students' progress; only their ability to do better or worse than others (Galatians 5:26).

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the Scripture verses above?
- What evidence do I see that my classroom culture stands on the truths of these verses?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Create systems that encourage students to spur one another toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- Design academic reward programs within a framework of progress, encouraging students to do more or achieve higher than they have before. *Competing against one's own personal best allows students to see progress more frequently and more clearly.* No two students develop exactly the same way or at the same time in any academic area; comparing them to a "set score" or to each other creates resentment and resentment destroys peace.
- Consider having students track their own progress, with your support, in an individual notebook or through a technology program. If a tracking display is necessary to keep students focused or motivated (*or to keep the investor responsible for the incentive happy - I get it, friend; I really do*), design displays to show how many students are at each performance level or how many books have been read, but not which students or which classrooms. Keep the "who" piece at the teacher-student level; not the hallway display level.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my classroom culture stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well am I supporting a progress-based focus in my classroom? Are my practices competitive or collaborative/cooperative? What am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Competing for grades

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Imagine if God held a competition and ranked all people throughout history from who sinned the least to who sinned the most and then only let the top 10% into Heaven. *What would be our motivation to help each other avoid sin? How many people would be tempted to cause others to sin so they could improve their own odds of getting in? Yikes!* God wouldn't do that! First, He tells us that our sins are forgiven and forgotten when we accept Jesus as our Savior (Isaiah 43:25). Second, He wants everyone to be saved and that means He wants everyone to go to Heaven (1 Timothy 2:4-6). Praise God, His ways are far more merciful and gracious than some of our grading practices in the classroom!
- A grading system that requires students to compete for grades, awarding top marks to the student who did the best (regardless of what that best was) and lower marks moving downward through the ranking is a recipe for discord, pitting students at the top against each other, resigning students in the middle to mediocrity, and creating feelings of hopelessness and defeat for struggling students. There is no peace in such a system.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my classroom culture stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Teach students to carry each other's burdens, to suffer with each other and rejoice with each other by implementing a standards-based or mastery-based grading system. In these systems, students are free to help one another and learn from each other, encouraging one another when they struggle and celebrating when others succeed.
- Basing grades purely on student progress toward or achievement of designated standards (also called objectives or learning targets) ***gives students peace in knowing exactly what they are reaching for, when they are expected to reach it, and how close they currently are to reaching it.*** When paired with other fruitful practices, this method of grading creates an environment in which students encourage each other and help others reach their goals.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above and those presented previously?
- What evidence do I see that my classroom culture stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well am I supporting peace-filled grading practices in my classroom? What am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Enabling competition for top student or student who receives the most of your attention

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Some students are caught in the comparison trap when they come to you. Students desiring to be the “top” student must compare themselves to other students academically. Students desiring to be the center of your attention must compare how much attention others receive to how much attention they are receiving. God’s word is clear on the topic of comparison:
 - “Don’t compare yourself with others. Just look at your own work to see if you have done anything to be proud of. You must each accept the responsibilities that are yours.” (Galatians 6:4-6)
 - “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” (James 3:16)
 - “A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.” (Proverbs 14:30)

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my classroom culture stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Encourage students to seek their personal best, not to be better than someone else (Philippians 2:12-13).
- Encourage high performing students to use their skills and knowledge to support classmates rather than compete with them (Luke 12:48).
- Create diverse support roles in the classroom that allow students to embrace their potential to serve each other. Focus some roles on knowledge or skill and other roles on helpfulness, organization, time management, and other skills.
- Use engagement strategies to ensure that all students have opportunities to respond, interact, ask questions, receive feedback, etc.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my classroom culture stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well am I emphasizing personal progress in my classroom?
Am I encouraging collaboration over comparison? What am I doing well? What needs work?

PRACTICE 4: IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES



You've committed to be a fruitful educator who creates a peace-filled place.

You lead your class with Christ-honoring confidence.

You consistently demonstrate and teach self-regulation.

You established practices that promote community over competition.

And wha-la! You have the perfect classroom..., right?

Oh friend, know that I am smiling and shaking my head with you.

Implementing the first three practices in this chapter will bring greater peace to you and your students, but there's no such thing as a perfect classroom and we both know it.

No matter how proactive you are, a few students will still blow into class like a Category V hurricane. No matter how prepared you are, some days your personal storms will carry your ability to self-regulate, along with your patient and kind spirit, right out to sea.

Though we seek to avoid it, though we try to manage it, conflict is simply a part of being human.

So, what do you do when some students struggle to settle into the peace-filled place you've created? How do you maintain the peaceful relationships you've built with students when you're the one who popped off or melted down?

For starters, praise God for His grace!

I need it. You need it. Our students need it. *None of us deserve it and that's why we call it the unmerited favor of God.*

The grace of God is most often referenced in light of the salvation He offers to all people, His unconditional love for mankind (Romans 5:8). But, His grace doesn't stop there. Because of Christ, we have received grace upon grace (John 1:16). This means that every misstep we have ever made or will ever make is covered by God's grace. Included in His grace is the patience and loving kindness to teach us to do better next time (Titus 2:11-12).

Christian, the sooner we embrace the fact that everyone fails to live up to established expectations sometimes, the more peace we will have in life in general.

Your students are going to bring their storms to class some days.

- *Extend grace to them.*

You are going to have seasons when you bring the storms of your life into the classroom too.

- *Extend grace to yourself.*



When conflict arises in your classroom, restore lost peace by:

Teaching Accountability:

- If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. - 1 Corinthians 12:26
- So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. - Romans 14:12
- Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. - James 5:16

Choosing Forgiveness:

- Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32
- Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. - Colossians 3:13
- Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?". Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times but seventy-seven times". - Matthew 18:21-22

When conflict arises in your classroom, restore lost peace by:

Letting Go:

- I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. - Isaiah 43:25
- As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. - Psalm 103:12
- Forgetting what is behind... - Philippians 3:13b

Looking Ahead:

- ...and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ. - Philippians 3:13b-14
- For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. - Romans 8:18
- Do not remember the past events, pay no attention to things of old. Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert. - Isaiah 43:18-19

In biblical terms, we call the four steps presented on the previous pages "reconciliation".

Christian, when we were lost in sin, God showed us that we were sinners (Romans 3:23) and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). When we heard the Gospel, He held us accountable for choosing His gift of eternal life instead of the wages of sin (Romans 6:23; John 3:16). When we chose to follow Him, He forgave us (1 John 1:9), and He forgot our sin (Hebrews 8:12). Now, He continues to work in us, transforming us each day to become more like Christ (Romans 12:2).

If life were a school, then as the only One who is righteous and holy, God has every right and ability to stick us in a corner and forget about us, to kick us out of class, to expel us from school altogether, but instead, He took the first step to reconcile us to Himself and sent His Son to pay the price for our sin.

As human beings, we'll never forgive as well as God or forget as well as God, but we can seek to be more God-honoring in our teaching practice by using a process called "restorative practice".

Restorative practice is an approach to teaching and learning that places accountability for behavior on the individual while focusing on maintaining positive relationships by addressing conflict in healthy ways.

Let's root out the branches of practice that make restoration difficult and examine how to prune practices to produce a consistently (not perfectly) peace-filled place.

Remember to embrace grace and take on the tips and changes Holy Spirit moves you to apply.



BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Failing to hold self and/or students accountable

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- As the leader in the classroom, it is imperative that you practice what you preach (Titus 2:7; Romans 12:1).
 - If you have a bad moment or a bad day, own it. Don't make excuses or give students a window into your personal life they don't need.
 - Simply apologize to students for being unprepared, or snipping at a student, or taking a crying jag when the copier messed up your test packet (*I had two babies while teaching - I get it!*).
- It is equally imperative that you hold all students accountable for their behavior. If some students are held accountable and others are not, divisiveness and the appearance of favoritism enters the classroom, and there is no peace where there is no unity (James 2:9).
 - Note: Due to a variety of needs and conditions, some students present a diminished ability to self-regulate or meet grade-level expectations; this does not give them free reign to distract others or create a chaotic learning environment. Additional support is certainly needed as are inclusive practices, but it must be clear to students that behavior expectations exist to keep all students safe and learning.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my application of accountability stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- Stay true to the expectations you have set for the classroom as the leader by consistently applying expectations to yourself and to others, reminding and supporting students, and providing corrective measures as needed (see Practices 1-3).
- Yes, some students have special behavioral needs, but in these cases they should also have a behavior modification plan to guide you in supporting them. If they do not, open a dialogue with your school counselor or administrator. Some students present truly extenuating circumstances in which their behavior is beyond their control, for these students extend extra grace and teach other students to compassionately do the same, being careful to keep confidence regarding the student's needs.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths from Scripture previously shared are supported by the practices above?
- What evidence do I see that my application of accountability stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well am I holding myself accountable for meeting expectations? My students? What am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Failing to ask for forgiveness or to forgive students

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Unforgiveness plants a seed of bitterness in the heart, a seed that can grow into anger and resentment, emotions void of peace and sure to tank classroom relationships (Hebrews 12:14-15). This is why God so heavily emphasizes forgiveness in His word, to protect our hearts.
- Failing to ask for forgiveness when your actions or attitude disrupt classroom peace presents students with a double standard and - as much as we hate the “h” word - it is hypocritical to expect something of students you will not uphold yourself. The double standard will cause some students anxiety and will cause others to lose respect for your authority, both of which undermine the peace-filled classroom (Matthew 18:5-7; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9).
- Failing to forgive a student sets a seed of bitterness in your heart toward that student, creating a stronghold for Satan to attack from in the future, damaging the teacher-to-student relationship and classroom peace. Additionally, if some students are forgiven, but not others, or some offenses forgiven but not others, you risk the same double standard and hypocrisy mentioned above.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my application of forgiveness stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- As the leader in the classroom, it is imperative that you model forgiveness, including forgiving yourself and asking students and colleagues for forgiveness when your attitude or actions have broken the peace in some way.
- Forgive early and consistently. Forgive before students ask for forgiveness; some students never will ask, but that's the beauty of forgiveness: it doesn't have to be initiated by the one in need of forgiveness, it can be freely given. Honestly, sometimes students don't even realize they are in need of forgiveness. Give it anyway.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths from Scripture previously shared are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my application of forgiveness stands on those truths?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well do I practice forgiveness? Am I quick to forgive myself? My students? My colleagues? What am I doing well? What needs work?

BARREN BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Holding onto the past

WHY IT DOESN'T PRODUCE PEACE

- Inappropriate behavior has consequences. Holding a student to those consequences, like assigned seating, restrictions on hall passes, lunch detention, is part of accountability and providing structure for students to self-regulate, but *we must be careful not to extend the consequences beyond the point the student has begun to self-regulate.*
- Overextending consequences, ***assuming a student will always misbehave*** is a sign of holding onto the past, of assuming the worst rather than the best. Students in this situation begin to assume the worst of themselves or to take on the identifier of a “troubled student”, removing their own accountability for behavior by believing that adults will view them as troublesome no matter what. This creates a major setback in developing a peaceful classroom and internal peace for students. It also flies in the face of God's desire for all to be saved; all are redeemable (1 Timothy 2:4-6; Psalm 107:1-43).

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my ability to forgive and forget stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

HOW TO PRUNE TO PRODUCE PEACE

- When Peter denied Christ three times, what did Jesus do? (John 21:15-17).
 - He sought Peter out and asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter denied Christ three times and Christ questioned him three times. Three times was what it took for it to sink into Peter that he had hurt Jesus through his denial. Verse 17 tells us Peter was grieved that Jesus asked three times. He realized what his denial had done and was sorry for it. He was ready to do better and Jesus gave him a task to move forward - feed My sheep.
- Set consequences and boundaries that match the student's learning need and let them go when the student has demonstrated a desire to do better.
 - Students need corrective instruction and boundaries to help them learn to self-regulate, to be a contributing member of a peace-filled learning community, but they also need opportunities to show their growth and engage in the task of self-regulating as a community member.

ROOM TO REFLECT

- What key truths are presented by the verses and observations above?
- What evidence do I see that my ability to forgive and forget stands on the truths of these verses and observations?
- Are there areas in my practice where these truths could be applied more consistently?
 - If so, what do I need most?
 - More instruction (*how to do it*)?
 - Greater faith (*belief in God to help me do it*)?

Reflection Questions for Daily Growth:

How well do I let go of the past? Do my practices support student growth or hold them trapped in past mistakes? What am I doing well? What needs work?



CONCLUSION AND COMING SOON!

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CONCLUSION

The fruitful educator creates a peace-filled place for students, and, though we didn't address it in this section, a peace-filled place for colleagues and families too, but more on that in later installments.

How is this peace-filled place for students achieved?

- By leading with God's authority in the classroom.
- By teaching students to self-regulate attitudes and actions (*and regulating your own as well!!*).
- By promoting community over competition.
- By implementing restorative practices.

Precious Colleague, until He tells you otherwise, our great and gracious God has placed you in the mission field of your classroom for no other reason than to make Him known; this is the purpose of every Christian after all, to tell of God's steadfast love and to shine His light into a darkened world (Psalm 107:43; Matthew 5:16).

I know it can feel very difficult to tell about God's love or His transformative power in your life. You may feel or even been told that there are limits on what you can say and keep your position, or keep students open to your teaching. While you continue to seek God's guidance on what to say and when and to whom, let the fruitful teaching practices shared in this resource fill your classroom with God's peace. Let your teaching practices speak Jesus until God leads you to speak aloud.

I pray that this resource has been useful to you as an educator and especially as a Christian, equipping you to walk more confidently in the mission field God has set before you. I do hope you'll join me in future installments, but for the time being, allow me to intercede in prayer for you.

Father God, thank you for the gift of your peace. Thank you for your Son Jesus through whom we are reconciled with you and for the in-dwelling of Holy Spirit through whom we receive your peace. Lord, envelope my precious colleagues in education in your peace. Guide them in creating peace-filled places of learning for their students. Though their students come with many burdens, though they themselves weather storms, your peace lifts every weight, stills the wind and calms the waves. Bless the efforts of those you have placed in the mission field of teaching, multiply their fruit that you Lord might be glorified. To you be all glory, honor, and praise. Amen (let it be so now).

Coming Soon...

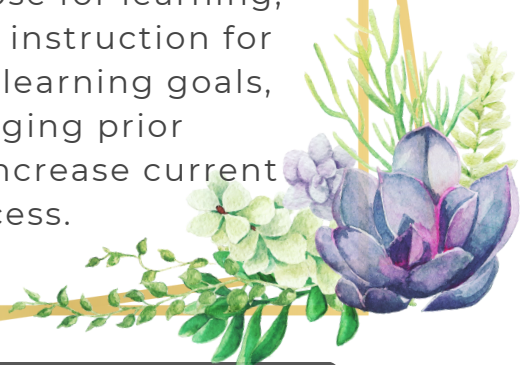
Did you find "Creating a Peace-Filled Place" helpful?

Keep an eye out on Psalm1072.com/the-fruitful-educator for additional installments of ***Teaching Practices that Testify (louder than words!)***.

Also releasing Summer 2023,
"The Fruitful Educator Plans to Give Students a Future and a Hope"



Sons and Daughters of the One True King hold onto hope because God has promised that His plans are for the well-being of His children yesterday, today, and forevermore. Anchored in Jeremiah 29:11, this installment of Teaching Practices that Testify moves the Christian educator beyond traditional lesson planning methods to planning instruction that gives students a hope and a future. Addressed in this installment are, setting a relevant and engaging purpose for learning, providing clear instruction for accomplishing learning goals, and leveraging prior knowledge to increase current success.



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TEACHING PRACTICES THAT TESTIFY

(louder than words!)

Your students need you, but more importantly they need to see Jesus in you. In the mission field of your classroom, will you choose to be a fruitful educator? Will you allow God to shape your teaching practices? I pray you say "Yes and Amen!"

S U B S C R I B E A T

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