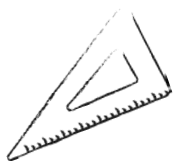


Inspiration for Passionate Teaching

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Preface



My husband Jeff and I came to the Anabaptist faith from an evangelical background in 2006 during our fifteenth year of marriage. Prior to this, Jeff had spent nine years as a professional symphony musician before deciding that he preferred teaching. He left his tuxedo tails behind in 2001 and taught for several years before taking a break from 2006 to 2010.

I also enjoyed teaching. I had taught school before we were married and then homeschooled our five children for thirteen years. In 2010 we returned to the teaching profession in an Anabaptist school setting, but this time together, with Jeff and I teaching and our five children among the students. We have had many adventures along the way, some of which I will share in the upcoming pages.

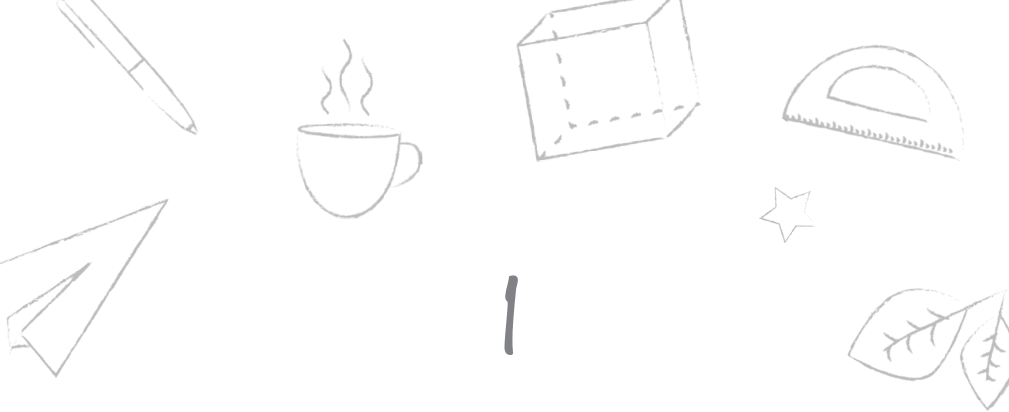
We have spent most of our adult lives in the field of education and could think of no better, more fulfilling way to spend our working hours. In addition to encouraging and leading children and youth, we enjoy the laughter, creativity, personalities, lovely sounds of music, and the “Aha!” moments when our students understand a new concept.

In 2012 I began writing a blog called *The Plain Professors*, sharing some of our ideas in the hope that they would be helpful to other teachers. Several years later, a few friends and acquaintances suggested that I collect selections from the blog for a book, which I had the opportunity to work on during the Covid-19 shutdown.

This is not meant to be a how-to book or a handbook on

teaching. There is no specific formula; each teacher will develop methods that work well for him. I have read many books on teaching, and every one of them has suggested some things that I would never do or that would not work well in my classroom. I'm sure this book will be the same. We simply offer it to give teachers ideas and inspiration—more “tools in your teacher's toolbox,” as a dear friend used to tell us.

In these pages, I hope you find a tool or two that will be helpful for your classroom. Although I wrote much of the text, many of the ideas came from Jeff. A few selections written by him are noted as such.



Our Assignment from God

At a teacher's conference, I once heard a speaker say that around January, most teachers are contemplating whether they should teach another year. We shouldn't have that mindset, he said. "Do businessmen think about whether they will continue their business next year?" Of course not! And neither should we. The speaker went on to say something like this: "If you've been asked to teach, consider it your assignment from God until He shows you something else." Jeff and I agree.

Here is probably our favorite teacher verse: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and *teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:11-12, emphasis added).

That is why we should be teaching. We could make more money doing something else with our time. We could be doing things other than being responsible for many little precious humans for most of the day. But this is what God has called us to do, what He has gifted us to do, and what we personally need to spend our time doing in obedience to Him.

If you are currently teaching, do you accept this important position as your assignment from God, or do you view it as a temporary detour? What are your gifts from God? Could this be something that you could do long term?

Feed My Sheep

While we were going through our transition to Anabaptism, we attempted several interesting occupations, including flipping houses, online shoe sales (our office had stacks of shoes to the ceiling), cabinet installation, cabinet drawer manufacturing, organic farming—and my favorite, shepherding. Just the mention of the word brings a smile to my face.

We purchased a little farm on six acres in a rural area near our church, bought a few chickens and sheep, and began our pilgrimage into shepherding. It was glorious.

I remember one day when a friend brought her sister over to see the crazy family who was renovating a barn to live in (us). I loved having company, and I loved my little farm. I called my sheep, and they came running. I always had a little pail of sweet feed for them. They were afraid of everyone but me. I loved them. The sister looked at me with a strange glare in her eye. “They’re pets,” she said stolidly.

Uh-oh, I thought. This isn’t good. She’s thinking that I won’t make money off them—like it’s not my business enterprise. I better recover quickly.

“Oh, no,” I retorted. “They aren’t pets. I sell their wool”—which was true. I did shear my sheep every spring before lambing season and sell their fleeces. She still gave me a strange look; I don’t think I convinced her one bit. But, truth be told, she was right. They were my pets.

We ended up with over forty of them, about all our six acres could handle. I learned how to shear by hand, use garlic dewormer,

unclog hoof oil glands, and how to deliver all kinds of breach lambs. I could give penicillin shots, fix fences, and find lost lambs. My daughter and I learned how to card the wool, and I used it for pincushions and pillow stuffing. I loved just about every minute of it.

On spring mornings (and often during the night), I checked to see if we had any new lambs. In the afternoons, I let them nibble sweet feed from my hand. In the evenings, I locked up the chickens in their coops with my sheep following me as I gazed at the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance.

In the spring, my children and I mucked out the stable, sheared, got dams into lambing pens, helped deliver triplets, and made sure they were all healthy. In the summer, I rotated the grazing pastures and made sure the worms didn't take over. In the fall, we watched them jump in the air on the first cold day and race each other to eat the leaves and tasty seedpods that fell from the trees. In the winter, I led them across the field to graze on our neighbor's land that had more winter grass.

Jobs changed, businesses closed, and my husband and I decided to go back into the field of education. We had learned a lot in those years. At first, we sold some of the chickens, rented our place out, and planned to return. Then we had to sell the sheep when our renters moved; and two years later, realizing we would probably never return, we sold our beautiful renovated barn and acreage. I was quite sad about it, even though I do love what we are doing and where we are now.

Gradually I realized that I have another flock of sheep—my students. And my students are so much more important than sheep. They will hopefully grow up and impact their world, and possibly *the* world for Christ. A real sheep will never hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” but my students, Lord willing, will hear that someday. As cute as little lambs are, they will never teach anyone

about Christ, much less help lead them into His kingdom, but my students have that potential.

My new sheep are different. They are certainly not as skittish as real sheep. They smell much better. I do not have to shear them or unclog their oil glands. I do have to occasionally bring them back inside the fence, or gently point out how to think of others.

In the mornings, my students bring me interesting things they have found from God's creation. During the day, they write funny notes for me to read while I'm grading their papers. At lunch, they share yummy pupusas or chocolate from their lunches. At the end of the day, they tell me goodbye or stay after school to help pass out papers, clean the whiteboard, or anything else I ask them to do.

In the fall, they arrive eager to learn and tell me how glad they are that school is beginning again. In the winter, they roller-skate and laugh. In the spring, they beg me to play kickball even though they know I hate to run. (Of course, I play. Who could resist a huge card begging me to play, with *please* written on it 468 times? Yes, they counted them.) In the summer, they find me on Sundays and tell me that they miss school.

My real sheep never gave me pictures they had drawn or colored. They never smiled at me the way my students do; and they never made me proud of them when they answered a question correctly, worked hard to make a good grade, or passed a test. But my students do. And that is so much more important.

Who are your sheep? Do you value them more than some hobby or pastime? Do they know it by what you say to them, how you act toward them and, most importantly, how much time you spend with them? Children are important to God; they should also be so to us. He has entrusted them to us, the parents and teachers, for such a short period of time. Are we teaching them all that we should be?



2

Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief... Teacher

As a teacher, I wear many hats. The first is obvious, and that is my “teacher” hat—I teach, I grade, I correct, I explain, and I hand out report cards.

Another hat I wear is that of logistical engineer, the school “mom.” When I see my students fighting over who gets the best seat or who gets to sit next to whom at lunch, the “mom” part of me kicks into high gear.

My “nurse” hat is my least favorite. My rule is “no Band-Aid unless I see blood.”

I also wear a “janitor” hat. One morning as we were singing in morning devotions, one of the younger students projectile vomited. Thankfully the child was standing in the front row, and my husband was far enough away that he wasn’t hit. He stopped the choir and called the first-grade teacher and me up to the front.

When something like this happens, you must think and act calmly and quickly. Taking the child by the hand, I assured her that everything was just fine. We took her to the bathroom while Jeff led the rest of the students out of the room—being very careful where they stepped. While the first-grade teacher cleaned the child

I Am a Teacher, and I Love It!

up and called her parents, I cleaned up the mess. As I was down on my hands and knees wiping up curdled milk curds, I thought, *This would be an interesting aspect of teaching to write about, because anyone who works with children could relate.* So, fellow teacher, the next time you are cleaning up vomit, remember, you are not alone!

I am also a storyteller, a disciplinarian, a parent liaison, an encourager, an empathizer, a party planner, a coach, and a drill sergeant.

I am a teacher, and I love it!



3

Rules, Boundaries, and Fun

Good rules set appropriate boundaries, freeing students to relax, feel safe, and enjoy learning. It is like having toddlers playing safely inside the fence, with Mom watching from the porch. They can play in the sandbox, swing, ride trikes, and run within the safety and freedom of their own yard.

The opposite is also true. If teachers are too permissive, the boundaries are unknown. The students know that they can get away with a lot, and they will often test the teachers to see how much more ground they can gain. Not only does this often lead to a downward spiral of character and morals, but it also means the sense of security is lost. The teacher has lost control—whether they want to admit it or not—and there is often a loss of innocence.

Jeff and I have a no-talking policy in our classrooms. *Please do not misunderstand:* our students do talk, when they raise their hands and are given permission to do so. They are permitted to write little notes or to use sign language to borrow an eraser or ask for a tissue, as long as there are no tissue boxes flying across the room.

The no-talking rule is important for two reasons:

1. Many small Christian schools have several grades in each classroom. It would be chaotic if the teacher were teaching the third graders while the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders were all having conversations.
2. It frees us up to enjoy learning (and have fun) without worrying that things will get out of hand or that we will interrupt the other classes.

Students can be taken almost anywhere if they have learned to stay in a line, safely cross streets, and behave quietly and respectfully in restaurants or museums. It is a joy to take well-behaved, quiet students to interesting places.

Studies have shown that students learn more if they are laughing and enjoying themselves as they learn. Learning can be very engaging. If situations stay controlled, they can all giggle, stop when the teacher gives the cue (for us it's a musical cut-off hand motion), and then go on with the lesson. On the other hand, if situations get out of control with students laughing and goofing off, it is difficult to get them focused again.

When all their classwork is completed, students can read, study, do "brain games" or other activities without any interruptions or distractions from other students; this is a must in a multi-grade classroom.

As long as things stay quiet and controlled, it is possible to allow unusual things to happen, such as letting a student pet the parakeet someone brought to school that day. Rules and boundaries are helpful. Set them wisely and stand your ground!