

## Teaching by Listening—the Value of Asking Questions

By Bob Young

I begin with a brief Bible study of Acts 18, the story of Aquila and Priscilla with Apollos. This is a well-known story to many. Apollos was a passionate and powerful preacher, but his knowledge was incomplete. Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and taught him the way of the Lord more completely.

I identify three essential aspects of teaching in the story: attention, affirmation, and appreciation.

→First, a good teacher or mentor must be present and a good listener. ATTENTION. Priscilla and Aquila were Paul's co-workers. They had a church in their own home (1 Cor. 16:19). In Acts 18, they helped Apollos understand spiritual truths he did not know. Details of how they taught Apollos are not given, but I believe they were paying close attention to Apollos. Those who have an influence on others are good listeners.

→The second thing Priscilla and Aquila did was call Apollos apart to talk to him. AFFIRMATION. Notice that they did the teaching or correcting in private. They protected Apollos. The best teachers help students see the positive side. As we seek to influence others for Christ, let us remember the power of encouragement, reminding others of their strengths and not just pointing out weaknesses.

→We all need words of encouragement to move forward. APPRECIATION. After Priscilla and Aquila had taught Apollos, notice how the other brothers and sisters encouraged Apollos to carry on with his ministry of preaching and defending the gospel message (verse 27).

I share this biblical text to remind us of important principles of teaching, and also as an introduction. When I think about teaching by listening, when I think about the need to pay attention, give affirmation, and express appreciation, I am reminded that good teachers know the value of learning to ask good questions.

I am a big fan of asking questions. The person who asks the questions controls the conversation. When I teach Bible studies, I like to ask questions. Questions are a great tool in coaching, teaching, modeling, and mentoring.

Here are five suggestions for asking good questions.

### How to ask good questions.

- Be prepared to listen. Listening well takes diligent preparation. It means clearing your mind of all the clutter that causes you to think of your needs, your problems, and your goals. It is actually much easier to do all the talking. Listening takes more work and is the foundation of good teaching.
- Prepare some possible questions in advance. Learn the difference between open questions and closed questions. Learn which type of questions are best for which situations. In general, be ready with open questions rather than closed questions. Write down your questions: personal questions, Bible questions, relationship questions, and needs-oriented questions.
- Write down the responses that are given to your questions. Be ready to bring up subjects that need more attention.
- Be a fanatic for encouragement. Great teachers are encouragers.
- Be willing to challenge the student. A good question to introduce a challenge is this: "Can I have permission to share with you something?"