The lyrics of the lead song on Pink Floyd’s album Brick in the Wall go like this:

We don’t need no education.
We don’t need no thought control.
No dark sarcastms in the classroom.
Teacher leave them kids alone.
Hey! Teacher! Leave them kids alone.
All in all we’re just another brick in the way.

It’s a pretty cynical view of education and one not shared by most. The United States has been committed to a free, public education for well over a century. A significant decision was made in the United States in the late nineteenth century that was, as much as anything, responsible for the United States becoming the world’s industrial and economic leader. While all the other nations of the world made possible only a grammar school education, the United States committed itself to require of its youth primary and secondary education. It was expensive, especially when the debt from the Civil War had not yet been paid.

One of the pieces of good news is the increasing percentage of students that graduate from high school—around 76% for 2012. The challenge is getting these students to attend some post high school educational institution and completing it. Part of the problem is affordability. The costs have risen dramatically even as grants and scholarships have declined. We are increasingly aware that if we are to compete on a global scale in the future, young people will need additional educational experiences—liberal arts or trade skills, and will need to keep their skills up to date. In other words, they’ll have to become lifelong learners.

If this important for secular education it is even more crucial for Christian education i.e., we all be lifelong learners. The word learn appears some 42 times in scripture usually in reference to learning the statues and ordinances of the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 5:1). Learning here means memorizing. There is a significant change when the word learn appears in the New Testament. Jesus uses this word in the sense that we are to flesh out what we learn. It is not enough to know something, but we must live it.

The first thing Christians need to be a lifelong learner is the right textbook. United Methodist Christians call this primary textbook the Bible. Certainly there are other texts we will use—books on church history, devotional guide books, etc., but the Bible is our primary roadmap for Christian living.

It is important to remember that the Bible is a book of faith. It may have history in it, but it is not a book of history. It may have some scientific views in it, but it is not a book of science. It may have some wonderful literature in it, but it is not a book of literature. It
is a book of faith—a story of God’s interaction with humankind with all humankind’s successes and failures and God’s constant faithfulness.

Secondly, we will need committed and faithful students. This, of course, is up to you and me. Too many of us can become lax and feel like we have learned it all. We do the Bible study and feel like there is no more for us to learn. Part of the difficulty of the way too many of our churches have approached the Disciple Bible Study Series is simply studying the text. The original intention of the Series is that we take a course one year then lay out the next so that we could implement what we had learned.

The committed and faithful student must put into practice what we have learned or it is for naught. The Beatitudes which is our text for today simply become some nice platitudes if we do not try to live them. Indeed, Jesus says later in this text that Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise person who built their house on a rock (Matthew 7:24). James writes, but be doers of the word, and not merely hearers . . . for if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they look like (James 1:22-24).

Finally, we need a good teacher. I am struck with Jesus admonition to Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. How comes this rest from the burning of the noontide heat and the burden of the day? By taking [his] yoke upon [us] and learning from [him]: for [he] is gentle and humble in heart, and [we] will find rest for [our] souls (Matthew 11:28-29).

The word teacher is seldom mentions in scripture except in the gospels in reference to Jesus as a teacher (rabbi). The second time in Matthew the word teacher is used is in the context of urging the students to emulate the teacher (Matthew 10:25). After that, with only two exceptions the word teacher is used as a title by those seeking to trap Jesus. Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you [if you’re so great](Ibid., 12:28). Teacher, tell us if it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Teacher, if a man dies childless, etc.(Ibid. Matthew 22:21ff).

For a teacher, any teacher, or a pastor for that matter, to have any value to us for learning they need to command our respect. Those who respected Jesus were generally not found in the religious community with few exceptions. We will never learn anything from Jesus as a teacher unless we respect him enough to practices what he teaches.

As a child my family took summer vacations often joined with a revival my father was holding somewhere. Whenever we went on these vacations a member of my father’s congregation would give my sister and me five silver dollars to spend. One summer we spent two weeks in the panhandle of Oklahoma. My apologies to those who may be from that area, but there’s not much to do.
On the day we were to leave, in fact on the way out of town, the money was burning a hole in my pocket. I had to buy something to show for the two weeks away. So we stopped at the local department store and my parents and sister waited in the car while I went inside to purchase something. After some time passed I emerged with my prize in hand—a bubble head.

A bubble head was a plastic bowl that was fastened to cylindrical piece of aluminum that sat on top of the head. There were two straps that hung from the aluminum plate which fastened beneath the chin holding the apparatus to the head. From the plastic bowl ran a plastic tube that was long enough to place the other end in my mouth. I filled the bowl with a bubble solution, and could walk around blowing bubbles from my head.

Now my parents could have scolded me for blowing my silver dollars on a rather ridiculous contraption. They certainly understood that my education on the use of money had a ways to go. They had already taught me a lifelong lesson that no matter how much money had received 10% before taxes was given to God.

Instead of scolding me they laughed with me. They were people of grace and not judgment and that has made all the difference to me about what they taught me. My friends, this is exactly what makes God such a great teacher. I am sure there are times God could scold us for some of our decisions, but more likely God laughs with us. Frankly, God’s grace and laughter will make us better students in this classroom of life and faith.

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