

If I could begin over . . .

I like to think that I would . . .

LeRoy Ford

* * *

"I'd like to get away from earth awhile, then come back to it and start all over."
(Robert Frost) If I could begin over, I like to think that I would . . .

1. LEARN AT LEAST ONE OTHER LANGUAGE.

The most significant events of my professional life grew out of my belated attempt to learn Spanish. As a result I became the learner in relationships with over one hundred professors from a dozen universities in Mexico when they visited Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ministry opportunities multiplied. Invitations came to lead curriculum design workshops for the National University of Mexico, the University of San Luis Potosi, the University of Guanajuato, the University of Queretaro, the University of Mechoacan, the University of Aguascalientes, the National Polytechnic Institute of Mexico, the Department of Public Education of Mexico, and for the United Nations.

Immediate rapport developed with professors from Mexico when I shared with them translations of poetry of the Aztec lord, Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico's greatest precortesian intellectual, and cousins of Montezuma. He wrote:

Somewhere a God of Power,
hidden and unknown,
Is the Creator
of all the universe.
Only he can console me
in my affliction;
Only He can soothe
my anguished heart.
It is He I want
for my Helper
and my Defender.

Again he wrote:

I love the song of the mockingbird;
bird of a thousand voices.
I love the delicate color of jade.
I love the colorful flowers
that wrap me up in their fragrance,
But I love my fellowman more!

Nezahualcoyotl (Ness-a-wall-cóy-otl) wrote that long before Leigh Hunt invented "Abou Ben Adhem." But not before Jesus commanded it.

Conversation with nationals in their own language widens one's world view more than all the travel and sightseeing the best of travel agencies can provide.

2. MAKE MEMORABLE THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY.

If you should ask me today to give one last admonition to Christian educators, it would be: Find ways to make memorable the study of Christian History. The timing is right for some association of Christian educators to team up with church historians and place on their "to do" list a workshop around the focused theme, "How to Make Memorable the Study of Christian History."

Campbell Wyckoff has suggested that we consider timing an element of curriculum design. This in addition to objectives, scope, context and methodology. Today's political and ecclesiastical turmoil seem to say that today is the time to study Christian History, particularly Church History. George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember their past are doomed to repeat it." Robert Ulich wrote, "Wise men consult history for advice; minor men consult history to confirm their prejudices." (The Education of Nations) Hershell Hobbs, author of Baptist Faith and Message, said, "Baptists have forgotten who they are!" (Personal conversation, 1994)

Thomas Babington Macaulay believed that "history should be made as attractive as fiction; it should give persons and events of the past the same vitality which fiction gives to persons and events that are purely imaginary."

Greece and Rome each made its own contributions to the history of Western Civilization. America's greatest single contribution to the history of Western Civilization has been the concept of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. But few church members understand that this contribution grew largely out of Roger William's insistence that Massachusetts Bay Colony had no right to use civil power to enforce the first four of the Ten Commandments.

3. AFFIRM WOMEN STUDENTS IN THEIR CALL TO MINISTRY.

Several years ago in Dallas, NAPCE presented to me an educational leadership award. Dennis Williams made the presentation. Two other men spoke. Then NAPCE presented the same award to Dr. Howard Hendricks. Two other men spoke. Becky Ford, our then four-year-old granddaughter, sat on her grandmother's lap and listened. She turned to "Granny" and asked, "Is this the way it is, the men talk and the women don't?" I ask, Is this the way it is: God calls men to ministry but doesn't call women?

4. READ THE BIBLE IN AN EXPECTANT WAY.

My former pastor, E. F. "Preacher" Hallock, used to say, "If you have a problem, you can find the answer in the Book." He meant that if your problem is the same as the problem faced by a Bible character, God's answer to the Bible character is also your answer. (Pastor of First Baptist Church, Norman, Oklahoma forty years.)

George Mueller read the Bible through hundreds of times—the last hundred times on his knees. E. F. Hallock read it through the equivalent of two hundred times—expectantly. One can read the Bible through four times a year by reading just ten pages a day; one time in a year by reading three pages a day.

5. LEARN TO PLAY WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY.

Even now as I fish from the shore of crystal-clear Woods Lake at the foot of Mt. Wilson near Telluride, Colorado, I wonder whether I might better spend my time working on a Handbook for Church Curriculum Writers or a book on Goals, Objectives and Common Sense.

Once I had no time to feel guilty. I had to keep untangling Daryl Eldridge's line!

What is this life, if full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars like skies at night.

A poor life this, if full of care,
We have not time to stand and stare.

(William Henry Davies, "Leisure.")

6. PRESERVE IN RETRIEVABLE FORM MY OWN DOCUMENTS.

The Christian educator who has something to say, but does not express it in retrievable form, forfeits the prospects for a continuing ministry.

I would preserve by whatever medium (written word, video recording, audio recording, computer records) my own insights and syntheses of ideas—and I would put a date on each of them.

7. SIMPLIFY MY CONCEPT OF THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

The purpose of Christian education is to lead persons to become “walkers (w-a-l-k-e-r-s) in the Word.

8. VIEW PART OF MY CALLING AS SIMPLY “TO WALK AMONG THE PEOPLE.”

A minister of education came to my office. “The church members, seminary related members in particular, just don’t seem to want to get involved. I’m frustrated and depressed. Nothing seems to happen,” he said. I responded, “Jim, for awhile just try ‘walking among the people.’ That’s part of your calling too.”

9. MINISTER MORE CONSISTENTLY “TO THE LEAST OF THESE.”

Jenny and I toured the ruins of Teotihuacan, the pyramids just outside Mexico City. The trinket sellers enveloped us, hawking their volcanic glass trinkets. Growing tired of saying “no,” I stopped and talked with a particularly insistent one. I asked his name; whether he had children, and how many. And their names. I asked where he lived and whether and where he went to church.

As we talked his eyes brightened. But he looked surprised that I should bother to ask. When I turned to walk away, he offered me not a trinket, but this benediction:

May God bless you
On your journey home.
And when you see
The ones you love,
May he bless them, too—
Each and every one!

I do not know which of us was “the least of these” that day. (Matthew 25:40)

10. REGARD TEACHING AS A FINE ART.

The artist-teacher who plans and teaches for change and observes progress toward its occurrence, experiences the same delight which a Michelangelo or a Rafael experienced upon the completion of a masterpiece.

11. APPLY MORE DELIBERATELY WHAT THE FOUNDATION DISCIPLINES SAY ABOUT TEACHING.

Many teachers teach as if what they understand about how persons learn has absolutely nothing to do with what happens in a teaching-learning event.

It is a source of wonder to me why so many great thinkers seem to think it profane to call upon the foundation disciplines of educational philosophy and educational and developmental psychology for guidance in creating a teaching-learning event.

12. SHARE MORE OFTEN MY OWN LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES.

A master teacher senses when to set the lesson plan aside and pursue other meaningful meanings. In my own experience I remember stopping long enough to tell how I handled, through God's promises, a troubling diagnosis of my daughter's illness. The doctor had said, "Judy has either tuberculosis of the spine or a malignancy of the spine." And we remembered that her tuberculosis test had proven negative the previous week. I told of a spiritual "ah'ha" moment I experienced while reading the verse, "The Spirit himself prays for you in those agonizing longings which can't find words." I realized that even when my own words wouldn't come, that the Spirit was praying for me a perfect prayer.

I should have done this more frequently. A confident artist-teacher can say at the beginning of a class, "I've decided that today I'll set aside the lesson plan. I just want to share with you a personal experience when . . ."

13. ATTEND MORE TO THE TEACHABLE MOMENT.

When my son Dan was seven years old, he came to me holding in his hand a drycell battery. "Daddy, what's inside this?" he asked. As I sat on the living room couch editing a past due manuscript for Baptist Adults, I wanted to say, "Dan, some other time. Can't you see this stack of papers. The printer has to have them tomorrow."

Instead I got up, took Dan and the drycell to the garage. The first blow of an ax split the battery wide open. "See, here's what's inside." Then I showed him an article in World Book Encyclopedia. It named all the parts. He went away satisfied. I returned to my editing work. I shudder to think what I might have taught had I not responded to, "Daddy, what's inside this?" When I returned to my editing, I looked at the problem statement at the beginning of the lesson. The statement asked, "How can we recognize and take advantage of the teachable moment in children?"!

Once in my Sunday School class a new Christian, Manuel Martinez, asked, "This word 'humble,' what does that word mean?" Another time he asked, "That woman Martha, who was that woman?" And another time he asked, "This Old Testament and New Testament thing, why we got two of 'em?" Each time Harry Lawson paused,

changed course in his lesson plan. He explained and asked other class members to help. Harry recognized and took advantage of the fleeting, teachable moment.

What lesson would Harry have taught had he said to Manuel, "We'll get to that later. Let me finish this point, then we'll talk about that."

14. MINISTER TO MY OWN FAMILY, TOO.

I often called September and October "resignation months" at First Baptist Church, Norman, Oklahoma. During those months the church (1) prepared for and conducted a two-week revival; (2) conducted the annual stewardship campaign; (3) enlisted, trained, and approved four hundred workers; (4) welcomed hundreds of new students from Oklahoma University. In addition to other things!

During one of those two-month periods, I did my job at church for sixty plus nights in a row! My twisted and gnarled alignment of priorities merited an apology to my family. I needed counseling. I feared criticism for not doing my job.

I forgot that children in a family need the security of family rituals and the experiences of developing a repertoire of meaningful family memories upon which to reflect. I've heard people say, "I block out in my calendar time for quality time with my family." I have a feeling that quality time is more spontaneous than that.

15. VIEW THE CHURCH AS TEACHING IN EVERYTHING IT DOES.

The sign in front of the church building teaches; the landscaping speaks volumes about the people inside; visitors and members alike react to the architecture and the appearance of the vestibule. Greeters teach when they make friendly eye contact with all who enter. The church teaches in the way it conducts its business. The church teaches at the higher levels of learning (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) when it leads its committees to function creatively. (If there were no such things as church committees, I would have to invent them because of the learning opportunities they afford.)

The church teaches when its members bear one another's burdens; when its members set examples worthy of emulation; when its teachers recognize and take advantage of teachable moments; when it makes the Bible the textbook in teaching and training.

16. VIEW PROCESS-GENERATED MEANINGS AS A PART OF CONTENT.

I have often felt guilty when interactive teaching seemed to take so much time in class sessions. I could have "covered more material" using the set lecture.

To resolve the seeming conflict between interaction and presentation, one must first decide whether learning is an active process. If not, the teacher can go merrily along teaching himself. In a curriculum workshop, Dr. Herbert LaGrone, then Dean of the

School of Education at Texas Christian University, emphasized that we must learn to make that 180° turn from the teacher telling to the pupil learning. Once the teacher makes that decision, he or she as an artist can inject pupil involvement into almost any methodology whether active or primarily passive in nature. The woods are full of ways to inject learner response into the most passive of “content” presentations. Once one accepts that premise, the world of creativity in teaching explodes into a many-splendored thing!

In the following exercise, determine (1) the process-generated meanings and (2) the transmitted meanings:

An instructor in pastoral ministry gives to small study groups a case consisting of the section about the parson in Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village.” The teacher asks the groups to (1) identify the characteristics of effective pastoral ministry revealed in the narrative—a cognitive outcome; (2) arrange the characteristics in what they believe the order of importance—cognitive and affective outcome; (3) reflect on their own ministry and decide which of the desirable characteristics represent weaknesses in their own ministry—affective outcome; (4) compare Goldsmith’s characteristics with biblical admonitions.

Which meanings originate through transmission? Which meanings originate through process? Content includes both transmitted meanings and process-generated meanings. Try to separate process-generated meanings from transmitted ones. Which approach results in more permanent learning?

Teachers who focus on a few pregnant, meaningful-level goals and objectives, as opposed to a torrent of less meaningful ones, have no reason to feel conflict between interactive learning and transmitted learning.

17. SURROUND MY CHILDREN WITH THE STIMULI OF THE FINE ARTS.

Oh, I did a few things to expose my children to the stimuli of the fine arts. Like the time I played for Dan, our then seven-year-old son, Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony. During one of the movements I said, “Dan, can’t you just see the boys and girls dancing in the meadow?” “Yes, Daddy,” he replied, “The boys have beards and the girls have pigtails!”

Then there was the time we enrolled our oldest daughter, Judy, in a painting class. She did a pastel of a vase of chrysanthemums. Even she didn’t view the work as worthy. So she turned it upside down, gave it a name, “Fireworks,” entered it in a sidewalk art exhibit and won first prize!

Ernest L. Boyer suggests eight core commonalties around which to organize the school curriculum plan. Among them he lists “The Aesthetic.” He says:

The arts are, above all, the special language of children, who even before they learn to speak respond intuitively to dance, music, and to color. And the arts are

uniquely helpful to children who are disabled. Years ago I taught children who were deaf. They couldn't speak because they couldn't hear. But through painting and sculpture and movement and rhythm they discovered self-expression. The simple fact is that every student who enrolls in school has the innate urge and capacity to be artistically expressive. And it's really tragic that for most children the universal language of arts is suppressed and then destroyed, in the early years of learning because school boards consider art a frill.

I'm suggesting that for the most intimate, most profound, and most moving experiences in our lives, we turn to music and dance and to the visual arts to express feelings and ideas words cannot convey. The arts are also, as one poet put it, "the language of angels." To be a truly educated person, then, surely means being sensitively responsive to the universal language of art, which should be a central strand of the curriculum in every single school.

So, if I could begin over, I would surround my children with the stimuli of the fine arts. There must be a similarity between the miraculous acquisition of language and the development of love for good music. Both require immersion and saturation. The first week of birth—and I'm sure some would say the time before birth—is not too early for little ears to listen again and again to great music.

18. REVIEW OCCASIONALLY THE EVENTS SURROUNDING MY OWN CALL TO MINISTRY.

Recollection prevents extinguished memory. Telling others reinforces memory. When I served as educational director at First Baptist Church, Norman, Oklahoma, my pastor excused us from a staff meeting. He asked us to go to our offices and write out the story of the events and persons associated with our call to ministry. I no longer have the document I wrote, but I remember telling about standing at a bus stop in Washington, D.C. I was on the way home from a government employees' party at an employee's home. For the first time I had observed friends getting tipsy from too much drink. As I stood there, I realized that my life should take another direction.

I resigned my work in Washington, went home to Oklahoma, and to Ridgecrest that summer. Sitting next to me on the bus was Lowell Clark who was also on his way to Ridgecrest. We roomed together. We sat together during the Wednesday night service. I was too timid to answer the invitation to commitment to church-related work. But Lowell stepped out and I followed him. That night at the Oklahoma state meeting, I heard from Sophia Dirkson, state youth worker in Oklahoma, that some churches had staff members called educational directors. I knew I wasn't called to preach—so this opened for me the door to church-related work.

19. PRACTICE WITH GREATER DELIGHT GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS.

Earl Mead, dean of educational directors among Southern Baptists once said, "A leader is known by the personalities he enriches."

I once led a writer's conference in Kentucky. During a break, one of the writers spoke to me. "Dr. Ford, you won't remember this, but one time when I looked over a paper you had returned to me, you had penciled in the margin, 'Jim, have you ever thought of doing graduate work?'" Then he said, "I took the paper home, sat down on the divan with my wife, and we read the note over and over again." Jim did not do graduate work, but he became a regular writer for youth periodicals. Enriching one life a day keeps burnout away.

20. APPLY CARDINAL NEWMAN'S ADVICE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

"... we should ever conduct ourselves toward our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend." ("Definition of a Gentleman")

21. VIEW THE WORK OF THE CHURCH IN A MORE ECUMENICAL WAY.

Whittier in his "Snow-bound" tells how the Calvinist doctor in their town depended on his mother, a Quaker, to come to the aid of poor neighbors sick a-bed. Together the doctor and matron ministered to those in need.

What mattered in the sufferer's sight
 The Quaker matron's inward light,
 The doctor's mail of Calvin's creed?
 All hearts confess the saints elect
 Who, twain in faith in love agree,
 And melt not in an acid sect
 The Christian pearl of charity!

William E. H. Lecky, Irish essayist and historian had observed first hand the religious conflicts in Ireland. He wrote, "There is no wild beast so ferocious as Christians who differ concerning their faith."

"This is my command: Love each other." (John 15:17) "My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

22. ATTEND MORE TO WHAT THE WORLD'S GREAT LITERATURE SAYS ABOUT MY WORK.

I have read the Bible through many times, cataloging in the margins what it said about my work. But I regret that students left my classes without deepening their love for the other great literature of the world.

Concerning the role of a teacher's example in teaching, Geoffrey Chaucer says to me through the priest in his "Canterbury Tales":

This noble example to his sheep he gave, that first he did things
and then he taught.

To draw people to heaven by fair living and by good example—
this was his business.

But the teaching of Christ and his twelve apostles, he taught,
first following it himself.

Concerning teaching by one's own example, Thomas Cranmer observed:

... he shall prove at the length well able to teach, though not with his mouth yet
with his living and good example, which is surely the most lively and most
effectual form and manner of teaching. ("Preface" to The Great Bible.)

Concerning the role of the teacher as agent for producing affective outcomes,
Wordsworth advises me that:

What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how. ("Prelude")

Concerning writing goals and objectives at the level of meaningful activity, Henry
David Thoreau says to me:

It is not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.
(Walden)

Concerning the characteristics of a well-written objective, Robert Frost gives teachers
some advice:

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know what I was walling in or walling out.
("Mending Wall")

Concerning the value of instructional media, Robert Browning says:

We're made so that we love first when we see them painted, things we have
passed perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see. ("Fra Lippo Lippi")

Concerning the development of understanding by translating ideas into new forms, Benjamin Franklin recalls:

Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again.
(Autobiography)

Concerning the use of advance organizers to facilitate learning, Chaucer made use of them long before I discovered their value.

Now I have told you shortly, in a word or two, the conditions, the dress, the number, and also the reason why this company was gathered. . . Now it is time to tell you how we conducted ourselves the night we alighted in the inn; and afterwards I will tell of our journey, and all the rest of the pilgrimage.
("Canterbury Tales")

Concerning the need for "tight writing," Alexander Pope visualizes tight writing in his "Essay on Criticism":

Words are like leaves; and where they most abound, much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

Concerning the frustration many curriculum writers experience, Jonathan Swift gives this prescription:

Blot out, correct, insert, refine, enlarge, diminish, interline. Be mindful that when invention fails, to scratch your head, and bite your nails.

Concerning the choice of just the right word to express ideas, Mark Twain has some words for me:

The difference between the right word and an almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.

Concerning the role of direct experience in learning, Henry David Thoreau reflects:

To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college that I had studied navigation!—why if I had taken one turn down the harbor I should have known more about it. (Walden)

And Francis Bacon had his say about the same subject:

. . . and studies do give forth too much at large, except they be bonded in by experience. ("Studies")

Concerning scope as an element of curriculum design, Helen Keller almost elaborated it. If given three days to see, she wrote:

The first day I devoted to my friends, animate and inanimate. The second revealed to me the history of man and nature. Today I shall spend in the working world of the present, amid the haunts of men going about the business of life. ("Three Days to See.")

Concerning the home as the primary context of a curriculum design, Robert Frost spoke a parable when he wrote:

Home is where when you go there they have to take you in. ("Death of the Hired Man.")

Concerning the place of life-long learning in curriculum design, Tennyson pictures it for me:

I am a part of all that I have met. Yet all experience is an arch where-thro' gleams that untraveled road, whose margin fades forever and forever when I move. ("Ulysses")

Again, concerning life-long learning, Theodore Roethke observed:

I learn by going where I have to go. ("The Waking")

Concerning the selection of curriculum writers, Charles Anderson Dana reminds us that writers need not only (1) to understand their subject and (2) possess writing skills, but (3) they must "be":

But you don't find feelings in written words unless there were feelings in the man who used them. . . . you won't get tears out unless you first put them in. . . It isn't the way the words are strung together that makes Lincoln's Gettysburg speech immortal but the feelings that were in the man. ("Gettysburg Address")

And on the same idea, the Chinese painter imaged it for us:

Before you can paint a bamboo, it must first grow in your heart. (Chinese painter-philosopher)

And a Latin poet said it long ago:

If you wish me to weep, you must first feel sad yourself. (Horace)

Concerning getting along with people with whom we may have adversarial relationships Cardinal Henry David Newman sounds a warning:

... we should ever conduct ourselves toward our enemies as if he were some day to be our friend. ("Definition of a Gentleman")

23. VIEW THE HOME AS THE PRIMARY CONTEXT FOR THE RUNNING OF LIFE'S RACE.

Many contexts shape curriculum designs and plans: geographical, educational, denominational, political, cultural, historical, ecclesiastical. But the familial context, the home, is the primary context for what happens in the running of life's race.

24. SHARPEN THE USE OF CURRICULUM-RELATED TERMS.

Three curriculum-related terms come to mind: curriculum, curriculum design, and curriculum plan. One educator said, "The difference between a curriculum and a curriculum plan is the difference between a curriculum had and a curriculum planned. That means the difference between a race already run and a race strategized. Tennyson said it, "I am a part of all that I have met," meaning "I am a part of all that I have already met; I am a part of the race I have already run. Now I need a design and plan for what I will do next as I traverse the untravelled road ahead, a lifelong road."

When planners say, "We're revising our curriculum," they speak a fuzzy. They can no more revise a curriculum than go back for the first time to a place they have already been. They can say more accurately, "We're revising our curriculum design and our curriculum plan. They will revisit their descriptions of objectives, scope, contexts, methodology, and instructional and administrative models and revise those elements as needed (the design). They will develop a blueprint for breathing life into the design. They will revisit their departmentation schemes, their catalog descriptions, and most of all, their models for writing course descriptions. They will determine whether their design legitimizes their plan.

Commitment to revise a design and plan commits planners to produce two documents which they can hold in their hands and wave—a design and a plan.

I would define curriculum as the sum of all the experiences one has had thus far in life's race toward accomplishment of ultimate objectives. The learner needs guidance in continuing the race—a design and plan. Planners can revise their designs and plans for helping the learner run his future race efficiently.

I am aware that common usage embraces the word "curriculum" to refer to curriculum designs and plans. But if we mean designs and plans, why not say so.

Planners who use accurately the terms curriculum design and curriculum plan could create a thought revolution in theological education.

25. GRADE PERSONALLY ALL NON-OBJECTIVE TESTS AND ASSIGNMENTS.

I would find time to grade all tests and assignments requiring thought and preparation at the higher levels of learning. Even responses on objective tests provide insight into the needs of students.