

monologue. I found it unexpectedly difficult to frame a question—one, that is, which required the scholar to do some thinking to answer. I discovered that I had been in the habit of propounding "yes" and "no" queries, merely as excuses for five-minute orations.

Then, too, when I began to put down in black and white, just what I expected to put into that precious half-hour, I wondered what I had been doing with it hitherto. By my previous methods two or three little notions would keep me going through the whole thirty minutes; but ideas do shrink so when you put them on paper with a question-mark at the end! It is wonderful how many questions can be asked and answered in half an hour. I gained a new conception of the value of time, and of the teaching value of study hours.

In writing out these questions, then, the first thing to be thought of is that consideration with which a good teacher will begin his lesson, but a poor teacher will close: "What is the main teaching of the lesson?"—as important, this "main teaching," as the compass to the sailor. What particular characteristic of God's noblemen is this lesson to strengthen in my scholars? Every teacher should know the power which is given by an ultimatum; by a decision, that is, as to the one thing which, no matter what else it wins or fails to win, that lesson must accomplish. Is it to make my boys and girls more truthful, more brave, more cheery, more trusting? Whatever the point be, about that shall cluster the questions, the illustrations, the arguments. Countries, customs, times, history, shall be only its framework. There must be other points, to be sure, but merely as side excursions, from which we return with greater zeal to this our main quest. Those subordinate points we next determine, and the order in which we shall treat them, and then sit down to write out our questions.

Does all this seem too mechanical, this writing out questions, and determining point by point just what results you will seek, and in what order? It is business-like; it is mechanical. Why are we so afraid of mechanism in bringing hearts to the great Mechanic, without whom was nothing made that has been made? A machine is merely a contrivance for applying power effectively, and the

only question should be, "Does this machinery make my aim more direct, widen and deepen the range of my efforts? It is a grand and god-like thing to be mechanical, but it is a pitifully weak thing to stop with being mechanical. Machinery accomplishes all the work that is being done anywhere, but it is machinery informed by the Holy Spirit. Our lesson preparation will be in harmony with all of God's preparing, if it is orderly, painstaking and definite, binding together, however, all its labored details with the sweet and creative spirit of prayer. Machinery touched by prayer is always the machinery in which, as in the old Greek plays, the god descends. Nothing is mechanical, everything is poetical and spiritual, that can be prayed over.

But will not all this take time—all this ransacking of the Bible, original study, writing out of questions, and formulating plans? Of course it will. Time is what good things are made of—time and toil. It would be strange if the best of good things, the sanctification of lives, did not take time and toil. But let us remember two facts: one, that this work, being thorough work, need not be done twice. Seven years of such Bible study as I have indicated, and what a magnificently trained teacher you will be, ready, all ready, for the next International Lesson cycle, the next Sunday-school Sabbath of years! We Sunday-school teachers have enlisted for life. It is so much wiser, then, to study for life. And in the second place, familiarity with this thoroughgoing way of working makes it much easier and more rapid than at first. We no longer have to use the concordance, but memory supplies passages needed for illustration. Bible customs are soon learned. The peculiarities of Bible language are readily mastered. The poetic instinct which sees parables and applications grows with its use until they crowd upon you and must be critically culled. Nothing ends easy but that which begins hard.

After all, however, these are the lower motives. What matters it even if the preparation for this blessed work remains hard to our last Sabbath? Let it be the best we know, and on that last Sabbath, if God has given us the knowledge that even one soul has been turned to the supreme happiness by all our toil, we shall deem it rich reward.—*Amos R. Wells, in "Sunday-School Success."*