

**You've Got to be Taught**

# YOU'VE GOT TO BE TAUGHT!

*Deuteronomy 4:9*



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**9 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.**

**Special Music: Heather Bambrick – You've Got to be Carefully Taught**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urP7cnTwMQk>

or

**John Legend – Glory**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx_o)

Several years ago, I had the pleasure of taking a cruise to Alaska. It was not my first cruise to Alaska and every photographer I know is enthralled with the natural beauty and spectacular scenery as well as the wildlife that Alaska has to offer. It's just one of those locations that photographers drool over. The image that is the background today's graphic is built on an a photograph of a pod of whales that I was able to capture with my camera just off the coast near Juneau. Not only is the image beautiful, but the activity that these whales are engaged in, is beyond fascinating.

This activity is known as Bubble Net Feeding and the whales involved aren't necessarily related to each other, nor do they necessarily travel together. But they work together like a well-oiled machine. In the frenzy known as Bubble Feeding, a single whale sends out a message to other whales like ringing a dinner bell. That whale becomes the leader and begins a search for large schools of small fish. When the fish are found, the leader begins to swim in a circle around the fish, blowing bubbles. The other whales join in the activity and together they create a wall of bubbles. The number of whales can be anywhere from six to a dozen. The fish don't realize that they can swim through the wall of bubbles and they feel trapped. So, in an effort to escape they begin to swim in circles inside the chamber built by those bubbles. The leader of the whales then dives down and encourages the fish toward the surface where a feeding frenzy occurs. All of the whales engaged in the fishing activity, gorge themselves on the abundance. This is an extremely effective way of fishing.

Now, one could easily be amazed by this fishing technique where the whales, who are not familiar with each other, work together for the common interest of feeding. And you would be correct that it is an amazing thing to watch. But that is not the truly extraordinary part.

You see, this technique known as Bubble Net Feeding is not done by instinct. As a matter of fact, only certain whales can do this. The technique of Bubble Net Feeding is a learned technique, meaning that one whale has to teach it to another whale. So, unless a whale is taught how to do this, they cannot engage in the activity with the other participants. The uneducated whale has to be willing to learn and a participating whale has to be willing to teach. This makes watching Bubble Net Feeding unique and adds greatly to the wonder when we experience it. Watching all those whales emerge together from the water at the same time will take your breath away. Understanding that these whales have taught each other this complex fishing technique adds a whole new dimension to the experience when you see it.

The special music for today is actually a version of a song from the musical “South Pacific.” I had the privilege of playing Lt. Cable, the character that sings this song, in my high school production of South Pacific. The song isn’t long and it isn’t particularly catchy. It is actually quite difficult to sing. South Pacific

premiered in 1947 and it almost didn't happen due to the controversy over this particular song. When the request came to remove the song from the production, Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein refused to cut it. They refused to cut the song because it embodied the essence of what the show was about. It is so easy for us to love and sing along with songs like "Some Enchanted Evening", "Cockeyed Optimist", "Bali Hai", "I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Outa My Hair", "Younger Than Springtime" and "This Nearly Was Mine." But no one goes around singing "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." In 1973, the year of my High School production of South Pacific, a young African American lady played the Polynesian girl Liat to my Lt. Cable. When it came time to kiss, the directors chose to delete the kiss, afraid that it might cause violence and physical confrontations at the school. In their defense, they were probably right. Tensions were already high due to the fact the black students that attended my High School had been forcibly bussed there when the Fort Worth Independent School District closed the predominantly black high school and forced integration. The district did not close any white schools and while a case could be made that the white high schools were in better condition than the predominantly black high school, you have to ask yourself why that was the case. There was no doubt that more district money was being funneled into the predominantly white schools than the schools that were predominantly African American.

As I prepared for this sermon, I listened to a lot of music. Some of the music was much too graphic to be a part of our worship experience. I listened. I felt the emotion. I gave into the pain. I wept. I wanted the pain to go away. I wanted to believe that we as a people were better than how these songs portrayed us. I wanted to believe that we have grown enough as a people and that things are better today than they were in 1947, or 1973. Some of that music has deep roots in our combined history. Many people in other countries don't understand and cannot comprehend that we, as Americans, continue to hurt each other through our neglect and outright abuse based on intangibles like race, skin color, gender, sexual preference, political ideals or even preferences in music. The vision of our forefathers was to seek out and celebrate our differences. They realized that those differences are what make us unique as a nation. This great experiment of a melting pot for all people can actually enrich our combined culture and give us greater clarity and insight. But we often prefer to build walls or attempt to push away those who are not like us even though we are all part of the same American family and experience. We are victims of our own minds through years of teaching and training. These behaviors are not instinct. They are learned.

The minds that are the easiest to imprint with our prejudices and attitudes, are the minds of our children. Those minds are like little sponges that absorb everything that they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. When they are old enough to begin to make decisions on their own, it is extremely difficult for them to set aside those things that they have learned, especially those things that they

have learned from those closest to them whom they love and respect. It takes a monumental effort on our part to dismantle the walls that have been built in our brains by the people that we love and care for most.

In 1974, I attended a summer session at Oklahoma Baptist University. Summer classes are always more difficult in many ways than classes in the Fall and Spring classes, simply because the summer classes are so very condensed in order to get all of the curriculum presented in such a short period of time. That summer, I took science courses (biology and physics) and Western Civilization which was a combined course that covered the history and literature of western civilization. I knew that I would do well with history and literature, but I was never a great scholar when it came to science. However, there was a young man around my age who just happened to be in my classes and his strength was in science. His dorm room was two doors down from mine. The thought occurred to me that it might be to our mutual benefit if we teamed up and he could help me with my science, and I could help him with his history and literature. His family was Native American which I saw as an additional bonus, but I hadn't really had much interaction with Native Americans. I saw this as an opportunity to expand my cultural experience.

So, one day, after class, I strolled two doors down and knocked on his door. He came to the door and politely asked me what I needed. I introduced myself,

shook his hand, and mentioned to him that we shared classes and that we might be able to help each other out. He said that he remembered seeing me in class and that it was possible that we could both find mutual benefit by common study. But there was one problem that we had to overcome before he was willing to commit. I was a little taken aback by that comment, but I was willing to listen and see what we could work out. He looked me in the face and told me that we could never be friends or find common ground if I could not admit that I was prejudiced against him.

Well, this was a problem because I was in no way prejudiced against him. I had never given any thought to prejudice against Native Americans. When people talked about prejudice, it was a black and white thing. I had dealt with prejudice in high school due to forced integration and felt the pain of trying to find common ground in a world where the African American students had been forced to attend a predominantly white high school, where they had been removed from a place where they had bonded through a common educational and cultural experience and faced the challenge of rebalancing that identity to incorporate a different cultural view. I had listened to their cries for understanding and their feelings of helplessness. I had done everything I could to avoid the violence in the hallways, the fights in the cafeteria and the altercations on the football field. I felt I had gone above and beyond to erase the stigma of prejudice from my mind, and push away the teachings that I had been brought up on, fighting back the insensitive thoughts that my parents had unconsciously burdened me with. I had quite a few

**African American friends. Being prejudiced against Native Americans was just nothing that had ever crossed my mind.**

**We parted cordially, because I either couldn't find that dark spot on my heart that he assumed I had, or because I would not allow my pride to give into his pain. I also understood that we couldn't move forward unless I did acknowledge a truth that he believed down to his core, a truth that I had never contemplated. I had run into a wall that I could not break down without compromising my own standards. We had far more in common than things that were different. We were both Christians attending a Christian University. We were studying similar subjects. We lived on the same dorm floor. We were approximately the same age. We were the same gender. And the problem was not with the color of our skins. He simply felt that I could never understand the oppression that he and his family had experienced, and I simply couldn't understand why he would assume that I was prejudiced against him when I wasn't. Why should I be expected to pay the price to break down a wall built by my ancestors? But I was young. Today, I realize that I could have learned so much from this young Native American man, his history, his ancestors, his own prejudices, his principles, his values, his opinions, and his perceptions. But I let it all slip away because I could not find a way to bring us to common ground. He believed with all of his heart that I felt he was inferior and I could not find a way to lift him out of that belief long enough for him to look me in the eye so that he could experience our shared equality.**



**When we are part of the privileged in a melting pot society, we simply cannot understand what it means to have prejudice heaped upon us. All of us have small experiences where we encounter and are even subjected to prejudice. We find out that we did not get a job because we are too young, too old, we are female or we are male, our hair is too long, we have a tattoo, we smoke, we don't wear a suit, we do wear a suit, our tie is the wrong color, we have the wrong experience or not enough of the right experience. Some of us may even remember not getting a job because we were white, anglo-saxon, protestants and the company needed to meet a quota for hiring minorities.**

**But I don not believe that there are many of us that can understand what it is like to have had a brother, sister, mother, father or child killed because someone felt that they were inferior due to the color of their skin, the clothes that they were wearing, their age, or the country that their parents originated from. I doubt that there are very many of us who experience prejudice at the level where we are denied access to basic services because of our sexual orientation or barred from attending an activity because our skin isn't light enough or dark enough. It is difficult for us to understand the anger and frustration of those who have had to endure such experiences. And we certainly do not understand and often get irritated when someone assumes that we carry those very same prejudices that our parents espoused when we were children.**

**It takes a monumental effort on the part of every human being in order to shift a moral standard, because whether we choose to accept it or not, we teach our standards to our children. They watch and hear us when we make an off-color remark, say something derogatory or choose to ignore someone in need. As much as we want to believe that we can sit them in a corner and explain the world to them, they really learn by our example, not our words. We can tell our children how inappropriate it is to judge people based on own personal preferences, but what they remember is how we treat other people that we encounter. We can say that it is wrong to be prejudiced until we are blue in the face but the very minute we make a comment about someone's age, skin color or life-style, when we use classifications in a derogatory way, those are the words that are imprinted on the minds of our children. We often don't even realize that a remark we make is prejudiced or we feel that others people should not be offended by it.**

**Each of us has opinions and I truly believe that most of us work hard to separate our opinions from facts, but we are human and we do let things slip and when we do, we are building walls instead of bridges.**

**"All democrats are liberal, tree hugging, socialists."**

**"All republicans are conservative, stingy autocrats."**

**"All African Americans are thugs looking for ways to cheat the system."**

**"All Native Americans are lazy drunkards."**

**“All Hispanics are border jumping illegals.”**

**“Anyone accepting social services is afraid of work.”**

**“All Muslims are terrorists.”**

**None of which is true. None of which is even close to being true. Yes, there are abusers at every level, every age, every skin color, every religion, every gender, every lifestyle and every political viewpoint. But instead of opening dialogues and discussing our differences and our hopes, we tear each other down thinking that if we get the last word in, things will magically change.**

**This number may surprise you, but the current accepted number of Christian denominations is a little over 33,000. Many of those denominations do not believe themselves to be denominations at all. They see themselves as the full embodiment of the church. I refuse to play the game that my denomination is the only true one or my church is the only true Christian Church. But this figure should tell you something about opinions, even among Christians. Those opinions can vary to the point that it can be difficult for us to find common ground because we are so busy exploiting our differences rather than acknowledging that we are all believers in Jesus Christ and our purpose on this earth is to meet the needs of humanity.**

**So often we find ourselves afraid to acknowledge our differences because we feel like to do so would be admitting that we are wrong. And we are afraid to engage with our peer denominations and push back against them telling them that we “can’t be friends” unless we force them to admit that they are prejudiced against us or that they don’t speak truth.**

**We throw up walls. They throw up walls. Walls that are put into place, not for protection, but for separation. “Good fences make good neighbors.” That is not a position that comes from a heart for Jesus or exemplified by Jesus. Jesus was all about breaking down walls, not building new ones. Just looking at the differences among his disciples will show you that His desire was inclusion, not exclusion. That community is not dependent on everyone being or thinking the same.**

**This month, we are talking about Claiming Freedom. Christ has given us Freedom and it is ours to claim. Christ opened the door to our cage and set us free. But we can’t claim that freedom if we are building walls to separate us from that freedom. It is almost as if we are afraid to step into the Freedom that Christ offers because we don’t know what is on the other side. So rather than embrace the freedom being offered, we are going to shut the door so no one else can get in. Instead of finding ways to embrace and encourage each other, we fall back on our past, listen to the false teachings that we grew up with and find reasons to**

**keep our distance. Then we validate those reasons to make ourselves feel justified in our actions.**

**There is so much that we can learn from each other. There are so many ways that we can support each other. And, even more importantly, we can teach the next generation that it is okay for us to be different. It's okay that our skin doesn't match and that our parents didn't come from the same country. It's okay if we don't have the same opinions or lifestyles. It's okay to enjoy the broader family of God by stepping out of our cage. It's okay to embrace and lift people who do not share our opinions and beliefs. It's okay to understand that hunger, poverty and pain are universal, and we have the power of God to make a difference in those lives of those who are suffering.**

**By Claiming the Freedom that Christ offers us, we are free to share His light, His Air, His Bread, His Living Water, His Shelter, His Purpose, His Salvation, His Mercy, His Grace and His Love with the world. We are to be an example of His grace when others seek only to separate and divide us.**

**So above all, let us teach our children and grandchildren, grace. They cannot learn grace and mercy on their own. They look to us to example it in the world and we need to have the strength and tenacity to admit when we are wrong and show them that by providing the light of God in this world, by Claiming Freedom**

**that that is give by grace to us through Jesus Christ, we can make a difference.**

**We can change the world.**

**AMEN**

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