LeFever's *Creative Teaching Methods* was not concise enough for my taste, but it showed me several areas in which I could improve my teaching, particularly of small groups, and provided myriad ideas and examples for using creative teaching methods.

1. Promoting student creativity is one of my obligations.

In the past, I have used creative teaching methods only because I instinctively knew where or when a teaching needed jazzing up to keep student interest high enough for learning. I understood that if I bored them, they would not be interested in my message [21]. However, now I agree that, "We need to search Scripture for principles on which to base decisions, and then we must, in love, lead our students to the fullest possible development of their own creativity" [38]. "We can't get caught up in the gratification and comfort of the immediate, forgetting that we are in the process of guiding the now and future kingdom of God..." which would lead to decadence instead of growth [36]; thus, we need to promote the gifts of the students, including the creative, to equip them for future ministry. "Perhaps we in the western world [have been] too action and product oriented to allow time for creativity to develop" [46].

"Creativity. It's a gift that we have from God, and it's a gift that we can give back to him" [19]. To boost creativity in people, we must expose them to creative types of things and encourage an openness to new experiences [34-35]. Our children and students will become more creative as they are exposed to creative people… Excitement is contagious, and so, we suspect, is creativity… most of us aren't geniuses, but our abilities do grow when we are surrounded by people we can admire and emulate" [39]. We must promote a culture that gives access to creative expression for everyone. "Most creative people are both sensitive and independent. In our society sensitivity is a female characteristic, and independence is considered a masculine characteristic. It is possible that the creative girl may seem more masculine than her counterparts and the creative boy more effeminate" [36-37]. "Moderate stress is a stimulus to creativity… Too much stress will hinder creativity, generating fear and rigidity" [38]. "We need to develop a tolerance for and interest in people who don't believe exactly the way we do. Here we are not talking theology… Tolerance means that we develop an inquisitive interest in things that are different from our set patterns" [38-39]. We must encourage an atmosphere of honoring creativity. "What a difference it can make to these people to feel our affirmation and our prayers, and perhaps our cautions when they take on more than they should" [40].

"It makes sense for teachers not only to cultivate their own creativity, but also to know enough about creative characteristics to be able to spot them in their students and to cultivate them" [41]. "One of the most universal characteristics of a creative person is curiosity about everything: questions you wish wouldn't be asked, insights that just don't dovetail with the thought you have been trying to communicate. The creative person is also imaginative" [42]. "The creative person has a strong will. This often makes the student hard to teach. Creative people are convinced they know a better way, and it's frustrating for others to admit that they sometimes do" [42]. "Creative students are independent in their thinking. They will not bend to the opinion of others. They enjoy being different. That marked independence often makes them leaders. This lack of bending adds some stress to their lives – and often to their teachers' lives as well. However, this stress is one of the spurs to creativity" [43]. "Creative people see things as other people do, but they also see things as others do not. And they are likely to say so" [44]. "Creative people daydream a lot, moving far out in their thoughts and coming back again, sometimes bringing with them the ideas and possibilities that were part of their minds' freedom" [44].

"They [self-actualizing creative people] enjoy life and are often childlike and fresh in the ways they approach life. They tend to be natural leaders – filled with energy and daring. They aren't hard to pick out of the group and encourage" [45]. "[Special talent people] are not at ease with themselves. They often isolate themselves from the group. They exercise a high degree of control over impulse, but not over their imaginations… we must find ways for them to be accepted by the group and to be affirmed as people." With special talent people, we should establish a friendship, affirm their talent, pray extra for them [45].

To help students be more creative, model being a creative and growing adult [allow time alone to let your mind float]; affirm differences in the group; affirm the learning process, not achievement; make your time together fun [vary methodology, change things often; be diverse, effective, and fun; try unusual assignments]; encourage difficult and unusual questions; watch for blocks to creativity in them; believe in what you have to offer [47-51]. We must train our creative students to be discerning, which is difficult for them [36]. We need to be disciplined to develop our gifts and to set aside time for creativity, and we need to remember to fight our assimilation into our culture [41]. "Creative students won't accept your authority as easily as most of the other students… More love and modeling than polemic is required with these thinkers" [44]. The test showed I was "very creative," but not "exceptionally creative."

2. Variety in methods will better teach the diverse student body.

Jesus used a variety of teaching methods. We should reflect Christ's creativity and be creative teachers, who "have the ability to make the most of every situation… a receptivity to change that allows [us] to greet new opportunities with glee rather than panic" [12-13]. I have tried to be opportunistic in my teaching, but I admit that I have relied overly on discussion and consideration of non-fiction texts to the exclusion of other methods described in this book.

I believe I should use diverse methods of teaching because the student body is diverse and therefore learns in diverse ways, and because their "participation in the learning process stimulates learning and encourages growth. Negatively, when the teacher is in total control of the class's activities, his or her ego may be the only growing thing in the classroom" [9]. Though I have been limited in my methods, I have always stressed participation. My small group teachings are Socratic dialogues, and even my large group teachings are highly interactive. I have learned that I should purposely use methods of impression [lecture, films] and of expression [role play, discussion, projects]: "Since students learn through both methods of impression and expression, there is a danger in limiting education to one approach or the other. Both were used in the teaching ministry of Jesus, and are still needed for education in the church today" [21, footnote].

I should work harder at looking for better ways to communicate an idea, finding fun things to do with the students to get the point across and create excitement in them [20]. "For us, this is hard work. We don't easily take an idea from the experience part of our lives and insert it into the teaching part, yet that mixing will make our teaching more creative. We also have to be open to things that aren't immediately familiar to us, if we are to be creative teachers" [15-16]. After all, "… being serious about the end result doesn't negate having fun getting to it" [19]. I agree with all that; it just hasn't been my strength as a teacher. However, I see LeFever's point when she said, "We limit our creative people by insisting that orthodox belief be expressed in 'orthodox' ways" [20].

3. My preparation should be more intentional.

"No teaching method should be used simply because it fills time. An idea must be tested against our aim for the teaching hour. What do we want to do in this lesson? In what ways will God be glorified through the participation of students in this process? Is it time effective?" [16]. While I have not been guilty of just filling time, I have admitted that my creative activities were sometimes merely designed to maintain student interest. Of course, I also try to select activities that help teach the lesson, but I have not conscientiously considered how various methods might lead to different patterns of growth. I need to be more disciplined in that area: "The Christian's creativity is developed through spiritual discipline, not through a do-what-the-mood-dictates process… Teachers need to put in their time developing spiritual discipline, increasing their knowledge of the age level they teach, and growing in their understanding of the teaching process and the rules governing interpersonal relationships" [18].

There is a five-step creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination, elaboration, and verification [23]. In preparation, we need to lay the groundwork to becoming a good teacher, such as Bible study, developing skills, watching other teachers… "A good teacher is the person who cares enough to work hard to multiply the natural ability God has given… Every area of yourself will pay a part in the building of a good teacher" [23-24]. This I am good at doing. I could do better at understanding the educational trends, keeping up with current events, knowing the key concerns of my students, being more fun to be around, and getting along with extended family members [24-26]. Incubation is "when you let your ideas just sit in your head for a while" [26]. Illumination might be one dramatic moment or "come in bits and pieces all through the week" [26]. Elaboration is fleshing out the idea, but "the idea should not be forced into a preconceived mold. Something may happen that almost begs you to take your idea and run a different direction with it" [27-28]. I believe I do most of this well. Verification is looking it over and evaluating it, which will lead to refinement. I should "get rid of irrelevancies and excesses" [28]. We often get discouraged if we rush our work and use it before it is ready [29], so I need to protect against that happening.

When evaluating a final product, after performance, I should wait for feedback. I should not set expectations too low – allow for God to work! – but also not set them so high that disappointment is inevitable. When setting expectations, I should be open to the Spirit's guidance [29].

4. All sorts of stories can aid in reaching cognitive and affective goals.

The Bible uses stories to teach, as did Jesus, so we know they work [61]. "Stories – personal illustrations, life experiences of others, sections from books, short stories, parables, myths – no matter what the form (and often no matter if the writer is Christian or non-Christian), story helps us participate in the reality of the Christian experience" [173]. "The story is an effective way to help students examine truth and learn to apply it to their lives" [177]. Secular stories can be useful to contrast to Christian messages or because they illustrate truths in life that are worth discussion [180-181]. We must choose our stories carefully for appropriateness and the maturity of the students [182].

Stories can be narratives, dialogues, speeches, or parables. "Perhaps, along with the familiar biblical parables, we need to shock with contemporary parables that contain spiritual truth. We can stretch people's thinking by using the same literary style Jesus was so fond of" [191]. Using drama allows people to look at truths in new ways, equalizes experiences [drawing out shy people, e.g.], and provides experiences instead of just information [63-64]. Humor can be an effective teaching device, as less threatening and more fun than direct discourse [73]. After a story, you can ask questions or do a role play [185], but be sure the students realize that you are using fiction, especially for young students [185]. I have found students appreciate drama and stories a lot.

As teachers, we should read a lot, from the Bible and from excellent literature, to get ideas for useful stories [173]. We should keep files of stories, sorted by category [176]. We should practice reading, noting how well we convey the feelings, vary the speed and expression, used pauses for suspense, and showed enjoyment [175]. When we read the story, we should use facial expressions for larger emotions [not nuances], use eye contact, and let our voices reflect the emotions of the story [175]. Good authors to read are, according to LeFever, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, Flannery O'Connor, Harold Fickett, Joseph Bayly, Calvin Miller, and Madeleine L'Engle [187].

"Case studies challenge our students to think, to deal with an increasing range of complexity of life experiences, and, within the Christian framework, to deal with increasing personal intentionality and responsibility" [218]. "A case study must be a true situation in which a problem is presented… there are those gray areas where our kids stumble, and where we stumble, too. A case study is a short dramatic situation based on actual facts involving actual characters who are faced with actual problems that need solving" [218]. "In a case study, the class reads the case (or hears it read) and discusses it. Christianity

comes alive to students who have considered Bible stories and the principles they contain only in abstract ways. Roleplays give practice for what could happen in real life, but case studies are the experiences of real people. Case studies are field experiences that allow students to apply their Christian values" [219]. "People learn by solving real problems, and in doing so, they learn problem-solving steps that will serve them when they are in the business world. They also learn to use the sources that are available to them" [219]. "One of the strongest aspects of a case study is that participants rarely find out what really happened. Students are left to grapple with the issues" [219].

I can see that case studies help application of biblical solutions to real life problems, sharing opinions and solutions, building empathy, and develop analytical skills [220-221]. "Actually it's quite difficult to teach a case because the teacher can never really be sure what direction the students will take… teachers surrender their sovereignty while still maintaining control of the discussion" [222-223]. The teacher "must be so thoroughly conversant with the case that he is ready to deal with any angles which the class may introduce, to modify his approach at any time, or suddenly to change his outline in accordance with new ideas which may not previously have occurred to him" [quoting Robert Merry; 223]. Case studies can be found from your own life or lives of others, from magazines and newspapers, and from history [233-234]. This is something new for me to try.

5. Simulation helps develop spiritual convictions and skills.
"The primary aim of the Christian leader should not be to cram knowledge into students' heads, but to help them apply and use what they have learned. Dramatics – plays, roleplays, simulations, mime – have tremendous potential for helping teachers reach this goal [82]. Role play helps people learn how to handle different situations [87]. It also exposes the participants' spirituality and knowledge, shows the students that not every situation works out well for Christians, and allows them to find answers to their problems [88]. They will be exposed to a broad range of experiences, release their feelings about a subject, draws out student observations, creates empathy, can send students back to scripture, and can help draw out the quieter students [90-91]. In role play, students are part of the creative process, giving them a sense of achievement, which helps motivate them to share what they have learned [104].

To do role play well: establish an environment safe for trying and failing, be enthusiastic, expect imperfect results, maintain control during the experience [have fun, but be serious about it], use dramatics often, make sure the observing students are participatory, always follow up with discussion, and use warm up exercises [84]. We should stay away from real situations the students are facing, unless they bring something up [102]. A good activity is to have the students develop a role play around a picture [101]. You can role play a Bible story, helping them better understand the temptations, triumphs, and challenges of biblical people and apply the Word to their lives [107].

Simulation games reproduce real situations to allow the students to experience them, so that they will gain in understanding of how to apply the Bible to those situations [134]. "A student, through simulation games, experiments with life… [but, simulations] are one step removed from reality. This minimizes the sense of risk. A student feels free to participate and learn through involvement because he or she realizes the situation isn't real life" [137]. Simulations require a good amount of time [about an hour] plus time for discussion; they also require adequate space and people, and can be expensive if purchased [139]. A simulation game about challenges for missionaries, for example, could increase prayer support and interest in missions among the participants [139]. "The teacher's goal is to use the games to help students learn something new, or to gain practice in an important area of Christian life" [167].

6. Creative writing can deepen convictions and draw out openness.
Writing assignments can help students confirm what they believe [237]. It also can help them develop original thinking, and draw out those who are not active talkers [238]. Writing often brings out honesty

and openness [240]. It can help them work through issues and decide what they believe as opposed to what is being thrust upon them [241]. Writing assignments can be useful in reaching out or serving [241]. The students could write to missionaries, shut-ins, college students, servicemen, servants in the church, others hurting [253-254]. The teacher should always give an opportunity for the students to share what they have written [242]. Another idea is to use "what-if" situations, asking them to finish the story. You can use biblical examples from study passages too [255-256].

Students need to be exposed to excellent poetry before they will be excited by it; "look for poems that share true emotion" [243]. Choose poems that provoke thought [244]. Encourage use of parallelism and acrostics, as in Psalms [245]. You can even supply students with the first line and ask them to complete with parallelism [246]. Acrostics can be based on a key word in a passage or the key concept in a lesson [248]. This is good for homework too [249].

Asking students to write prayers gives them the opportunity to organize their thoughts without worry about how they are sounding [250]. It is important to let them know the prayers are confidential and they can use normal language [250]. You can ask them to write prayer promises to God based on a lesson; or ask them to re-write parts of Psalms to correspond with modern situations [252].

"In projects teens and adults actually give part of themselves; these projects may be the most significant things students remember when they look back on what they gained from your years teaching" [255]. Projects require commitment, time, effort, and God, so they can create growth; ideas include letter writing, fundraising, service, outreach… [255]. "After your young teen students have completed a large unit of study… plan a Bible newspaper competition to help them review. Divide the class into two or more newspaper staffs… competing against the others to give the most complete and interesting coverage of the events they have just studied" [257].

7. I could make better use of computers.
We are all familiar with the use of video or slides to attract attention during a discussion [295], but LeFever had some other good ideas for incorporating computers into teaching. She suggested having students make and edit a video for the church [295], creating a group web page or personal web pages to discuss their journey of discovery [295], and creating a group newsletter [300]. Of course, she also suggested the teacher can ask the [more computer-literate] students for ideas on how to use the computer or internet in teaching [294].

LeFever pointed out that email is useful for communicating with students and parents [302]. I have used this as much as possible. I have been hampered by email restrictions [such as no attachments or no embedded images] that some people have. I have also used the computer to create form letters that are easily personalized for each student. Another idea from LeFever was to have the group keep in contact with a missionary through email or the web, to build missions awareness [299].

I appreciated the idea of using web sites like www.hot-headlines.com, which relates breaking news to biblical teaching [296]. I do make use of Christian web sites, such as for Christian magazines [296] and for Bible tools [297]. I do promote those sites to my students, but should show my students how to use them.

8. Using music and art can be effective.
I have used songs of reflection or worship to get students thinking along certain lines or to evoke certain feelings. As LeFever pointed out, you can use Christian songs to open up discussion on a topic, discussing what the song brings to mind, how they would add a verse to the song, and so on [261]. LeFever also had several good ideas about using music that I hadn't considered. I

could ask the students to write verses to go with popular melodies [261], for example. Or, they could do a choral reading, using scripture, repeating lines as appropriate to add emphasis; this can be like a choir, but not singing, so less stressful but still praiseful, and helpful to them for learning God's Word and providing a way to express praise [262-264]. They could even add music to go with the reading or find music that would work [267].

I am not artistic, so I have not used art as effectively as music. LeFever says that using art will help the students with visualization, creativity, intuition, inventiveness, and allow artistic students to shine [276-277]. Some of LeFever's ideas seemed intriguingly strange, such as having the students choose colors to represent how characters feel in a Bible story or the personality of the character or how they feel reading it [270]. I have at times asked students to draw something to represent how a passage relates to them [276], but LeFever also suggests asking students to create art to answer problems or questions of their peers [273]. I have used artwork to start a discussion, relating back to scripture [274-276], but I admit this was never my own idea.

Other ideas were to have the students use art to represent themselves, such as coats of arms or pictures describing themselves or their relation to the lesson or a collage representative of something or a paper sculpture using magazine pictures cut/pasted and fitted together [279-283]; use symbolic diagrams to represent relationships, such as work in the believer of the Holy Spirit [284]; use photos like other art, to represent, provoke, et cetera, or have them use pictures to represent the lesson or passage [285]; use comics that represent the lesson [287], which I have done, especially as part of devotions I created [297]; use comics with the captions erased and have the students create original captions [287]; or have them draw their own cartoons [288].

9. There can be value in mime.
I admit, I have never seen much value in mime. However, LeFever says mime draws out creative interpretive skills in both practitioner and audience [108]. If I select the scripts carefully and prepare the audience by providing suggestions of what to observe, I will get better results in the subsequent discussion [115], which is integral to the effectiveness of the teaching [111]. Members of the audience often will interpret aspects of a miming differently, seeing their own symbolism in it [112].

Mime is not hard for students to learn, for it involves body language we all use, signals, gestures, emphatic body movements [108]. Unlike dance, which is "abstract, weightless and airy," Mime emphasizes every burden and strain; dance is beauty, while mime is what is necessary to communicate [109]. If the students think of Mime as charades and realize that the church used it historically to help those who were illiterate, then they will not be anxious and will develop some enthusiasm [113].

10. I can make better use of discussion.
I put this point last, because I already make great use of discussion in my teaching. But still, I did learn a few things about it from this book. Lefever says, "When students share aloud, they become more sure of what they believe, and more confident about their abilities to live what they believe. They also hear the wisdom and experience of more than one person, traditionally the teacher" [202]. Discussion creates interest, provokes thought, develops analytical skills, helps

students work through problems, hear more mature opinions, aids in application, strengthens convictions and builds confidence [203-204]. I never really thought of what it could do, in these terms; I just knew it helped students nail down the concepts. LeFever also says, "The Bible stories remain the same, yet their impact on students changes as the students' questions grow more complex and their life decisions less obvious. They need to verbalize what is happening to them on their faith journeys. They need to get excited over the successes others share. They need to grapple with ethical questions in a secure situation in preparation for the less secure life settings" [202-203].

I agree with LeFever that, "In a free discussion, you must assume the role of guide and participant rather than the role of an instructor or dictator. You steer, rather than shove, to keep the discussion relevant to the meeting topic" [207]. I appreciated the ideas of using buzz groups, brainstorming, forums, panels, debates, and parent-teen wisdom exchanges, as well as ordinary class discussion [209-212]. For guest teachers, I liked the idea of interview: "An interview can often be more valuable to the class than a lecture given by that person, because, first of all, an interview demands student participation. And second, when students ask the questions, they are alerting the visitor to areas in which they have both interests and needs" [214].