

# HANDBOOK FOR TEACHING BIBLE-BASED ESL

J. WESLEY EBY

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE  
Third Edition



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# DEDICATION

I gratefully dedicate this book to

**"Aunt Gladys"**  
**Gladys Owen Zahner**

for her professional influence in helping me become an ESL teacher

and

for her personal influence in helping me become a child of God.

# USEFUL ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The following abbreviations and acronyms are used throughout this handbook. Use this list as a quick reference when you see them in your reading.

- EFL: English as a foreign language
- ELL: English language learners
- ESL: English as a second language; a term for English being learned by people who speak another language as their first one; a term in this handbook for all the types of English being taught and learned
- ESOL: English for speakers of other languages
- ESP: English for specific purposes
- L1: language one or a person's first language
- L2: language two or a person's second language; sometimes L2 is used to refer to a person's third, fourth, etc., language
- LEA: Language Experience Approach, one method of teaching reading
- LEP: limited in English proficiency or limited English proficient
- PEP: potentially English proficient
- TEFL: teaching English as a foreign language
- TESL: teaching English as a second language
- TESOL: teaching English to speakers of other languages; also a professional organization, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.
- TPR: Total Physical Response; a method of teaching ESL

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# FOREWORD CALLED TO TEACH

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it. And God has placed in the church . . . *teachers* . . .” (1 Cor. 12:28-29, NIV, emphasis added). *Teaching*. This is one of the gifts of the Spirit identified in Scripture as being important in serving God.

This book is designed for those of us called to teach English to people who are thirsty and hungry to hear the good news of Christ and His message of salvation and who lack the English language skills to fully understand His words as written in the Bible or presented through sermons or group discussions.

Written by internationally recognized teachers, teacher trainers, and curriculum developers, this book incorporates information on the most current methods of language teaching and information about the English language, along with teaching the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Drawing upon the content approach to teaching language skills, the authors offer step-by-step guidelines for teaching both the skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and the systems of English—phonology (pronunciation), morphology (word structure), syntax (sentence structure), and semantics (meaning)—through scriptural content. The guidelines are such that the novice to teaching and/or teaching English can feel a sense of comfort and success with his or her first steps in teaching. At the same time, the experienced teacher who may be new to teaching English or even the experienced ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) teacher will find information and insights to guide them in teaching language through biblical content.

The authors’ expertise in training, mentoring, and nurturing teachers as well as people new to the words of God and Jesus Christ is especially reflected in their sensitivity in addressing the role of culture in the language-learning process, especially in the understanding and explanation of the Bible. The image of the welcoming Christ, opening His arms and hands to include all who come to Him regardless of age, education, gender, race, or culture, is spread throughout this section of the book. The explanation and teaching tips promote inclusion of the cultures of the students into the classroom rather than setting them apart as being somehow different from the culture that framed the images of the Bible.

Not to be forgotten is the ongoing process of assessment of what students need and want, what are appropriate goals and objectives, and how to measure progress toward meeting these goals and objectives. The authors once again reflect upon their knowledge of the complexities of assessment to provide the reader with concise tips and explanation that ensure that learning occurs.

True professionals and practitioners promote professional growth and development in their training programs. The authors do not disappoint the teacher who becomes hooked on teaching English and biblical content to nonnative-English speakers and wants to know more. The bibliography and suggestions for further study invite the teacher to advance his or her knowledge and understanding about this rapidly growing field.

Christ calls us to go forth and make disciples of all nations. With this book and the Bible as guides, the reader can respond to the call to teach English to others regardless of prior formal

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knowledge and training in the field of education or English. The apostle Paul in Romans 12:6-7 writes: “ In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. . . . If you are a teacher, teach well.” (NLT). Wes Eby, LaNell Stahl, and Nancy Zumwalt have answered God’s call by providing us with a guide to teaching English through the content of the Bible so that we can do a good job of teaching, regardless of our training and experience.

My prayer for this book is that readers from all Christian faiths, denominations, and backgrounds will be touched by its content and use its lessons to spread the Good News—Christ is alive among us.

—Adelaide Heyde Parsons

Dr. Parsons is the retired director of International Programs and master of arts in TESOL at Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau. She is a former member of the Board of Directors of the TESOL organization, served as chair of the 2001 TESOL International Conference and Exposition in St. Louis, and chaired the Christian Educators TESOL Caucus (2003-04). She has also served as president of both MidAmerica TESOL and Ohio TESOL.



# PREFACE

Jesus Christ gave His followers the command to teach all people about himself. His last words to His apostles were “Go to the people of *all nations* and make them my disciples. . . . and *teach* them to do everything I have told you” (Matt. 28:19-20, CEV, italics added). Jesus, in saying “all nations,” meant *all* people of *all* countries of *all* the earth.

This directive from our Lord, however, presents a complex challenge for Christians. The challenge? There is no one language for the entire world, and there probably never will be. Yet, of the thousands of languages on earth, English is an important means of communication in many world areas. For countless people English means economic survival. Furthermore, English is now the primary language in the world for international business and commerce, for science and technology.

The teaching of English is one way Christians can obey the Lord’s command. Whether ESL (English as a second language) or EFL (English as a foreign language), English instruction is an excellent means by which Christians can help people who need or desire to learn English. English teaching is a way to show Christian hospitality, care, and friendship. ESL/EFL is an important method for spreading the gospel and discipling believers, even in world areas now closed to traditional mission outreach.

ESL is a *connecting* ministry. ESL *connects* the students to Christians, to the Church, to the Bible, and to God. Christians, who are interested in teaching English to people whose first language is not English, truly desire to help others learn English and ultimately *connect* them to the Heavenly Father. Yet they realize they may lack the training to be ESL/EFL teachers or tutors.

This handbook has been written primarily for the person who lacks professional training in ESL/EFL. Yet most teachers, even experienced ones, should benefit from the many practical suggestions on language teaching. While the focus in this handbook is on Bible-based instruction and materials in a Christian setting or context, most of the information applies to English instruction in other settings or contexts.

Our prayer is that this handbook will help everyone who desires to teach those with limited English. We trust the Word of God will become alive in the minds and hearts of the learners—through English instruction.

—J. Wesley Eby, Rita LaNell Stahl, and Nancy Zumwalt



# WHAT IS ESL?

## GENERAL ESL

ESL is an acronym for English as a second language. ESL deals with teaching English to people who are learning English as their second (or additional) language. For these people another language is their first language or mother tongue.

ESL is one of two major areas in the field of education known as ESOL or English for speakers of other languages:

- ESL (English as a second language): for non-English speakers in English-speaking countries, such as the United States of America, England, Nigeria, Guyana, et cetera
- EFL (English as a foreign language): for non-English speakers in non-English-speaking countries, such as Mexico, Denmark, Israel, Korea, et cetera

Today an important part of ESOL is ESP (English for specific purposes). ESL and EFL educators teach ESP for a specific reason, such as international business and trade, medicine, technology, et cetera.

In the field of ESOL, teachers refer to the learner's native or first language as *language one* or L1. They refer to English as *language two* or L2. These terms will be used frequently throughout this handbook.

In teaching ESL and EFL, there are more similarities than differences. The major distinction between the two is the setting (where you teach it) more than the method

(how you teach it). **Therefore, throughout this handbook the term ESL will always refer to the teaching of English (L2) regardless of setting or method.**

## BIBLE-BASED ESL

ESL has been a part of English-speaking Christian churches for many decades. ESL actually began when Christians first worked with people who did not speak English. However, an awareness of the need for a formal ESL ministry did not surface in the United States and Canada until the past five or six decades. The influx of refugees and immigrants during the last half of the 20th century brought new faces to cities as well as towns—and sometimes to churches. Because many of these people could not speak English, language barriers limited ministry efforts. At this point, Christians began to see ESL as a practical means for helping reach their new neighbors for Christ.

The primary goal of Bible-based ESL is to present Jesus Christ to people and to disciple new believers. Yet a major goal is to help the learners improve their English proficiency and, thereby, increase and refine their communication skills. **In fact, the latter goal may need attention first before the primary goal can be achieved.**

ESL in the Christian setting has several values. ESL can

- connect the student to Christians, the church, the Bible, and ultimately to God

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- guide the student into a knowledge of faith in God and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- help disciple the new believer as he or she grows in the Christian faith
- enhance the student's understanding of a Christian lifestyle
- aid the student in gaining English skills, both oral and written
- help the student function successfully in an English-speaking society, including participation in a church of his or her choice

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

English is becoming the language of the world. This is the result of people emigrating to other countries and the shrinking of our globe by commerce and electronic communication. The ability to communicate in more than one language is often necessary as well as useful. Bilingual people have certain advantages over those who speak only one language. Communication skills in both L1 and L2 (English) are certainly an asset.

In the United States until the 1900s, the speaking of other languages by even third-generation Americans was accepted. But during the first part of the 20th century, the public, for the most part, did not accept bilingualism, even forbidding it in many schools. Instead, the melting pot idea became popular in many areas of America. As immigrants arrived, they frequently *melted* into the mainstream of life and culture. English soon became the only language for many newcomers, and society often pressured immigrants to forget their mother tongues.

In the last third of the 20th century, some Americans began to question the melting pot theory. The migration of people, expanding trade, new technology, and educational opportunities all helped to bring about new thinking. A better metaphor was needed;

thus, the term *stewpot* was created. In the melting pot, everything blends together with no ingredient keeping its identity. In the stewpot, ingredients maintain their identity: that is, meat and potatoes and carrots are still recognized as meat and potatoes and carrots. Although mixed together, each food influences, affects, and “flavors” the others.

The stewpot metaphor works well with society. Newcomers keep their identities while mixing into community life. Instead of melting into society, people choose to retain L1 and keep the parts of their L1 culture that are important to them. Still they willingly contribute their time and ideas for the betterment of all people, influencing—and adding “flavor” to—the whole of society.

Teaching English as a second or foreign language has been part of education for a long time—in fact, for as long as non-English speakers have been learning English. In certain parts of the world, people have taught and used British English for centuries. In many countries, such as Germany and Japan, EFL has been taught for many decades. However, educators in the United States only began to recognize ESL as a subject of study in the last half of the 1900s. Teacher education programs in ESL and the development of ESL materials on a wide-scale basis evolved during the 1950s. Concerned ESL educators formed the professional international organization known as TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Inc. in 1966.

Since 1960 the value of an ESL ministry has become clearer to churches in the Western world. Christians have expanded ESL ministries among other nationalities and language groups. The term *missionary* has taken on a new meaning. It now includes the possibility of cross-cultural work in one's homeland for evangelizing, discipling believers, and meeting people's needs, such as through English classes.

## *What Is ESL?*

### **SUMMARY**

What is ESL? For the purposes of this handbook, ESL is

- a means for evangelizing people and discipling believers, and
- a means for teaching English to anyone limited in English language skills.