



Teaching to Reach Their Hearts

By Rev. Jan Wilton, Public School and Homeschool Representative

Looking back on years of teaching school and serving as a children's pastor, there are children, now grown adults, I will always remember. When I first began teaching, my desire was to touch the hearts of children. Each day of every year in ministry to children, whether in public or private schools or in churches as the pastor, my prayer has been to teach and reach their hearts.

Years ago, I read a book, *Parenting Is Heart Work*, by Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller. This parenting book changed and enhanced my approach to children who caused issues in the classroom. The website www.Biblicalparenting.org/heart-work/ describes the book this way:

"Rewards and punishment have long been used to motivate kids to change their behavior. But behavior problems are symptoms of deeper issues and behavior change is often temporary at best. A heart-based approach to parenting is far more effective.

All parents want to reach the hearts of their kids, but what is the heart?"

Teachers may want to reach the hearts of their students, but how do they do that? What is behind the child's behavior? What is the real issue? It is easy to think they just want to be that way. Is it family problems? Are they abused? Are they hungry due to poverty? Has someone bullied the child? These may be the heart of the problem. How do we find the issue? Often, it is not possible to find out answers to these questions because of privacy laws and a child's own silence.

Regardless of the abusive words, the sleeping in class, and/or the lack of cleanliness, it is our duty to pray and ask the Lord to help us love any child. Jesus loved the unlovable, the outcast.

I remember a struggling student in an inner-city school.

It was difficult, hard to work with one girl because of her body odor. God helped me as a young pregnant teacher to avoid nausea and show her love until the school nurse came alongside me to help this student with hygiene and deodorant without embarrassing the student.

Be observant. Watch for clues and seize the opportunity to have a godly influence in the life of any needy child. Make sure they have the food, clothing, and school supplies they need.

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me..." (Matthew 25:35, NIV).

I remember a boy named Charles.

Charles was a very neglected first-grade student. He was the youngest of six children whose mother had died. Their dad had gone out of state to "get them a new momma." He left the teen siblings in charge of Charles. One cold snowy day, Charles came to school in a girl's princess-style coat with all the seams torn open. It took a needle and thread during break times to repair the seams. His love and appreciation for this simple action was a blessing. He became ill one day and experienced a fever of over 101 degrees. My heart wanted to bring him home and care for him. Shortly after this incident, Charles' dad came home with a new mom, and he took the whole family to another state. I still remember and pray for Charles who is now 50 years old. Charles had been one of those kids who suffered from parental neglect.

I remember a girl named Jada.

Jada came into small-group reading class every day with a scowl on her face. I know God gives grace for each new day. Every day, I prayed for a new way to reach her heart. Every day, she slouched down in her seat and glared at me. Then something happened. An instructional aide at our school saw an unused counter between the restrooms nearest to the fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms. She put up a sign that everything on the counter was free for the taking for any student. A bright pink sherpa-lined hoodie jacket had hung in my spare closet for several years. God prompted me to donate it. Guess who chose that jacket! Jada. I prayed that God would fill that jacket with His love and peace. The rest of the story? Jada's heart began to soften, and she began to change! She ended that year well, and I couldn't wait to see her the next year!

All of these and more happen with listening. Listening to your heart and hearing from the heart of God. He knows your students. He can help you know His plan for reaching their hearts. Take time to listen to their heart's cry for someone to care. Pray that God will help you see through the attitude and behavior. Listen and respond in love, God's love

Be consistent.

Many teachers throw their hands in the air and cease caring. They ignore misbehaviors. They say, "I do not care anymore because nothing ever changes." The rules that were in place the first of the year now have become tattered and torn by inconsistency and nonchalance of the teacher. Students know we care when we keep the schedule and procedures in place. Our students know we care when we care enough to keep the guidelines we set and keep accountability of consequences and rewards we promised.

Listen to your heart.

Lead from your heart. Remember the students whose hearts you touched in the past, and keep on reaching their hearts. Let your students know YOU CARE! They will see the love of the Lord in you, and you will continue to be a witness to heart changes in your students.

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Resources:

National Center for Biblical Parenting, "Heart Work Curriculum", available at: www.Biblicalparenting.org/heart-work/

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, *Parenting Is Heart Work*, published by David C. Cook, 2005 .