



A Fresh Start

By Becky Ramsey, public and Christian school representative

Every school year, I wanted to have a fresh start. As an elementary student, I looked forward to new crayons, pencils, markers, folders, erasers, and a notebook full of clean paper. Those same new supplies were important to me as a teacher as well. I would color code my classes with folders that matched the textbook color if possible. I would have a folder for the week's plans: one for assignments that came in and another to collect tests. Color coding my lessons helped me organize each day. It also helped when I left a code for a substitute if I had to be gone, either for a planned or unplanned reason. If I stacked my folders before I left for the day, I felt ready and I knew that a substitute would be ready to go as well.

Welcome Gifts

I also wanted my students to feel like they had a fresh start as well. I had some sharpened pencils and a grading pen ready as an "I'm Glad You Are in My Class" gift for that first day of school. It was really a gift for me (Do you know how long it takes a classroom of students to sharpen pencils on the first day of school?). But new supplies are not the only thing needed to have a fresh start. While I recycled bulletin boards from year to year, I always had at least one new board so that there is something that looks new and fresh in the room. I usually had a content bulletin board and a motivational board; therefore, the motivational or theme board for the year was usually my fresh new idea each year.

Set the Mood with a Devotional Each Day

Another thing that I did for myself was to get a new devotional for the school year. Year after year, God always directed me to a devotional book that I specifically needed for the students, families, and experiences that I had. When the message that I read for the day fit what happened in my day, I always knew that God and I were partners in this educational venture. I always liked to arrive early enough in my room to walk around and pray over the desks of my students. I asked God for his touch and direction for each student. This also provided a fresh start for the year as well as for each day. School days that started with prayer for each student and activity always went smoother. Even if you are in a public school and cannot pray with your students, you can always pray silently for your students and ask God to give you insights in how to help and challenge each one in your classroom.

Give the Students a Fresh Start

Just as teachers need fresh starts each year and each day, so does every student in your classroom. Do not let yourself have predetermined ideas shaded by other teachers who might have taught your students previously. Even if yesterday posed challenges with one or more students, you can decide to come into the school the next day offering clean slates and fresh smiles. I found that writing a special note of encouragement on the desk of a child who has experienced a difficult day on the previous school day always helped the child know that I was giving him or her a fresh start. Lamentations 3:22-23 (NIV) tells us: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

If God gives us new love, mercy, and compassion each day, we as teachers need to do the same for our students. Plus, when we give that new love, mercy, and compassion to our students, we will feel those same passions coming back to us multiplied.

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