

### **So Teach Us to Number Our Days**

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A few years ago I created a Where Are They Now? bulletin board in my classroom, where I post pictures, letters, and newspaper clippings from my former students. Keeping updated on the lives of previous students is one of the many joys of my teaching. Their notes and pictures remind me of the immense responsibility and remarkable opportunity I have to model God's truth and to promote excellence in their lives. What we accomplish in our classrooms does not remain in our classrooms; rather, our work reaches far beyond the white boards and bulletin boards of our individual classrooms. Staying focused on the big picture in Christian education reminds us that we are not alone in our efforts.

When I consider the accomplishments of the scholars who have endured the rigors of my eighth-grade English classes, I am humbled by the privilege of being called to such an important, world-changing profession. Last year's bulletin board chronicled the lives of a high school teacher, an associate pastor, a student at Harvard University, a physician, a valedictorian, a piano teacher, a singer in New York, a television editor at Warner Brothers Studios, and an exceptional high school athlete. The board also featured several articles from the *Wall Street Journal*, one of which referred to a former student as the possible "growth-stock whiz kid of Europe." I pray that the education these students received in my class and in many others now serves as a solid foundation for influencing a congregation, university professors, the medical community, the entertainment industry, and the European financial community. Whatever our students go on to become, it is vital that we Christian teachers and administrators renew our vision of how Christian education, or what we faithfully pour into students on a daily basis, moves beyond the classroom to affect our communities and to safeguard biblical values.

One of the most thought-provoking gifts I have ever received from a student is a little plaque that still remains in my kitchen. The plaque is a framed miniature chalkboard with a wooden apple affixed to the lower left corner. Its neatly printed white message reminds me of the important work that takes place in my classroom. The message reads, "Good teachers see the future in a child's eyes." This little gift speaks volumes to me each time I see it. It reminds me of what is at stake in classrooms across the nation. We all possess approximately one hundred eighty days to influence, shape, and educate the hearts and minds of our students, as God has called us to do.

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) warns, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Christian teachers must have the vision of the impact that God's truth can have on students. Last November at an ACSI convention, Josh McDowell challenged teachers and administrators as he described today's society. Truth,

he lamented, is currently a matter of personal opinion, and, moreover, our world has become morally relativistic. Feelings have too often replaced facts and supplanted logical thinking. According to McDowell, if Christian teachers do not use God's truth to battle the current cultural climate, the job will not get done. Christian teachers must fight the battle against moral relativism if objective truth is to be preserved and the godly heritage of this nation is to be defended. In no other institution can biblical truth be taught with such fervor and boldness than in a Christian school. Christian teachers have the responsibility to model Christ's love with consistency in their classroom and to teach their subject matter with enthusiasm. We as Christian teachers need to recognize the raging battle in the marketplace and in the lives of our students and their families.

As McDowell communicated, Christian teachers must stay current with the times. Understanding the postmodern culture allows us to be more effective as we seek to share God's Word to a confused, rebellious youth culture. We must recognize that our students have become commercial and moral targets. Advertisers in the movie, television, magazine, music, and clothing industries count on the money young people spend for products that attack biblical values and all too often destroy lives. Teaching our subject matter from a Christian perspective and teaching our students that their value as human beings comes directly from their Creator will help to counteract the lies perpetuated by various industries.

In the midst of the daily classroom adventures, however, I must admit (and I have reasons to believe that I have company in my experience) that I do not always see the future in a child's eye nor do I remember the importance of what I am attempting to accomplish each day. My days are often chaotic and filled with selfish thoughts and motives. Many days pass by me without a fleeting thought of the eternal nature of my business as a teacher. Instead, I am concerned with my list: grading quizzes, correcting essays, returning parent phone calls, attending meetings, answering a seemingly endless barrage of questions, and returning too many emails. As I feel the pressure of the daily grind, do my thoughts, words, and actions reflect Jesus Christ and His love? Am I faithful in looking at students with the patient perspective of my loving heavenly Father? Have I become more concerned with my list than with my charges?

Sadly, numerous classroom teachers have become so burdened and distracted by the daily affairs of teaching that they have closed their minds to the big picture of Christian education. We can too easily lose sight of our calling and the importance of our daily work. Many teachers have chosen to close their doors to block out an unsupportive administration or to escape from an annoying colleague. Others close their doors as a result of a spirit that resists becoming part of the school's mission or vision. And exhaustion, boredom, and discouragement have caused others to lose sight of their important place in the lives of young people.

Many Christian teachers may need to renew their vision of Christian education. Instead of retreating into our classrooms and focusing on the drudgery, we must remember the important role that we play in educating children, who can go on to accomplish amazing things. We are to use whatever vehicle God has given us to teach His truth. Whether we

teach quadratic equations, literature, basketball, phonics, or United States history, we must integrate His truth in a way that will change the way our students interact with the world.

Many teachers experience what Charles Hummel writes about in his book *Freedom from Tyranny of the Urgent*. He says, “We live in constant tension between the urgent and the important.” He challenges us to redeem the time that we have been given: “We have only today, this hour, within our grasp.” Think about your daily “to do list” and ask yourself if your tasks are urgent or important. Are we seeking to build into our students a Christian worldview, or are we seeking to fly through the curriculum or to survive another day with a difficult class? Perhaps some of us are focused on the upcoming weekend or on Christmas vacation. I have missed opportunities to encourage students because I chose to be distracted by my computer. At other times, I have missed a teachable moment because I did not take the time to organize the day well enough. We need to block out distractions that cause us to miss the chances to encourage students and pour out God’s love.

All Christian schools, despite their differences, seek to prepare students who will make Jesus Christ and His teachings a vital part of their daily decisions and who will serve God faithfully in whatever they do. Because we are all working toward the same goal, we must resist the temptation to close the door to our ultimate calling. Keeping focused on the powerful potential of a solid Christian education in the life of each student allows us to work together. When we arrive in our classrooms each morning, may we see the significance of the day. In many cases, students spend more time each day with their teachers than they spend with their parents. Are we teaching God’s truth on a consistent basis? Are we taking time to encourage and guide each student? Are we equipping each student to serve God in a world that is hostile to Christianity?

Psalm 90:12 (NKJV) reminds us of the importance of our time: “So teach us to number our days, / That we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Proverbs 16:3 (NIV) reminds us that God ultimately establishes our steps: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” When we as Christian teachers return to our classrooms, let us remember the importance of our work. What we teach in our classrooms today will travel to places that only God foresees. As we steadily pour Christ’s truth and love into our students, may we be mindful of how teachers touch the future today.

### **Reference List**

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