

# Not Just Another Teacher

BY DENNIS PETERSON

Teachers, do not sell yourself short simply because your paycheck is not sterling and your title is not engraved on the door. This article will offer encouragement and purpose to every teacher.

“What is the use?” Vivien declared dejectedly as she shoved her plan book and a stack of ungraded papers to the other side of the table. “It does not matter how carefully I plan or how quickly I get my papers graded and back to the students. I am still not making a difference in anyone’s life. And all the parents ever do is complain; they never offer to help. I have had it with teaching!”

How often have you expressed similar thoughts? If you have taught for any length of time (and are willing to admit such feelings), you have probably been where Vivien was, asking your self, “Is it really worth the effort? Am I making any impact at all? Do I have any real importance as a teacher, or should I be doing something else?”

## The Significance of the Teacher

You, the teacher, are important for many reasons, not the least of which are the knowledge and experience of your person, the power and authority of your position, and the influence of your example.

**Knowledge/experience.** Although many of your students—and perhaps even you yourself—may not realize it, by comparison, your storehouse of knowledge and life experiences far surpasses those of your students. There are, of course, no know-it-alls in this life, but the mere facts that you have lived longer, have had more years of formal education, and have gained more practical training in the school of life put you in a good position to teach your students what they need to learn. It is seemingly incongruous, but nonetheless true, that whereas in the traditional school setting you teach students a lesson and then give them a test; in the school of life, you were given various tests first and then learned valuable lessons from those tests. The impartation of *that* wisdom to your students, perhaps more than mere book lessons, makes your work worthwhile.

**Power/authority.** As a teacher, you stand in *loco parentis*, in the place of the parent. Through the combined human authority and support of the parents and your principal, administrator, and school board, you approach your students from a position of power. But, more importantly, you also stand before them with a God-given call to teach. With that call comes the divine authority, enablement, and empowerment to teach. Without it you cannot succeed; with its practical implementation you cannot fail to make a difference.

**Influence/example.** “A teacher affects eternity,” someone once said. “He can never tell where his influence stops.” Perhaps you do not see the results of that influence from day to day or even from week to week. But it is ever present and always working, for “the years teach much that the days never know,” as a wise person once declared. Your students are watching you, and they are picking up your habits and adopting your attitudes to ward life, learning, and God. The extent of your influence rivals, in some cases, even that of the home itself.

Society still possesses a great deal of respect for a professional educator who is dedicated to both the job and the students. What you do as a teacher *does* make a difference. As Lon Waters sagely quipped, “School is a building that has four walls—with tomorrow inside.” And Jesse Stuart, himself a teacher, wrote that “No other profession . . . has directly or indirectly influenced the destiny of so many people as has the teaching profession.” In truth, your work as a teacher is so important that its influence literally carries into eternity, for you are teaching souls that will live somewhere forever.

## **The Deference of the Teacher**

The realization of our significance as teachers, however, should not puff us up with sinful pride. As Paul stated, “Knowledge puffeth up. . . . And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:1a, 2).

Rather, the realization of our significance should have the opposite effect, leading us to humility, renewed effort, and continual learning. There will always be room for growth. In fact, it is in expending our utmost efforts to teach others that we ourselves learn the most. We should progressively become more sensitive to the weight of responsibility on our shoulders—not self-destructively sensitive, but wisely sensitive—with a catalytic desire to do our very best, to improve our teaching continually, and to learn from others—teachers, parents, and even students—all for the glory of God.

Perhaps James had this realization of responsibility in mind when he wrote, “My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), *knowing* that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jas. 3:1). As divinely appointed teachers, we are accountable to God for our job performance, and His appraisal of our work is far more important than that of any student, parent, administrator, or curriculum committee. After all, God does not evaluate teachers on the basis of human standard; His evaluation is based on the degree of our faithfulness to the ministry to which He has called us.

With a renewed realization of both our significance as teachers and our accountability before God, we should begin each school year, each day, and even each class session with deference—a certain degree of reverential fear and trembling, a courteous respect for and submission to the expectations of the Master Teacher.

# The Confidence of the Teacher

This fear should be healthy, self-preserving, and constructive because the very God who holds us accountable also has told us in His Word that we should be “confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it. . .” (Phil. 1:6).

With this promise, we should never be ashamed of our profession as educational ministers in God’s service. You are not just a Christian school teacher, a message sometimes inadvertently communicated (often without actually being verbalized) by your carriage, your dress, or your manner of work. You relay just such a negative message when you lack professionalism, dwell on your low wages (even jokingly, such as “I could be making more money driving a truck”), or decry your school’s lack of modern facilities or equipment rather than quietly making optimum use of what you do have. Besides, high wages, fancy buildings, and the latest equipment can never guarantee excellence in education—only a committed teacher can do that.

Jesse Stuart, writing from the perspective of not only a teacher but also an administrator, admitted in *The Thread That Runs So True*, “I had one criticism of my teachers. I had heard a few of them say, ‘Oh, I’m just another schoolteacher!’ This burned me up. I told my teachers never to say this. I told them to walk proudly, with their heads high, and to thank God they had chosen the teaching profession—the mother of all professions. . . .”

The next time you begin to feel the way Vivien felt (and you sometimes will), remember that you are not just another teacher. You *are a Christian teacher with a divinely assigned and divinely empowered mission*. You are important, your work is important, and you do make a difference. As Philip Melancthon, one of Martin Luther’s followers, declared, “Fitly to train one single youth is a greater achievement than the taking of Troy.”

And, as a dedicated teacher, your influence lives on. To quote Stuart once more, “A teacher lives on and on through his students. I will live if my teaching is inspirational, good, and stands firm for good values and character training. Tell me, how can good teaching ever die? Good teaching is forever, and the teacher is immortal.”

*Dennis L. Peterson has taught various subjects, including history and writing, at the junior high, senior high, and college levels and in a home-school cooperative for seventeen years. He has written numerous articles on education, history, and writing for both Christian and secular markets.*