**TEACHERS (#2)**

***The Gift Of Teaching***

**“A good teacher is like a candle – it consumes itself to light the way for others” – Mustafa Ataturk**

**The hardest teacher I ever remember from my childhood was Mrs. Edwards, my fifth grade teacher. She was of the old-school, a stern, strict, no-nonsense disciplinarian who expected much from her students. More than once (actually, more than three dozen times) I received a ruler across my knuckles for not paying attention or for being the class clown. She often caught me staring out the window, daydreaming of glory on the ballfield or battlefield. School was not my thing and Mrs. Edwards knew it. She also planned to do something about it. To me, a very wise 11-year old, she looked like a crusty old spinster who delighted in torturing little boys just for the fun of it. Oh how I hated that class! She disciplined me so much that I felt she despised me. I was wrong.**

**The Hebrews writer reminds me:** *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* (Heb. 12:11). And Solomon told me: *“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly* (Prov. 13:24). Mrs. Edwards loved me. Looking back through the rearview mirror of time I can now see she was perhaps the greatest school teacher I had in my formative years. It was partially from her that I learned the love of books. And it was from her that I discovered the joy of history, and its application to life.

Mrs. Ann Howell was also a powerful influence on my life. She was my Bible teacher when I was very young. She even gave me my first little Bible. She always held a special place in my heart for the rest of her life. Thoughts of Mrs. Edwards and Mrs. Howell make me ask each of you this question, what teacher(s) made a lasting impact on you?

Teaching is a necessary and valuable part of life. We come into this world ignorant and must be taught. From learning to speak our first words, to knowing the alphabet, to encouraging our motor skills to walk, to acquiring cultural norms and social manners to get along in society, to hearing the moral values for good citizenship and spiritual growth, we must be influenced by teachers. Everyone needs teachers.

It is fascinating to me to read Paul’s description of the gifts given to men by God. In Romans 12 we learn of various talents we receive from the Spirit. I am going to be blunt here – YOU are found in this list. Look for yourself here:

*“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness”* (Rom. 12:6-9).

Did you see yourself? Whether you are an introvert or extrovert or a combination of both, you can very likely practice one or more of these “gifts” from God. Included in that list is the gift of teaching.

To take a talent that is God-given and bury it will result in catastrophe on the day of Judgment (see Parable of Talents – Matt. 25:14-30). To teach a child the stories of the Bible, or to teach the plan of salvation to a teenager or neighbor is perhaps the greatest service you can render in your entire lifetime. To influence another soul with truth will set a man free (Jn. 8:32). If I accomplished nothing else in my life but to show another lost person how to be saved then I would have died a successful man, for “*he who wins souls is wise*” (Prov. 11:30).

Imagine this scene. You and a person you loved enough to teach the gospel are standing side by side as Christ brings you both to Judgment. The Lord opens the Books and reads these words to you while looking at your student: “*If anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*” (Jam. 5:19-20). Then you hear Him pronounce these emotional words as He turns back to look at you: “*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord*!” (Matt. 25:21,23).

Your entire life on earth was justified by your love for that soul. You were a teacher greater than Annie Sullivan who was “the miracle worker” (Mark Twain gave her that title) for Helen Keller. While Helen’s world was opened by sign language by the teaching of Ms. Sullivan, a lost soul’s world was opened by the gospel as taught by you. While Jaime Escalante might win “Teacher of the Year” in 1988 for teaching inner city ghetto kids from Los Angeles how to conquer mathematics and gain entrance to universities, you will remain unknown on earth, but bring ovations before God in heaven (Lk. 15:10).

While I have been called a “preacher” for the past 45 years (I began full time preaching in 1975) I have taken greater satisfaction in just trying to be a good “teacher.” The greatest joys of my life have been discovered in the teaching of my children before bedtime, in one-on-one Bible studies in a coffee shop, in a gathering of a family around their kitchen table, or in a class setting at the church building each week. I feel more at home as a teacher than as a preacher. Perhaps that was God’s greater “gift” to me. What was your “gift” from God?

The “gift” of teaching is not reserved for those with college degrees, it is given to all of us who have a heart for souls and who dedicate ourselves to sharing what we learn with others. As Peter put it, “*Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man who asks you for a reason of the hope within you, with meekness and fear*” (I Pet. 3:15).

You have a gift. Share it. You’ll change a life forever.

I love you. – Rick