**TEACHERS (#3)**

***The Difference One Teacher Can Make***

*“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.   
The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”   
– William Arthur Ward*

William Holmes McGuffey was born in 1800 in Claysville, Pennsylvania. He died in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1873. In that “*threescore years and ten*” that Moses spoke of (Psa. 90:10) Mr. McGuffey made an impact on the educational system of our new nation that outlived him for over a century. Every child growing up in this country back in the 19th and early 20th centuries knew very well the series of books called *McGuffey’s Readers*, or subtitled *McGuffey’s Eclectic Reader*. With America opening up its free public school system they needed an organized way to teach elementary children the basics of reading.

In 1835 a young Harriet Beecher Stowe, who would later write the famous novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to stir the abolition cause of ending slavery, encouraged McGuffey to write a series of readers for young children. He had developed a wonderful way to teach young minds by not only using letters and words in the popular rote style, but to use them in sentences that told a moral story. Children all over our young nation began reading which combined words with stories that had ethical principles of right and wrong. Biblical lessons were learned every day in our public schools. It is estimated that over 120,000,000 copies of *McGuffey’s Readers* were sold between 1836 and 1960. Only the Bible and Webster’s Dictionary outsold them. They not only reflected the moral values of America in the 19th century, but also shaped them. (Note: They are still in print if any parents are interested. I have a set, and love them.)

I use William McGuffey’s story to illustrate the difference one teacher can make on the lives of others. He, like Abel, being dead yet spoke to generations beyond his own life (Heb. 11:4). I believe it is the desire of most men and women to leave a legacy that lives beyond their own life. It seems that is internally coded into our DNA by God. We want to believe we can leave the world a little better for having lived here. We pray our life counted for something, both for time and for eternity. I say that with confidence because the Bible says, “*He has placed eternity in their hearts*” (Eccl. 3:11). All of us want to make a difference. But how do we do that?

The answer to that question is seen in scriptures like Deuteronomy 6:4-9. God told Israel to pass down the stories of God, and the wisdom of God, to the next generation. He said it like this:

4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall ***teach*** them diligently to your children, and shall ***talk*** of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall ***bind*** them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall ***write*** them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Teach them. Talk of them. Bind them. Write them.

Teaching is more, far more, than merely passing on information that results in grades given for a good memory. It is not great teaching until it inspires the student to take what he has learned to heart and make changes in his life. As William Arthur Ward said above, “*The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires*.” Isn’t that exactly what Paul meant when he said, “*Imitate me even as I imitate Christ*” (I Cor. 11:1)? Didn’t he say, *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you”* (Phil. 4:9)?

In the first century a “disciple” was a student of a teacher. But it was not in the traditional way Americans have come to understand a teacher / student relationship. A teacher, such as Gamaliel, would take on a student, like Saul of Tarsus, and bring him into his circle of influence. Saul (aka Paul) would describe it this way, “*I sat at the feet of Gamaliel*” (Acts 22:3). He was more than a student, but an imitator of his teacher. Gamaliel was his mentor, that is, his example. Jesus described it this way, “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a* ***disciple that he be like his teacher****, and a servant like his master*” (Matt. 10:24-25).

While all Christians are to be disciples (imitators) of Christ, we in turn are charged with the responsibility to pass on to the next generation what we have learned from Christ, and from others who imitated Christ for us. That is where Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is especially important as a pattern for us to teach. Whether to our children, or the workmate in the cubicle next to you, the pattern is the same for teaching:

1. Teach them. That takes words from the Bible.
2. Talk of them. That means it is part of your daily walk and talk of life.
3. Bind them. That means consistently walk your talk every day of life.
4. Write them. That means it is permanent. You are forever Christ’s disciple.

William McGuffey made a difference to several generations of American children by the influence of his *Eclectic Readers*. Tens of thousands of teachers have made a difference by how they inspired a student to reach beyond their self-imposed limitations and become more than they ever thought they would. “The great teacher inspires.”

That leads me to ask myself, then you, who are we inspiring to reach beyond themselves to be “*delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (Col. 1:13)? I pray fervently that each of us will inspire others within the sphere of our influence and make a difference in their lives, both for time, and eternity.

As I write at the bottom of all my emails: “To the world you may be just one person, but to one person you just may be the world.” - Rick