

HALF CUPS OF COFFEE

by Shawn A. Roberts, Classical Christian Academy

What victory stories do you share with your faculty, parents, students, and community? It is good to remember and share how our benevolent God has financially provided for our schools. We are also to honor others as evidenced by our trophy cases filled with awards and trophies which are cool and shiny. There is another type of victory that needs to be shared: victories of the heart.

The first time I read “Apple Nailing” by Paul David Tripp, my spirit leaped exclaiming “Yes, I want that!” For those unfamiliar with the article published in the Autumn 2013 *Classis*, Dr. Tripp states he is concerned with the structure of Christian schools and whether or not we are asking the law to do what only grace can accomplish in the hearts of our students. Classical Christian

schools have a good reputation for decorum. This is to be commended. As administrators and teachers in classical Christian schools, there are behavioral standards and policies to guide our mission published in the Parent-Student Handbooks. These are important, but do we allow these rules to become like the law which reveals sin but will never deliver your children from it? Dr. Tripp says our students live, act, speak, and respond out of their hearts. This is true. If our hope is in “the right set of demerits, the right set of rewards, and a good system of consequences” relying on the structure to “change the life and character of a child”, this will only produce hard, pulpy, dry inedible apples from the hearts of our students. To repeat, we are asking the law to do what only grace can. How do we reach our students’ hearts and maintain handbook

rules, decorum, and academic integrity? Do we sacrifice the heart on the altar of discipline? Or, do our students’ hearts yield to the Holy Spirit and yearn for repentance when disciplined?

To answer these questions, we must ask one more: How does God reach my heart? Romans 2:4 instructs us that God’s goodness leads us to repentance. Out of His lovingkindness, He reaches our heart. As a Good Shepherd, God leads His sheep toward green pastures for nourishment, still waters to quench our thirst, righteous paths to bring Him glory, and discipline to shape our heart. God desires the same for our students. His will is to use discipline to lead the student to repentance shaping their heart in the process. As disciplinarians in our schools, this is an awesome responsibility. Yet, as teachers and

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administrators, God has called us to this ministry. God loves each student, deeply. His Son died for that student to cure him from sin and death.

I asked one of our students to calligraph and frame my favorite passage from *Mere Christianity*. It hangs behind my desk. C. S. Lewis writes:

“But the great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him.”

I often tell the student that God loves you so much that He allowed them to get caught in sin and there is a cost. God is relentless in His pursuit of us because of His great love for us. He loves you! So do your parents. So do I.

Am I reflecting God’s goodness? is the question that guides my words and actions during a disciplinary event. If not, then I need to repent. There have been those times as well. Do you ever get frustrated with a student because they are not responding “out of the heart” as we want them to respond? I hope you nod your head yes. It’s okay. Just repent and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. He will. It is His promise.



God is intimately involved in every act of discipline at our schools, for the hearts of our students are at stake.

Our teachers love our students! It is the one thing I express to every family. One year I noticed our faculty had become frustrated with a couple of students. After asking questions, praying, and reflecting, the Lord reminded me that He has established a hierarchy with boundaries. The hierarchy for discipline is teacher then administrator. We are both to partner with the parent in the spirit of “in loco parentis”. I realized that our faculty were overreaching their established boundary. The faculty were giving too many warnings, too many talks in the hallway, and the students were not responding rightly. The proper thing to do was for the faculty to send the student to the office sooner. I trained on biblical discipline, outlining responsibilities and boundaries

for faculty, administration, and parents. Because our faculty love our students, there are times where they feel the students are their own. But they are not. God has given those children parents. The principle is the same with sheep. Sheep who go beyond the established boundaries experience danger and hardships. When teachers and administrators go beyond God’s established hierarchal boundaries it often manifests in frustration and only produces hard, pulpy, dry, inedible apples in the student’s heart. We are treading where God did not intend. Teachers should be quick to address the sins of the classroom and know their established boundary. The same is true for administrators. Then we both can delight in the students.

I recently had a situation where the heart of a student was not being reached. I was asking all the right questions, actively listening to the

student, and seeking the Holy Spirit for understanding and guidance. The Lord proved His faithfulness, reminding me that I was not the student's father. I excused the student from my office and called her dad. He was in the area and drove right down. I explained the situation and allowed dad and daughter to use my office to hug, cry, correct, and pray together. This young lady needed her dad. Only he could reach her heart. It was beautiful. It is how God has designed the family and our schools to operate. What if I had not called dad to the rescue? The end result would be hard, pulpy, dry inedible apples. She is one of our heart victories!

As custodians of our school's culture, we are to protect academic integrity. Often the student is aware of the consequence of cheating or plagiarism as outlined in the handbook. He or she knows they will get a zero on the assignment and perhaps even a paddling depending on the age of the student.

There came a knock on my door. A teacher was holding a paper in hand. I knew exactly what was up—plagiarism, by a rhetoric student. It was after school and the student had gone home. Do we call the student and parent informing them of the consequence? If we do, the end result would be hard, pulpy, dry inedible apples. Because integrity is a matter of the heart,

we prayed asking the Holy Spirit to do His work in the student's heart. That student had a restless night and ended up telling her parents that she had plagiarized a paper. She then called the teacher at home and confessed, though it was late in the evening. The teacher cried with the student, forgave the student, and informed the student that I was in the know, and that we had prayed for her asking for God's will to be accomplished. We met with the student and parents the next morning. It was beautiful because God was at work in the heart of the student and His Holy Spirit led the student to repentance and shaped her heart in the process. I love this student and we have a wonderful relationship though she is a young adult now. She is one of our heart victories!

The students know that I love them. They also know that I will never judge or hold a sin against them. Jesus warns us of that. I call it "sticks and logs." I let the student know that we are all sinners saved by grace, and yes, I have sinned and made foolish choices. These are covered by God's grace and mercy, and have become an associate headmaster despite these adolescent acts. I often reflect on my frame when I was in 7th or 8th grade. I will tell stories of the knuckle-headed, impulsive, and foolish things I did, just like they

do. One memory stands above most. I was sitting in my chair waiting for English to begin. The teacher was not yet present and I noticed a rubber stamp ink pad sitting on her desk (you know where this is going if you were ever a 7th grade boy). I thought it would be funny to slide the desk chair out, lay the open ink pad on the seat, then slide the chair back hoping the teacher would sit on it. And that is exactly what I did, and exactly what the teacher did. My impulsive ways continued and culminated with me receiving a paddling by my principal, in 7th grade. This paddling redirected my path, thank God. Transparency can be good, and bad. It calls for wisdom—so be careful what stories you share as you might find a whoopee cushion in your chair!

Transparency helps to establish honesty in a relationship and is necessary for discipline. If we are going to reach the student's heart, then the student must be honest and transparent which is difficult, even for us. This is why building relationship with the students is critical, and relationship takes time. I once asked a faculty member, a former pastor, how I could become a better leader. I expected the feedback to be fruitful but the response surprised me. He replied, "Have half cups of coffee." How long does it take to drink a half cup of coffee? 10 minutes? He encouraged

me to spend more time with the students even if just a half cup of coffee's worth. This counsel pays dividends! The sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd because there is relationship and administrators who handle discipline must have relationship with the students. But it takes time.

There are two places in Hebrews the word *consider* is used. In the Greek, the word is *katanoëō* and commands us to set some time aside and seriously dwell on this personhood. In 3:1 we are commanded to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus” and 10:24 admonishes us to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” Do we set some time aside and seriously dwell on a student, asking God how we can spur that student toward love and good works? As administrators, we ask our teachers to consider the frame of the student. So must we. We must *consider* our students. One of my favorite passages in Scripture describes an intimate conversation between Jesus and Peter as they take a walk on the beach after breakfast. Can you imagine? On this walk Jesus is asking Peter deep heart issues: “Do you love me, Simon?” Jesus is the Master teacher, and He provides an example of how to reach someone's heart . . . go on a walk with them. Jesus *considers* Peter.

Sometimes a student simply needs to go on a walk and talk. It is during these times where God is wanting to ask the student deep heart issues. There is a heart victory waiting!

Despite all these efforts, there are times a student needs to be dismissed from the school. One student was asked to leave the school due to behavioral issues. It was the right decision. Just as we believe that every student should have a classical Christian education, I believe this student needed to be in our school. However, my headmaster and I would not compromise in his misbehavior and rebellion. After one year, the dismissed student and I met for lunch a number of times. I was able to ask deep heart issues. God used this dismissal to reach the heart of the student who was admitted back into the school. He is one our heart victories!

I appreciate Dr. Tripp's concern for Christian schools. Like the law, our policies and handbooks reveal sin, but only redemption provides the cure. I encourage reading “Apple Nailing” with your faculty and coaches so our schools may be a culture of grace and where heart victories are won.

Here's to half cups of coffee!

NOTES

1. “Apple Nailing”, *Classis*, Volume XX, Number 3, Autumn 2013, p. 2.