

# REACHING CHILDREN

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE TEACHER AND DISCIPLINE

IT IS nine-fifteen on Sunday morning, when the door to the Primary Department opens. In comes Johnny Rodgers, freshly attired in a blue Sunday suit, with a pert blue cap to match. A quick glance at the neatly arranged room tells him that he is the first one there. He tosses his new hat toward the brightly painted clothes rack, but misses, and the hat falls on the floor. He runs over, picks it up, and hangs it on a hook. Next, he looks around the room for something to break the monotony of the silence. Ah, there is the piano. His face bursts into a wide smile revealing a large blank space big enough for two teeth, and he quickly walks over to the musical instrument. Up goes the lid, and down go the keys. Johnny needs no Sunday school teacher to amuse him.

In the midst of terrific thunder and lightning manufactured by musical Johnny, the door opens again. "Hi, Bob. Come on over. Teacher's not here yet."

Bob comes on over, and the lightning and thunder output is multiplied by two.

A few minutes later, Marjorie, Jack, and Allan walk in, breathless from running. "I touched you last," says Marjorie to Allan. [ 153 ]

"Ha, ha, I got you then," and he reaches over and gives her a shove which knocks her into a chair. Not to be outdone, Marjorie jumps up and chases him around the table, leaving a trail of upset chairs behind her. As their game grows in excitement, the room grows more and more disorderly. The other children who come in join either the racket at the piano, or the mad game of tag.

Suddenly the door opens, and in bursts the teacher at nine-thirty-one. "Children, children, what does this mean?" She picks up an overturned chair from her pathway, and hurriedly removes her wraps. "What terrible conduct! What can you be thinking of?" And her first words to the children on Sunday morning take the nature of a scolding.

In reality, the terrible conduct was not in the children at all, but in their teacher.

Of course, she excused herself to the superintendent, telling him that the boys and girls in her

class were very ill-mannered. "I was only one minute late, and there was a regular madhouse in progress. It took almost the whole period to get them quiet."

Of course, those children in the foregoing incident should not have acted as they did, but there was nothing for them to do. "An idle mind is the Devil's workshop" for older people, and it is even more true for children. They are at the age in life when they have almost boundless energy. They are all action, and must be doing something. If we do not like the channel their action follows, it is up to us to place a different course before them.

Folks say we do a lot of things  
We hadn't ought-a had  
We never mean a bit of harm,  
Nor do them to be bad;  
But when a chance just comes along [ 154 ]  
With fun a' peekin' through  
We take it mostly just because  
We've nothing else to do.

Boys are an awful problem  
All the grown up people say  
But honest all we really want  
Is just a chance to play.  
And all us boys from country towns  
And from the cities too,  
Would quit what you call mischief  
If you showed us what to do.

This situation illustrates the negative side of another proverb that every good disciplinarian must practice: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Too many people begin to wonder what to do about discipline problems after it is too late. The time to face behavior difficulties is before their occurrence.

### ***BE EARLY***

"Teachers should always be on time" is a false statement. A teacher who wishes to maintain good order should never be on time; she should be early. For the first ones to arrive, whether in a Sunday school, a Child Evangelism Class, Daily Vacation Bible School, or Tent Meeting, set the atmosphere for the service. If the teacher values this atmosphere, she should be present early enough to control it.

But how are we to break down lifelong habits of tardiness which are so deeply ingrained in the lives of many teachers? One method is to have a pre-prayer service for them which begins one half hour before the children's meeting. [ 155 ]

Perhaps you are thinking, "Oh, we couldn't have a pre-prayer service - not that early. My teachers are always late; we couldn't possibly get here that soon."

But if the matter is presented in the right manner, stressing the value of prayer, rather than the need of punctuality, the teachers who are earnest and sincere will be willing to cooperate.

In one Sunday school there was a teacher who was habitually from five to fifteen minutes late. Even if the Young People's Society were having a wiener roast, they expected Maybelle to be the last to arrive. However, even Maybelle made up her mind that she would attend the pre-prayer service, and she did. We saw real transformation in that whole department due to the fact that the teachers were present to greet the pupils as they came, and the minds and hearts of the teachers were quieted before the beginning of their task.

It is not only in the Sunday school that this service is valuable.

In the Child Evangelism Class, where the only adults are the hostess and teacher, time can be set apart to have prayer together before the gathering of the children. Even if the hostess acts as the teacher, the necessary things may be done in advance, and the last few minutes before the meeting spent in quietness and prayer. The staff of the Daily Vacation Bible School, the group helping with the children's Tent Meeting, and any group of adults working with children will find real profit in the pre-prayer service. Not only will they find answers to their prayers, but they will learn the first rule of good discipline - "be early." [ 156 ]

### ***BE PREPARED***

An early teacher is a wise one, but if in addition she is a prepared teacher, we have a very pleasing combination.

Not only should the lesson be prepared, but the whole service should be planned. If there are songs to be sung, or Scripture passages to be read, let this be determined upon before the actual meeting. All decisions of this sort should be made and the program firmly in the mind of the leader in order that the pause - that breeding spot for discipline problems - be eliminated. For it is in such a pause that little Johnny feels an uncontrollable urge to poke the pal beside him, which, strangely enough, is followed by a stronger urge born of the spirit of retaliation which sweeps over the little pal. All of which is not conducive to the composure of the teacher.

If there are supplies to be used in the meeting, be sure that they are available at the needed time. Nothing is so advantageous to mischief as the time when teacher has to leave the room. Of course, if an emergency does arrive, and she needs something she had not anticipated, little Johnny will be less troublesome if he is sent after it, rather than left to entertain the rest. Children must be occupied every minute and it is the teacher's task to see that such occupation adds to instead of subtracts from the effect she wishes to produce.

In other words, foresighted preparation is one sure way to avoid using the "pound of cure." [157]

### ***BE INTERESTING***

Be early, be prepared, but be sure to be interesting.

A child will willingly spend hours doing something in which he is interested. Why not loosen up a trifle, and make our programs interesting for them? It won't hurt us. It is not necessary for our

lessons to be as dry as a dust storm in order to be effective. The Gospel means "good news." Let us treat it as such, remembering that an interested child is a good one.

Material to be interesting should be on the right level - easily comprehended and yet not too simple.

In a thickly populated area in Chicago, a Child Evangelism Class was taking the neighborhood by storm. The attendance mounted and mounted, until sixty. to sixty-five were present. The whole neighborhood was being reached. Then suddenly, with a change of teachers, the attendance dropped more suddenly than it had risen, with ten to twelve little hoodlums holding the fort alone.

What was the cause?

The teacher insisted on teaching the children memory work they had already memorized. As it was not interesting, the majority dropped out, and those who remained were inattentive. If you find that the children already know what you had planned to teach and you can add no new thoughts or methods, for discipline's sake change to something that is less familiar. The Bible is full of stories and lessons: no adult has ever fathomed its depths, much less a little child.

When you see Marjorie and Allan begin to look languidly toward the window, inject into your story an illustration from child life. Choose an actual child, with an actual name, the very same age as the children you are addressing, and watch their interest deepen. [ 158 ]

In telling that wonderful Passover story, and the salvation or destruction of the first-born, remember that some of the children in your audience are the oldest ones in their families, and that the story will really live for them if this point is brought out.

There are many places in Scripture where facts of interest to children are mentioned.

- The little girl whom CHRIST raised from the dead was twelve years of age. Some in your audience may be twelve.
- The little boy who gave his lunch to JESUS is not so different from the boys and girls you know who have carried their lunches.

You will always find that children love the familiar: stories about other children come in this category.

When you are illustrating a spiritual truth, see that a child is in the illustration.

Little stories about children are printed in leaflets, and are available at a very low cost. In addition to these tried and proved morsels, any incidents from actual experience are always appreciatively devoured.

### ***BE WISE***

An interesting teacher should not find difficulty in being a wise one.

And it does take a wise adult to deal with a large group of modern youngsters.

If we could go back a few years into our own childhood, it would help us to understand the attitudes of the children with whom we deal.

- Do you not remember how you looked up to a certain child in your neighborhood, and how that a suggestion from that small general decided coming activities for the whole gang?
- And do you not remember with what glee you exulted together when you had "put something over" on the teacher?

I am sure that if you are human, you have such recollections.

Even though times have changed, we know that human nature has not; leaders still remain among children, and they still feel a barrier between them and adults. [ 159 ]

It is with these leaders that most teachers have their difficulty.

The children are little angels when Johnny is not present, but if he is there class might as well be dismissed for all that will be accomplished. The teacher has one objective in view, the child leader another, and the result is not gratifying to the teacher. Let us put our objective in the minds of these leaders, and get them to lead the children to do what we want them to do.

In a tent meeting for children we instructed each teacher on the very first day to choose the boy in her group whom she thought would be the naughtiest, and to bestow upon that young man the high order of captain.

Some of the good ladies were shocked to think that we would thus reward badness, but we carefully explained that this was not a reward, but merely an "ounce of prevention."

It was the heavy responsibility of all captains to keep the children out of the tent before the meeting, to line up the boys and girls in their group for the march, and to help maintain good order in the class while the teacher was teaching. One teacher was particularly doubtful about the wisdom of this plan. She was sure that it would take her more than one day to decide on the naughtiest boy in her group. We told her she must make the decision the first day, and that if she were alert she could discover the best captain. [ 160 ]

After the first morning she came to us and said, "My, I didn't know it would be so easy to pick the worst one. Frank is his name; I had him spotted in the first five minutes. I told him he was to be captain tomorrow, that we would have a badge for him, and he was thrilled with the idea. Why, before that he was poking the boys beside him, while he alternated kicking and pulling the hair of another boy in front of him." But our teacher was still dubious. "He's so bad, do you think he will really make the others be good?"

The next few days told the tale.

Frank took his job seriously. If some child came into the tent before time, he was bodily ejected by the determined little officer. We did not always approve his ferocious methods, but we had to admit that the results were admirable. He was present every day, arriving long before the other

children, and remaining until the last teacher had departed. In between his official duties he managed to learn a great deal of memory work, and gloried in the acquisition of gold stars which were awarded for each verse. One day he astonished us by taking a younger boy aside and teaching him the Bible verse for the day. So thoroughly was he won over to the teachers' side, that one morning as we started our pre-prayer service we heard him call vociferously to the noisy group outside, "Shh, they're praying."

At the close of the meetings when the teachers were evaluating the results, one teacher remarked, "The discipline problems were rather disappointing: we didn't have any." It was remarkable considering that the neighborhood was a very rowdy one.

Yes, the children must be won over to the side of the teacher if discipline problems are to be avoided. Sometimes this may be done by singling out the leader, as in the above case, and sometimes the whole group must be won. Surprise is an excellent way to accomplish this. [ 161 ]

My aunt, who is a school teacher, was leading her class in choral reading one afternoon. The girls were fine, but the boys were about as expressive as fence posts. After wheedling, coaxing, and threatening, she said severely, "Boys, march to the hall. I want to speak to you there." Filled with curiosity, and not a little foreboding, the boys marched. As soon as the door was shut, they grouped in front of her, wondering what was the next command to be given.

"Each one of you run down the hall to the fountain, get a drink, and hurry back, but don't you dare tell the girls what we did." Three minutes later fifteen grinning boys read their lines perfectly. They were on the teacher's side.

Surprise may also take the nature of a rebuke.

I well remember the first class of little children I ever had. I was so anxious to win the love of those seven and eight-year-old children that I was very softhearted. Jimmy always wanted to sit by delicate, dark-haired Louise, but when he did I received no attention from either one. One day, Jimmy was seeking to have the chair next to his little girl friend, but that chair was occupied; its owner believed that possession was nine points of the law. After a real mental struggle, I completely separated Jimmy and Louise, putting him on one end of the line of chairs, and Louise on the other. Walking home that day, I remember the sick feeling I had. They wouldn't like me now, I knew. But to my utter amazement, the following morning Jimmy brought me a beautiful red rose. I had not earned his ill will, but his respect. [ 162 ]

### ***BE PRAYERFUL***

These little hints will prove helpful, but even they will not solve every discipline case.

However, we do have a Saviour who can solve every problem, and we also have the privilege of taking even the behavior of problem children to Him in prayer. But if we are going to pray about the discipline, let us not wait until the problems arise. Let us ask for wisdom in their prevention. A few adults sitting in strategic points will very often keep trouble from arising. Let all those who help with the meeting by playing the piano, taking the roll, or whatever they may do, sit in a group of children when they are not occupied with their duties.

The first few meetings are very important as far as behavior is concerned, for they set the standard for the days to follow.

Every effort should be made to see that the group is orderly and well-behaved the first four times, and after that the children will accept orderliness as the standard of conduct. The converse is just as true: if the first four meetings are disorderly, you may be assured that the others will be very similar.

Concentrate your prayers and efforts on the first few meetings, and be thankful that you have Someone to whom you may appeal in the hard places.

### ***BE A SOUL WINNER***

Our most important "Be" for the teacher desiring good behavior on the part of her pupils is Be a Soul Winner.

Salvation changes the behavior of even a naughty boy.

One summer, in the stockyards section of Chicago, Mrs. Warren was attempting to hold a Daily Vacation Bible School for the children. [ 163 ]

I say "attempting" advisedly, for thirteen-year-old Gus was determined that this was all it should be. He sat in the back of the room, quarreled with the older boys, teased the younger ones, and yelled at the teacher at intervals. For three meetings she tried to be patient. After his success in balking her every effort to restore order, she said to the other teachers, "I'll give him one more chance. If he is the same tomorrow, out he goes, and I don't care what anyone says."

Tomorrow came, and with it the unceasing activities of Gus were resumed.

The teacher also continued with her seemingly fruitless teaching, that day presenting to the eye the work of CHRIST upon the cross.

A large red heart was placed upon the flannelgraph board and in the heart were placed the sins common to childhood: lying, stealing, cheating, pride, selfishness, and greed.

The love of CHRIST was proclaimed, and in a few words Mrs. Warren told the story of the Cross.

Then on a large cross the sins from the heart were placed, while Mrs. Warren explained that CHRIST was bearing the punishment for our sins when He died there.

As Gus was in the very act of pulling the chair out from under the chap in front of him, the truth of the message seemed suddenly to dawn upon him. "Did that guy, JESUS, do that for me?" he asked in a husky voice. Mrs. Warren assured him that He had. "You know, I like that guy, JESUS."

His reply surprised everyone in the room including himself.

After the service, he stayed and talked with his teacher, and Mrs. Warren had the great joy of leading her greatest problem to the foot of the Cross.

Needless to say, he was no problem after that. Salvation changes behavior.

**Be a soul winner! [ 164 ]**

You teachers who are having problems with order in your classes, evaluate yourselves.

Just where is it that you are falling down?

Notice again the important "Be's"

- Be Early,
- Be Prepared,
- Be Interesting,
- Be Wise,
- Be Prayerful, and
- Be a Soul Winner.

Give your earnest attention to these points in which you are weak, and you will have the joy of seeing your discipline problems minimize in importance.

Discipline, you see, is not dependent upon having a group of well-mannered children, but in having a teacher who meets the problems before they arise, one who has always with her the "ounce of prevention." [ 165 ]

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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