



Cherokee Christian Schools

Getting to the Heart of Behavior

*20 My son, pay attention to what I say;
Listen closely to my words.*

*21 Do not let them out of your sight,
Keep them within your heart;*

*22 For they are life to those who find them,
And health to a man's whole body*

*23 Above all else, guard your heart,
For it is the wellspring of life.*

Proverbs 4:20-23

Teaching is my passion. It has been my experience that until you deal with matters of the heart, you have very little success with reading, math, or any other subject. All life deals with matters of the heart. How we think, discern, love, seek, pray, hate, grieve, know, everything that we are flows from the abundance of our heart.

I often begin my training early in the year by using the example of a tree. Living things are something that my students are familiar with and can understand. If a tree is planted by streams of water, then it has the necessary nutrients to make it thrive. This tree will grow strong and produce good fruit. We discuss what would happen to the tree if it didn't receive water and sufficient soil. I ask the children if it would be able to produce fruit. Once we have established an understanding of trees and their needs, we begin to transfer this teaching to their life in a spiritual sense. We dialogue together about how God has carefully placed them at Cherokee Christian School to learn all they can about Him and His Word. I help the

students to see that they are like the trees and the Word of God is the water that nourishes their lives. The more they listen to the Holy Spirit and apply the truths they are taught, the stronger they will become and begin to produce spiritual fruit. They often ask what spiritual fruit is. With this question, I can take them directly to God's Word in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Against such things there is no law." I always include Galatians 6:24 as well, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." Once this foundation is laid, we can begin talking about the needs of every heart.

The Bible makes a clear statement in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" This is the state that every person finds themselves born into. We all have a heart problem. It is full of sin with a great need. Mr. Lee teaches that we are all sin factories and we do what our nature tells us to do, which is to sin.

Now here is where my awesome privilege as a classroom teacher begins. I have the opportunity to teach to the heart about everyday behavior. When we have an instance where someone is unkind, impatient or lacks self control, we can talk about issues

of the heart. A tree is known by its fruit. Apple trees produce apples; peach trees produce peaches, etc. In like manner, when a person makes a claim to be a Christ-follower, another name for Christian, then the fruit of his/her life should be consistent with the fruit of the Spirit as stated in the previous verse. Too often we give lip service to being a Christian when the fruits of our lives paint a very different picture. I often remind my class of the tree analogy and ask them to examine the fruit of their lives in the classroom and at home. Is the fruit consistent with the kind of tree they are claiming to be? Do they demonstrate love, patience, and kindness, obedience to authority, and self-control?

Of course, perfection is not the goal, but we do live from our hearts. If there are great discrepancies from what we say and do, then we are back to a heart issue. Maybe we need to rethink our relationship with Jesus. Is he really Savior and Lord of our life? Maybe the issue isn't salvation, but rather we are not repenting (changing our mind about sin) or confessing (asking for forgiveness when we fail), and thus sin has a strong grip on our lives. Either way it comes back to a heart issue.

Our goal is not simply to change behavior for the sake of good behavior, but rather till the soil of each child's heart, thus, giving an opportunity through the hearing and teaching of God's Word to reach their heart and impact their behavior for now and for eternity. ~ *Glenda Marshall*