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Navigating Life – Teach Like It's Important

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mother used to." After the children left she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, and writing, and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children.

Elizabeth Silance Ballard
HomeLife Magazine, Baptist publication—1974

This TALK is dedicated to teachers, coaches, and parents tasked with teaching children during the pandemic. It is also dedicated to teachers who maintain learning for children and adults in our church via Zoom and other electronic devices.

The legend of Teddy Stoddard is a huge influence in my life as a teacher. I first heard the story while I was speaking and training for the Zig Ziglar Corporation as a much younger man. Zig read the story in some of his motivational presentations as a way of encouraging his listeners to recognize their personal potential to influence others positively.

Later, it was read by Paul Harvey on his "Rest of the Story" radio program as news. Mariam Wright Edelman, who established the Children's Defense Fund, has used the story in her speeches, and I consider Mariam a personal hero. Most speakers acknowledge the story is fiction, and they should. I believe, however, that out of great fiction, comes great truths.

Mentioning the story in collegiate Interpersonal Communications classes and Bible study is common for me. I use it to demonstrate how we influence others, good and bad, but with intent to make influences positive. I recently referenced the story in the Pastor's Tuesday Morning Bible Study and soon received inquiries from class participants. In preparation for this TEDDY TALK, it occurred to me I could simply share the story and call this TALK "completed."

Talking to myself, I said, "Hey Teddy, save some time and effort and just copy, paste and post the story to avoid having to write something new." Tempting, but the story consists of 929 words. My goal for these TALKS is to write consistently within 30 words either side of 750 words. So my advice if you want to read the story is simply Google "The

“Teddy Stoddard” story. You can read it on line, print it, send it to friends, and even ask me to send you a copy via email or post office.

Elizabeth Silance Ballard’s story about Teddy has tugged on reader’s heartstrings, brought tears, and more importantly, offered encouragement. What follows here is a brief version of what happens to Teddy and his Teacher, Mrs. Thomson.

The story introduces the reader to an elementary school teacher, who dislikes a grubby little underachiever in her class. The following is the authors description of the teacher’s feelings about the young student.

Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. But that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard. Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he didn’t play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. And Teddy could be unpleasant.

It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X’s and then putting a big “F” at the top of his papers.

Reviewing his school record, she reads his mother has died, an important introduction to the rest of the story. After a tearful hour of contrition, she decides to take him under her wing. Mrs. T recognizes her misjudgment, determines to pay special attention and give him guidance to instill him with personal pride. Because of her attention and apparent love he flourishes until and after his family moves out of town.

Unknown to his fifth-grade teacher, Teddy’s life progresses. During those life changes, he writes letters to Mrs. Thompson at unexpected times. Each letter informed her about his advancement in life and offers heartfelt gratitude for her influence on him.

For the true message in this writing, I want to let the “Teddy Stoddard Story” speak for me. I believe you searching for and reading the story and his letters will lift your spirit. Just trust me on that. Okay?

Peace always,

Ted