

Seeking the Faith Quotient

Repentance

The ability to repent is not a skill the secular world acknowledges. Adults are reluctant to admit mistakes as this is perceived to be a sign of weakness. We can be equally reluctant to encourage children to admit they are wrong as this may adversely affect their self-perception. There is also the issue of shame/guilt. Shame is not a healthy emotion for a child or an adult. Shame comes with a lack of hope that anything can be done right or that anything can get better. However, our Bible verse points out that repentance leaves no regret. By this we understand that guilt is a healthy emotion. When we do something wrong, or don't do something we ought to do, God's Law which is written in our hearts spills into our conscience and we feel guilt. Without this guilt we would not turn to our Savior for forgiveness.

Too often we are reluctant to admit to our wrong-doings or our honest mistakes because we fear shame. But what happens to mistakes if we don't admit to them? They keep happening, they get buried and fester and grow into contempt or conflict. The ability to repent is one of the biggest factors that determine spiritual and emotional health.

If I cannot admit my mistake or my sin to my colleagues then I will not be able to build healthy relationships. If I cannot admit my errors to myself I will doom myself to constant repetition of the same sins that got me into trouble before. If I cannot admit my sin to my God I will destroy my relationship with Him and eventually convince myself that I am following the Law and do not need Grace. Even in a secular sense, if one cannot admit to mistakes and survive that admittance, then emotional growth cannot happen. In addition, one tends to spend an inordinate amount of time creating a world in which one is always correct.

It is important for teachers to be consistent and complete in the teaching of repentance. Children need to be gently and firmly walked through the process. They need to understand the sin, admit they were wrong, apologize and make a plan to prevent the sin from happening, again. However, this is not the entire process. Children must also know that the Holy Spirit works in their hearts to help them to stay away from that sin and they need to know that their God and their teacher love them even when they make a mistake. This is what keeps so many people from being able to admit they are wrong. When children experience the process of repentance and forgiveness, they build pathways in the brain that become familiar roads. It won't help them enjoy repenting but knowing that forgiveness and acceptance are part of the process makes repentance much more palatable.

Being able to admit to a mistake is more than about confessing sins. This skill also applies to being wrong in any situation. It is hard for many children, and adults, to admit that they do not know the answer to something or that they did not receive a perfect score on a homework assignment. Children who cannot survive mistakes will only do what they know how to do. They will be reluctant to take a risk and try something new; they will also be less likely to learn from a wrong answer. This affects a child's ability to learn and to problem solve.

*Godly sorrow
brings repentance
that leads to salvation
and leaves no
regret.*

2 Cor. 7:10

*This is how God
showed His love
among us:
He sent His one
and only Son
into the world
that we might live
through Him.
1 John 4:9*

The first aspect of self-perception is self-concept, which is the answer to the question "Who am I?" As Christians our response to that question is "I am a child of the Heavenly Father." In this assurance we know that even when we make a mistake, or when we sin, we still belong to God. The second part of self-perception is self-esteem. This asks the question "How good am I?" In the secular sense we would define ourselves by what we do well; or by the fact that we are right. Young children can come to school with the impression that they are capable of doing anything. Then they find other children who are better at skills or can do things they cannot do. Simply telling a child that he/she is capable of doing anything does not work. The secular view of self-esteem can come crashing down very easily.

Additionally, children who develop a self-esteem that requires them to be good and right on everything have a very difficult time accepting children who are different from them. If someone has a different opinion, roots for a different team, enjoys a different activity or chooses to dress in their own style, those differences can imply that the

child with the secular view of self-esteem is wrong. These children do not tolerate differences and perceive that the other children need to be corrected or should be teased or ostracized for their differences. They will often justify the mean things they do to children who are different as being what that child deserved. In their minds they are punishing different children because they are wrong. The children with this type of self-esteem issue tend to create a "popular" power group that they can control. Oddly enough, because they are in the "popular" group they are often described by their teachers as having good social skills. The reality is that children of this type are actually very insecure in their relationships with others.

In the Christian view we answer the questions "How good am I?" with the response, "I am forgiven by my Savior." With this view of self-esteem the emphasis on our own skills or rightness is moved to the proper place. Jesus is right for us. We know that we will sin, and that we will be wrong. We also know that we will be forgiven. Knowing that we can survive being wrong and that God will help us to grow and learn through the process of sanctification, creates a strong sense of self-esteem that will promote good learning and healthy relationships. To develop this kind of strong self-perception a child needs to be taught both repentance and forgiveness. Without unconditional love, this is a useless lesson.

Group Discussion

1. Have you ever had a child who could not handle being wrong? Did this adversely affect his/her learning? Did it affect social skills development?
2. Identify the cliques in your school. Are any of them "power" groups? What happens to people outside the group? Are differenced tolerated? Are the people in the clique able to admit they are wrong?
3. How does it feel to know that your self-esteem does not depend on your abilities or performance but on Christ's forgiveness?
4. Have you repented and apologized to your class this year? If so, what has been the response?
5. Why are forgiveness and unconditional love so important to the repentance process? What are the consequences of omitting forgiveness and unconditional love?

Putting it into practice

Teachers

Think about the emphasis repentance has in your classroom management style. Include here the usual steps you walk the children through when confessing a sin to a teacher or a classmate:

What changes do you think need to be made? If your procedure gently walks children through confession, repentance, forgiveness and reassurance of love you are modeling the complete process. Is there a way to make this more obvious to your class?

Think of the children in your class who have a difficult time admitting to mistakes or who have a difficult time tolerating differences. How does this negatively affect their learning or your classroom climate?

Plan a lesson on the benefits of making mistakes. Teach that lesson and then watch for changes in behavior. Note them here:

Putting it into practice

Administrators

Some teachers admit to mistakes quite easily. Watch to see that they do this in a healthy way. Are they admitting to mistakes that are actually theirs or are they admitting to mistakes to be peacemakers?

Other teachers will never be caught admitting to a mistake. They can have many ways of deflecting blame which includes allowing others to accept responsibility. Oddly enough, these personality types can be peacemakers, also. For them they fear conflict because it may show them to be wrong.

Both of these types of people need to know about grace and forgiveness. A false sense of humility is not any healthier than arrogance. Conflict needs salt and light. Conflict needs an administrator who can bring the problem out into the open, shine a light on it, help people to accept responsibility and make a plan to change. Conflict needs the salt of forgiveness.

The first step is to be honest with yourself about your ability to admit you are wrong. As the administrator you model what you want to see your teachers practice in their classrooms. If this has been a problem for you in the past, confess this to your God and know and feel His forgiveness.

Are there any teachers on your staff who feel uncomfortable admitting mistakes to their students? Set up a time to have a heart to heart talk with these people to help them make a plan to change with the help of the Spirit. Repentance is genuinely learned by students when they see it modeled by the people they admire.

Make it a point to use the words "I forgive you" with your teachers and your students. Then watch for the reaction on their faces.

Assessing learning with follow-up discussion

These questions can be used for a follow-up discussion after teachers have completed classroom observations:

1. Share with the group the procedure you use to gently walk children through the repentance/forgiveness process. Have you made any changes over the last few weeks?
2. Give examples of how repentance and forgiveness have had a positive effect on learning and relationship development in your classroom.
3. Do you have any children who simply cannot admit to having made a mistake? Share your concerns with the staff and see if there are any suggestions for how to help this child.
4. How does the idea of repentance as an emotional skill affect your relationship with the parents of the children in your class?
5. How does healthy repentance and forgiveness affect your relationships with other staff members?