

“Castle Hills and The Heart Issues: More Than Appearance”

An unsure young mother finds a word of encouragement and understanding from a kindergarten teacher... A troubled teen receives counsel on finding the will of God at a critical crossroad in life... A third-grade student asks Jesus into his heart after morning Bible class... A high school history teacher lights up with a spontaneous illustration to apply the Scripture to the pages of the textbook... A secondary principal prays with a student after a discipline issue is resolved... A passionate coach humbly apologizes to the team for “losing his cool” during that tense moment in last night’s game...A group of teachers assembles for devotions before school to gather strength for the day...

Occurrences like these endear people to Christian education. These are the *Heart Issues* that take place within our school that make us distinctive. These are the opportunities teachers experience that make all the effort and sacrifice in serving in a Christian school worth it all.

“Watch over your heart with all diligence; for from it flow the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

Families choose Christian education on the basis of many issues facing the home today. Not surprisingly, many people walk through our doors for the first time on the basis of *externals*—academic reputation, extracurricular opportunities, standardized test scores, facilities, athletic programs, dress code, or other issues. These external distinctives are important; however, Christian schools retain families on the basis of the way we address the *heart issues* in their children’s lives. What issues are at the heart of what we do? Though *externals* tend to draw people to an institution, the *heart* of the school, below the surface, is the real reason for our success in maintaining a long-term relationship in educating children and enriching their lives.

A Heart to Change the World

Christian schools are more about transformation than information. We lead students to know Christ and make Him known. Ultimately, our goal must be to change our world by changing young lives. Like God spoke concerning David, we must remember to affirm to our students that “*God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (I Samuel 16:7b). Although we may desire to produce successful executives, doctors, pastors, engineers, and business people, our higher purpose is to lead students to give their lives to greater causes. Our focus is to inspire students and alumni to serve their communities and transform the culture for Jesus Christ. Eagle students become servant-leaders who make a difference in the world. A great education leads students to a personal commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

A Heart to Create a Partnership with the Home

Christian schools are special because the institution is an extension of the Christian home. In reality, we have the children for almost two-thirds of the day for nearly three-fourths of the year. We know parents are extremely challenged in our generation to successfully raise godly kids. Teachers offer advice, assistance, and encouragement to support the parents. Families live better lives when our actions build a solid bridge supporting their dreams for growing godly young men and women. We empower parents by communicating and operating in a way that shows we are an extension of their authority in their children's lives. The Latin phrase, *in loco parentis*, means "in the place of parents." That is the teacher's location when standing before the students – we are serving each family in the place that God gave them to educate and prepare their children for life.

A Heart to Develop Servant Leaders

Leadership is not as much a position as it is influence in life. If we are to produce world changers, our students must learn to lead. Jesus was clear on this, "Leadership is valid only as it serves the interest of others. Self-serving leaders may achieve worldly success – yet they live empty, hollow lives." It is a central goal of our school to teach principles of leadership, to be an example in modeling that leadership, and to provide specific opportunities to develop leadership skills. Every aspect of campus life should include a serving component Christ and others. We envision every student leaving Castle Hills equipped to lead and serve after graduation.

A Heart to Affirm Value and Worth

Much in educational psychology can be critiqued in light of popular views on building children's self-esteem. However, the Christian school has a tremendous responsibility to create an atmosphere that affirms the value and worth of each child in Christ. A specific effort should be made to identify, cultivate, and document the gifts, abilities, affinities and talents of each student. No matter a child's ability or disability, his report card average, or even his behavior, a Christian school student should always be valued on the basis of being: (1) a special person whom God created in His image; (2) a person that God loves and sent His Son to redeem; and finally, (3) a person for whom God has a wonderful plan. All relationships in the school family should be built around communication that affirms value, worth, and a godly self-image.

A Heart to Discipline with Dignity

Blessed is the Christian school teacher who has come to see discipline as an *opportunity* rather than an *interruption*. Often, students receive more from our correction than our directions. We must believe that every student is providentially placed in our classroom, and that we are his teacher by God's design and specific plan. We should anticipate those inevitable failures and trouble spots as opportunities to *positively* shape each student's life.

Christian school discipline should demonstrate value for the child's person, while dealing proactively with his behavior. We are firm in discipline, yet still affirming. We must never use shame, guilt, or intimidation as our tools to shape behavior. The dignity of the child is to be preserved in discipline if we ever hope to produce independent, self-disciplined individuals.

A Heart to Demonstrate Life Lessons

The greatest lessons being taught on our campus today are communicated through the lifestyle of the faculty. Our actions and reactions show students our true character and values. Teachers' **greatest lessons** must be confirmed by the **greatest lives**. Constantly, we must remind ourselves as teachers that we are "the living curriculum" in the classroom. Administrators must place as much focus on developing the personal lives of the faculty as is placed on developing the curriculum guides and school programs. Teachers are the most effective visual aids of the character we hope to develop in students' lives. As it is said, real "character is better caught than taught."

A Heart to Pursue Excellence

Whatever goals surface in a given school year, whatever programs make the drawing board, whether they are curricular or co-curricular – all pursuits should be initiated and maintained with no other target than excellence. Many things would be better not done at all than done half-heartedly. When too many areas are approached without passion, the atmosphere of the school declines toward mediocrity. A school's leadership must keep the student's performance, growth and development, as well as school programs on a pathway toward excellence. The pursuit of a culture of excellence must define the atmosphere of our school. We must choose our plans and programs wisely, in order "*that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.*" (Philippians 1:10, NASB)

A Heart to Value the Soul

The highest goal in a Christian school must be the salvation of our students. Many schools take for granted the spiritual condition of the heart of a child. Simply because a child is growing up in a Christian home and weekly attends an evangelical church, does not remove our responsibility to introduce the Savior to him. Great teachers have a heart for the Great Commission in their classroom relationships. Are our students individually and personally encountered by the staff about their eternity? Imagine the shame in having a child for twelve or thirteen years of life and never having received a personal gospel witness. If we miss any *heart issue*, let this not be the one.

A Heart to Develop a Christian Worldview

We must always keep at the forefront of staff meetings, in-services, and faculty discussions the joy and great value of applying the Word of God to our subjects. Every subject is to be viewed and presented through the lens of Scripture. Teachers should design illustrations, probing questions, testimonies, and group exercises that reveal to students God's relationship to the subject. This is "where the real action is" in the Christian classroom. Biblical integration and the development of the Christian mind must be: (1) planned in curriculum development, (2) discussed in our priorities, and (3) affirmed in our teacher evaluations.

A Christian worldview is one of the central outcomes we keep ever before us. Our goal must preeminently be for students to discern an invisible kingdom in a visible world. *Changed lives* are always preceded by *changed minds*. "For as a man thinks in his heart; so is he." (Proverbs 23:7)

Heart Issues: Look Below the Surface

Schools must set out a planned program to identify, develop, cultivate, and communicate the *heart issues* that will define the school culture. The board and administration should always place the focus of the school constituency on those values that matter most. Teachers who demonstrate dedication to the *heart issues* in the classroom should be acknowledged and affirmed. Parents should be consistently reminded of the core values we choose to shape the culture of the school. We should celebrate success in those areas with a greater vigor than we give to *external* distinctives.



Christian schools that focus on *externals* are like **ice cubes**. Their influence will not last long when the white, hot fire of trials or temptations come to a student's life. Athletic programs, academic reputation, dress code, facilities, and other external indicators are important priorities. They each have their place, but they do not, by themselves, produce destinies.

Christian schools that maintain focus on the *heart issues* are like **icebergs**. Their influence will last long after the heat of the warmest day. These schools have their *externals* together, yet they are "only the tip of the iceberg." The great substance of the Christian school is below the surface.

In conclusion, what lies beneath is what commands respect in our school. We must attack the sin of pride that tempts us to elevate externals above their appropriate place in our priorities. The real reasons for success will never change. When students' lives are shaped by our commitment to the heart issues, we receive the blessing of God and the long-term commitment of parents. If our great hope is to produce students who serve their communities and transform their culture, our attention must remain on the *heart issues*.

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