

The Courage of a Teacher

When you think of career fields that call for courage, jobs that may call for loss of life are most often thought of. So the career fields of firemen, policemen or the military are jobs that involve a great deal of courage that we cannot discount. Teachers, by contract don't really think of themselves as strong or brave individuals compared to these more obvious choices. But it takes a tremendous courage to be a teacher in ways that it is worthwhile to acknowledge as we are doing here today.

The courage of a teacher goes beyond just being willing to stand up in front of 20-30 wiggly children every day and try to guide them through their studies. Of course, standing up in front of that kind of crowd does take a lot of guts. Children are notoriously unpredictable crowd. And while the chances you will see physical harm speaking to a classroom of youngsters are small, it is a public speaking nightmare and facing that kind of nightmare takes a real courage not many need on a daily basis.

Going into teaching as a lifestyle choice is also a courageous decision. Teaching is well known to be both a low paying position and one that affords little thanks to the teacher. Teachers are often the target of attacks by parents all the while they are enduring considerable sacrifices just for the privilege of teaching young people. Many times budgets for schools are cut so that class sizes swell and a teacher who wants nothing more than to be able to mentor and love a small group of children finds a class room of twice that size put before him or her to teach. Or the supplies budget for schools gets slashed so many times teachers will go out with their own money and buy the classroom supplies they need so the young can be educated and the classroom can function despite these problems.

There is an emotional risk that teachers openly embrace every year they take on a new class. A lot more goes on between a teacher and a class of students as that teacher puts out instruction to make those children better people. A bond and a love develops that is valuable to the educational process. This affection often carries on into childhood for the children who will speak with fondness of that favorite teacher decades ago. But for the teacher, as soon as that bond becomes mature at the end of a year of teaching, those children move on and they must prepare their hearts for a new set of kids in the fall. That emotional roller coaster is a wrenching experience that teachers embrace to be able to continue doing the one thing they love to do which is to teach.

This is not to say that there are no physical dangers or acts of heroism that teachers often exhibit when the need arises. In any urban schools, courageous

teachers face injury or worse from students who are gang members who threaten them with dire injuries for being there to do the one thing they are called to do which is to teach. Further, we have documented cases where school shootings put students in danger that teachers put themselves in harms way and even lost their lives to protect their students. We saw this at Columbine and at other crisis situations as well. And that kind of willingness to become a martyr to save a student is a classic example of what it means to be courageous.

As you prepare your career path toward becoming a professional teacher, you may not have ever thought of yourself as courageous. But because of the sacrifices you are about to make and because the only real reward of being a teacher is the joy of imparting knowledge to young students, there is a nobility to what you are about to do that is worthy of recognition and honor. And while society will not necessarily take the time to give honor to the courage of teachers, its a good thing when we do that so it is documented here that teachers are truly a courageous lot and we can all be glad for their influence on our children's lives and on society in general.

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