

The Ten Commandments of Teaching Students With Special Needs

Joyce Inouye M.A.Ed
Christian Educational Therapy

Introduction

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to Me and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them. Mark 10:13-16

"Special need" students estimated by some at 20 percent are students who have school learning difficulties and differences for which there is no apparent explanation. These difficulties and differences cannot be attributed to a low IQ, or to a physical, emotional or neuro-motor problem. Yet "special need" students find difficulty in learning within the curriculum expectations in school and on a daily basis. Within all school systems, private and public, every classroom has "special need" students. Whether the difficulty is short-term, long-term or lifelong, this difficulty exists. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, "Come onto Me, all who are weak, weary and heavy-laden, gentle and I, humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your soul". Our challenge as Christian administrators, teachers and parents, is to help the "special need" student "find rest for their soul" by growing in their relationship in Jesus Christ as we build upon their area(s) of weaknesses. It is vital that we encourage them in their identity of the "Truth and Promises" God has given to them as their Creator, Mastermaker and Savior. The "Ten Commandments of Teaching Students with Special Needs" are a "tool and weapon" for the battles you are facing. It is my prayer that as you read these commandments, alongside listening to the audiotape from the website www.ChildD.org that you will become empowered, inspired and directed.

❖ **Commandment I—Thou shall know that this student is placed in your classroom because of God's divine plan.**

"For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

Placement of students in your classroom is not an administrative decision, one by referral, or by intellect. Placement is because of God's design. Your students are in your life for your refinement, just as you are in their lives for their refinement. God is providing opportunities for growth and refinement for both of you. Are you willing to be further refined into what God wants you to become through this student?

❖ **Commandment II—You shall have no other resource or strategy before Me.**

"...not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." Zachariah 4:6

Gaining awareness of your student's "special needs" is a necessary and powerful tool. Wanting quick answers to solve concerns may seem enticing, yet when "speed" comes versus accuracy our actions can lead to consumption of time, emotion and finances. We must remember that it is not by might, knowledge, credentials, or curriculum, but by His Holy Spirit that we can not only teach this student, but actually reach them in life influencing ways.

❖ **Commandment III—Thou shall not diagnose a student without the use of a multidisciplinary team effort.**

*"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel."
Proverbs 1:5*

It is important to get the confidential opinion of the school administrators and other professionals who know this student and have worked with them. Working together as a " Multidisciplinary Team" allows an avenue where strengths and weaknesses can be confirmed. Some students may have outside school help, and discovering this information and asking them to join into the "Multidisciplinary Team" for this student will be extremely helpful. The "Team" effort lessens the possibility of a misdiagnosis and misdirection because many special needs characteristics fall under an "umbrella" of related symptoms. Having more information regarding the special needs of your students will provide accuracy in how to minister and accommodate for their needs.

❖ **Commandment IV—Thou shall not discourage any "excitement" within your student's heart.**

*"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."
Matthew 18:10*

Jesus delights in our excitement like a father as he watches his child ride a bike, pick a flower or laugh with joy. Will our students feel the love of Jesus by the way we listen to them, instruct them or encourage them? What about those times when our patience runs thin and we are not as willing or as flexible as they need. Will our ways make them feel like we "despise" them for bothering us and causing more work? Do we value the exciting times our student's share only when it is convenient for us?

❖ **Commandment V—Thou shall give thyself grace.**

*"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness' most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me."
2 Corinthians 12:9*

Teaching student's with "special needs" can challenge our abilities. It can bring the best out in us, as well as our worst. At times this becomes an emotional "roller-coaster" that can be discouraging and allow doubt and insecurities to surface. Today, few private Christian schools have "special need" programs for those who learn differently. Today, special need students are entering into your classroom. Yet, your students are in a Christian school because you seek to teach them. God creates a "special need" program within you because you care. Because of your love, this student is in a school that provides hope and identity in Jesus Christ versus one's accomplishments in the grades. How can you not give yourself grace?

❖ **Commandment VI—Honor your Administration and those placed in positions above you.**

*"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority..."
1 Peter 2:13*

God will place others in authority over you. It is biblical to honor them and be obedient to their commands. Your submission to the authorities in your life, whether you agree with them or not, will become a mighty example of trust to your students. Honor your authorities, and know faithfully that then you are honoring God who truly is the one in control. Remember to ask God how you can support your administrators or authorities, and pray for their leadership.

❖ **Commandment VII—Thou shall know the difference between "challenging" your special needs student versus asking them for something outside of their abilities.**

"...and that they will truly know Christ. Not only is He the key to God's mystery, but all wisdom and knowledge are hidden away in Him." Colossians 2:2-3

God allows us to experience only that which He knows we can handle. We trust that in all situations, no matter how difficult, God has given us His promise that we will survive. Can our student's have this kind of faith in us? Can they trust our discernment of their challenges, so that they will persevere versus give up? Observable signs such as an eagerness to learn, willing participation and happy students versus those who withdraw, are absence, and apathetic are visible signs in which we can discern whether a challenge is appropriate or not. What do you see when you teach your students?

❖ **Commandment VIII—Thou shall recognize how a student learns best, and teach through this way.**

"I will give thanks to Thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well." Psalm 139:14

Jesus was a multi-sensory God. He uses every modality to teach and reach, to minister and touch. Not only did He use styles of learning, or multiple intelligences, He met others where they were most comfortable and most familiar. Teach using a student's abilities, hobbies, interests, work pace, attention span and temperament. Find out what your student likes, their joys, fears, hopes and dreams and use them in your lessons. Attention, understanding, esteem, desire and memory will be heightened as you seek to personalize the lessons you teach. In making your lessons personalized positively, your student will not only learn what you are teaching better, but remember what you did the rest of their lives.

❖ **Commandment IX—Thou shall teach what is necessary, not just what is convenient.**

"Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe your commands." Psalm 119:66

Are you teaching what is necessary? Are there things that can be omitted, changed, or re-done? The world our students live in is technical, interactive and quick in speed. Time management, organizational skills, study skills, speaking abilities, listening abilities, reading comprehension, social skills, sensitivity, discernment, prayer and applying God's Word in one's life all are vital and necessary. Knowledge of the tools of technology such as the computer, calculator, organizational pilot, digital phone and keyboard are empowering. Build upon these skills, and discern why you teach what you do. We want our students to succeed in our classrooms but more importantly we want them to succeed in the life outside of our classrooms.

❖ **Commandment X—Thou shall teach your students about Me, so no other God's will be before Me.**

"...You shall love your Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27

God has given you the greatest opportunity to give the greatest lesson in your student's lives. This lesson is to teach your students about God and build their knowledge of who He is to them, and who they are to Him. In knowing God, they will have God's perspective about themselves and their personal lives.