

## Teach 4 the Heart Podcast Transcript

### Episode 337—My Students Think I'm Mean. Now What?

Linda Kardamis (00:01.294)

My students say, I mean, what on earth am I supposed to do? Well, don't panic. This is actually a fairly normal complaint and we have some ideas that I think will be a huge help for you. Welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. Why are we here? Because we don't believe that our spiritual walk and teaching profession should exist in two separate domains. Rather, the hope we have in Christ should change how we approach everything, not just at home, but at school as well.

So join us as we explore both the spiritual and practical sides of key teaching challenges, integrating them together so we can succeed at teaching, glorify God, and make a lasting difference in our students' hearts and lives. So has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been surprised to hear students say that you're a mean teacher? Maybe you're worried, am I actually mean? Well, let's think through this together. And we're gonna kind of start by actually considering

taking an honest look and saying, okay, let's make sure that we're not being mean. Is there anything that we do need to change about the way we're interacting with our students? We're gonna start there and then we're gonna tackle, okay, so if we're not being mean or, you know, let's say that this is an unbased accusation, how do we handle that? And how do we move forward without getting frustrated? Okay, so let's dive in. We're gonna start by talking about step number one,

make sure you're not being mean, okay? So, I think the immediate thing if someone says, you're so mean, or, you know, gets back to us that someone thinks we're being mean, is to just stop our defenses and just say, I'm not mean. But we do want to just give ourselves a little bit of an honest look before we move any further and just ask, am I mean ever? And also, could it be?

objectively coming across as mean, even if I don't intend it. Now, there's a very key difference here because kids can sometimes interpret something as mean that is really, really not. Firmness is not meanness. So in other words, holding them accountable, not letting them off the hook, that's not mean. That's caring for them. Okay, but they might interpret it as mean. Okay, and we're going to dive more into that nuance in a little bit.

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But recognizing if you're being firm, if you're holding your line, that's not mean. But if you're losing your temper and yelling at your students, that can be mean, right? Or if you are uncaring in the way you interact, if

you come across as like, I don't care about your problems, that's not my problem, that can also come across as mean, even if you don't intend it to be. So I think particularly looking out for, am I losing my temper and like, responding in with like angry emotion instead of with calm, then I might actually be being mean without intending to be. So that's one trouble spot to look at. I acting? Am I responding forcefully in emotion? And then secondly, am I being, am I not being empathetic? Am I kind of coming across as with that, you know, that it's, you know, it's kind of as not my problem type of attitude. Okay. Now,

Once again, important distinction here, and we're going to talk about this more. We absolutely need to hold our students accountable. And we shouldn't just let them off the hook because they have a, you know, have some type of reason or excuse all the time. There are times when we should, but for the most part, we need to hold them accountable, and it is their problem. But we can respond with.

empathy and kindness at the same time we hold them accountable. that's number two. If you're realizing, maybe I do come across as mean from time to time without meaning to. Number two, we need to prioritize kindness and the fruit of the spirit. Let me share a couple of verses with you and then I want to talk about what it looks like to be kind and firm without being mean, okay?

So, Colossians 3, 12 to 15. I love these verses. I remind them myself every time I'm like, well, I try to remind myself every time I'm frustrated and like wanting to respond in frustration. So it says, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if you have a grievance against another.

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just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. And above all this, put on love, which binds us together in perfect unity. And then Galatians 5, 22 to 23, you know this one. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law. So I bring these.

Versus up, to make the case for kindness, okay? God doesn't really give us the option to stop being kind. He tells us that this is the fruit of Him. We need to be kind and have this fruit, this compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, as it says in Colossians. The fruit of the Spirit, peace.

Patience self-control these same words coming up in multiple places because it's important That's what the Holy Spirit living in us and pouring out of us looks like okay? But that does not mean as I said before that we don't hold students accountable and that we just let them get away with stuff okay, we absolutely need to be both kind and firm and in doing so we

show the love of Christ, both by our demeanor and by holding them accountable, which is what they need. So let me give you a concrete example. Let's say a student doesn't have their homework, you know, because,

and they have this reason, that's like, it's, you know, it's a legit thing that happened, but it's not the type of extenuating circumstance that would excuse or give extra time. It's one of those, you you needed to be more responsible type situations, okay? You needed to plan ahead. You shouldn't have waited till the last moment.

So we can say, we want to respond with empathy and with kindness while keeping the ownership on them. know, so we might say, wow, that is really sounds like a tough circumstance. But remember, we award full credit to work that's turned in on time. So I hope you can give it tomorrow because we do award partial credit to things turned in the next day. Okay, so do you see how the way I said that had

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empathy and compassion. And Love & Logic actually recommends using just a go-to empathetic phrase or sound. So it can be, that sounds tough. That phrase shows, I do empathize. That was a tough situation. I get it. But, and then sticking to the policy or sticking to the expectation or in some cases giving the consequence or whatever needs to happen. But it's done in an attitude of kindness while

being firm and not being a pushover, holding that line that we've set. So I hope this is making sense so far. Right now we're still in the category of just kind of making sure that if students say that we're mean, we wanna make sure we're not being mean, okay? And the answer is not to start letting everything go. That is not what's actually kind. That's not what your students actually need. The answer is to have a kind demeanor, to talk with humility and kindness and gentleness and patience.

while we hold them accountable. And I think that is a powerful combination because students can see that we care, but yet we're not letting them off the hook. And that's really, really powerful. Whereas on the other hand, if we are kind of flying off the handle and kind of giving them a reason to be annoyed, an extra reason to be kind of annoyed because of the way we're talking to them, that can be distracting to them and it can distract them from the lesson that we're trying to teach them. Okay, so so far to recap.

We said we wanna make sure that we're actually not being mean, that we're not responding in frustration or kind of have this lack of empathy. And number two, we wanna prioritize kindness and the fruit of the spirit, humility, gentleness, patience, all of those things in actions while definitely continuing to hold our students accountable, okay? So at this point, let's assume that either you've been doing this all along or you are gonna kind of tweak a little bit and that's where you are.

firm, but kind. I'll tell you what, you might still get students saying that you're mean, okay? And that might be where you're listening right now going, yeah, I'm doing this, Linda, I'm doing the best. I mess up sometimes. And by the way, we're all gonna mess up. You just need to apologize. And it's okay, we all do. It's a good opportunity for them to see adults mess up and apologize too. So, you know, if you're doing your best at all of that and students are still saying you're mean, well, what do we do about this? That's not very fair.

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No, it's not fair. We have to recognize that kids are not always going to understand. So number three is interact with confidence. Okay. Don't let it get to you if kids unfairly judge your responses. Okay. If you are not being mean, if you are being kind and firm and they still say you're being mean or think you're being mean, you need to recognize they don't have the maturity to see what you're doing.

the fact that you still gave them the detention or you didn't give them the grade they wanted or whatever it is where you held the line and you basically prioritize, I'm gonna teach you the lesson that you need to learn rather than just kind of letting it go and missing that learning opportunity that you need. So you've actually prioritized their long-term wellbeing over their immediate happiness. And that's not always gonna make them happy because literally you just prioritize their long-term wellbeing over their immediate happiness. So they are not.

going to be happy. And they might lash out and say, you're so mean, but you know you're not being mean. You are caring for them. You are prioritizing what is best for them over what's going to make them happy in the moment. And so you can be confident in that. long as you have the interaction, you demonstrated the fruit of the spirit and you were kind and empathetic and respectful in your interaction with them and you didn't fly off the handle or lose your temper or have no empathy, then you know I am not being mean. They just don't understand.

And Lord willing, one day they will. When they look back, they'll have a different perspective. And so you can move forward with confidence. And honestly, that's like a water off a duck's back type moment. Just don't even let those words sink in. Just recognize they don't get it. And that's OK. They're young. They're immature. Whatever. From K all the way through 12, right? They're young and they're immature, and they don't get it. And I'm going to trust God to do that work. And maybe one day they'll look back on this and realize, you know what?

Mrs. Cardemus wasn't actually mean. She actually really cared about me and I actually really appreciate that. But even if they never do, you know before God that you're doing the right thing. So number three, interacting with confidence, recognizing kids aren't always gonna understand when we prioritize what they need over what they want. And then number four, I think this is also a key, is build relationship capital. What I mean by that is,

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there are going to be these moments where we have to have these hard conversations with students, where we have to hold them accountable, where we're gonna prioritize the lesson they need to learn over what they want to have happen in the moment. And those will go so much better and there'll be a better chance of the student learning the lesson if they know ahead of time, going into the conversation that we care about them. And so,

Any investment that we can make into building relationships with our students, into showing them that we care about them, that is really helpful. Is it going to prevent them from ever saying you're mean? No. Once again, remember, the benchmark of success is not that no one ever accuses you of being mean. Sometimes that means you're doing just what you're supposed to. But once again, we want them, we do want them to understand that we care, right?

And so investing that relationship capital is just so valuable. And in particular, with the students that you know you're gonna have to have these conversations and maybe a bunch of them, sometimes there's this analogy given of like a bank account where if you're making deposits is when you show people those relationship capital, you're making deposits by showing students you care and you love them and you're interested in them. And then those moments of discipline are like withdrawals. And there's this analogy where

If there is nothing in there, if you're having to make so many withdraws from the account because there's lots of moments of discipline with that student, there needs to be more in there. You have to kind of keep replenishing it. Otherwise those checks are going to bounce as it were. And that's kind of sometimes when you get those really poor reactions from a student. So kind of just continuing to invest in them. And one strategy that I absolutely love and we can link to it.

in the article for this episode at [teach4theheart.com/337](https://teach4theheart.com/337). Dave Stewart talks about moments of genuine connection with students. It's this strategy he uses where you just kind of keep track of all your different students and you just have this moment where you kind of tell them, you show them that you care about them by just making a little brief statement about how you see something in them or something that they're interested in outside of school. So that's just like a one, a really simple relationship.

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building capital that helps them see, care, my teacher cares about me. Another similar concept strategy is called the two by 10. This is where you might identify a particularly troublesome student and that you need to really invest more than just an occasional or the amount that you might do for every other student. And so for two minutes a day for 10 days, that's where two by 10 comes from, you just talk to that student about things unrelated to school.

And if you can't get two full minutes, because you have 100 students, 30 seconds is valuable too. So the idea though is I'm going to talk to the student every day for two weeks, 10 days, and just kind of try to make that connection and build up that relationship capital a little bit. So I think that's something good to always have in mind, to always be seeking to build that relationship capital, take advantage of every opportunity you have to show students that you care about them, that you do love them. And then sometimes these intentional strategies can really help take that to the next level.

So I hope that this has been helpful to think through with you. Once again, recapping, we wanna first of all, make sure we're not being mean, not flying off the handle, not reacting with frustrating emotions. Number two, we wanna prioritize kindness and fruit of the spirit while we hold students accountable. Number three, we wanna interact with confidence, understanding that kids don't always understand why we make the decisions that we make. Often if we're doing something that's for their ultimate good, but not gonna make them happy in the meantime, they might not understand that and that's

And then number four, build relationship capital. Invest in your students, in your relationship with them so that they do know that you care about them. I hope that this episode has been helpful for you. I want to mention a couple resources that might be additional help. If you do feel like you're struggling with classroom management, if you're saying, Linda, okay, you're saying to be firm and kind, but I don't know what to say. I don't know how do I hold students accountable? I feel like they kind of are running over me and I don't know what to do.

I would love to help you. have a free training called How to Reduce Disruption so you can actually teach. That's at [teach4theheart.com/free](https://teach4theheart.com/free) . Or if you want to jump right to our classroom management program where we help you step by step, put together a classroom management plan, you can go to [teach4theheart.com/cm101](https://teach4theheart.com/cm101) and use the code podcast20 to save 20%.

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Another thing, if you're struggling with discouragement, if you're feeling like, am so frustrated by my students not understanding, I'm feeling discouraged, and I could use help, just like I need to stop feeling defeated, then we would love to invite you to join us in our new program that just kicked off, but you are totally welcome to join at any point, and that is called Hope Renewed, where we help you stop feeling defeated and face each day with hope. You can get info about that at [teach4theheart.com/hoperenewed](https://teach4theheart.com/hoperenewed) . And once again, you can use the code podcast20 to save 20 % on your enrollment.

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