



## **MIND AND HEART**

*A Podcast by Trinity Christian School*

**Ep 4 | SPECIAL: Thanks and Giving Part 2 with Edwin Miller**

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### **Jo Wilbur:**

Hi everyone. It's your host, Jo Wilbur here. I am so excited for you to listen to the amazing interview I had with Edwin Miller. He basically walks us through just an incredible life journey from his humble beginnings as a poor child in a small Georgia town to the successful businessman and devout follower of Christ that he is today. Now you will hear him become emotional and even tear up at points as he recounts some very painful and some very touching moments in his story; particularly the impact that one anonymous gift had in the trajectory of his life. So without further ado, enjoy the interview.

Welcome to Mind and Heart, a podcast by Trinity Christian School in Fairfax, Virginia. In this space, we explore our calling to raise up the next generation to be salt and light in the world.

### **Jo Wilbur:**

Hello and welcome to Mind and Heart, I'm your host, Jo Wilbur. And today I'm sitting down with Gemspring Capital Operating Executive Edwin Miller. Edwin is a growth, turnaround, and restructuring C-level technology executive, the author of two books, and a five-time CEO with a reputation for tactfully leading and transforming businesses into profitable organizations. He's also a former Trinity parent and the husband of our own Assistant Head of School, Kim Miller. Edwin, thank you so much for being with us today. If you want to take the opportunity to tell us a little bit more about yourself, if there's anything I left out there.

### **Edwin Miller:**

Well, I'm a father of three and I am married to Kimberly Miller (what I call her). I love playing the guitar and love being with my family.



**Jo Wilbur:**

Awesome. You are obviously an incredibly gifted and successful businessman with a beautiful family. And I think for some people it might be easy to look at someone like you in your position and assume that you were handed things on a silver platter or that you were born into a position of privilege, but I understand you didn't necessarily come from a particularly wealthy or successful family background. Could you tell us a little bit about your background and your upbringing?

**Edwin Miller:**

No silver spoon for sure. I was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, but moved to Georgia with my parents and grew up in the house that my father's father grew up in; very small, much like a shanty. You could hear banjos playing for the most part. So very impoverished early on, but over the years,

my father built a retail store, a small package store/gas station. So by the time I was in eighth or ninth grade, we were doing okay, right. Not great, but, I pumped gas in the summertime 80/85 hours a week. And during the school year, I would miss 32 days of school a year because at 33 you got held back. I grew up working. But the good news about that is I knew more about business by my freshman year of college than most people could ever imagine. It was really a blessing, but we grew up pretty hard, pretty tough life.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Hmm. And I understand you ended up through a certain set of circumstances going to a Christian school. Is that correct?

**Edwin Miller:**

Yeah. So let's see. I wanna say it was my seventh-grade year. We asphalted the parking lot and my dad let me put in a basketball hoop. Wouldn't let me play any little league sports, never got to play any baseball, any football, anything like that, because we were working. But he put a basketball hoop in and I played basketball between pumping gas. I'd shoot basketball for 14, 15 hours a day in the summertime. I can't remember how I got recruited to Athens Christian, but I ended up going to Athens Christian School and they had a really great athletics program. The state champs in football, baseball, basketball, et cetera, always in the top two or three in the state of Georgia- barely made the team my 10th grade year, but started as a junior and a senior.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Can you tell us a little bit more about your experience there at the Christian school?

**Edwin Miller:**

I wasn't saved when I went there, my sophomore year. It was interesting because the retail store was actually a package store, a beer and liquor store with a gas station. We made a lot of money because we sold on Sundays and that was a cash business. And so the thought of me being a Christian, and going back and working at the package store was kind of...it bothered my father quite a bit.

But, I got into a fight. I got into a lot of fights. It was usually attacking the bullies, that's kind of how my heart was. The seniors on the team didn't take kindly to a sophomore coming in and competing for a job. And I got into two fights, unfortunately (in the first... I want to say the first month of practice) with seniors and I lost handsomely by the way. It was a good, good bottom kicking. But I ended up in Miss Cummings office, which was the headmaster's wife, a couple times. The second time I was in her office, I came to the Lord, which was an amazing... I came to know the Lord...which was an amazing experience. I remember getting on the bus to ride home that afternoon and telling the bus driver...and I remember going home that afternoon and telling my parents... that experience was amazing.



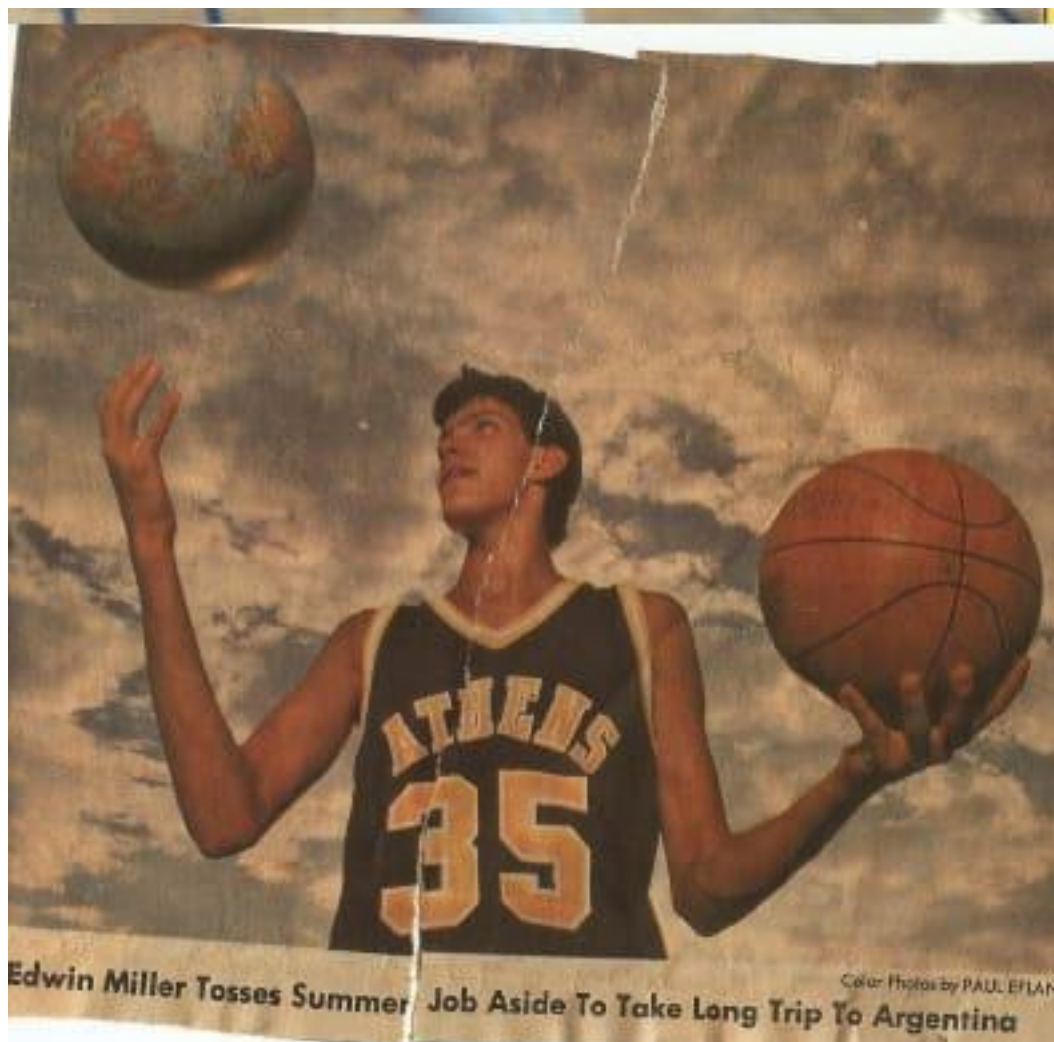
**Jo Wilbur:**

Wow. Yeah. That is not the experience you'd expect when being called into the principal's office. So you leave that day, really a changed person. Now you're walking with the Lord. What happens from there?

**Edwin Miller:**

By my junior year, I was starting point guard, which was an awesome time. And again, I mentioned we won states, which was really fun. My senior year though, my parents decided they didn't want to pay for me to go to the school. It wasn't that terribly expensive, but it was private tuition. And again, it wasn't like we had a ton of money. So I had to tell my coach, I wouldn't be able to come back. He called me back, I want to say the next day, and had an anonymous donor, who was going to pay for my... he called me back the next day and had an anonymous donor who was going to pay for my school. So I got to go finish my senior year there.

That summer, right before that all happened, I went to Liberty's basketball camp and was MVP of that camp and an All-Star. There were USA Scouts there for the USA private school basketball team. I got invited to play on that, and again, somebody donated the money for me to go... for me to go play overseas. So I spent the summer, seven weeks of the summer, going into my senior season, playing USA basketball in Argentina and Brazil. Great experience. Came back, had a great senior year, didn't win States (which was a bummer), but went to States and got recruited to go play college basketball. I did one year at Covenant College on a scholarship, transferred, and played a year at Georgia. I wanted to play Division I.



And unfortunately when I went back to Georgia, I was having to pump gas at night. So I was getting up at six in the morning, going to practice, going to classes, going to lunch, going to practice or lifts and driving back and helping my parents close the store. It was important because probably the most robbed retail outlet is a liquor and beer store and gas station. Because you get cash on hand. To leave your mother and your father alone was not good. My brother and I were typically, one of us was there. You had to be. And one of the things that happened during that time, which has really helped me in businesses because you're on high alert all the time with that kind of cash. You see everything. I could tell you... if I saw a car three times in one day, how fast was it moving, was it loaded down? Was there a lot of people in the car? I mean, I just knew. And the cool thing about that is in a business, you also had to have that kind of "spidey" instinct. You've got to know quickly. So again, I think it was a blessing...while very hard, such a blessing in my life. I decided that at Georgia, it was probably in the spring, I told the coach I was going to transfer. I didn't know where I was going to transfer, but I couldn't go to college and live the life I was living with the store. And the day after I told the coach I was going to transfer, I broke my shooting hand- fourth metacarpal- in a pick-up game with the football team. And so, hand broken, can't shoot, signing season comes and goes, and I have nowhere to go. I've told George I'm transferring.

#### **Edwin Miller:**

So basketball's over. And I remember laying in the bed one night, just praying out loud, "Lord, just get me out of here." Because it was...when I say it was hard... it was brutal. I'd broken my hand,

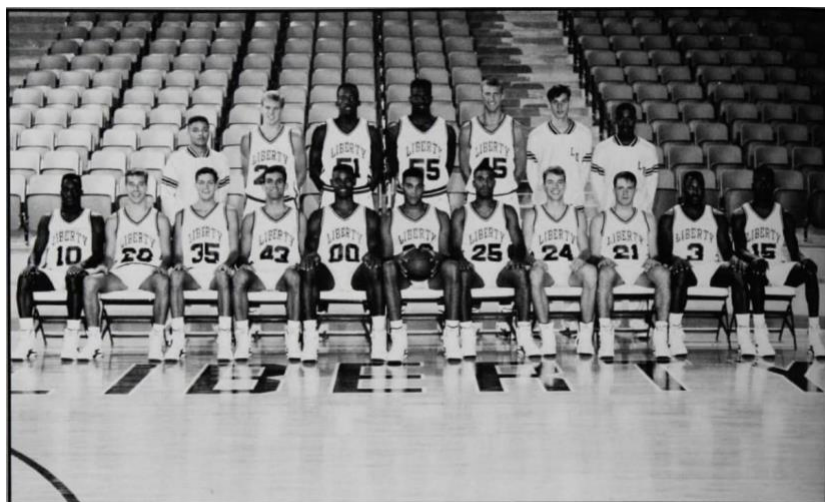


signing season come and gone, and I remember laying in the bed, praying, "Lord, just get me out of here." And that next day I went to join the Marine Corps and the intake Captain looked at me and said, "Why don't you go sleep on it? Make sure you want to do this." I gave it a couple of days. And I remember being at the store one day. We had a pay phone in the store, we didn't have a regular phone. And when I say store, think if you saw it, you'd speed up; bars on the window, steel door, cinderblock building tough. The phone rang. And the crazy thing about this is this coach had called my home before getting the number to the store.

And it was Coach Meyer from Liberty University. And he had called my high school coach saying, "What happened to Edwin Miller? Where is he?" My high school coach was a great mentor to me, and gave Coach Meyer my home number. He called my mother and my mother, by the grace of God, gave him the phone number of the business. And so I picked up the phone and it's Coach Meyer. And he said, "Edwin, how are you doing this is Coach Meyer!" And I remembered him, right? He had recruited me. I'd gone to Liberty on a recruiting event and decided not to go there. But the crazy thing about it is he invited me to a work at camp. And now, instead of being in the camp, you're one of the college players that are helping run the camp, if that makes sense. But at night, you scrimmaged. And what they did in this scenario is they would bring in kids that they wanted to see play against teams.

Most of the team was there and probably seven or eight other kids that wanted to transfer to play at Liberty or come play at Liberty. Not high school kids- you had to be in college. Now I hadn't been able to shoot the ball. I had tried out at probably three junior colleges and my hand would swell up like a balloon every time I played or tried to lift. And so when I got there the first day I told Coach Brooks, I said, "Hey, I broke my hand last spring. I've had tendonitis in it pretty bad. So my first night probably will be my best night. And if it swells up, I've got some medication to take for it, but it's going to be hard to control the ball." And I was ambidextrous, but I shot from the outside right-handed and that was the broken hand.

Well, I didn't have any tendonitis the entire week. And by Wednesday night they offered me a full ride.



**Row 1**--Chris Toomer, Matthew Hildebrand, Edwin Miller, Joey Thacker, Julius Nwosu, Mike Coleman, Cordell Robinson, Willie Roach, Brett Anthony, Derryck Thorton, Keith Ferguson.  
**Row 2**--Danny Curbison, Jeff Bloom, Daniel Pratt, Darrius Hunter, Jody Chapman, Nathan Unruh, Ted McClain.

**Edwin Miller:**

So November 13th, 1990, I got to meet my wonderful future bride, Kimberly. We were at a basketball game and I was redshirted my first year. I was sitting behind the bench, a lady named Holly who was a good friend, played soccer, came in and Kim was with her. At Liberty there was probably only 6,000, maybe 7,000 kids on campus at the time. You pretty much would see everybody. I'd never seen her. She sat down on the other side of Holly and I asked Holly like, who is that? We get to talking through Holly and, and Kimberly gets up and goes up into the stands. And I followed her and I sat right in front of her. She was with a linebacker, unfortunately, leave it to Edwin to pick the right one. But I kept talking to her and I asked her out, sitting there that evening and we went out and never stopped dating.

Beginning of my junior year, got eligible to play, was playing incredibly well, was leading the nation in scoring, in terms of minutes played, leading the nation in field goal percentage. I hit my first nine threes in a row, was 13 for 15 by the second half of the third game, and broke my jaw.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Oh my goodness.

**Edwin Miller:**

I remember waking up in the bed in the hospital with a broken jaw, and it's a really bad injury to have a broken bone in your head. Actually, I remember them being on the back, taking me off the court and the trainer trying to put my jaw back in socket behind the bench. I did come back and play that year. We went to the championship in the Big South. I want to say it was the eighth game of the season. I came right back. Maybe it was the 11th game. I may have missed five games. I dropped 20 pounds immediately, because you can't eat. My mouth was wired shut. Didn't deter me. Came back, played with a wired mouth/wired jaw, which means you really can't breathe so they had oxygen on sidelines for me. And my first game was against Virginia Tech at Tech. Unfortunately, was guarding Purcell backing down the court. The seven two center blind picked me and broke the bands of my jaw again. You would think someone would stop at that point, but I didn't. I came back and played again by the end of the year which was really bad for my jaw, because I kept taking contusions to it with it inflamed. Which that's what really ended my career. I remember waking up in the bed after my jaw was broken and knowing I'd never play again.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Wow.

**Edwin Miller:**

I think if I'd have had engaged parents...my dad never wanted me to play athletics whatsoever and he never saw me play a game in my life.

**Jo Wilbur:**

That must have been so hard getting to that level without the support of your family, putting in so much work, even after sustaining multiple injuries and then to have to basically watch that dream

die. I can't imagine. So where did you go from there? Because at that point you're going into your senior year, right?

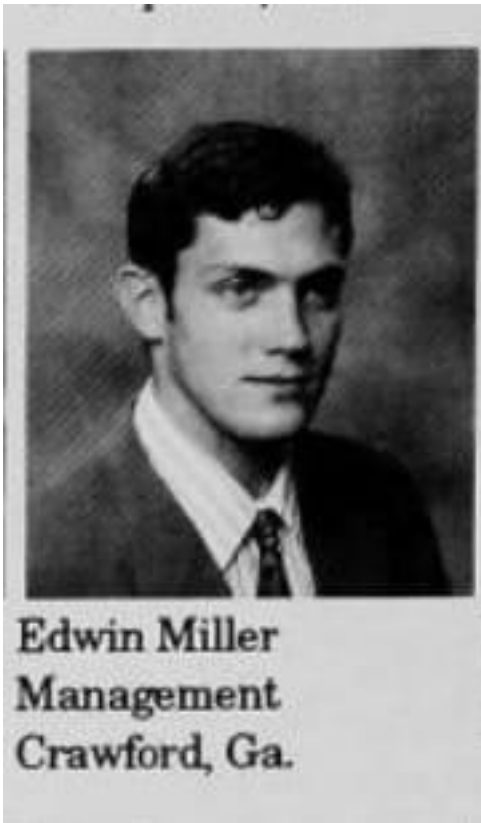
**Edwin Miller:**

I couldn't play my senior year. That was mid junior year. Couldn't play my senior year. Sent probably what, 200 resumes out, trying to get a job. I really had no interviews until my capstone professor, basically for strategy planning. He had graduated from West Point and had been a chaplain and he introduced me, based on my academics and my athletics, to the ring knockers. They call 'em the table knockers in DC. And I interviewed SAIC, IBM, you pick it. And I'll never forget. Everybody I interviewed with said, you should go into sales. I'm like, I don't want to be in sales. And they're like, no, you really should. I'm like, but I really don't want to be in sales.

Now growing up where I grew up, there was one car lot in the county I grew up in and it wasn't new cars. It was used cars and a guy named Johnny Burt was the sales guy. And so every time somebody said sales, all I could think about is Johnny Burt. I didn't comprehend there were software sales executives and by the way, there wasn't really much software then, it was hardware, whatever, back in '93. But I couldn't imagine calling my parents and saying, I'm going into sales. And them saying, "You're gonna be Johnny Burt?!" So, oh my goodness. That's so funny. I started at SAIC and Colonel Blackwell, it's right before Desert Storm, he gets called away. I show up and I'm sitting in a cube with no computer, no nothing.

And if I had been back home doing nothing, my dad would've kicked a hole through me. So I was worried every day. I remember calling Kimberly, like, "I'm going to get fired. There's nothing to do here." And she would say, "Calm down, honey. It's fine. You're gonna be fine." I'm like, "I'm telling you there's nothing to do here. They're going to fire me." So I literally picked up the phone. I called PSI Net and I said, "Hey, this is Edwin Miller. Remember me?" "Of course!" I'm like, "Is that sales job still open? I'm thinking I want to be in sales!" I went over and interviewed with the CEO of the business and the Head of the Director of Sales. I remember sitting with Bill Schrader and I looked at him and he said, "Well, what do you really want to do?" And I'm like, "Well, I see it's Performance Systems International." He was like, "Yes, it is." I'm like, "But you're not international." And he says, "Not yet." I'm like, "I speak German and French. I'd like to build that for you." That's what I said in the interview. And he looked at me like, "You... you can be in sales."





**Edwin Miller:**

So I started in sales and by the, I want to say the sixth month there I was selling what the entire sales force was selling on a monthly basis. And it was really cool because what I was doing is when you went to the library or the bookstore (back then Barnes and Noble, whatever), there was probably only 30 computer books. There was databases, there was a bit on hardware, maybe some COBOL programming language, but there wasn't a lot there. And so at night I was going to technology school, became a LAN administrator, became a database administrator,. So when I was on the phone, the people buying at that time, you've got to understand the market, they were all technologists. I could talk technology as deep as they could. And they bought from me. I ended up running all of sales, running, all of sales and marketing.

We did 22 acquisitions around the world. And so by the time I was 25, I was a vice president. Which was pretty cool. And from then, I started a company with a co-founder of PSI Net called Conducent- was co-founder of that, was president of a company called XML Solutions, which we sold to Vitria, was CEO of an ERP business called Everest Software, which had 3000 customers around the world. I've helped scale companies on the- one on the west coast called Astreya Partners, from about 30 million to 150 million in size. So smaller businesses in terms of scale, like an IBM, all technology, all software or services in the tech space. And been fortunate, wrote a couple of books. If you have a problem sleeping, I'll send 'em to you. Sure to knock you out. Been a great journey,

**Jo Wilbur:**

Truly an incredible story. And to see how far you've come from those humble beginnings and where you are now, not only as a successful person in business and in your career, but as such a strong man of faith.

**Edwin Miller:**

You know, what's amazing is people ask me, where'd you grow up? And I get the silver spoon look a lot. And I tell 'em [the small town in] Georgia, and they'll go, "Where's that?" And my response always is, "Exactly. That's exactly right." There may have been 3000 people in the entire county when I grew up. There's still just a flashing yellow light in the county. There's no red light. There's nothing there, there's one school. So the ability for God to take me out of that, send me to Athens to get to play basketball, provide all the transportation, to get me back and forth. And then that donor who paid for my senior year changed my life...which is one of the reasons, a big reason, every time we have the annual fundraising, Kimberly and I've given to every one of the sections for tuition for kids to be able to attend a Christian school. I really don't think it was the basketball that changed my life at all. It was coming to the Lord.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Mm. I can see that there's so much emotion surrounding that experience and it is pretty incredible. As you spoke to earlier, when you went to the principal's office, after having gotten into a fight, it sounds like probably one of many. And you leave that day a believer. I would just love to know more about that experience and what exactly she said to you that day.

**Edwin Miller:**

I remember the event very well. I remember her voice very well. I'm not sure what she, I don't remember what she said. It was out of a lot of love and a lot of care. But it's that event, certainly while basketball played a lot in my life and business- growing up in a business as small and dinky as it was- you still had to understand everything about a supply chain and, and have to price goods and understand margin and cash. I did the banking on Monday mornings. All that had nothing compared to what the Lord did that day.

And I don't know, again, that event and...a lot of people get saved and maybe not lived the life for God that God intended...because they weren't in an environment. So the donor that paid for my senior year really kind of finished it off for me. Right? You get to finish that senior year at a Christian school. And you're around godly Christian teachers, which is powerful. Mr. Hall comes to mind. He was our chemistry teacher and physics teacher. And I wasn't the best student as a kid. I probably had a 1.4 through ninth grade. I don't know how I passed. These, you know, academics were never important to my family. It wasn't like we came home and studied. I'm the only kid graduated high school. Regardless, the event of being saved and experiencing that Christian education was the difference.

**Jo Wilbur:**

It is so inspiring to hear everything that you've done and everything that God has done in your life, despite what would seem like very difficult circumstances. It almost, it might sound strange, but it really reminds me of Joseph in the Bible, right? Thrown into all these crazy circumstances. And yet through his hard work and his faith in God, God used him to do incredible things. Even when he was in prison. And even when he was experiencing all these hardships. And before I let you go, I have to ask, did you ever find out who the anonymous donor was at your school?

**Edwin Miller:**

No!

**Jo Wilbur:**

Pretend he or she is listening to this podcast episode...what would you say to that person?

**Edwin Miller:**

You changed my life... and I'd say, thank you, with all my heart. I don't think people understand what it means to a kid who can't afford a great education, to have that opportunity. And they gave that to me. Let me finish out my career at ACS. I can't imagine...the public schools were so tough where I grew up. I don't know if I'd have been the first one to go to college and graduate. Probably not. I'd probably have joined the Marines. I don't think people understand what it means to, to a kid. If the person is listening... you truly changed my life, which has allowed me to impact other people's lives. I imagine during my business career, the number of people that I've gotten to touch as a believer. It's, you just don't know what impact you're really having. And I tell Kimberly all the time that she's so blessed to come to a Christian environment, work with Christian people, have a great mission every day. And she always reminds me, you really don't know what impact you had today.

**Jo Wilbur:**

I think a lot of people are deterred from giving because they think this won't really make a difference or you know, why even bother. And so maybe what would you say to those individuals?

**Edwin Miller:**

Well, everybody's not going to be a CEO. I get asked all the time, how'd you become a CEO? The Lord. I have no idea. I certainly aspired to be a leader in a business, but I think people need to know, it's not about what happens on this earth and the position of power somebody might gain because someone pays for school. It's the heart. So thinking it won't make a difference...it may not turn that kid into a CEO, but it will change that kid's life. It's going to change that family, it's going to change that kid's future family. And it could even break a bad cycle and afford a kid to have a very different day, because a lot of kids have tough days.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Thank you so much, Edwin, I can't thank you enough for coming here and being willing to be vulnerable and share your story with us. And I know we're so grateful and I know our community is really going to benefit from your wisdom.

**Edwin Miller:**

You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

**Jo Wilbur:**

Thanks for joining us for this episode of Mind and Heart, a podcast by Trinity Christian School. For more information, visit us at [www.tcsfairfax.org](http://www.tcsfairfax.org).