

Getting Real in Sabbath School

I grew up a pastor's kid, went to Sabbath School (and attended church afterward), participated in most church programs, and knew Uncle Arthur's Bible stories well enough (so I thought) to say I knew the Bible right through.

Then I became an adult. And Sabbath School became those extra minutes of "needed" sleep.

I hadn't become a heathen. It was just that Sabbath School didn't seem to touch me in a practical way. The programs told me about foreign lands and about people being saved. But the people in our congregation—including me—were the same. I kept wondering who was going to save us! Who was going to save us from our routine?

It would have been great if someone had told me a parable using day-to-day instances and emotions rather than dealing with theology and things of the esoteric. Besides, most lesson studies, if they affected me, did so only until sundown.

God does funny things. Not funny "Ha! Ha!" but funny "H' mmm."

I took up a job as a lay volunteer to work in the most traditional of environments: my hometown. The place where my ambivalence had deep roots.

This time I was an adult and didn't have my mother prodding me to go to church. I had a wife, who eventually was won over by my logic (or got tired of my lack thereof). Two years of intermittent Sabbath School attendance, just a tad more church attendance, and we had settled into a comfortable churchgoing pattern.

The days we attended didn't seem to strike any note, let alone help us hear heaven's hosts.

Then it happened.

My student employees were telling me that Sabbath School was not practical, and I told them (hypocrisy came easier then) to stop complaining and do something about it. They did.

They nominated me as sponsor for a new Sabbath School class.

The first Sabbath a dozen students came to the new class. Among them were none of those who nominated me. I figured a dozen was good, small enough to work with (or disperse). I was using *CQ*, formerly called the *Collegiate Quarterly*, and we began our discussion. It was a focused exchange that related the lesson to everyday life.

The following week we had about six new members. The quarter's lessons were about witnessing. During our discussions we realized how very little we

knew of what the Bible had to say. We knew what Uncle Arthur said, we sort of knew what Mrs. White said, and we knew what the church said. We just didn't know what the Bible said. And that worried some of us. A Bible study group was suggested for the following Tuesday. I agreed to be the sponsor, figuring it would last for a couple weeks at the most. We're now completing a year, through exams, holidays, and the worst of days.

The First Step

Our Sabbath School class isn't extraordinary; we're just people who grew up hearing the same things again and again, things that we heard but didn't really know. We knew some, yet didn't know enough to be educated. It was at our Sabbath School class that we discovered we had a problem, or rather that we *were* the problem.

Once we realized we had a problem, the first step was admitting it. This was difficult for us, especially the religion majors. Our Sabbath School class became "Nominal Adventists Anonymous" for most of us. We would get up and say, "Hi, my name is _____. I've been a nominal Adventist for 19 years."

No one was trying to impress the rest with profound statements or knowledge. We were amazed at the simplicity of biblical teaching and realized that we had looked at others' pronouncements of the Bible without knowing what the Bible had to say.

We talked about how these principles affected our lives. We marked our lives on the yardstick of biblical principles and began to discover who we were in relation to God's family.

A Domino Effect

After suggesting the Bible study group, the young people suggested community projects, then they suggested a worship night, then they suggested projects for battered women, and now they just keep suggesting.

The remarkable thing about the whole situation was that every suggestion was met with action and a yearning to see how this thing called religion actually works. Because of this earnest action, they saw Jesus



as a real person, and they allowed me that vision. He isn't this larger-than-life person who walked on air; He is a real person who walked on this earth. We saw Him as a boy who skinned His knee, a teenager who probably had a crush, a young man who probably visited His mom for her meals, a Savior who died so that we may learn about God.

As class member Gerald "Noy" Christo puts it, "I'm a born SDA. As a pastor's son, I grew up learning all the right answers to questions I didn't know. I took the Bible for granted. After a year in the *CQ* class, it's more applicable to life. Now religion is more personal—not just the 'faith of our fathers.' "

A membership on the move

The Sabbath School group now has 40 members. We don't come to sit and go over pages of our quarterly. We come to worship and learn, and through worship we learn of a God who is a "people person." He can't leave us alone and He doesn't want to be alone. He wants to be with us! And that to us is wor-

ship: God with us, we with God. Someone once said, "Christianity is about change." We changed (and are changing) the way we look at Christianity every week. And it moves us—sometimes literally.

What made the difference? The class didn't want to do the usual lesson study thing that didn't affect our lives. We didn't want to have a seventh-day experience; we wanted it to change our week (hearts). We moved: in faith (that was intimidating at first), in action (talk about awkward!), in Christ (clichéd and unknown until we began), and with each other (insecurities were left at the door).

We stepped off the profound and saw the parables. We stopped looking at Bible people and saw everyday people. We saw each other and we saw Christ. We became real.

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