

**MR. K**

Although I grew up in a deeply godly home and went to a wonderful Bible believing church, the eight boys in THE Sunday School class I attended had very little spiritual support in their homes. Only one boy had parents who came to our church. The guys walked to church of their own free will—and were so faithful in attendance they all earned their own leather-bound Bibles for three years perfect attendance before I did.

I think we were a rough class to teach. I have a picture of all of us sitting on the grass at Dick Greenwood's house on his birthday in first grade. Almost all the boys were still in that class when we graduated from high school.

Most of the other guys lived right near the church and hung around together during the week. They were nice guys even though they had cultivated filthy mouths and bad habits; but I have no reason to believe any of them trusted Jesus Christ as Savior in all those years—except Ronnie Mac.

Maybe the Sunday School superintendent lumped all the incorrigibles into one class with the hope that it would give the church family kids a decent chance of getting some sound teaching in the other boys' class. It was just my "luck" that my name wound up on the wrong roll book!

For two years there was a revolving door with teachers coming and going. I remember counting seven teachers who took a crack at us during ninth and tenth grades. They came. They tried. They departed. I'm sure they had good motives but the cumulative attention deficit disorder which overcame us each Sunday was just too much. I think the other fellows were also aware that "our class ran off 7-teachers-in-two-years".

One teacher, let's call him Mr. K, made a profound and long lasting impression on us. It occurred when we graduated to sixth grade. Our class sat on the back row of the junior department. Mr. K's class sat in front of us. He was new to the fifth grade. After several months of hearing our snide remarks, muffled laughter, burping, rude (*but quiet*) remarks, he finally turned around in his seat during a lull in the opening assembly time and hissed, "Look you guys, why don't you try being polite just one time in your whole life and listen to what is being said at the front."

That was just too good an opening for Earl. He immediately snapped back, "And I bet you've never done anything wrong in *your* life."

It still amazes me when I recall his retort, but I'm sure I heard it correctly. "The next mistake I make will be my first." All the guys guffawed at it when we went to our cubicles ten minutes later. Now, I got to know Mr. K later on and he truly is a wonderful, godly man and I have no idea what he meant, but our class felt it had just been handed a bucketful of hypocrisy. How easily a hasty word can damage!

In all twelve years not one teacher visited me in my home or made a phone call or had me in his home or remembered my birthday or met with me outside of class or talked to me in the hall or even asked how I was doing in the cross country squad [*medium*] or the wrestling team (*eh, so-so*) or where I was going to college or whether I had a girlfriend (*no*) or how I was doing in school (*I was in a fog*) or how my lawn mowing business was going (*pretty well*) or whether I was saved (*I was*) and had dedicated my life at camp to serve Him forever [*yes, yes, yes*] or how I was doing spiritually (*uh, I was kinda stuck in neutral and didn't know how to get out of my funk*).

And then Sam Virgilio came along. He was an Italian landscaper. He took on our class for two years straight. He made the lessons a little more practical and at least got us to talk—we who transformed our brains to granite when we walked into the church. Wonder of wonders Sam even invited us to his home one year for a Christmas party.

We had gone through that string of teachers who were Bible college grads, church elders, deacons, and at least one missionary, as well as a stern disciplinarian who also had an infectious laugh. But apparently teaching our class had seemed more of a chore or a church duty (*or a term in purgatory*) than an opportunity to touch our lives. Don't get me wrong, Sam was just a teacher's manual wired-for-sound the same as the other teachers were—but with a little bit training I think he would have been willing to step into our lives and become more than a classroom fixture.

When I became a Sunday school teacher myself, I taught as I had been taught and boy, was I boring! The superintendent handed me the roll book, the teacher's manual, and pointed me to a circle of chairs. These guys were clones of the guys in my home church a thousand miles away, except they knew all the "Bible answers" and were probably all saved and content with the layer of frost on their hearts. Meanwhile I, their teacher, tried in vain to help them to come to know the Savior the way I was getting know Him!

But you know, it was the very lack of contact with any leader or teacher who would walk with me which gave me such a great desire to touch kids whom the Lord threw into my own classes later on as I developed slowly as a teacher.

I even learned to thank God for using Mr. K in my life.