

How Do You Keep the Joy of Teaching Alive?

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Can you still find joy in your job when the lemons start pouring down the pipe? My Thursday had started out fine in spite of a lingering sinus headache. My superintendent Lee Richards was to arrive by 8:30. AM. and I was nearly ready for my daily one-room school session.



The outer door was ajar when I arrived at school. I mumbled to myself about people who go out without making sure the door is closed tight and breezed right on through without turning the lock. I walked into my classroom, smiled to myself as I looked around, and thought about the few details left to prepare for the day. Lee called about that time to say that He would be a little late. I was thankful for a little extra time to get my day organized.

Then my gaze rolled past the aquarium. I suddenly lost all my joy. All six fish were definitely dead. Franklin, our turtle, didn't look too lively either. I put down my armful of books, took off my jacket, and grabbed the siphon tube. Soon I had drained out a bucketful of fouled water and was heading out the door to empty it. There would be at least two more dumping trips before I could put fresh water into the tank. I was mentally calculating the time it would take to complete this job when the door clicked behind me. The keys were in the classroom. It was frosty and I was lightly clad.

In a Job-like lament I prayed, "Now what, God?" I walked up the street looking for lighted windows and possible telephones. I was thankful that the Pastor lived in town. By 7:30 Pastor Morris had arrived with his key and I was back in the building. He played down his act of kindness. I rushed inside to cope with a vanishing time frame, a dirty fish tank, dead fish and a large area of wet floor to clean up.

Somehow, in spite of everything, I was ready for school on time. The Primary Bible lesson was on Joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit. I was trying my best to mask the inner stress that had built up before I began the day's lessons. I was talking to the children about the ways joy can flood one's life even when things are going wrong.

Directly behind the children was a window which was framing the autumn dress of the hills outdoors. I was instantly reminded of God's promise to be with me and to lift me above the mundane events that had been robbing me of joy all morning. As the children and I sang about joy bubbling over, I began to feel much better. It was at that point that Lee arrived.

The day continued to be difficult for me. My head ached. I misplaced work sheets. I had to explain about the fish. My aide didn't come. BUT, Lee assisted with some of the lessons, some students finished early and volunteered to help others, and I kept reminding myself that things could be a whole lot worse.

When Lee shook my hand and told me what a good job I was doing I knew that it was because I was prepared ahead of time and because my students were trained to help each other. It certainly wasn't that I had had a handle on life that day.

I have since realized that there are some key requirements if one is to operate a successful one-room school.

First, there must be both long-range goals and daily planning in place well ahead of time.

Second, the teacher must be ready to adjust schedules to fit unexpected events such as local health fairs, conventions or unexpected visitors.

Third, there must be components of community service to help students realize that they need to help others.

Fourth, the teacher must always strive for positive public awareness of the school. We must remember that there are people with their eyes on the programme we run.

Fifth, the teacher must have a programme that not only fits the needs of a Seventh-day Adventist school but also equips students for eventual entry into other educational venues.

Sixth, the teacher must also be aware of data with regard to the Seventh-day Adventist school system. We need to be able to demonstrate that what we offer is worthwhile.

Finally, comes the most important requirement of all. The teacher must have a growing relationship with the Lord. There are countless times when a teacher can only cling to the Lord for courage and strength to deal with joyless situations. The Lord must be much more than a rainy weather friend.

Then, when you are locked out you can dare to look up and ask, "Now what, God?" You will have the assurance that God has a solution to every problem that threatens to take the joy out of your teaching day.