

Literary Spectrum

Budding Writers...

Over the past several decades, I have taught a number of writing classes. I thought you might like to meet some of my students. Some were outstanding because of their talents, but I remember most of them best for other reasons

Student No. 1

I have experimented over the years with journal writing in various classes. Allan¹ was in one of those. I wish you could have met Allan, since he was one of those people who were genuinely spontaneous and interesting. I always knew when Allan had arrived at school because he was always talking. But the unusual thing about Allan was that his conversation was always interesting. Not always worthwhile, mind you, but always interesting.

Allan always had a crowd around him, and he was a loquacious story teller. But when journal period rolled around, Allen met his Nemesis. His innate creativity floated out the window as soon as he looked at a sheet of paper He could not and would not write. His quota for 15 minutes was about two sentences.

I had some fairly good writers in the class, and often after we were finished writing, I asked various students to read their creations to us. Poor Allan. He hardly ever had anything much to contribute.

But one day, Allan made a discovery. He discovered somehow that writing a story was simply talking on paper. He also discovered that he could get the same kind of attention for his written stories as he did for his verbal ones.

I have never ever seen such an enormous change in a student as I did in Allan. All of a sudden he looked forward to journal classes. And when ever it came time for Allan to read his journal to the class, everyone sat up and paid attention.

Again, what he wrote wasn't always worthwhile, but mark it down, it was always interesting!

Student No. 2

Sue was different from Allan. Her talent for writing was well developed when I first met her. Her characters were so realistic that they practically came alive and walked around on her paper when she wrote about them. In fact I would say that Sue had tremendous potential as a writer.

But Sue had one problem. She had never learned to use her talent to the glory of God. She wrote because it was fun, and to impress her friends. She enjoyed the writing class—writing classes are always more interesting than doing actual writing.

¹ Not his real name, of course. All of these illustrations are camouflaged as much as possible without destroying the character's personality. Hopefully no reader will recognize himself!

I haven't met Sue since that class. I don't know where she went from there. But I have never seen her name on a story or book. I wonder if she is still just writing for the fun of it, or whether the fun got stale.

Student No. 3

As I recall him, Sam was a lot like Sue. He too had real potential. He was a thinker and could write penetrating essays that made issues come alive. He knew words, and just where to put them. I was quite impressed with his assignments.

But I had a rude awakening one day. I discovered that Sam would only write when it suited him, or when he felt like it. He too had never learned that God gave us our talents to use for His glory. I am still not sure whether Sam was just moody, or whether he was lazy. Perhaps he was both.

Student No. 4

Amy was more difficult to evaluate. She was a very serious minded girl. She was also very tender hearted, and had evidently been raised in a very sheltered environment. But she put her heart and soul into her writing, and because of this it was good.

She had talent too. But it takes more than talent to make a good writer. A good writer must be able to put his soul into his writing. When you read a book by a writer like this, you feel like you have made a close friend.

Amy was that kind of writer. She lacked only one thing—experience. This made her writing a bit naive. It was easy to forgive her for this, but I was troubled at what I knew Amy would face in life when it finally caught up with her. The time was coming that a world full of troubles was going to bombard her, and she was going to realize for the first time what life was all about. I hope the Lord is gentle with her.

I haven't seen any writing by Amy either. But I think the Lord is educating her. When He has taught her some of the lessons about life she needs, I think she will remember her writing talents and start to put some of those lessons on paper. I will buy her books, because I know they will be good reading.

In conclusion...

It is amazing how you can get to know someone in a writing class. Most of my students would have been a bit shocked to know how well I could read them. Each of the students I have highlighted here had potential as writers. Yet each had areas they needed to work on to become the kind of writer that the Lord could really use.

Perhaps you have seen yourself in one of these profiles. If so, allow the Lord to do His work in your heart and make of you the writer that He wants you to be. God will only do so much for you. He gives you the seed of a talent, but He expects you to invest the effort necessary to make it useful for him. It would be very sad indeed to get to the judgment only to have God tell us that we buried our talents in the sand.

Maybe you like the praise of others, and when you don't get it, you give up. Maybe you are just out to have fun, and don't feel like getting serious. Or perhaps

you are too lazy or moody to put yourself into developing your talent. Take time to read Matthew 25:14-30 and take it too heart.

I want to give you one more example. I never had this brother for a student, but I want to tell you about him anyway. When I met John, I didn't think of him as a potential writer. He was friendly and conscientious, but I never thought of him as a writer. However, he had a secret urge to write. If I recall correctly, he worked at writing for around ten years before anyone ever accepted an article or story from him. He had disappointment after disappointment but he persevered, and he finally accomplished his goal.

John had less talent than any of the students I mentioned above. But he has accomplished more with writing than all of these others put together.

All of the people I have told you about are about the same age. You will probably note, as I did, that the factor that makes a successful writer isn't necessarily exceptional talent. It is perseverance and a dedication to bringing glory to God.

That is the most important lesson that any writer can learn.