

Who Should You Thank for Your Spiritual Growth?

If you've ever taught 7th-grade boys, you're an exceptional person. I once heard Dr. Phil Briggs, retired professor at Southwestern Seminary, call 7th graders *electric chihuahuas*.

That's why I admire Jim Burns. Mr. Burns taught my Sunday School class when I was in the 7th grade.



We were the typical group of emerging adolescents: cracking voices, discovering girls don't have cooties, and slugging each other every ten minutes—just because. Each week Mr. Burns tried to teach biblical truth to 10-15 boys high on Sunday School doughnuts. I don't remember if, on this one particular morning, we were especially rambunctious—maybe one of us accidentally slugged *him*—but at the end of class, he asked, "Why don't you teach the class next week?"

He was looking straight at me.

Being a 7th-grade boy—which means I didn't think this through—I said I would. So I took the book he gave me and I read. I actually prepared—and that's saying something because I rarely took the time to brush my teeth. And on the next Sunday, in spite of all my squirreliness, I led my peers in Bible study.

And 45+ years later, I am still leading Bible studies. Thank you, Jim Burns.

This past month has been pastor appreciation month, and we should express appreciation to our pastors. I am grateful and moved by the encouraging cards and comments I have received over the years. But while we express our gratitude for pastors, let's not forget the others who have played a role in our spiritual growth.

"Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead

you in the Lord and admonish you, and to regard them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

In this season of expressing gratitude and thanks, think also of the Bible study leaders, student pastors, and prayer warriors who've spoken into your life. Express your thanks to God—and express it to the person!

I'm honored to lead a team of creative people who produce Bible studies read and used by a million people each week. To the 98,000 groups using Bible Studies for Life, I and my team are a nameless entity; we rightfully stay in the background and allow God to use our resources in the hands of His Bible study leaders. Yet periodically, we'll receive an email or letter from someone who was especially challenged or encouraged by our Bible studies. Even though we do not know the person directly—nor does he know us—his words are an incredible boost and encouragement.

The power of our words and encouragement is multiplied when the ones we are thanking are people we know, people who have had a direct influence on our spiritual growth. Yes, I love your cards, letters, and emails (keep 'em coming!), but even more so, share those words of thanks with those who have had a direct involvement in your life: a past Sunday School teacher, that chaperone who talked with you at that all-night youth lock-in in 1989, and the one who loves on your kids each week in Bible study.

Thankfulness and encouragement are hallmarks on God's church.

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints because of the hope reserved for you in heaven" (Col. 1:3-5)

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