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Here We Are Now... Hold Us Together

Abstract

"I am thankful for teachers who planted seeds, or watered them, or pulled weeds, or simply waited patiently for fruit to start showing up."

Posting about teaching children to live out their faith from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/here-we-are-nowhold-us-together/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Here We Are Now...Hold Us Together

 [inallthings.org/here-we-are-nowhold-us-together/](https://allthings.org/here-we-are-nowhold-us-together/)

Dave Mulder

I have eclectic taste in music. With my iTunes on shuffle, I'll sometimes get a jarring juxtaposition...such as Nirvana's "[Smells Like Teen Spirit](#)" followed by Matt Maher's "Hold Us Together." If you know both of these songs, you probably won't see an immediate connection, but I have two stories to share that link these songs together in my mind, and they might even shed light on the work of Christian teachers.

The first story:

In 1991, I was a 14-year-old freshman in high school. I remember riding home from youth group one night with my friend Brad who had just turned 16 and was a newly licensed driver. A new song came on the radio—crunchy guitars and a singer who sounded like he had marbles in his mouth: "Smells Like Teen Spirit," a grunge anthem celebrating teenage angst, alienation, and anarchy. I felt like the song was about my life: frustrated, confused, and a little apathetic. The hook of the chorus seemed to capture my feelings at the time: "Here we are now, entertain us."

In retrospect, I realize that the song wasn't really about me at all. As a young adolescent, I wasn't an isolated loner; I actually had a pretty solid group of friends. I wasn't a burnout; I was basically a good kid and got good grades in school. I wasn't an anarchist; I actually pretty much did what was expected of me, played well with others, and tried to live the Golden Rule. Why then did lyrics like these resonate so clearly with me, and with teen culture at that time? Because they certainly did...and I still have music like this on my iPhone today.

I recognize that songs like this one are part of my story, part of my history. They reflect how I felt at age 14. Perhaps the grain of truth in "Smells Like Teen Spirit"—capturing teenage angst and the feelings of rebellion and alienation common to young adolescents—was what hooked me? But there's a part of me that wonders if it's because I was so steeped in "church" that I was reacting to it in some way. That even though I knew all the right answers, maybe I was reacting to expectations, acting out in some way, wanting to go along with the culture around me ("here we are now, entertain us") rather than living the Truth I really knew to be true?

This brings me to my second story.

I served as a middle school teacher for 14 years in Christian schools. As a music-lover, I often taught with my guitar close at hand. In my last year of K-12 teaching, I would sometimes play and sing while my 5th graders practiced their keyboarding; it made such a "boring" task more interesting. Since I was working on learning the song anyway, I played and sang Matt Maher's song "[Hold Us Together](#)" to great response. The chorus is catchy—pretty soon the whole class was singing along.

After the song, one of the kids said something along the lines of, "I love Christian music." And the kid sitting next to her said something like, "That's a 'Christian' song? It isn't about God or anything."

This actually prompted a pretty interesting conversation about what makes music "Christian." The 5th graders who knew "Hold Us Together" prior to our singing it in class had heard it on a local Christian radio station—that must make it "Christian," right? But, as I pointed out to them, there is no clear mention of Christ, or God, or the Bible, or "churchy" stuff...just loving your neighbor as yourself. What do we do with that? Is this still "Christian" music? It was a good conversation to have with young adolescents!

I'd like to think that my 11-year-old self would have been singing out with my 5th graders. But I sort of doubt that my 14-year-old self would have. 14-year-old Dave was the Nirvana fan, going through the motions of faith, fighting in some sense. What happens between 11 and 14? Would my 8th grade students have sang along with "Hold Us

Together”? Maybe they would in our Christian school where they’re “supposed” to act Christian. But would they sing it outside of school? Would they live out the words they are singing?

I’m very concerned about faith formation in Christian schools. I’m concerned about students knowing all the right answers, but not really believing it. I’m concerned that they’re going to get so Bibled-out that they’ll go through the motions, but not really own their faith. I’m concerned that they’ll be more, “here we are now, entertain us” than, “love will hold us together.”

Of course, as I’ve admitted, at 14 I was a lot more “here we are now, entertain us.” And I came around.

Christian teachers are in the business of planting seeds, and we know it’s up to the Holy Spirit to make them grow. We’re building houses, but only on the foundations the Lord has already laid¹. I’m convinced that Christian teachers have a role to play in the faith development of our students. I’m convinced that we need to model an honest life of faith for our students. For the younger kids, I’m convinced that we need to give them chances to express their child-like faith with full voice, as I’m convinced that this helps shape them. For the older kids, I’m convinced that we need to help them see it’s okay to have doubts and questions—that’s part of our life of faith. I’m convinced that we need to let kids go through the motions sometimes. Perhaps “acting Christian” will help them later to live their faith more fully when it is full-grown.

I’m thankful, after all, for the role models I had—teachers, especially. I’m thankful for Mrs. Aasen, my first grade teacher, who taught me to pray by talking to God, and to sing with my whole heart, and to love books. I’m thankful for Mr. De Jong, my 5th grade teacher, who taught me that being smart is a good thing and that I never have to apologize for the gifts God has given me. I’m thankful for Mr. Slager, my 8th grade science teacher, who taught me to build rockets, and who helped me see that the whole Earth is the Lord’s, and confirmed for me that science is pretty much the best school subject there is. I’m thankful for Mr. Branderhorst, my high school Bible teacher, who taught me that it’s okay to ask questions, and to have doubts, and to admit that I don’t understand God’s grace at all. I’m thankful for Dr. Vander Plaats, the professor who taught so many of my methods classes, and supervised my student teaching, and shaped so much of who I am as a teacher. I’m thankful for John Van Dyk messing with my head in my graduate work and challenging me to think audacious thoughts about what teaching Christianly really looks like. I’m thankful for Arlan and Marlys, former colleagues who came alongside me and mentored me through my first years of teaching. I’m thankful for Steve, my friend and long-time former colleague, who was an inspiration to me to just be myself in the classroom.

I don’t mean this list to be exhaustive; but all of these teachers—and many more—had a hand in shaping who I am today. They have helped in my own faith formation. I am thankful for teachers who planted seeds, or watered them, or pulled weeds, or simply waited patiently for fruit to start showing up. I’m most thankful for the Spirit’s work, so often through the work of Christian teachers!

This article was originally featured on Dave Mulder’s website, [iTeach and iLearn](#), and was used as devotions at Sioux Center Christian School.

Footnotes

1. See Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 3:5-11

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and

the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

