

ATHENS YMCA MEN'S BIBLE STUDY HISTORY

I was in my office one morning in the winter of 1991 when Jimbo Thornton and Ed Dudley walked in. They told me that they wanted to start a men's Bible study class. I laughed for 10 minutes. It was like Fats Domino wanting to lead a class in weight control. Jimbo was 2 years older than I and had left many stories of misbehavior at the "Y" and Athens High School. Ed Dudley was several years younger than I but left behind a legacy of the problems that he had created. Both said that they went off to school in high school but I always told them that they were "SENT" off to school. I soon realized that they were serious and that a miraculous conversion had taken place. We had the Bible study for the kids but nothing but an attempt to have a Christian atmosphere for adults. We set the date, promoted, and were off and running. The ones most active in the beginning were Ed, Jimbo, Charlie Burch, Upshaw Bentley, Jake Hutchins, Ken Malcom, Stan Satterfield and I. Stan Henderson and Bubba Scruggs were not far behind.

Ed did a great job relating his wild youth experiences, his SEC football officiating experiences and other actual experiences to his amazing biblical knowledge. Harold Huff joined us later and in the mid 90's Ed developed cancer. He gave it a good fight but finally asked Harold in 1997 if he would take the class on a part time, temporary basis until he got back. He died in 1998. Until the day Harold died I kidded him that he was only leading the Bible study on a part time, temporary basis until Ed got back.

Harold did a great job and the class continued to grow. We started in what we called the chapel. When the building was constructed, the board built a chapel complete with pews, lectern, and alter. Kelley used it one time and said that he had rather meet under the goal posts, gym etc. for his Bible study instead of such a "churchy" setting. We would have 20 in the chapel and we felt like it was a real small crowd. As the class grew, Harold and I discussed whether to keep it in the large Chapel or move to a smaller room. Sort of a "big fish in a little pond or a little fish in a big pond." We elected to meet in club room 1 which is the first room on the left as you walk in the side door. That room is around 8' X 10' and

some time we would have nearly 30 people in it and running out into the hall. In 2000 we built the board room and that is the location now.

Harold Huff passed away in 2004. Many of our participants were very disturbed and had their faith shaken by Harold's death. I feared that the class might fall apart. I believe that Bubba Scruggs should get the credit for holding our group together though he always denied it. We were able to talk Jerry Varnado into leading the class and I will always believe that he was one of a very few that could have saved it. Jerry attended the class from its inception on an irregular basis and had become an ordained Methodist Minister. He was able to heal wounds and bring us to where we are today.

The unique thing about the Athens YMCA Bible Study is the structure. There is none. There are no officers, no executive committee, and no bylaws. The YMCA did what little administrative work that there was to do at the beginning and Bob Bowen has assumed the duties now. There never was a vote. The same is true of our Bible Study leaders. No one ever nominated them. The class is self-perpetuating and I often tell people that it is amazing what can happen when we let Jesus Christ have the leadership.

John Simpson

Athens YMCA Director

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