

## *How To Visit Sunday School Classes*

One Sunday you're a class member or teacher and the next you are the Sunday School director. Teachers who were glad to have you in their classroom last Sunday now panic when they see you standing in their doorway, "Gasp. It's the Sunday School director! Is he coming into my class?!?" I have never been able to understand the fear and trepidation over a peer making an hour long visit in a classroom but often it brings butterflies to the stomach and causes all of the moisture to leave the mouth and suddenly collect in the palms of the hand of that teacher. It's just a fact of life.

Just like we cannot prevent the leaves from falling or the snow from accumulating, we cannot prevent this fear...or can we? We can if it is done properly. Let me elaborate.

I think that the reason most teachers fear the visit from a Sunday School director is that they understand the authority issue and respect the position. The Sunday School director *directs* the Sunday School. Hence, he makes decisions and is the final word. Many of these teachers possess a certain level of inadequacy in their teaching. It may be from poor preparation during the week or a lack of self-confidence. It may be just from a lack of teaching skills. Only the person feared, the Sunday School director, can alleviate these fears.

If the Sunday School director builds a reputation of evaluating the class, it is going to be next to impossible to help those teachers overcome the fear factor and have the welcome mat laid out for him. However, if he builds a reputation of encouraging the teacher and other class leaders, fear will be replaced with respect and anticipation of the next visit.

I have had Sunday School directors ask, "Should I just stand outside the door and listen?" My answer is, "How would you feel every Sunday if you knew that the Sunday School director might be lurking around the corner or outside the door? Why would he not just come in? There must be something he's hiding or he's trying to catch me doing something wrong."

I've discovered that the best way to visit a Sunday School class is to approach the teacher on the Sunday before the planned visit and make a statement such as this:

"Joe, I absolutely love my responsibilities as Sunday School director. I wouldn't take anything for it. But as much as I love doing what I do, there is a down side to it. You see, as Sunday School director, while I do study my lesson every week, I don't get the opportunity to sit down and be taught. I don't have that close group with which to fellowship each week. I am sometimes out of touch with specific prayer needs and I miss discussing the lesson and that interaction with others. Would you mind if, next week, I joined you all and just became a class member for a while? Please don't ask me to teach. I just want to be taught and just be a part. Would you allow me that privilege?"

When phrased that way, I've never had a teacher hesitate to open the door for me for that first visit. The best way to never be invited back, though, is to either take over the class

or do a lot of evaluating either in the class or after. The best thing to do even if the class time was just awful is to find something positive to encourage the teacher about. It may be as simple as, "I really appreciated the way you opened and closed your class in prayer" or "...on time." People love and need encouragement.

If they see you as a source of encouragement they will be asking you, "When are you coming back to our class?" The more comfortable they are with you the easier it will be for them to ask you to help them become a better teacher. Then they will really improve because they wanted to and you weren't the one pointing out their weaknesses.

Another great way to visit a class is to wait until the class has just started and drop in for a time of encouragement or congratulations. This could be the week after visiting a class to thank them all for making you so welcome and allowing you to be ministered to last week.

My favorite way to visit a class is after a teacher has received some training, especially if they have spent a few days in training. One such time was after two teachers had spent a week at LifeWay's Ridgecrest Conference Center for a week receiving training as children's teachers. I went to the class about ten minutes after the starting time, knocked on the door, poked my head in and asked, "I'm sorry to interrupt but would it be OK if I came in and shared something with the kids?" (Like they're going to say "No".) I went into the classroom and addressed myself to the third and fourth graders. "Do you all know how much Mr. Andy and Miss Jane love you guys?" Answers varied from short tales of what they had experienced to puzzled looks. "Let me tell you how much they love you," I continued. "They took a whole week off of their work, left their families, and drove several hundred miles to the mountains of North Carolina to spend that week learning how to be better teachers. Can you imagine them doing that just because they love you enough to be the best teachers possible?" With large eyes and shaking heads some "Wows!" and "Really?" escaped their agape mouths.

"I think that you ought to give them a big round of applause for loving you that much, don't you?" And did they ever applaud! As I left the room, after an apology for interrupting, the tears in the eyes of the two teachers told me that I was welcome in that classroom on *any* Sunday.

Every Sunday School director, minister of education, or pastor can be the most welcome person in the church if the teacher knows that they are going to get loved on and encouraged. However . . . you know the other side of that coin though.