

SPIRITUAL FOOD

for
Sunday School Leaders

**God's Nourishment
For Effective Service**

Rick Ellison



**SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR
SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS**

**GOD'S NOURISHMENT FOR
EFFECTIVE SERVICE**

RICK ELLISON

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SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR SUNDAY
SCHOOL LEADERS is designed to be read
along with your Bible. For maximum benefit
stop and read each scripture passage found in
the chapter.

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FOREWORD

Often the Sunday School Office State Missionaries are asked about the best way to develop leaders in Sunday School. Some people are looking for a plan to develop teaching skills and to provide additional tips for creating a learning environment. However, though we should strive for better techniques, the best way to develop a leader is spiritually. Teaching and other areas of leadership are gifts from God through the working of the Holy Spirit. In other words, teaching at its best is when the person is filled by and utilized by the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual transformation in the lives of students. Therefore, we strive not only to help leaders teach, but stay in touch with the Holy Spirit. The best leaders are those who are committed to spiritual disciplines and growth. If you want to excel in leadership then spend time with God in prayer, study the Word, and seek to share with those around you on a daily basis.

In this book, Rick Ellison seeks to get you started on the exciting journey of spiritual growth as a Christian leader. He leads you to feast on the Word of God and to experience His empowerment to accomplish the mission He has placed before you. Rick is not just a teacher, but a fellow traveler on the journey of spiritual growth. You will delight in his insights and grow through the Word.

Enjoy the journey and take others with you!

Daniel Edmonds
State Missionary
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SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS

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CHAPTER 1

A LOVING MENU

You had never experienced a majestic place like this before. In the darkness of the night your boat glides through the calm, gentle waters. The smell of the sea water has a relaxing effect. Occasionally you hear a fish jump in the water while a background of crickets and frogs sing in the night. The sea seems to have a poetic language of its own of both sounds and smells.

The night is clear as a thousand stars softly light the sky above. You imagine what it might be like to be on this sea in a raging wind with lightning streaking in a rainy storm. Tonight was different. There was something peaceful, purposeful, and almost reflective about this place.

You can see a crackling camp fire in the distance as your boat glides smoothly forward. The smell of fresh fish in the midst of rising smoke leaves an indelible impression on your senses. Added to this sensation is the smell of freshly baked bread. All of this draws you softly and lovingly toward the shore.

However, you are startled when you see a shadow of a man's figure standing directly ahead of you on the shore. You cannot make out his face at first. There is something clearly different about this man, even in the shadows.

As you draw closer to the shore, the light of the fire begins to bring his face in focus. The first thing you notice is his eyes. An incomprehensible feeling of love comes over you. Emanating from this man is the love of a father for his child. This love generating from the man on shore is so powerful you can hardly move.



The wind gently blows his flowing hair and white garment. He continues to look at you as though you are the only person on earth. You feel as though you are going home. As your boat reaches the shore the open arms of this man hug you and he invites you to sit down by the fire. "Would you like something to eat?" he asks you in a soft but powerful voice. "You have an important journey ahead and this food will give you strength." He seems to care about your every need.

The fire is so warm, the food smells so good, and the fellowship of this man is both comforting and inviting. You feel like never leaving this place. Of all the places in this starry universe, this is the best place to be.

As you ponder this man who sits across the fire from you, the stars at his back, you have the feeling that he is about to teach you something important. Perhaps the fish and bread will illustrate some spiritual truths about the meaning of life.

It then occurs to you who it is sitting on the other side of the fire. It is Jesus. You recall your childhood days in Sunday School. You remember the story of how Jesus fed 5,000 people with fish and bread. Would Jesus be willing to feed only one person like you?

It is obvious that Jesus is willing to be a servant to you. You wait in anticipation. What will Jesus teach you? What does Jesus want you to learn that is so important that he would go to all this trouble?

Now something happens that both hurts and shocks you. You grow faint at his words. Jesus looks at you with those eyes of love and asks a question that shakes you to your foundation. "Do you love me?" It is as though a knife has been plunged into your heart. Why would Jesus ask such a question?

You answer in a quivering voice. "You know that I love you, Jesus." Jesus then confuses you further. He says,



“Feed my lambs”.

You smile and try not to look hurt by his question. Yet, Jesus asks the question again. “Do you really love me?” You can hardly believe it and in your frustration you speak to him boldly. “You know that I love you.”

Again Jesus looks at you and says, “Feed my sheep.” Jesus gazes for a moment into the fire. He lifts his head and asks a third time, “Do you love me?” Jesus’ question penetrates your soul. In your heart you are confident that Jesus knows everything about you. With every fiber of your being you want Jesus to hear and believe your answer. “You know that I love you, Jesus.”

And yet again Jesus says, “Feed my sheep.”

Then it dawns on you. You brought nothing to this meal, only yourself. Yet you sense that is exactly what Jesus wanted.

Think about this scene for a moment. What does this experience on the sea have to do with you? As a Sunday School leader it has everything to do with you.

Suppose as you sat by that fire Jesus had asked you another question. “Why do you serve me in Sunday School?” Suppose Jesus went on to ask even more questions.

- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because you would feel guilty if you didn’t?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because you feel obligated to serve your time?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because no one else would serve in that position?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because someone else would not let you say no?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because your parents and grandparents did?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School to fulfill your civic duty?”

- “Do you serve me in Sunday School to receive the attention of being in front of the class?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School to make up for past wrongs?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because it makes you feel like a good person, even more spiritual than others?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School to be needed and a part of a group?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School to make the pastor or other leaders happy?”
- “Do you serve me in Sunday School because you love Bible history and facts?”

Imagine Jesus as he looks into your eyes with the fire reflecting on his face and asks you the final question. Not once but three times.

“DO YOU SERVE ME IN SUNDAY SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU LOVE ME?”

What is your motivation for serving in the Sunday School? We could give a list of good reasons. It is possible to become so busy and preoccupied with service for Jesus that we forget the real reason for our service in Sunday School. What gives true meaning, fulfillment and purpose to our work in Sunday School is loving Jesus through our service.

DO YOU LOVE YOUR SERVICE FOR JESUS MORE THAN YOU LOVE JESUS? WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR SERVING IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL?

When our daily motivation for Sunday School work is loving Jesus, we experience a whole new dynamic. Our leadership becomes more effective and purposeful. We begin to see the needs and hurts in people through the eyes of

Jesus. Teachers have spiritual insights as found in scripture that may even amaze them.

When our daily motivation for Sunday School work is loving Jesus, we discover three spiritual principles to which many leaders are oblivious.

THREE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS.

1) GOD DESIRES TO TRANSFORM EVERY SUNDAY SCHOOL WORKER INTO A SPIRITUAL LEADER.

Many Sunday School leaders have the idea that their job is to complete a set of tasks each week. If the tasks of teaching, ministering, fellowshiping, outreach and other assigned duties are completed then all is well. The worker places people in one of two categories. The good workers complete their tasks and are faithful to be present for what is required of them. Everyone else is in category number two and should be pitied for not completing their tasks, not to mention aggravating the good workers with their lack of commitment.

WHY DOES GOD DESIRE TO TRANSFORM EVERY SUNDAY SCHOOL WORKER INTO A SPIRITUAL LEADER?

**A SUNDAY SCHOOL SPIRITUAL LEADER HAS GOD-PLEASING
QUALITIES. . .**

- You serve God out of love and a sense that he has specific things to be accomplished through your service in the Sunday School.
- You are concerned with living out your faith through being a positive example of living the Christian life.

- You desire to make a difference in peoples' lives. The life of a preschooler, child, teenager or adult will never be the same because of your service.
- You are a positive influence. You support your pastor and are a peacemaker. If there is a problem you speak to your pastor privately.
- You live your ministry with enthusiasm and excellence.
- You believe that the word of God is absolute truth and to be lived.

No matter what your job is in Sunday School, God desires that you be a spiritual leader that sees beyond just doing tasks. When you walk with Jesus each day, your Sunday School responsibilities become a joy instead of a burden. There may be days when we are disheartened and discouraged and may even want to quit. A spiritual leader understands that these things cause us to depend on Jesus and his provision even more.

Many Sunday School spiritual leaders are quiet and even unassuming. You find them in a variety of ages. Their motivation for serving is a love for Jesus and they have influence in their sphere of living because others see Christ in them.

2) GOD DESIRES THAT EVERY SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADER RENEW THEIR LOVE FOR HIM EACH DAY.

READ

Psalm 5:3

Psalm 59:16

Psalm 92:1-2

Psalm 130:6

Psalm 143:8

What do you think of first when you awaken in the morning? Do you think of the problems and challenges of the day? Do you think about what God has for you to be and

do as you serve him on this day? Do you begin your day by asking God to use your mind, arms, legs, and feet, and begin to serve him on this once in time special day? Is your love for Jesus fresh and new on this day?

- 3) GOD DESIRES TO GIVE YOU SPIRITUAL FOOD AND NOURISHMENT EACH DAY FOR YOUR JOURNEY AS YOU SERVE HIM.

READ JOHN 21:4-17

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) What are some ways that God has blessed your life because he loves you?
- 2) What is your motivation for serving in Sunday School?
- 3) What has God done through your service in Sunday School?
- 4) What are some things that you love about God?
- 5) If Jesus asked whether you love him what would be your reply?
- 6) Is it possible to love our service in Sunday School more than Jesus?
- 7) According to the definition in this chapter, are you a Sunday School worker or spiritual leader?
- 8) How do you renew your love for God each day?
- 9) Do you see your service in Sunday School as a part of God's purpose for your journey through life?

THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS IN THIS BOOK
CONTAIN BIBLICAL TRUTHS OF SPIRITUAL
NOURISHMENT THAT WILL GIVE YOU WISDOM
IN BEING AN EFFECTIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL
LEADER WHO PLEASES GOD.

CHAPTER 2

PREPARED WITH LOVING HANDS

Imagine that you are back on shore. As you continue your conversation with Jesus you hear the rustling water behind you on the sea. The smoke from the fire and smell of the food produce sweetness in the air. The food is being prepared by the one who created it. As you watch Jesus prepare the food you notice something about his hands. These are not the hands of a cook but a carpenter. These hands are strong. These hands are sure. These hands are powerful.

There is something else that you notice. These hands are both busy and loving. These are loving hands with a purpose related to time yet eternal.

There is something special about God's hands. These are the hands of a builder.

REMEMBER

These hands are powerful enough to create everything.

These hands do miracles in the lives of people of all ages.

These hands call us to join God in his work.

Some reject God's work.

Some accept God's work.

READ

Psalm 102:25

Isaiah 45:12

Hebrews 1:10

Matthew 19:13-15

Luke 13:10-13

Isaiah 65:2

Isaiah 2:8

Isaiah 5:12

Romans 10:21

Ecclesiastes 9:1

Psalm 119:173

You notice something on the palms of Jesus' hands half in shadow and light from the reflection of the fire. These are the same hands that had been crucified on the cross. These are the same hands while on the cross that reached out to God the Father and commended his spirit into his hands. These were the same hands that were held out to the disciples to prove to them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

You focus further on Jesus' hands. There seems to be an inscription on the palms. Perspiration beads on your forehead as you strain to read the inscription.

You are totally amazed as you read the inscription. It couldn't be possible, you thought. You look one more time and it is confirmed. The inscription on the palms of Jesus' hands is your name. Why would your name be inscribed on Jesus' hands?

Then you remember what God said in scripture hundreds of years ago. What did that verse in Isaiah say exactly? People in the Old Testament thought that God had forgotten them. Then you remember something else God said. God said that "their walls were always before him". This sounds like something a builder would say. God loved his people so much that they were in the palms of his hands and he had a work for them to do. You wonder, could this meal have something to do with a mission that God has for me?

READ ISAIAH 49:16

As a Sunday School leader God has created you for a mission. This mission involves being a spiritual builder. What God desires to build involves both his hands and your hands in the work.

God has created you as a Sunday School leader to fulfill his purposes as you serve him at specific times and places. Picture God as a potter. As a Sunday School leader you are the clay.

Jeremiah was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. One day God told Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house. He was to observe the hands of the potter to learn an important lesson. The potter was at the wheel shaping the clay as it moved.

God the potter takes his hands that are inscribed with our names and shapes us like clay into the person he has created us to be. God's shape is our personality, gifts, experiences, uniqueness and training to fulfill the service that he has for us in Sunday School.

Sometimes people are unhappy in their service in Sunday School because they are not serving by how God has created and gifted them. There are times when God places us in an area of service for a temporary time because of a great need until someone better shaped can fulfill the responsibility. There are times when someone serves in a responsibility in Sunday School and it is obvious that they are not suited for the task. They would be more effective and happier doing something else.

When God created you he knew that some day you would serve in the Sunday School. He has a mission for you to fulfill.

When Jeremiah observed the potter he noticed that something happened. As the potter shaped the object an impurity got into the clay and it collapsed on the wheel. As Sunday School leaders, all kinds of things can come into our lives that can make us ineffective in our service.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT CAN MAKE US INEFFECTIVE IN OUR SERVICE IN SUNDAY SCHOOL?

Sinful Habits

The life we live as a Sunday School teacher is often the lesson. While none of us are perfect, people often see spiritual truths in the life of the teacher. Whatever the

responsibility is there any sinful habit that keeps you from being effective as a leader?

The Handling of God's Time

A most frequent complaint among Sunday School directors is that teachers and other leaders are not on time for their responsibilities on Sunday morning or whenever Bible study takes place.

It often takes a lot of courage for unchurched people to even visit a Sunday School class. What happens when an unchurched family comes to Sunday School for the first time? They may arrive at a children's class and there is no one to greet their child. An adult couple is taken to a class and no one is there. Not even the teacher. The couple is nervous enough about meeting new people and now they sit alone in a classroom wondering if anyone will show up. No one cared enough to even stay with them until someone arrives. This scene breaks the heart of God.

Even if a guest were not present, God's gift of time is precious. Do you appreciate the time that God has given you for Bible study, ministry, and prayer? Do you appreciate the gift of God's time enough to be consistently present and on time for your class? It is a high priority for us to be on time at our vocational job during the week. Does God's time for Bible study and prayer have as high a priority in your life? People have a tendency to arrive when they know that the class will begin.

A Low Priority of Our Service

Is service through the Sunday School toward the top of the list of your priorities? Sunday School teachers who begin to think about next week's Bible study a week ahead, study and spiritually prepare during the week, delight the heart of God.

Everyone experiences emergencies which occasionally cause us to prepare for Bible study late in the week. Teachers

can rob themselves of God's blessings by consistently waiting until the night before to prepare to teach. God has all kinds of wonderful things to teach us as we study the scripture during the week. Take the time to find illustrations that reinforce biblical truths. Think about the best way to lead the Bible study. Think about key questions that give others opportunities to share insights. All of these things that add to the Bible study experience take preparation time during the week.

If you are a teacher of adults and consistently read the teacher's material in your presentation there is good news for you. There is a better way. God has gifted you with a unique personality. You will be more effective if you share naturally in your own words the biblical truths that are the lesson. Some teachers use notes or an outline, but it is best not to read from these unless sharing a quote or reading from the Bible. There is spiritual wisdom among those who attend your class. When you ask the questions there will be truths shared that you have not thought about. It is important however, to keep in mind that biblical truth is not necessarily our opinion. As the teacher guides the lesson it is important to focus on what is taught by the Bible.

Outreach and ministry responsibilities are sometimes seen as less important than teaching in Sunday School. Those who have these responsibilities may not see the importance of making contacts and ministering to people as a high priority in regard to their time during the week.

Perhaps the greatest gift of time has been given to those who work with children in Sunday School. Preschoolers and children are developing their basic beliefs about God and church. What a tragedy to simply have baby sitting of children with no learning experiences of spiritual truths based on the child's age and learning ability.

One of the greatest uses of God's gift of time is to attend Sunday School training conferences. If God's time of service is a gift, shouldn't we seek to consistently be more effective in its use as a teacher or ministry leader?

Failure to Mentor and Use Approved Substitutes

A priority of every Sunday School leader should be to mentor someone else to do the same ministry. This is particularly true of teaching in the Sunday School. One of the highest priorities a teacher should have is to mentor someone else to teach in their age group. You will touch the lives of people for generations to come through the teaching of the one you mentor. You will touch the lives of people you will never meet through the teaching of the one you mentor. Teach someone else who is mature enough by age and in spiritual maturity to teach others.

There is a caution. It is important to be careful about using teaching substitutes. The person substituting should be known to us as biblically sound and that lives a life that honors Christ. Just because Aunt Suzy's nephew is in town and has some type of ministry is not a reason to enlist him to teach. For safety and security there needs to be approved guidelines for anyone working with children and teenagers. Churches should have a list of approved substitute Sunday School teachers. God holds those who teach his word to a high standard.

Failure to be a Part of the Team

The Sunday School is the church organized to carry out the Great Commission.

READ MATTHEW 28:19-20

Teachers should never view their class as a church separate from the main body. A spiritual responsibility of teachers is to promote unity and cooperation toward the direction of the entire church. The teacher is a spiritual influence who has the responsibility to support and promote the main emphasis of the church. Like any influence it can be used to strengthen or damage Christ's ministry.

There are times when the leadership of the church must make changes in the Sunday School for effective ministry. Church staff and lay leaders of the Sunday School should be careful to clearly explain why changes are being made. Leaders should communicate and receive input from the teachers and others. Ultimately the team (church) must move in the same direction.

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MEETINGS ARE
CRITICAL FOR COMMUNICATION AND A TEAM
FUNCTIONING TOGETHER.**

The pierced hands of the potter are continually shaping us for God's mission. We are being prepared with the same loving hands that caused the blind to see. As God shapes us he looks at our hands and places something very important in them. He places time in our hands. God is the creator of time. God has created us to be active in time as we serve in the Sunday School for a purpose.

**GOD DESIRES THAT WE BE BUILDERS IN A
SPECIFIC TIME FOR ETERNAL RESULTS**

The tragedy is that while hundreds of thousands of people attend thousands of Sunday Schools every week, many of those miss the purpose for their class and for the time God have given them.

Many adult classes view the Sunday School as a time to get together and enjoy being with friends, praying and learning some things from the Bible. While these things are good, God has a specific purpose and mission for every class.

HOW CAN I KNOW WHETHER MY CLASS IS REALLY ON MISSION WITH CHRIST?

QUESTION #1 – ARE WE REACHING ANYONE WHO IS UNCHURCHED?

Is it possible for a Sunday School class to be in existence for a year without reaching any unchurched person? How about five years? How about 10 years or more?

When a class can no longer look outside the walls and windows of the church and have a concern for the unchurched it has lost its focus and purpose for existence. It is a class who does not please God.

Not only were the hands of Jesus pierced but his feet also. Jesus is concerned that we build Sunday School with hands and feet that are ready to reach the unchurched. When those who needed Jesus fell at his feet they noticed his feet and his being were beautiful.

OUR FEET ARE NEVER MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN WHEN WE STEP OUT TO REACH THOSE WHO NEED JESUS.

READ ROMANS 10:13-17

QUESTION #2 – ARE PEOPLE IN OUR CLASS BEING BUILT UP IN CHRIST?

Are we growing in spiritual maturity as we study God's word? Are we ministering to people who are assigned to our class? Are we fellowshiping together as believers? Are we ministering to families?

READ I PETER 4:8-10

QUESTION #3 – DO ADULTS LEAVE THE CLASS PREPARED FOR MINISTRY AND SERVICE?

The highest compliment that could be paid to an adult teacher is that people are going out of the class to serve in areas of the church. People should leave the class to work with preschoolers, children, and youth and other adults during Sunday School.

It is also important that people in the class are built up to enter their mission field at work, school and other places during the week. Living what is learned in Sunday School produces spiritual maturity.

Nehemiah of the Old Testament is a great example for leaders in building a class or Sunday School. Nehemiah chapters 2-6 are great building chapters in the Bible as Nehemiah leads the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah and all his workers were inscribed on God's palms. God uses people like you and me to rebuild the walls. He will use us in building great classes.

NEHEMIAH PRINCIPLES

- 1) Nehemiah evaluated his current situation and what needed to be built.

READ NEHEMIAH 2:11-15

- 2) God's hand was on Nehemiah. He desired to fulfill God's mission.

READ NEHEMIAH 2:16-18

- 3) Nehemiah dealt with the ridicule of uncooperative people.

READ NEHEMIAH 2:19-20

- 4) Nehemiah involved everyone in the building. There were people of all ages with different gifts and skills. People were willing to use their hands and feet as eternal builders in the following chapters.

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) What mission has God created for you as a Sunday School leader?
- 2) Proverbs 21:2 tells us that God “weighs our heart”. Read the entire verse. When we consider our work in Sunday School, what are some wrong attitudes leaders can have?
- 3) If God is like a potter and we are like clay, how has God shaped you to serve in Sunday School?
- 4) What are some things that can make us ineffective in our Sunday School service?
- 5) Why is it important to be a part of the team of Sunday School leaders?
- 6) What has God laid on your heart to do through your ministry in Sunday School?
- 7) What is the mission of the Sunday School?
- 8) What can we learn from Nehemiah about being an effective Sunday School leader?

CHAPTER 3

A HEALTHY DIET

As you sit by the fire, the warmth comforts you. As you look through the flickering flames at the face of Jesus, his warmth comforts you even more. You reflect back on Jesus' question. "Do you love me?" You recall the many ways God has expressed his love to you all your life. There is only one conclusion. Of all the billions of people who live on this planet, God has chosen to bless you personally.

As you watch Jesus prepare the meal, there seems to be a loving purpose. This meal is for your benefit. This meal is a healthy diet. It is designed to help you grow in a healthy way. How can you ever repay Jesus for his love?

As a Sunday School leader, how can you repay Jesus for his love? Take a moment to think about your life.

- Has God loved you when you were not very loveable?
- Has God loved you when you rejected or ignored him?
- What are some ways that God has specifically expressed his love to you?
- What has God given you that you didn't deserve?
- What miracles has God done for you because of his love?
- Do you serve God in Sunday School because of your love for him?

King David thought about questions like these in the later years of his life. He was so overcome by God's love that he recorded a song of thanksgiving in the Bible.

READ II SAMUEL 22

In the Old Testament days of David, there is a beautiful story that illustrates God's love for us. The story of Mephibosheth reveals God's love for us as his child and as a Sunday School leader. This story also reveals that God desires that we learn some spiritual lessons that result in spiritual wisdom as Sunday School leaders.

Saul had been King of Israel. He was jealous of David because of his popularity with the people. David defeated the giant Goliath and was a great military leader. On several occasions Saul tried to murder David. He hunted David like an animal and made his life miserable.

Saul was killed in a battle by an enemy army and David became the king of a united nation. He had absolute power and control. He could take revenge and kill anyone in the household of Saul. Mephibosheth was a descendant of Saul. In II Samuel, David decides to show kindness to Mephibosheth despite the fact that he was descended from Saul. This story is a beautiful picture of God's love for us. Notice these similarities.

Mephibosheth

- He was crippled by a fall when dropped by his nurse. (II Samuel 4:4)
- He lived in Lodebar (a place with no pasture) separated from the King. (II Samuel 9:4)
- The king forgave him and brought him to his table to have continued fellowship with him. He was to eat continually at the king's table. (II Samuel 9:13)

Christians

- We were crippled by a fall because of sin. (I Corinthians 15:22)
- Before we knew Christ as Lord and Savior we were separated in a place of no pasture. (Psalm 23)
- God has forgiven and saved us to have continual fellowship with him. (I Corinthians 11:26)

As believers and Sunday School leaders God desires to have fellowship with us at his table. The spiritual food that he gives us are his words. When the prophet Jeremiah ate the words of God they became the joy of his heart.

READ JEREMIAH 15:16

God desires that Sunday School leaders feast on his word continually for spiritual wisdom. It is impossible for us to learn everything from God's word, but there are certain spiritual truths God desires every Sunday School leader to know.

SPIRITUAL WISDOM FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS

1) HAVE A GODLY LOVE FOR THOSE YOU SERVE IN SUNDAY SCHOOL.

What a wonderful gift to invest our lives in working with preschoolers in Sunday School. Godly care for those who have been recently created by God is a rich experience. Preschoolers have their whole life ahead and God has allowed us to invest in their learning those basic things about him.

It is also a wonderful gift to work with grade school children at a time when they learn incredible things about God and his word. How many lives have been impacted because of a caring Sunday School leader?

Understanding and working with teenagers is a special gift. A key to impacting their lives is the godly care of Sunday School leaders.

What is your motivation for working with adults? Is it because no one else would take the responsibility? Is it because no one else would teach? As you teach and minister, do you really see the people that God has entrusted to you? Do you really care about and love the people you are ministering to? What is your motivation for service? What should the love of a Sunday School leader look like?

READ I CORINTHIANS 13

It really doesn't matter how talented and gifted a leader you may be if you don't have love. Without love for people, our ministry amounts to very little. Love for people energizes and makes Sunday School leaders more effective. The leaders who experience the greatest results are those who love people.

2) GODLY LOVE LEADS TO OUR SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT IN EXPANDING GOD'S WORK IN SUNDAY SCHOOL.

God has called believers to sit at his table and have fellowship with him. The added bonus is that we have the opportunity to care for and fellowship with other believers at his table. The real question is one of room. How big is God's table of fellowship? If it were up to us, would God's table be limited to ourselves and our friends?

God's table of fellowship has no limits or boundaries. His table is unending for those who receive him.

READ ACTS 1:8

God is always at work expanding his table because all who will come are welcome. He is not passive but active in every generation. God expects every believer to join him in bringing people to his ever expanding table. The Bible records that God has feelings. We break God's heart when we keep people from his table.

There are two major ways that believers in Sunday School can be a hindrance to expanding God's work and reaching people for Christ.

FIRST: CLAIM FOR OURSELVES SPACE THAT BELONGS TO GOD.

Every Sunday School classroom and space belongs to God. Even if our family has given to the building program for years, the space is not ours. It belongs to God. Every Sunday School classroom or space should be dedicated to God.

Sunday School leaders should consistently evaluate the best use of space in order to reach people for Christ and minister to those who attend. When a growing class desperately needs space to continue to reach people, and a class with no growth but plenty of space refuses to cooperate, God's work is hindered. There are times when adult classes decorate their room and add furnishings and claim the room for themselves. They do not want to move even if it hinders God's work.

Certainly priority must be given particularly to where preschoolers, senior adults and those with disabilities meet. Safety is an important consideration. Groups that have mobility should be willing to meet where it is best strategically to reach new people and minister to attendees. This demonstrates true Godly love.

SECOND: MISS THE BLESSING OF PRAYING FOR AND STARTING NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES.

Starting new Sunday School classes is one of the greatest ways to express our love for God and others. God desires to use existing classes for his purposes in touching peoples' lives. He also has purposes for new classes that will touch the lives of people in the future. When a new class is started it will touch people's lives perhaps even ten or twenty years from now in ways that we may never see.

It is critically important to structure preschool, children and youth classes for effective teaching and ministering. Enlisting teachers and space may be the greatest challenges to starting those new classes.

Starting new adult Sunday School classes is the key to church growth and health. When the church appears to be in a maintenance mode, new classes can energize everything from attendance to people receiving Christ and being baptized. Starting new classes often requires sacrifice and God honors our faith in stepping out to expand ministry.

Growing churches know that the key is to gradually expand the number of classes. In many churches, for every new Sunday School class that is started, an attendance of 10-15 more people will be present each Sunday. More lives are touched for Jesus Christ!

Starting new classes helps us to reach and assimilate more people. When an adult class has been in existence for some time the fellowship of those who attend grows deeper. Even though the class may be friendly to newcomers and may reach some, there are those who feel that they must break into the group. New classes designed for a certain adult age group will usually grow quickly because everyone is new. Sometimes those who only attend worship or are no longer attending their class will attend a new class.

New adult classes also give more opportunity for people to serve and use their gifts. New classes have a tendency to grow faster than existing classes. New classes also often provide a place for an age group with like needs that does not currently exist. One of the best ways to love God and others is to start new classes and provide more opportunity to fellowship at the Lord's table.

If starting new classes is critical to the life and growth of a church, why is it difficult to do in many churches? How we start new classes is critically important. Some people are reluctant in starting new classes because of past experiences that were not positive. Given the fact that God is at work in starting new classes, it is absolutely important that we go about it in the best way possible. What is at stake is touching people's lives. For some the stakes are eternity with Jesus Christ.

There are certain ingredients that help to start new adult classes in a positive way.

- Identify the age span where the most people could be reached. What age span of people attend worship but not Sunday School? What age group in the community could

we best reach? What age span has life needs that help people best relate to one another?

- Who would be the best teacher for this group? When an age span has been identified and a teacher enlisted 90% of the work is done in starting a new class. The teacher enlisted is one who has a heart for reaching new people for Christ and the study of his word.
- Refer to the new class as a “mission class”. A new mission class is being started to reach people for Christ and include them in Bible study. The old terminology of “splitting a class” is negative and should not be used. When we split a class we are focusing on splitting relationships.
- Communicate with and involve any teachers of existing classes in the same age group or who might be affected in advance. Ask existing classes to pray for the new class that will start. Some key leaders who will start the new class may come out of the existing class as missionaries. Coordinate with teachers of existing classes plans to contact those on their roll who no longer attend. Seek to involve them in the new class.
- Enlist those with a mission heart and spirit to start the new class. Enlist the willing. There are certain people in your church who have a heart for reaching people for Christ and involving new people in Bible study. These people have a mission spirit. They desire to be on mission with Christ as he leads toward starting a new class. These people are willing to help start a new class because of their spiritual maturity and desire to please Christ. There is not a selfish bone in their body or spirit. Identify a small group of these willing servants in the age group of the class you are starting to be the core. If you are starting a new men’s class enlist a few men with the mission spirit to help start the group. Enlist a few women to help the teacher start a women’s class. Enlist a few couples to help

the teacher start a new co-ed class. The term co-ed is good because a spouse can not always attend the class. The core group will invite new people to the class and be involved in ministry to one another. Single adults may choose to attend co-ed, singles, men or women's classes.

- Advertise the start of the new class in the worship service through a bulletin insert or announcement for a couple of weeks. Call and send out information to those in the age group of existing classes who currently do not attend and invite them to the new class. New church members who have not gotten involved in Sunday School may also be invited. Invite those in the age group who have recently visited your church to the start of the new class.
- God is not limited to this one way of starting new classes. A large class may have a heart for starting a new class themselves. A teacher may come out of the class in cooperation with church leaders. The core group may be chosen by the large class and are commissioned to go out to begin the new work. A pastor and the enlisted new teacher may host a dinner in a home and invite those who might be interested in starting a new class. The pastor or enlisted teacher may teach a special topical Bible study for a few weeks for the new class to help get it started. What other ways could we start new classes?

God is at work and continually calls believers to be a part of his expanding of the kingdom. What keeps many believers from being a part of starting new classes? FEAR. Fear that our comfort will be disturbed. Fear that our needs will not be met. Fear of change. Fear of failure.

READ II TIMOTHY 1:7-9

God calls us to have fellowship with him at his table because he loves us so much. There is always room for others at his table. As you fellowship with Jesus he offers you a healthy diet of feeding on his word. God's word, the Bible, strengthens and builds us up to be on mission with him.

READ PSALM 23

AS A RESULT OF GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO FOR HIM BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE FOR HIM AND OTHERS?

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) Has God loved you when you were not very loveable?
- 2) What are some ways that God has specifically expressed his love to you?
- 3) What has God given you that you didn't deserve?
- 4) What miracles has God done for you because of his love?
- 5) Do you serve God in Sunday School because of your love for him?
- 6) What impact has God's words from the Bible had on your life?
- 7) Why is it important to have a godly love for those you serve in Sunday School? What can we apply to our service in Sunday School from I Corinthians 13?
- 8) Would you be willing to help start a new Sunday School class if given the opportunity?

CHAPTER 4

SHARPENING YOUR UTENSILS

As the fire crackles and sparks float across the wind, you feel like the most honored of guests. As Jesus continues to prepare the meal you realize the God who created the universe is setting apart time to spend especially with you. Of all the needs in the universe this time has been set aside just with you. Of all the work to be done in the universe, Jesus feels it is important to have this time with you.

Somehow you know this time alone with Jesus will prepare you for a work to be done once you leave. Then you notice that Jesus barely has any utensils to prepare this meal. You ask him about this and are confused by the answer. Jesus indicates that what he has is adequate for the task.

You think about the fact that Jesus who created you also desires to sharpen you as his instrument and his utensil to accomplish his work in a sinful world.

Then you understand. Withdrawing to this private place to spend time with Jesus is the key to fulfilling his purpose for your service through the Sunday School. As you sit alone by the fire with Jesus you are encouraged and strengthened about everything in your life. There is a clearer direction about life and ministry, as clear as the night sky above.

Then your words come from the deepest part of your heart in response to Jesus' earlier questions. You say with certainty, "Jesus, I love you." This time alone with Jesus is a time to love him. There begins to flow from you words of love to Jesus. Words of thanksgiving come as you think of all that Jesus has done for you.

In the midst of these words of praise to Jesus it is as though a knife has cut your heart as you think of the sin in your life. As you ask Jesus for forgiveness you feel a cleansing and a burden is taken off your spirit. Jesus in such a moment has forgiven your sins. You remember the day you first trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You remember the

times you failed Jesus and are overcome. An impure thought? Angry words? Fear, worry, and a lack of prayer? Yet in your failure, as you confessed your sin Jesus forgave you.

It occurs to you that other people have hurts and needs. You can see their faces as you look in the fire. Family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. The person who was crying in the parking lot of the grocery store. The person you recently visited in the nursing home. You ask Jesus to help each of them. You know that Jesus not only hears but loves each of these. Your request to Jesus on behalf of these people will impact their lives.

As a Sunday School leader it is critically important to spend time alone with Jesus every day. A time to tell God how much you love him. A time to confess to God sins that became a barrier to a joyful life and effective service. A time to thank God for his blessings and bring our requests before him. A time to pray for the needs of other people.

Withdrawing to spend time with Jesus is the key to effective service as a Sunday School leader. It is in this private place of Bible reading and prayer that you receive strength, direction and joy for your service.

**JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE. HIS TIME ALONE WITH
THE FATHER GAVE HIM STRENGTH TO FULFILL
HIS MISSION.**

READ JOHN 12:49-50

**DO YOU HAVE A SPECIFIC TIME AND PLACE
EACH DAY TO SPEND TIME ALONE WITH GOD?**

DOES GOD SPEAK TO YOU AS YOU READ THE TRUTHS OF THE BIBLE? DO YOU SPEAK TO GOD AS YOU PRAY? DOES GOD GIVE YOU INSIGHT ABOUT NEXT WEEK'S BIBLE STUDY?

AS WE SPEND TIME ALONE WITH GOD HE SHARPENS US AS HIS UTENSIL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN AN EVIL WORLD, A WORLD SYSTEM THAT IS IN CONFLICT WITH GOD.

Jesus spoke of a world system where the prevalent philosophy is to possess as much as possible and to “eat, drink and be merry.” READ LUKE 12:16-21. Jesus pointed out that there is a problem with those who are rich with things but not rich toward God. Jesus taught that life is much more than physical food. Our treasure is God. God’s treasure is a heart who loves him. READ LUKE 12:30-31.

In the Old Testament Adam and Eve were given everything by God. They had the best food from the fruit of the trees in the garden. This was not enough. They were not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden. They had to have this fruit as well. It brought them destruction instead of wisdom.

The Bible speaks of those whose stomachs are full but miss being fed by the presence of God. READ PSALM 17:14-15. When we awake in the morning aware that we are beginning a new day with Christ and commit our hands, arms, feet, legs, mouth, mind, ears, eyes and indeed our whole being

to him, something special happens during our day. God fills us with his power, wisdom and strength to serve him.

The Bible teaches that a person can continually eat of the things of this world and never be satisfied. It's God's righteousness that fills us.

READ PROVERBS 13:25

READ I CORINTHIANS 6:13

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:18-20

WHAT IS YOUR FOCUS IN SPENDING TIME ALONE WITH GOD?

IS YOUR PURPOSE TO DELIGHT GOD?

READ PSALM 40:8

Would it make any difference as a Sunday School leader if your purpose was to delight God when you are alone with him? Would your ministry become more than routine or tiring if your sole purpose was to DELIGHT God? Do you view the things that you do to serve God in Sunday School as a way to delight him?

Have you found a special place to be alone with God? A place that is quiet and where you can openly talk with God is important. As a matter of fact this may be a place that you can look back on where God answered prayers and did miracles. It is a place where you fall in love with Jesus each and every day.

READ PROVERBS 15:3

Do you ever pray to God in your Sunday School classroom or place where you will meet the next Sunday asking God to speak to peoples' hearts as you teach?

God shapes us as his utensil as we spend time alone with him. He strengthens and encourages us for ministry. God desires to shape and use us.

Feeding on the things of the world leaves us unhealthy. In Deuteronomy 32 we discover that Israel was an example of this. They became bloated and fat with sin because they had abandoned God. There were things that pushed God out of their lives. God desired to feed them honey, milk, meat, and wheat, and produce drink from the finest grapes. God desired to give them food for spiritual strength. Yet things that appeared more attractive pushed God out of their lives. The result was an unhealthiness that leads to death.

READ DEUTERONOMY 32:12-15

Spiritual food strengthens and shapes us as God's utensils. In the Old Testament Joshua was leading God's army to conquer Jericho. When he was near Jericho he was walking along and apparently looking down. The cares and issues of this world often cause us to go through life looking down. There are those special times when God gets our attention and we look up. Something caused Joshua to look up.

Joshua was surprised by a man who stood in front of him. There was something special about this man. There was something different about this man. He stood before Joshua with a drawn sword in his hand. Who was this man? This man was like a son of God. He was like one eternal.

Joshua approached him very carefully. Joshua asked him if he was on their side. Joshua was concerned that he might have been on the side of the enemy.

The man replied that he was not on either side. He was a commander of a greater army. He was commander of the Lord's army. It was as though this commander had come to review the troops and what was going on.

Joshua was overcome as he looked at this man. This man appeared to be a divine person. Joshua treated him with the greatest respect. Even though Joshua was a general of the

army of Israel he fell on his face on the ground and worshipped the one before him. There was no jealousy. There was no questioning of who this man represented. He joyfully submitted to this commander. He humbled himself to this one who stood before him.

Joshua placed himself as a servant before this captain. He eagerly wanted to know what directions he would receive from him. Joshua's spirit connected to this captain of the Lord's army. He was ready to follow his commands.

The commander of the army could have told him many things. He simply told Joshua to take off his sandals. He was to remove them from his feet because he was on holy ground. Joshua would never be the same as God's servant. He was sharpened spiritually for his service. God would give him victory as Joshua was faithful to him.

READ JOSHUA 5:13-15

As a Sunday School leader we stand on holy ground. God is the "captain of our salvation". (Hebrews 2:10) We owe all of our respect, love, honor and praise to him. He is our commander and we are his soldier servants. As Sunday School leaders, we are in the Lord's army. There are those times when we are alone with Christ and we are on holy ground. We bow on our faces before him to do his will.

We are on holy ground when we lead in Bible study. We are on holy ground as we seek to reach the unchurched and enroll them in Sunday School. We are on holy ground when we minister to the ill or those facing difficulties. We are on holy ground when we fellowship with those in our class or group. When we pray and serve through the ministry of the Sunday School we are standing on holy ground.

There are at least two things that God does for us when we are on holy ground. God feeds us from his word the Bible and he strengthens us for service as we pray. Second, God sharpens us as his instrument or utensil to accomplish his

ministry. Just as this commander who stood before Joshua held a sharp sword God shapes us for the task ahead.

**WHAT HAS GOD DONE FOR YOU AS
YOU SPEND TIME ALONE WITH HIM?**

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) Of all the people who live in the universe God desires to spend time personally with you. Jesus died on the cross to make it possible to spend time with you. How do you feel about that in light of the fact that we sometimes miss spending time with God?
- 2) What are some specific ways that you have expressed your love to God?
- 3) Why is it important to have a special time and place to get alone with God?
- 4) What does God do for you as you read scripture during your time alone with him?
- 5) What are some types of things you should pray for in your time alone with God?
- 6) What impact does your time alone with God have on your ministry through Sunday School?
- 7) Why is it important to delight God through our service?
- 8) What does it mean to eat of the things of the world instead of the things of God?
- 9) What does it mean to “stand on holy ground” in our service?

CHAPTER 5

THE CORRECT LIGHTING

The fire lowers into hot coals. Just right for cooking. As the light from the fire decreases you realize the importance of its brightness. It is more difficult to see. However, as you look at Jesus he has a light of his own. It is as though his whole being is light. You are reminded just how important light is to God.

It would be difficult to have a meal without light. Light gives form to vegetables, animals and us. That's why God said at the beginning of the world, "Let there be light." (Genesis 1:3)

Jesus himself is light. He is the "light of the world". READ JOHN 8:12. Even his garments were a bright light at the transfiguration. READ MATTHEW 17:1-5. Jesus desires to give light to us. READ JOHN 1:1-9.

Light is a precious gift from God. Light is absolutely essential to our work in the Sunday School. Light is essential to who we are and what we do in service.

Light speaks of righteousness in the Bible. As Sunday School leaders we are to strive to set an example by living according to the principles of the Bible. God is the "Father of Lights". READ JAMES 1:17. God as our father deserves that we be a light as well. He desires that we live a life that pleases him.

We live in a world of confused values. The prophet Isaiah teaches us that even we are a light to God in righteous living, that we are sweet in his presence. When we live a life of sin we are bitter to him. READ ISAIAH 5:20-21. The Bible speaks of ridding ourselves of dark works and wearing protective clothing of light. READ ROMANS 13:12. As God's children we are to live a life of light.

God's word the Bible gives us direction for living. God led the children of Israel on their exodus out of Egypt with light. READ EXODUS 13:21. Job spoke of those who

“stagger” in the dark with no light. (Job 12:25) The psalmist speaks of how God is our light and gives direction.

READ

Psalm 18:28

Psalm 27:1

Psalm 36:9-10

Psalm 37:3-6

Psalm 43:3

Psalm 97:10-12

Proverbs 13:9

READ PSALM 119:105

Lamps in the Old Testament did not give off much light to the one walking. Light was given for one step at a time. God’s word will lead us a step at a time as we live for him and do his will. God’s word gives us light and direction for our service in Sunday School.

Light also speaks of being a witness for Christ. It is vitally important for every Sunday School leader to be prepared to share the good news of the gospel and salvation. At the end of this chapter the plan of salvation is outlined for you. Use this page in sharing the gospel with others. Even better, memorize this brief presentation. You will be prepared to lead someone to pray to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

It is also critically important for teachers to periodically share the plan of salvation to the class as you lead in Bible study. There should be an opportunity to equip all Sunday School members to share the gospel.

TAKE A MOMENT TO REVIEW THE PLAN OF SALVATION AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER.

The opposite of light is darkness. God's purpose for our lives is to be his children of light. Yet there are attitudes that can come into our lives that dim our light.

WHAT CAN DIM OUR LIGHT FOR LIVING AN EFFECTIVE LIFE FOR JESUS CHRIST?

The Old Testament book of Malachi reveals some attitudes that can come into our lives as God's children that dim the light of living for Christ. These attitudes keep us from living an effective life of righteousness. These attitudes keep us from being effective as a witness of God's love and salvation. These attitudes keep us from being effective in our service in Sunday School.

LIGHT DIMMERS

- 1) DOUBTING GOD'S LOVE IN THE PRIVATE MOMENTS OF OUR MIND.

READ MALACHI 1:2

The people of Malachi's day openly doubted God's love for them. They lived in a difficult time and openly questioned God's love.

Has anything ever happened in your life that would cause you to doubt God's love? As God's children it would be rare for someone to openly question whether God loves us in a Sunday School class. However, even as Sunday School leaders we can doubt God's love in those private moments when facing difficulties, even though deep in our heart we know that God loves us.

DOUBTING GOD'S LOVE CAN DIM OUR LIGHT OF LIVING FOR HIM.

READ HEBREWS 13:5-8

2) FAILURE TO WORSHIP GOD WITH ALL OUR HEARTS.

READ MALACHI 1:6-7

Worshipping God with other believers is critically important as a Christian and Sunday School leader. Even beyond worshipping with others, God desires that we worship him with all our heart. When you attend worship at your church do you sometimes find that your mind and heart are far away from God? Even while you sing praises to God? Even as God's word is taught and proclaimed?

WHEN WE FAIL TO WORSHIP GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART OUR LIGHT CAN DIM.

There are times when a Sunday School leader may become angry with the pastor or others about some issue in the church and decide to no longer attend worship. To decide to no longer worship with other believers because of an issue displeases God. It hurts our witness. Sunday School leaders should use their godly influence to encourage others to worship. God never intended for us to use a lack of participation in worship as a weapon toward others. Sunday School teachers should especially be conscious of their influence and encouragement to others by worshipping God faithfully and with all their heart. God builds Sunday School leaders through their participation in worship.

READ HEBREWS 10:25

3) BUYING INTO THE WORLD'S PHILOSOPHY THAT THOSE WHO DO NOT FOLLOW GOD PROSPER.

READ MALACHI 2:17

On the surface it seems that no follower of Christ would consider the idea that those who do not follow God prosper.

Like doubting God's love this idea can unexpectedly enter our minds. It is a subtle attack by the evil forces that oppose God.

Perhaps as a believer we work hard to serve God. We are faithful to him in our service in the Sunday School. We love God and pray to him every day. Yet, we face struggles in our life and in our family. Perhaps there is an illness or family problem.

Perhaps our neighbor has nothing to do with God. He attends church on Easter. He doesn't think about God much and is not sure if he even exists. Yet, he has a good job and health. He appears to prosper financially. He has a wonderful family. While we suffer our neighbor seems to prosper.

There comes the temptation to no longer sacrifice our time and resources to God. It's as though those who don't follow God prosper. However, the circumstances of this world are temporary. There will come a day when each of us will give an account to Christ whether we have lived our life for him.

COMPROMISING WITH THE WORLD CAN DIM OUR LIGHT.

READ ROMANS 14:12

- 4) FAILURE TO RETURN WHEN WE ARE OUT OF STEP WITH GOD.

READ MALACHI 3:7

As a Sunday School leader is there anything in your life that puts you out of step with God? In Malachi's day the people were totally out of step with God. More accurately the people were in rebellion against God. God was ready to forgive them and bring them back to him. The people could not admit that they were out of fellowship with God. They were not willing to confess their sins and return to God. They denied any wrong doing.

UNCONFESSED SIN CAN DIM OUR LIGHT FOR CHRIST.

READ I JOHN 1:9

- 5) FAILING TO BE FAITHFUL IN GIVING GOD OUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS.

READ MALACHI 3:8-10

The people of Malachi's day angered God by failing to give their tithes and offerings. Where we give our money reveals the priorities of our lives. Where we give our money reveals what is important to us. God is a giver and he desires that we have the same spirit of giving.

For the Sunday School leader there are many blessings related to our giving. We give our tithes and offerings because we love God. We give because God's work is important to us. We give because God has commanded it and we receive a blessing by obeying God.

God desires to bless you as his child and as a Sunday School leader. We can't out give God. He desires to open the "windows of heaven" and pour out tremendous blessings on us. God desires to give to the extent that we are overwhelmed by his blessings. God desires us to be faithful in our giving as he blesses and provides for us.

DO YOU RECEIVE BLESSINGS AS YOU FAITHFULLY GIVE YOUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS?

READ II CORINTHIANS 9:7

- 6) BELIEVING THAT IT DOES NOT PAY TO SERVE GOD.

READ MALACHI 3:13-14

Have you ever come to the point as a Sunday School leader that you have questioned whether it is worth sacrificing and

servicing God? This could be especially true when there is difficulty in our service or when we don't seem to be making any progress. We may even wonder why God led us to serve in this position. There is nothing wrong with evaluating whether we are in the right place of service. However, our service often requires time and patience to see results.

Imagine this scenario. There is no doubt that a person is serving where God has led them in the Sunday School. Others confirm that they are in the right place of service but that person still experiences difficulty or discouragement in his service. He may even feel that God is not doing his part. If we are not careful we can come to the conclusion that it does not pay to serve God. Our thoughts and words can even weary God.

God wants us to know that he is alive and active in our service. Faith that God is at work in our service pleases him. God is at work. Watch for him.

**BELIEVING THAT IT DOES NOT PAY TO SERVE
GOD CAN DIM OUR LIGHT FOR CHRIST.**

READ JOHN 5:17

Jesus is the light of the world. As Sunday School leaders let us be light in a dark world.

READ I JOHN 1:8-9

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) What are some ways that God demonstrates himself as light?
- 2) How are we to be light as Sunday School leaders in a world of confused values?
- 3) Should the plan of salvation be shared in adult, youth, and grade school children's classes at planned times?
- 4) Are you able to share the plan of salvation with someone who needs Christ? (REVIEW THE NEXT PAGE)
- 5) How is it possible for a believer to doubt God's love? How does doubting God's love harm our ministry in Sunday School?
- 6) Why does God desire that we worship with others? What does corporate worship do for your service in Sunday School? Why is it critical to resolve issues that would keep us from corporate worship?
- 7) How is it possible for a believer to come to the conclusion that those who don't follow God prosper? How does that affect our service in Sunday School?
- 8) Why would a believer refuse to confess sin and return to God? How does this issue affect our service in Sunday School?
- 9) How does giving our tithes and offerings affect us as believers? How does that affect our service in Sunday School?
- 10) How could a believer come to the conclusion that it does not pay to serve God? How does that affect our service in Sunday School?

HOW CAN A PERSON KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT THEY ARE A CHRISTIAN AND WILL GO TO HEAVEN?

1. UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE SINNERS AND DON'T DESERVE TO GO TO HEAVEN.
 - *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* Romans 3:23 (KJV)

2. UNDERSTAND THAT JESUS CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS FOR YOUR SINS SO THAT YOU CAN GO TO HEAVEN WHEN YOU DIE.
 - *“But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* Romans 5:8 (KJV)

3. REPENT OR TURN FROM YOUR SIN AND RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST AS PERSONAL LORD AND SAVIOR.
 - *“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.”* John 1:12 (KJV)

If you would like to receive Jesus Christ and His free gift of eternal life (we can't earn our way to heaven) say this prayer to God from your heart:

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for loving me and for dying on the cross for my sins. I no longer want to be separated from you because of sin. I want to follow you. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and I receive your gift of salvation by faith. Please help me to understand more about you and to grow as your follower. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 6

THE RIGHT CLOTHING

As you wait in anticipation for the meal you notice the clothing Jesus is wearing. His clothing is more than white. There is radiance to the simple, worn garment. The illumination from Jesus' clothing helps you to see in the morning darkness. There is something about Jesus' clothing that speaks to you about his righteousness. In comparison to Jesus your clothes seem as filthy rags.

As you ponder your clothing situation, you feel helpless. After all, there are so many evil influences in our world. What you are wearing is not worthy to wear in your service for Jesus. You worry about this and then you remember something Jesus said. That if God clothes the flowers and "grass of the field" he will also clothe us. READ MATTHEW 6:30.

You began to understand the lesson of Jesus' clothes and how it relates to your service in Sunday School. You are not alone in service. God will be with you in your service. Since Jesus is a servant he will minister with you. He will give you direction and encouragement. Even more he will bring about results that are far greater than you could ever achieve. He will clothe you. He will make provisions. He will do greater things as you work together than you could ever imagine.

Jesus Christ will clothe you for your service in Sunday School. He gives you the clothes of provision for what you need in service. You are not alone as you serve God. He stands ready to do greater things than you ever could do alone as you serve in the Sunday School.

Christ understands that we also need clothes of protection. We live in the influence of an evil world. There are all kinds of things that tempt and divert us from doing God's will. In the Old Testament book of I Kings, we note that King Ahab was a worshipper of God and Baal. He married Jezebel who supported the prophets of the false god Baal. This brought

Ahab in conflict with the prophet Elijah. This situation became worse when Jezebel had most of God's prophets killed. Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and eventually killed them. Jezebel now swore to kill Elijah.

Elijah was overcome with his battle against an evil society. His fear diverted him from fulfilling God's purpose despite the fact that the Lord had given him great victory. The world had brought Elijah down. He wanted to die. He was ready to give in to the world. He forgot that God was his partner. He needed God to pick him up and clothe him in his power.

God provided exactly what Elijah needed. He strengthened him for his journey of service. Without God he would wander aimlessly.

Elijah felt all alone in this evil world. Elijah felt all alone in service. God asked him what he was doing. God already knew but he wanted Elijah to recognize what he was doing as well.

God told Elijah something awesome. God was about to pass by. There was a wind so great that it tore the mountains apart as it passed by. God was not in the wind. He did not clothe Elijah with the power of the wind for his service.

Next there was a powerful earthquake. God was not in the earthquake. He did not clothe Elijah with the power of the earthquake for his service.

Next there was a great fire. You guessed it. God was not in the fire. Even though God used fire to defeat the prophets of Baal he was not in this fire.

**GOD SPOKE IN A VOICE MORE POWERFUL
THAN THE WIND, EARTHQUAKE AND FIRE.**

GOD SPOKE IN A GENTLE WHISPER.

God's whisper was so awesome that Elijah had to pull his clothing over his face. God's whisper was more powerful than Satan's wicked and worldly schemes. A whisper clothed Elijah because God was in it.

In I Kings 19 there is a beautiful story of how God strengthened and encouraged the prophet Elijah at a time when he wanted to stop serving. Elijah had actually come to the point of wanting to die rather than serve God. He was completely discouraged in his service.

God provided for Elijah a fellowship meal. He provided something for him to eat and drink. God did more than give him physical food. God clothed Elijah with a "still small voice" that let him know that he was not done. God was concerned and active with him in his ministry.

READ I KINGS 19:1-13.

**WHAT DISCOURAGES YOU THE MOST IN YOUR
WORK IN SUNDAY SCHOOL?**

**DO YOU SERVE IN SUNDAY SCHOOL
CONSTANTLY AWARE THAT GOD IS PRESENT
AND ALSO AT WORK?**

**DO YOU DEPEND ON THE WORK OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT TO FULFILL YOUR MINISTRY?**

READ PSALM 65:13

READ PSALM 93:1

READ PSALM 104:1

READ PSALM 132:9

READ ISAIAH 61:10

God knows just how to clothe us for his work. As a matter of fact he gives us a whole outfit. He gives us armor for victory in service. This clothing consists of. . .

TRUTH

RIGHTEOUSNESS

GOSPEL OF PEACE

SHIELD OF FAITH

HELMET OF SALVATION

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

READ EPHESIANS 6:10-18

(Prayer is the key.)

There are times when we wear new clothes and it makes us feel good. When God clothes us we should be happy. God is with us as we serve him in Sunday School. The result is that we “rejoice in goodness”.

READ II CHRONICLES 6:41

Attempting to serve God in our own strength is tiring. The book of Job describes it like being clothed with “worms and clods of dust”. There is no rejoicing in our service.

READ JOB 7:5

In Mark 5, there is the story of the Gadarean demoniac. Here was a man who lived among the tombs. He was out of his mind; night and day he would cry out and cut himself with stones. Some tried to catch him and tie him up with chains. The demoniac was so strong that he broke the chains.

One day Jesus and his disciples crossed the sea. As they got out of the boat they came face to face with this man. When the Gadarean demoniac saw Jesus from a distance he ran and worshipped him. It must have been something to see

Jesus cast out the demons from this man into some 2,000 pigs that were there. The pigs ran down a steep place into the sea. There were those in a nearby city who heard about what Jesus had done. They came out to the place where Jesus was and found this man “CLOTHED and in his right mind”.

The Gadarean demonic was clothed to fulfill Christ’s mission.

READ MARK 5:1-20

THERE WERE THREE BASIC REASONS FOR HIM TO BE CLOTHED.

1) TO REACH OTHERS FOR CHRIST

The Gadarean demoniac was living among the dead. He actually lived among the tombs. In a spiritual sense he was living among the dead.

There are those all around us who are living among the dead. They drive cars. Walk our streets. Go to work. Perhaps have a nice home and wonderful family. Perhaps enjoy good health and a good job but are living among the dead. There are those all about us wherever we go each day who are among the spiritually dead because they do not know Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

Jesus gave this man the opportunity to go to the Decapolis and tell others the good news of what Jesus could do for one who is spiritually dead.

2) TO BE BUILT UP AS A DISCIPLE

Jesus had done a miracle in this man’s life. He was “CLOTHED and in his right mind”. He could use his mind to learn the things of God. He could use his mind to understand and apply God’s teaching to his life. He could spiritually mature as he lived for God.

3) TO LIVE A LIFESTYLE OF SERVICE.

When Jesus healed this man he was so grateful and joyful that he wanted to stay with Jesus and the disciples. However, Jesus sent him home to his friends to live a lifestyle of ministry for Jesus among them. He was “CLOTHED” to live a lifestyle of ministry.

THE GADAREAN DEMONIAK DID NOT HAVE A COAT OF MANY COLORS LIKE JOSEPH AND WASN'T CLOTHED IN PURPLE AND FINE LINEN AS THE RICH MAN THAT JESUS TALKED ABOUT. HE WAS CLOTHED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. EVEN THOUGH HE DID NOT GO WITH JESUS HE WAS NOT ALONE. CHRIST WAS STILL WITH HIM AS HE MINISTERED IN THE DECAPOLIS.

ARE YOU WEARING THE RIGHT CLOTHING?

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) Why do Sunday School leaders sometimes feel they are alone in their service?
- 2) What are some things Christ can do that you can't in your work in Sunday School?
- 3) How does God clothe us for his service?
- 4) What does God's whisper have the power to do in our lives and ministry?
- 5) What discourages you the most in your Sunday School work?
- 6) What does it mean to "rejoice in goodness" as we serve in Sunday School?
- 7) What were the three basic reasons for the Gadarean demoniac to be clothed? How do these relate to us?
- 8) How is Jesus both Lord and partner with you as you serve in Sunday School?

CHAPTER 7

THE RIGHT COMPANY

It is almost time to enjoy the meal. This meal and Jesus' presence makes this an awesome experience. As the heat drifts up from the coals and food, you wish others could join the feast. Wouldn't it be wonderful if hungry, hurting, and hopeful people could join in this meal with Jesus? As much as you want to be alone with Jesus, you have an uneasy feeling that there are others who need to bring their needs to Jesus.

Sunday School is about making a difference in peoples' lives. Jesus himself offers us a beautiful picture of what ministry through the Sunday School is all about.

In Matthew 14, Jesus sends his disciples on a boat into the sea of Galilee. Jesus sends them out in this boat to teach them a lesson about ministry that makes a difference. Jesus went up on a mountain side to pray that they would learn the lesson of ministry that touches and makes a difference in other peoples' lives.

As the disciples moved across the sea they encountered a storm. The storm was very real as the lightning flashed; the thunder echoed and as the rain and waves beat both the boat and disciples.

Imagine that your Sunday School class is in the boat on the stormy sea. Jesus is back on land praying for your class to learn an important lesson about ministry. Picture yourself in this boat on this night. Picture the faces of those in your class also on the boat in the storm.

All of you are in the middle of the storm. Each has unique problems, stresses and tough decisions to make. Some in the boat may have challenges related to their marriage, children, health, job, home or school.

Some in the boat worry. Some are depressed. Some angry. Some critical. Some negative. Some positive. Some

praying. Some analyzing the situation. Some hard-hearted. Some helpful.

THE SITUATION IS THAT EVERYONE IN THE CLASS IS IN THE SAME BOAT. EVERYONE NEEDS MINISTRY.

There are some in the boat that need more help than others. The wind from the storm is blowing as you row into the wind and the splash from the waves spray into the boat. Some in the class feel they are getting nowhere as they struggle. It is dark on the sea. It's about three o'clock in the morning. Some in the class can't see which way to go. There is a dark cloud of ministry needs.

READ MATTHEW 14:22-24

As your class is being beaten by the waves in the sea, someone comes up with a brilliant idea. LET'S PRAY. Needs and burdens are lifted up into the storm in prayer. Suddenly the class begins to feel that someone is praying for them in their weakness. That someone is sympathizing with them. They know without a doubt that it is Jesus.

READ HEBREWS 4:14-16

SUDDENLY THE MOST AMAZING THING HAPPENED.

In the middle of the storm there is someone walking toward the boat. And then everyone notices the most incredible thing. The one who is coming toward the boat is walking on water. This reminded someone of an of Old Testament verse in Isaiah.

READ ISAIAH 43:2

All of a sudden it is perfectly clear. The one walking on the water toward your boat, the class, is JESUS. As Jesus walks across the water the wind blows his hair. The wind blows his garment. As Jesus looks toward the boat it is as though he is looking every person directly in the eyes. As Jesus walks across the water a laser-like love comes from his eyes and penetrates every person. This kind of love could only come from the eyes of Jesus. Yet some in the boat thought it might be a ghost.

As Jesus looks at every person in the boat with a godly love he says an amazing thing. Two little words powerful enough to hold the universe in place. Jesus looks at your class in the boat and says, "I AM".

Those words "I AM" sound familiar to everyone. Some thought, Did Jesus mean "I am light" (John 8:12) and will he give us direction back to shore? Did Jesus mean, "I am the bread of life?" (John 6:35) Will he give us food for strength in the storm? Did he mean that he is the "way, truth, and life" (John 14:6) back to the shore?

Jesus has everyone's attention. Those in the boat are thankful that while they prayed Jesus came to them. There is a question on everyone's mind. Each person in the boat have their own storms. Which did Jesus come to deal with? To give light and direction?

Then someone in the boat realized that "I AM" is an unfinished sentence. "I AM" what? It is though a light of understanding shines in every heart. Jesus is the "I AM" able to meet our every need no matter how hopeless the situation. Jesus is everything.

"How will Jesus practically meet our needs?" someone ask as the rain stops. Someone opens a Bible and begins to read. The class teacher is inspired to teach. Jesus came walking through the storm in a different way to everyone in the boat. Jesus came to each person through his word and comforted, encouraged, strengthened, and gave wisdom and direction.

Even though the teacher led in the Bible study he could not visibly see how Jesus came to each individual. He could not see all the questions that were being answered, or the needs that were being met. That was Jesus at work.

READ MATTHEW 14:25-27

Someone in the boat got the craziest idea. “I wonder if I could walk on water. Hey, Jesus can I walk on water, too?” Jesus said, “Come on.” Peter then stepped very carefully out of the boat and actually began to walk on water. Peter was always the one in the class ready to try new things.

As Peter walks on the water toward Jesus he has second thoughts. He reasoned, “You know, a man can’t really walk on water.” He took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. As a result of being in the boat Jesus wanted him to walk by faith.

It was a good thing that Jesus was there. He caught him and asked why he had such little faith. Everyone in the boat felt Jesus was also asking them this question. It was a very personal question.

READ MATTHEW 14:28-33

Those in the boat begin to realize just how important their Sunday School class is to them. It is a place to bring burdens. It is a place of prayer and searching God’s word, where Jesus shows up and does something special in the life of everyone there. It is a place where people really care and love each other the way Christ intended.

It dawns on someone in the boat. “There are others out there who need our class. There are those who have been shipwrecked by life.” A thought leaves everyone short of breath and uneasy in their stomach. Could there be people running from God who were drowning in the water? Could there be those who were in the depths of despair?

As the class looks over the side of the boat they recognize some people down in the water. Someone thought they saw

John struggling in the water. John had been a member of the church for years but never attended worship or Sunday School. He sure did like to fish on Sundays. The class had stopped reaching out to him years ago.

Someone else thought they saw Ann down in the water. "Hello, Ann" someone shouted. She hadn't been to Sunday School in some time and the class had almost forgotten about her.

A short distance from the boat there was bubbling in the water. Perhaps it was a school of fish. As the class strained forward to get a better view they discovered these were not fish at all. These were people who were drowning in the water. Someone in the boat yelled, "Can't you see Jesus? Don't you know that he can save you?" Those in the boat thought they recognized some of those drowning. One person thought they saw a relative. Another thought they saw a neighbor. "If only we could catch them and bring them into the boat," someone said. "It would be as though we were fishers of men, women, boys, and girls."

Your Sunday School class is a holy place to encounter God and bring your burdens. There are those who do not attend your class that need to be a part of a place where God and others can love and care for them. There are Christians who are running away from God or who just no longer seem to care about spiritual things. There are those who have no eternal hope and need to know that Jesus can rescue them from their sins.

The boat is a good place to be. It will eventually take us to our home on dry land where God can build our lives on solid rock.

READ MATTHEW 7:24-27

There are those like the Old Testament person Jonah who are running away from God.

God told Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against its wickedness. Nineveh was a powerful and most

wicked city in its day. It was one of the largest cities on the earth at that time. Jonah decided to run from God rather than obey. Jonah was as far away from God as possible. As Jonah was sailing across the sea, God sent a powerful storm. Jonah was cast into the sea and swallowed by a big fish. According to the Bible God can speak to a fish and he commanded this fish to vomit Jonah on dry land. God ordered Jonah to preach to Nineveh and he obeyed God this time. It was one of the greatest revivals in the history of the world and the city repented and turned to God. God decided not to destroy the people. Jonah became upset because God did not destroy them and wanted to end his life. Jonah's will had not been done. However, God's will had been done. God has promised that he is slow to anger and full of love. God always keeps his promises.

While sitting in the hot sun, Jonah asked God to end his life. God gave Jonah a vine which grew to give him shade. God's will was at work. The next day God provided a worm to chew the vine so that it would wither. Again, the sun blazed down on Jonah's head. Once again he wanted to die.

Jonah had more pity and compassion for the plant than he did for the city of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh were of more value than a plant. Jonah's priorities were mixed up. Our priorities can be mixed up as well.

READ JONAH 4

Are the priorities of your Sunday School class the same as the priorities of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you see the people outside your class with love and compassion? Do you care for those who are in the class? Do you minister and pray for one another? Do you reach out to those who are drowning with the good news of the gospel?

Perhaps you have telephoned and written notes and even visited members of your class who no longer attend. Perhaps they seem not interested or even hostile. Ask them occasionally if they have any needs for prayer. Most people

appreciate being prayed for. It is non-threatening. When there are ministry needs reach out to them. Reclaim them.

IS THERE SOMEONE YOU NEED TO SHARE JESUS WITH TODAY?

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) What difference has the Sunday School made in your life?
- 2) How does the fact that Jesus is praying for us impact our work in Sunday School?
- 3) Describe what your Sunday School class would be like if you were in a storm. What are some of the storms that people might be going through?
- 4) How does Jesus work as the class studies the scripture each week?
- 5) Are you ever amazed at the number of needs and prayer requests in your class? How does God work as we pray as a class?
- 6) What does it mean to you personally to walk by faith?
- 7) If your Sunday School class no longer existed would it make any difference when it comes to touching peoples' lives?
- 8) Do you see your Sunday School class as a holy place to encounter God?
- 9) There are people today who are running from God. How can we help them?
- 10) Is there someone that you need to share the love of Jesus with today?

CHAPTER 8

THE MEAL

The moment arrives that you have long been waiting for. It is time to share in the meal with Jesus. You know deep in your spirit that the food Jesus served will change your life forever. This food will make you more mature. This food will give you both energy and the insight needed to fulfill your ministry.

You look over the assortment of food. There are a number of life-changing things for you to consume. As you review the food you are reminded of God's provision.

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| FRUIT SALAD | READ GALATIANS 5:22-26 |
| QUAIL BISCUIT | READ PSALM 105:40 |
| HEAVENLY CORN | READ PSALM 78:24, MATTHEW 12:1 |
| FISH AND BREAD | READ LUKE 9:16-17 |
| OLIVES | READ PSALM 52:8 |
| MILK AND HONEY | READ EZEKIEL 20:6 |
| WATER | READ JOHN 4:14 |
| ANGEL FOOD DELIGHT | READ PSALM 78:25 |

You wonder why God would provide such a big meal for you. Why would God give you so much provision? And then you remember something you read in the New Testament book of Acts. That verse talked about how God feeds us “filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

READ ACTS 14:17

There are at least two things that come to mind as you think about this. First, you think about how God would no longer walk around the earth as a man in the flesh. Jesus left someone to be his witness. He has “filled our hearts with food and gladness” to share his message and do his work.

There is a second thought that comes to mind. The work God has for you to do is much bigger than you. You will need God-sized strength and provision as you serve him. And as you accomplish what God can only do through you.

Sometimes our tasks in Sunday School appear bigger than we are. God desires that we have a big vision of what the class can accomplish for him.

One of the reasons adult Sunday School classes turn inward is that they never try to reach people for Christ. They never attempt to start a new class. It's as though they believe that God has gotten old and has been put in the nursing home. Some live as though there was a time when God could do great miracles as recorded in the Bible. But some live as though God has grown old and powerless.

There is great news. God can do more through your ministry in Sunday School than you could ever imagine. God can do more through your Sunday School class than you could ever imagine. God can do more through your Sunday School than you could ever imagine. Every Sunday School leader needs God's provision to do a work greater than them. The God who called us to his service is faithful to give us what we need.

**WHAT DOES GOD WANT TO ACCOMPLISH
THROUGH YOUR MINISTRY IN THE SUNDAY
SCHOOL?**

**WHAT DOES GOD WANT TO ACCOMPLISH
THROUGH YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS?**

**HAVE YOU PRAYED AND DREAMED ABOUT
WHAT GOD WANTS TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH
YOU?**

**HAS YOUR CLASS PRAYED AND DREAMED
ABOUT WHAT GOD WANTS TO ACCOMPLISH IN
THE FUTURE?**

IS YOUR VISION CONSISTANT WITH THE WORD OF GOD AND AGREES WITH YOUR PASTOR AND OTHER LEADERS?

As God gives us provision to work his work, we find that we need other believers to help us accomplish God's purpose. Organization is an important part of this. What happens if we do not provide the right kind of space for preschoolers and children? What happens when we do not have enough leaders for our children? What happens when teachers do not understand how preschoolers and children learn? What happens when we have classes that are too large to adequately teach and minister to our children? Organization and training become vitally important.

What happens when there are not adequate leaders who can relate and minister to youth? Again, these are training and organizational issues. God is making provision but leaders must be organized and work together.

One of the most tragic things we witness in adult Sunday School are those teachers who try to do it all themselves. Every adult in the class should have some type of responsibility. Spiritual growth comes from more than hearing the word of God on Sunday morning. It comes from doing and living the word of God. When everyone has a place of service, God will bless and do so abundantly. Some may teach. Every adult teacher should be mentoring one or more people to be future adult teachers. Some may lead in outreach ministry or fellowship. Some may provide good records or lead in the prayer aspect of the class. An adult class may have an administrator who leads in the enlistment and works with those who serve in the class. This frees the teacher to spend his or her time in personal ministry and preparation for teaching.

**THERE ARE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES
THROUGH SUCH PLACES AS YOUR STATE
CONVENTION SUNDAY SCHOOL OFFICE ON HOW
TO ORGANIZE CLASSES.**

Moses is an example of a man who tried to do it all himself. He was one of the great spiritual giants of the Old Testament. Yet, as he went out to fulfill God's purposes he became discouraged even to the point of death. The lesson that Moses learned is one that we need to learn today.

Moses was leading the Israelites on their journey to the promised land. The people began to grumble and complain about the food that God provided for them. They began to talk about "the good old days" of slavery in Egypt. They would have rather been slaves than children of God. They had an exaggerated view of how good things had been in the past. These people spoke against God and doubted his power.

These Israelites could not see that God was supplying exactly what they needed. Their appetites were not for the things of God. The people worried to the point that they began to speak against God. These people would not be satisfied until they had more and more. They felt that God owed them. They doubted God's power, his goodness and that he could supply all their needs. The result was personal and family anxiety. They had no joy in God.

The people's attitude troubled Moses very much. The people could not see God's provision for them. Moses took their grumbling personally. He felt overwhelmed. He wished that he did not have responsibility to lead these people. He felt that the people were a burden and he did not want to take responsibility for them.

Moses began to take his eyes off God and began to wonder how he could feed all those people. Moses was depending on his own strength instead of God's strength. Moses doubted God's power and his word. He was so discouraged that he wanted to die. He no longer desired to

live a life of God's purpose. He could not see God's provision.

It is difficult for us to believe that Moses would rather die than fulfill God's purposes. Moses is one of the greatest spiritual giants ever in history. Yet, he was ready to abandon a life of purpose. There were at least five things that caused Moses to give up on serving God.

- 1) His relationship to others in God's community. He could no longer stand these people.
- 2) He did not see his circumstance as an opportunity to grow spiritually. Rather than allow God to teach him in his difficult circumstances he just wanted to give up.
- 3) He did not see his difficult circumstances as an opportunity to minister and be a leader that could change the history of the world. He could only see the problems and not the opportunity for ministry.
- 4) He did not consider God's plan of redemption and creating a nation to bless generations to come. He did not understand that he was dealing with eternity in establishing Israel. He could only see the immediate circumstance.
- 5) Most of all, Moses took his eyes off God. He was not loving and worshipping God as he should. He became spiritually sick even to the point of death.

Moses was trying to do it all and was burning out fast. Moses needed to get others involved in helping him.

READ NUMBERS 11:1-17

READ EXODUS 18:13-24

When Jesus fed the 5,000 it was in an organized and orderly manner. He divided the people into groups of fifty.

READ LUKE 9:12-17

Out of all the thousands of people that Jesus taught he chose twelve to pour his life into so that they would be future leaders.

God gives you his provision for a God-sized ministry in Sunday School. It takes other believers to accomplish the task.

A part of God's provision for us is to strengthen us to be a part of what he is doing in his world-wide mission. Sunday School classes can contribute to what God is doing through mission work in a number of ways.

- 1) PRAY FOR MISSIONARIES AND MISSIONS NEEDS.**
- 2) CONTRIBUTE MONEY AND ITEMS THROUGH YOUR OVERALL CHURCH'S SPECIAL OFFERINGS AND EMPHASIS.**
- 3) CLASS MISSION TRIPS**

Southern Baptists have an opportunity to support God's mission work around the world as you give your tithes and offerings at the church each week. A portion determined by the church is sent through our Cooperative Program to support mission causes around the world. God has given us so much of his provision. Our love for God leads our class to involvement in missions.

DOES YOUR CLASS HAVE A BIG WORLD-WIDE VISION?

Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) What are some different foods in the Bible that reveal God's provision for us?
- 2) According to Acts 14:17, God "fills our hearts with food and gladness" to be his witness. Does that describe you?
- 3) Why does God give us tasks bigger than us even in our service in the Sunday School?
- 4) Why do some Sunday School classes turn inward rather than depending on the power of God to fulfill his mission of reaching the world?
- 5) Do you believe that God can do more through your ministry in the Sunday School than you could ever imagine?
- 6) What does God want to accomplish through your ministry in the Sunday School?
- 7) What does God want to accomplish through your Sunday School class?
- 8) Why is organization important to effective Sunday School work?
- 9) Why is it important to be a part of Sunday School training opportunities?
- 10) Why is it important to involve adults in areas of ministry and responsibility through the Sunday School?
- 11) How can we avoid burn out in Sunday School ministry?
- 12) What place does missions play in Sunday School ministry?

CHAPTER 9

THE COST

At the end of a fine meal at a choice restaurant you would expect to be presented with the bill. You would expect that a fine meal like the one provided by Jesus would cost a lot. But as you finish this meal prepared by the hands of Jesus you are not concerned. The debt has already been paid in full by Jesus. You know that because you have been adopted into his family there will be no charge. A family meal is prepared out of love and not for profit.

As you look across the low, dying flames of the fire, you suddenly see the most astonishing sight of your life. Jesus is no longer sitting on the other side of the fire. He is high and lifted up on a cross before you. It is a moment of divine revelation as the light from the fire flickers on the scene of Jesus on the cross.

This meal has cost something. It has been prepared at great sacrifice. A life has been given for this meal and to spend time with you. You begin to understand more deeply why Jesus asked three times whether you loved him. Jesus has freely sacrificed his life for your love and even your service.

Just as suddenly, Jesus is no longer before you on the cross. You are sad. You are not sad about Jesus. He is alive. You are sad at all the times that people answer no to Jesus' examining questions. "Do you love me?"

THREE WAYS TO TELL JESUS YOU DON'T LOVE HIM THROUGH THE SUNDAY SHOOL.

- 1) **WHEN CONTROL AT CHURCH IS MORE IMPORTANT TO A PERSON THAN FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION.**

This may take the form of being critical toward the pastor or other leaders. This type of attitude is based on ego and a

need for power. It is a negative attitude toward reaching and discipling people. The focus is on control and not ministry in the church. There is no commitment to the Great Commission.

READ ROMANS 12:3

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20

- 2) **WHEN A PERSON FEELS THAT THIS IS MY CHURCH AND IT IS BIG ENOUGH.**

There is resistance to church growth and expansion. One evil and satanic lie is the idea that a church should stop reaching new people and only concentrate on discipling those who already attend. God desires evangelism and discipleship. The two go hand-in-hand and are connected spiritually. You can't separate them. This is one of Satan's most dangerous lies. It is a way of expressing to Christ a lack of love.

READ JOHN 3:16

READ EPHESIANS 4:30-31

- 3) **WHEN A PERSON IS NO LONGER OPEN TO CHANGE IN ORDER TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL.**

Those who love Jesus would never want to tell him that they don't love him. The Bible teaches that God has feelings and that we can cause him anger and even grieve him. None of us would ever want to intentionally show Jesus that we don't love him. Yet our actions often show a lack of love for Jesus. By nature we are often selfish and are concerned with our own needs.

Our selfishness can take the form of a Sunday School class who resists moving to another room even though it is in the best interest of reaching people for Christ. It may take the form of expressing critical attitudes and opinions during a

Sunday School class in order to upset others about an issue in the church. It's resistance to God's work when changes need to be made in the Sunday School for effective ministry. Sunday School leaders should use good judgment. But we can both anger and grieve God.

READ PROVERBS 29:22-23

READ PSALM 7:11

READ ISAIAH 53:3-6

The Bible teaches that our Savior is a "jealous" God. However, it is a good kind of jealousy. God does not want anyone or anything to be more important in our life than him.

READ EXODUS 20:5

Jesus paid a great price for our salvation. It cost him everything. He also paid a high price in order for us to be his Sunday School servants.

READ MARK 15:22-39

Imagine once again that you are sitting across the fire from Jesus. As you look up you see the cross but Jesus is no longer there. He is alive. As you look at the cross you notice two simple words on the crossbar. You focus in on the words. Are these some words of wisdom about the meaning of life or a prediction about the future?

There are two simple words on the cross. "THE DIFFERENCE." Then it strikes you what Jesus wanted when he asked three times if you loved him. It becomes clear as the morning sky what he wants from you as a Sunday School leader.

He wants you to learn how to spell LOVE. The kind of love that Jesus wants us to have for him as Sunday School leaders. That kind of love is spelled "COMMITMENT". That

was the difference. As a Sunday School leader what commitments are you willing to make because you love the Lord Jesus Christ? More important, which commitments are you not willing to make to Christ in your service for him? Please check the following areas that you will commit to Christ in your service in Sunday School.

MY LOVE COMMITMENTS TO JESUS CHRIST.

EXPRESSING MY LOVE TO GOD THROUGH SERVICE

READ JAMES 2:18-26

1. I will pray for my pastor and church leaders. I will support the vision of the pastor and other leaders under the direction of the Holy Spirit. I will communicate information that will support the emphasis of the church. I will be a peacemaker when there are concerns.
2. I will organize my class for teaching, outreach and ministry.
3. I will be prepared to lead in meaningful Bible study for my age group. I will use effective learning principles for my age group.
4. I will be prepared for my ministry on Sunday morning and during the week.
5. I will be regular and punctual in attendance and use approved substitutes.
6. I will mentor others to serve in my area under the guidelines of the church. EXAMPLE: An adult teacher may mentor a future teacher and allow him to occasionally lead in Bible Study.
7. I will participate in training and planning opportunities to increase the effectiveness of the team.
8. I will actively seek to enroll new people in Sunday School. Being a member of the church IS NOT a requirement for being enrolled in Sunday School. Enroll

- anyone, anytime, anywhere, if they agree. Do not drop people from the Sunday School roll who have not attended recently. Seek to see each name as a person for ministry.
9. I will use every opportunity to invite people to Sunday School. I will meet them at the church or bring them to Sunday School to make it easier.
 10. I will be cooperative in starting new classes. Churches that do not start new classes will not grow. Each new class is a mission point to reach others.
 11. I will be involved in reaching the unchurched and ministering to those who are already a part of the church.
 12. I will grow closer to God through a daily quiet time of Bible reading and prayer. Direction and strength for service comes from our quiet time.
 13. I will strive to set an example by living according to the principles of the New Testament.
 14. I will depend on the work of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the ministry.
 15. I will be teachable and willing to learn.

CHAPTER 10

THE BAD SMELL OF SPOILED FOOD

There is something revolting about spoiled food. The image conjures up all kinds of nauseating smells, tastes, pictures and feelings in our minds. No one would want to eat something that has rotted. No one would want to drink something that has soured. Yet, a wasted life is like spoiled food. A daily routine without God's purpose is like spoiled food. Missing God's will for our lives is the worst thing that could happen. The main ingredient in spoiled spiritual food is sin and it can spread through our whole being.

One of the greatest things about the Christian life is serving Jesus. One of the most significant places where we can serve Christ is through the Sunday School. Those who do not find a place of service miss a real blessing in being able to touch the lives of others.

Those who invest themselves in the lives of preschoolers, children, youth, and adults have a special place in God's heart. These leaders are making an investment and making the lives of others better even for eternity. Those who serve in the Sunday School have chosen not to waste their lives. They are eternally thankful for God's salvation. Sunday School leaders make an eternal difference on planet earth.

A life is a terrible thing to waste. Only Jesus can give us true significance. Only serving him can give our lives true meaning. If we did not serve Jesus something would be missing. For that reason it is also important that we involve, teach and train others to serve in the Sunday School. No task is too small.

The greatest compliment that could be paid to an adult teacher or class is sending out people to work with preschoolers, children, youth, or to teach or start another class. That is a wonderful use of one's life for everyone involved.

A graphic picture of a wasted life is found in the person of Judas Iscariot. Judas was with Jesus every day. He ate meals with Jesus and could ask him any question. He walked and talked with Jesus. He saw people healed. He knew first hand about those who had been raised from the dead. Jesus loved him and shared his food with him. Judas heard Jesus' teaching and was fed daily on spiritual food directly from God.

Judas is one of the most graphic pictures that we have of a wasted life. Spoiled food. His desire was to do his own will instead of God's will. The death of Judas is a graphic picture. We may wonder why it is recorded in such detail in the Bible.

READ ACTS 1:15-20

The story of Judas in Acts 1 is a picture of what sin really looks and smells like. It is like spoiled food. Life apart from God is no life at all.

Service through the Sunday School brings great reward to our lives. The work is sometimes difficult but there is a joy in knowing that we are serving God and others.

Jesus tells the story of some people who missed a great opportunity. A man gave a large banquet. He invited a number of guests. When it was time for the banquet he sent his slave personally to let them know that all was ready.

One by one each invited guest began to make excuses as to why they could not attend. When the slave came back and told his master he became very angry. The master sent his servant to invite others so that his house would be filled.

God, the master, personally invites us to serve him through the Sunday School. He invites us to serve so that he can bless us. Some will reject God's call to serve. If you are in a position of enlisting Sunday School leaders and you hear every excuse not to serve, don't be discouraged. The excuses are really being given to the master. Just as the master was angry in this story so often is God angry with our excuses.

The master invited the willing to come to his banquet. Thank God for thousands of Sunday School leaders who are

willing. They make a significant difference in the life and ministry of their church. Because of those who said yes to the invitation of the master there was joy and his house was filled. The reason that many of God's houses, the church, are not filled today is because of the excuses of those who will not serve him.

Those who attended the master's banquet tasted of his blessings. Sunday School leaders are blessed by God sometimes even in ways that they don't ever see. God desires to bless those who sit at his table.

READ LUKE 14:15-24

It is tragic that many believers have not found the joy of serving Christ. They are content with experiencing just a little bit of Jesus. They may occasionally attend church and tip their hat to Jesus. The tragedy is that believers who are not committed to serve Christ are content just to eat the crumbs off God's table. They miss out and don't experience all that God has for them.

One day a Gentile woman cried out to Jesus to have mercy on her and her family. She knew that Jesus was her only answer. She cried out that her daughter was being tormented by a demon. As we read this story in scripture it seems as though Jesus ignores this woman. To us this doesn't seem like Jesus. The disciples were annoyed and wanted to send her away. Jesus uses this as a teachable moment and tells them that he has come to this planet both for Jews and Gentiles.

The woman was persistent. She begged Jesus for help. Then Jesus says something that we can hardly believe. Jesus said, "It's not right to take the children's bread and give it to dogs". Jesus not only seems prejudiced here but totally insensitive. He referred to this woman who was begging him for help as a dog.

Jesus always had a purpose for what he said and did. He loved this woman and her daughter with a godly love. His heart really went out to them. Why then would Jesus refer to

her as a dog and seem to have no concern in helping her? Jesus wanted this woman to see what her life was like apart from God. Apart from God she had no hope. At best she could only receive the crumbs that had fallen off the table, spoiled food that was only fit for dogs. She knew that she needed Jesus and would even settle for the crumbs.

Jesus' heart went out to this woman. He was touched by her faith in him. Because of her faith and obedience to God a miracle occurred. Her daughter was cured.

There are believers today who are happy to settle for crumbs off God's table when he has so much more for them. When we serve God through the Sunday School we sit at Jesus' banquet table. The fellowship of joy in serving Christ and the provision that he gives his faithful servants is like constantly being at a great banquet.

READ MATTHEW 15:21-28

The testimony of those who have faithfully served in Sunday School for years is that their lives have been blessed because of their service. As a matter of fact, their lives would not be the same if they had not served Jesus. What a wonderful opportunity we have to express our love to God through the commitments that we make to him as we serve in Sunday School.

**WHAT EXCITING ADVENTURES DOES GOD HAVE
FOR YOU IN SUNDAY SCHOOL SERVICE AS YOU
FEAST IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM AT HIS TABLE?**

**THANKS FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR
ETERNITY.**

READ I CORINTHIANS 2:9



Questions For Personal Reflection

- 1) What are three things that you would like to improve in your service in Sunday School?
- 2) What would you like to see accomplished through your service and in your class in the next year?
- 3) What is God doing in your life right now as you serve him in Sunday School?
- 4) What could be done in your church to encourage others to experience the joy of service through the Sunday School?

**GOD USES COMMON PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME
TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR ETERNITY. AS
YOU FEAST AT GOD'S TABLE YOU OF ALL
PEOPLE ARE MOST BLESSED. MAY GOD USE YOU
ALWAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR HIS
KINGDOM.**



NOTES

*Discover
God's Provisions
For You
As You Faithfully
Serve Him
Through
The Sunday School.*



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