

## *My Beginnings As Sunday School Director*

“If you don’t like how he’s doing it, why don’t you do it yourself?” These stinging words came from my wife’s mouth just after I had expressed frustration with my own inadequacies as an adult teacher. I knew that there had to be training available but had not the slightest clue as to where to find it. I was directing my own frustrations specifically at the current Sunday School director who I felt was not doing his job in training me. Little did I realize that God was beginning a path for me and my family that would literally change our lives.

“What do you mean by that?” was my reply and in not too gentle of a tone. “I mean that David (not his real name) has already told us (the Nominating Committee) that he would stay on as Sunday School director until we found someone else, but that he would like for us to find a replacement as soon as possible,” she said in her usual kind tone that brought immediate conviction for my own. “If you don’t think he is doing a good job and you see needs that should be met, why don’t you take the position and do it the way you think is better?”

Even though I had been a deacon, Sunday School teacher, and served on numerous committees for years, I had discovered only a couple of years earlier that I was very religious but not a Christian. I had done all of the “church” things under my power and now I was “in Christ... a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”<sup>i</sup> My old way of doing and thinking should be behind me and I should look for solutions instead of being so quick to point out problems.

David was a good guy and was doing what he knew to do, but God had not placed inside of him the passion for Sunday School that He was about to give to me. No doubt, David was being used by God to help point me in the direction of Sunday School leadership. First, I had a decision to make; would I take a big step in giving up my teaching responsibilities, which I loved, and move into a new area for which I had no training or skills or would I just stay put and grumble?

After much prayer and soul searching I made the decision that would bring a new fire to my soul and would be the first step of an adventure that I still get excited about to this day.

Since I had now accepted the role of Sunday School director, I needed to find out something about what I was actually supposed to do. I discovered a now out of print piece that gave some simple step-by-step guidelines that would be foundational to my fourteen years as Sunday School director and serve to prepare me for a whole different ministry path in days ahead.

I attacked that workbook with the enthusiasm of a child on Christmas morning with that most exciting new toy. I could not put it down and was certain that this piece was in the hands of every Sunday School director everywhere. We hope that this book you now have in your hands is that same type of resource for you.

I discovered the Christian Growth Study Plan from LifeWay. Then it was called Church Study Course from the Baptist Sunday School Board. I requested a copy of the Church Study Course Catalog and was thrilled to see that there was a whole track of study for Sunday School directors and I could even receive diplomas by completion of a group of these pieces. I found out later as I re-enrolled in college that, at the Baptist college I attended, I could even receive college credit for some of my completions.

I then discovered a jewel of training, Ridgecrest Conference Center. During my first visit to Ridgecrest I felt like I had reached the Promised Land for Sunday School directors. I had the opportunity to meet the people who literally wrote the books on Southern Baptist Sunday School. I was actually sitting under their teaching and learning from those who *lived* Sunday School. Every opportunity God provided for me served to increase my zeal for my ministry with no idea of where it would be leading.

I began to build a library of Sunday School books and discovered the fathers of Southern Baptist Sunday School; Arthur Flake, P. E. Burroughs, J. N. Barnette, A. V. Washburn, and others. One of the early thrills was to hear and experience the passion of Harry Piland. I saw Harry explode with excitement as he spoke to a group of Sunday School directors. That shrapnel hit me and many others that evening; I carry the wonderful wounds of Harry's direct hit to this day.

I was hooked. I lived and breathed Sunday School. I knew that I had a kindred spirit when I heard another Sunday School director some time later say, "I work a job to provide for my family and to pay bills in order to support my passion for Sunday School."

There are many people who have encouraged and supported me in the area of Sunday School over the years; far too numerous to list. One, however, caused my heart to open in a new way and help me move my passion for Sunday School to a new level. Bill Taylor, then director of the Sunday School Group, LifeWay Church Resources and his wife, Rose accepted an invitation to our church to lead an appreciation banquet for our Sunday School leaders. As Bill was setting up his materials, he stated that he was under the impression that I was the minister of education. I clarified that I was the Sunday School director. As later I responded to the same misconception by Rose, she asked, "Have you ever considered fulltime vocational ministry?" Directly from my heart, bypassing my brain, I quickly responded by saying, "No, but that is the desire of my heart!"

The next morning Bill asked if I would be interested in talking to some churches as a prospective minister of education. I explained that I had neither seminary training nor finished college. Bill declared that while some churches will require that, there are many others that want someone capable of doing the job regardless of education. I declined, saying that I just didn't feel that I was ready for that yet. Bill then invited me to come to Nashville and meet some folks for a sort of career counseling session. I accepted his invitation and we set a date.

To sum up the latter part of my story, I have had the blessing of leading Sunday School training in numerous states, went back to college and received a B.S. in Christian education, and now am serving as minister of education in one of the most exciting and God-blessed churches in the world. I have even had the great honor, joy, and profound privilege of leading conferences for other Sunday School directors at both Promised Lands for Sunday School directors, Ridgecrest and Glorieta.

A word of encouragement to you as a Sunday School director, minister of education, or pastor -- it's never as bad as you think it is nor is it as good as it can get. Take it from one whose frustrations have led to a gift that could only come about by the hand of God!

We hope that this book will be, first, an encouragement to you; second, very helpful in your Sunday School responsibilities; and, finally, lead you onto the unique path He has designed for you.

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<sup>i</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17