

**“Praying Up
Your
Sunday School”**

**Daily
Devotional
Guide
Weeks 1-6**

“Praying Up Your Sunday School” Daily Devotional Guide - Week 1
Every Sunday School Class member will pray daily for your pastor, staff, and Sunday School leadership (Written by Steve Stone, Associate Executive Director, Church Growth Division, MBCB)

Sunday

Action Word: BELIEVE (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Before you begin your devotional time today, let me encourage you to read the entire chapter of Ephesians 4. As we seek to “Pray Up the Sunday School”, our focus for the next seven days will be to look at seven dynamic action words: **Believe** (vs. 1-6), **Receive** (vs. 7-10), **Achieve** (vs. 11-16), **Deceive** (vs. 17-19), **Conceive** (vs. 20-24), **Grieve** (vs. 25-31) and **Relieve** (vs. 32). Let’s begin.

First, we must **Believe!** (vs. 1-6) As the body of Christ and based on God’s calling on our lives, we must believe that we are to walk in unity. This unity really begins when we bow the knee (Ephesians 3:14). To bow before the Lord means you are in submission to the one who is over you and in this case it is the Lord Jesus Himself. As we walk this journey of life, He comes to strengthen us both inwardly and outwardly. For us to “Pray Up the Sunday School” and for the Sunday School to impact your community, the people in your community must see the church unified.

Paul lists seven foundational elements necessary for our unity. They are:

(1) **“One Body”**: Paul wrote to the Romans and said, *“So we being many are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”* (12:5) We belong to Christ first but we also belong to one another. Both relationships are to be in unity with each other.

(2) **“One Spirit”**: Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity that is our unifier. It is through God’s Spirit that we get our passion, energy and courage to share the Gospel message. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment and guides us into all truth. (John 16:5-15)

(3) **“One Hope”**: God’s one hope is to see a world redeemed unto Him. Each Sunday School leader and member must *“...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”* (1 Peter 3:15)

(4) **“One Lord”**: To make Jesus Lord must be a high priority in our lives. As Lord He is to rule and reign in our being.

(5) **“One Faith”**: We receive God’s grace through faith (Ephesians. 2:8-9). Through our faith we receive the power to release God’s grace to those in whom we come in contact.

(6) **“One Baptism”**: Baptism by immersion is your identifier with Christ; you believe He died for your sins, was buried and rose again. Remember we are buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life.

(7) **“One God”**: Our God is all powerful, all knowing and ever present. God is not one of many gods but is the supreme sovereign God of the universe. He is not in some distant removed place but right here with us. Jesus instructed us in the Model Prayer to pray to “Our Father”. Jesus knew of the intimate, personal relationship that God desires with His people and that we can approach God as our heavenly Father.

Today’s Action:

Prayer Suggestions: Right now, pray to your heavenly Father about your Sunday School being unified in every age group—preschool, children, students and adults. Pray for the whole Sunday School to be “one unit” unified in purpose and ministry.

Monday

Action Word: RECEIVE (Ephesians 4:7-10)

As we studied yesterday, God’s people are to be a people of unity. Yet, Paul indicates there is unity even in our diversity. Every born again believer **RECEIVES** a “spiritual gift” at the time they trust Christ as Savior. Jesus confers on us one of His grace gifts. That does not mean we all possess the same gift but it does mean all of our gifts are to be used for ministry. Paul said, *“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing, according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.”* (Romans 12:4-6a)

God's grace is truly amazing! The word grace is found approximately 150 times in the New Testament alone. Timothy George wrote in his book Amazing Grace that grace is used to describe the most basic truths of our Christian faith. The apostle Peter said, "God is called a God of grace." John wrote that Jesus came from heaven "full of grace and truth". Zechariah declared that the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of grace". God's throne is called the "throne of grace". (Hebrews 4:16) We receive forgiveness of sin in accordance to God's grace. Do you remember that day when you received God's amazing grace into your life? If you are saved, go look in the mirror, and you will see the miracle and manifestation of grace.

Grace is one of the great themes of the Bible. We say "grace" at the table before we eat our meals. When someone is baptized we see the grace of God bring a person from the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of new life in Christ. Many church services close with the scripture found in 2 Corinthians 13:14, "*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" We have just seen that grace encompasses our lives in many ways. But perhaps the place we minimize grace the most is when we choose not to use the wonderful grace gift that we received from Jesus Himself.

Your grace gift is determined by the Holy Spirit of God. Spiritual gifts always edify Christ and His church. One should never brag about their spiritual gift or be jealous of another person's gift. Disobedience to God or an unwillingness to use your gift will deter God's plan for His church. Your gift belongs to the body of Christ. We need all parts of the body present and ready for service. Someone has said it well, "My place in the body of Christ is an act of grace. My function in the body is an act of grace. My service is an act of grace."

Today's Action:

Prayer Suggestions: Pray and ask God to reveal someone to you so that you may share His grace today! Write down your spiritual gift and list ways you are using your grace gift(s) to increase the effectiveness of your Sunday School. If you're not sure of your gift, you need to take a spiritual gift inventory (i.e., **3 in 1 Leadership** produced by the North American Mission Board).

Tuesday

Action Word: ACHIEVE (Ephesians 4:11-16)

"Praying Up Your Sunday School" will only be **ACHIEVED** when the clergy and the church come together in the use of their spiritual giftedness. Some have erroneously read Ephesians 4:11 and believed that the work of ministry is only for the pastor and staff. But when carefully studied (4:12-16) one will notice it is the responsibility of the pastor/staff to equip the lay people to use their spiritual giftedness for the ministry of the church.

Among the gifts are "pastor" and "teacher" which usually refer to the same person. The primary role of this leader is to "equip the saints" for ministry. In our vernacular today the two terms pastor and teacher are not often communicated together. This may contribute to the congregation's lack of understanding of the full role of the pastor. The educational component seems to be suppressed. He must be both pastor and teacher to meet the ministry needs of the church and the community. The pastor has the responsibility for equipping the saints but the saints have the responsibility to develop their spiritual gift for the Lord's church. These two must come together—pastor and people!

When spiritual gifts are used in spiritual service then the ultimate goal of the church will be achieved, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (vs. 13)."

Steps to knowing your spiritual gift:

Study the scriptures to determine your gift: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11

Take a step toward your gift. What excites you, what is your passion for serving our Lord and His church?

Engage others in the body of Christ. Remember we belong to one another. Others may help you to discover your spiritual gift.

Pray! If you don't know, ask God now! Then when you know, pray, pray, pray and ask God to help you use your gift for His glory!

Start today using your gift!

When every part of the body uses their spiritual gift, the result will be immovability (vs. 14), immensely desiring to speak the truth (vs. 15) and an immeasurable amount of love among the members that will draw others to the Lord and His church (vs. 16).

Churches that place a high priority on Sunday School usually have a high priority on evangelism. These two priorities must not be divided. God calls all believers to be witnesses unto Him (Acts 1:8). It is a command and not an option yet we have made evangelism optional rather than an integral part of our Sunday School ministry.

Today's Action:

Identify ways in which you are using your gift(s). _____

Who can you minister to today? _____

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for your pastor/staff as they equip the Sunday School for fellowship, evangelism, worship, ministry and discipleship.

Wednesday

Action Word: DECEIVE (Ephesians 4:17-19)

I have this saying in my office, "Your talk talks and your walk talks but your walk talks more than your talk talks." In others words, it's easier to say something than live it out. But for the Christian my talk and walk should be the same. Satan will do everything to **DECEIVE** us in believing that our walk and talk don't need to match. Paul is instructing the Ephesians that the Gentile way of life is not the way of life for the Christian. The Christians in Ephesus had once participated in the Gentile world seeking the pleasures of this world. Paul says, no more, don't be deceived into sinning.

The Christian is not to walk about with an emptiness of mind. The word "emptiness" means the absence of any real content. Verse 18 takes this idea a step further and says that the Gentiles were "having their understanding darkened" and were "being alienated from the life of God" because of their ignorance and blindness of their heart. This deception led them to believe that real living included lasciviousness and greed. They were so greedy for the physical pleasures of this world that they believed it was the best life had to offer. They had missed the true way of life found in Christ. They were following darkness rather than the light. (Read 1 John 1-2)

Is it any different in our world today? We have become so tolerant of the things of this world that sin does not bother us as it should. We have fallen into the trap of deception by the greatest deceiver of all time—Satan. Sin hardens our minds and hearts and leads us away from walking and talking like Christ. When we are deceived the result is moral and social decline. Timothy said it best in 2 Timothy 3:

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
For men will be lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers,
disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving,
slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors,
headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
having a form of godliness, but denying its power.
And from such people turn away! (3:1-5).*

What a description of our world! How do we overcome this deception? It begins with prayer asking God to fill our minds with His thoughts and ways. When we speak like Christ and walk like Christ, the world will begin to see this new life that Christ offers.

Today's Action: As a Sunday School leader who can you pray for that is being deceived and caught up into the things of this world? _____

What can your Sunday School class do to address the moral and social decline of our nation? _____

Reread 2 Timothy 3:1-5. What is the opposite of the stated phrases and individual words found in this passage? _____

How can this way of thinking help my talk and walk match up? _____

Prayer Suggestions: You will not be deceived and to show you His way to walk the talk.

Thursday

Action Word: CONCEIVE (Ephesians 4:20-24)

In yesterday's study we examined the "old man" (vs. 22) life without Christ and today we will inspect the "new man" (vs. 24) life with Christ. This new life begins when we are no longer deceived by Satan and begin to **CONCEIVE** (to think or imagine) what Christ has in store for those who trust Him.

The Cross of Calvary provides for us this new life in Christ. When a believer comes to faith in Christ, Jesus teaches us in His word to put off the old self of sin and put on the true life of righteousness and holiness found only in Him. The word "learned" in verse 20 is the verb from which "disciple" is derived. As a disciple we are to become "learners" of the ways of Christ. In order to do that we must put off some things and put on other things.

First, what are we to put off? (vs. 22) Paul calls this our former conduct; the way we lived before becoming a disciple of Christ. We are to move away from rejecting Christ to accepting what Christ has for us. We are to put off our old way of thinking and living and begin to think and live as Christ does. The call is for us to lay aside our former life. The concept of "stripping off old filthy clothes" was to be done once and for all when a person is saved.

Second, what are we to put on? (vs. 24) Paul calls this our new nature fashioned after God Himself. The hallmark of God's character is the twin tower of righteousness and holiness. Marion Soards in the *Holman Bible Dictionary* (p. 1195) defines human righteousness in the New Testament as absolute faith in and commitment to God. (Matthew 3:15; Romans 4:5; 1 Peter 2:24) The one, who in faith, gives himself/herself to the doing of God's will is righteous, doing righteousness, and reckoned righteous by God. (James 2:23)

Leviticus 19:1 says, "*Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.*" John D. W. Watts in the *Holman Bible Dictionary* (p. 661-2) wrote: Christians are called to holy living. (1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:17) They are saints who lead godly, righteous lives. Being sanctified, or made holy, is a work of the Holy Spirit. Christ's atonement calls for obedient submission from those who have been saved. Christians are holy because of Christ's calling, because of His atonement for their sins, and because of the continual ministrations of the Holy Spirit. They are holy inasmuch as they receive and submit to these saving and sanctifying agents.

Today's Action: As you "Pray Up Your Sunday School" today, begin by conceiving what your Sunday School would look like if all members demonstrated righteousness and holiness?

Begin to conceive of one righteous deed that you can do for someone today.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for inactive Sunday School members. Call and ask the inactive Sunday School members to pray for a specific event in the life of the church and ask if they have any prayer needs. Make prayer the focus of your call. List event _____
List prayer need(s) _____

Friday

Action Word: GRIEVE (Ephesians 4:25-31)

Our focus word today is **GRIEVE**. Ephesians 4:30 says, "*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" Grieve means to burden, to injure or to harm. If we don't act in a righteous and holy way toward God or others, it can cause a great sorrow or afflict great pain upon God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity. The Holy Spirit is a person and capable of being hurt.

In what ways can we grieve the Spirit? Paul wrote that carnal Christians can grieve the Spirit. (Read I Corinthians 3) When a child of God chooses to live like the Gentiles in Ephesians 4:17-19, it

grieves God's Spirit. Many times carnal Christians stop praying; they do not read the scripture with any regularity or at all; they enjoy the things of this world over spiritual things; they have lost real joy.

A second way the Spirit can be grieved is when a Sunday School class or church focuses on their own needs before focusing on the needs of a lost community. Statistics have indicated that minimally one-half of the population in every county in Mississippi is unchurched. Does that statement disturb you? It should! I can tell you that when we turn a deaf ear to the lostness in our communities it grieves the Holy Spirit.

A third way the Spirit can be grieved is when a born-again believer hears the Word of God to witness to a lost person and they refuse to share their faith. Sadly, the North American Mission Board estimates that 95% of Christians have never shared their faith and known the joy of seeing someone come to faith in Jesus. Not only does this grieve the Holy Spirit but it decentralizes the reason Jesus died on the cross. The life purpose of Jesus is summed up in Luke 19:10 when He said, *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* We must repent of this awful sin of refusing to share our witness with a lost and dying world.

In 2 Peter 3:9 we find these words, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* The scripture says we are sealed for the day of redemption. As believers our names have been written in the Book of Life until the day of redemption, until the Lord comes again. Aren't you glad Jesus did not return before you were saved?

Today's Action:

- Rely on the Sword (God's Word) to convict you of ways in which you grieve the Holy Spirit (Read John 16:5-15).
- Respond to the Holy Spirit by praying for one lost person by name.
- Radiate the Holy Spirit by sharing your faith with someone today.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for the person you should recommend to your Sunday School Class to join you in praying for the lost person that you have been taking to God's throne room of grace.

Saturday

Action Word: RELIEVE (Ephesians 4:32)

Our final lesson this week is focused on the word **RELIEVE**. This word means to free from any burden, to remove anything that depresses or crushes. That's exactly what Jesus did for us on Calvary. He forgave the debt of our sin; in fact, it has been paid in full. If we are to have caring, loving Sunday School classes we must be people that know how to forgive just as Christ forgave us. We need to accept and see people as Jesus sees them, people in need of a savior. Jesus is the **RELIEVER** of sin. There is no need for a savior unless you need forgiveness of your sin. Read this three point outline about forgiveness:

I. Definition of forgiveness – To forgive is never an easy thing to do. When you have pain and conflict, it is our tendency to lash out and strike back. To understand true forgiveness, we must understand its definition. (ex. Peter in Matthew 18:21-22)

A. FORCES A CHOICE – Forgive even if you have been wronged. Human forgiveness must be connected to Divine forgiveness. Remove the offense that was imposed.

B. OUTLASTS YOUR MEMORY – You will not forget the hurt and pain easily. Not a sign of failure. Put positive events in the place of the pain.

C. REMOVES THE BLAME: Don't play the "blame game". Accept responsibility for what you need to do. Make things right.

D. GROWS THE PERSON WHO FORGIVES – Keep blaming and you will stifle your spiritual growth. Don't keep records. Clean the slate.

E. INQUIRE – Seek and search what caused the conflict. Reach a point where you can talk to the person about it.

F. VENOM IS REMOVED – The sting and venom will poison your attitude and heart. Cancel the debt. Quit making it an issue.

G. ENJOY THE RELATIONSHIP AGAIN – There is no greater feeling than when peace comes to the heart.

II. Detriment in not forgiving – Consequences if we don't forgive.

- A. Hinders our relationship with God – You can't hear God. He cannot depend on you. We move away from God not to Him. We don't face reality.
- B. Hinders our relationship with others – Not forgiving will cause you to lose respect for others. Reputation is what others think, character is who you are.
- C. Hinders our relationship with ourselves – There are six forces of sin that oppose the witness of the Spirit. (Read Ephesians 4:31)

III. Directions for forgiving (vs. 32)

- A. Be kind one to another. Be kind like Jesus was to the leper.
- B. Be tenderhearted one to another. Be full of sympathy and understanding.
- C. Be forgiving of one another. Just as Jesus forgave you!

Today's Action: Pray and seek the Lord if there is anyone you have offended and need to reunite with them. You may need to forgive those who have rubbed you the wrong way.

“Praying Up Your Sunday School” Daily Devotional Guide - Week 2

Every Sunday School class member will pray daily for every Sunday School teacher and Sunday School leader of the church (Written by the Discipleship Training Department Staff)

Sunday

Pray for the Bible Teachers in Your Church - I Corinthians 12

Today our challenge is to pray for those who are currently serving as Bible teachers in your church. For most of us the majority of the Bible teachers in our church are working through the Sunday School or a similar ministry with a different name. Bible teaching is one of the five primary ministries of the Sunday School and its classes.

Every worker and officer in the Sunday School has a Bible teaching role, even if their title is not teacher. In verse three of our text the Apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth that no one says (or teaches) “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. So, if the teachers in your church are doing a good job teaching that Jesus is Lord, we should thank God for them. Thank God for calling and gifting the teachers in your church.

Pray by name for the teachers in your Sunday School to find satisfaction in filling their God given role. Paul teaches in verse 11 “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” The New Testament emphasizes God’s sovereignty in giving gifts to each follower as He determines. Verse 7 stresses that God gives each of these specific gifts for the Common good. “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.”

“For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? (I Corinthians 12:14-15). Paul is talking about the local church as a whole being a body. It would do no harm to the Scripture to consider the church’s ministry we call Sunday School a body with many parts. Some of those parts may be directors, outreach leaders, preschool teachers, children’s teachers, student teachers, adult teachers, or extended session teachers. The preschool teacher cannot say because I do not teach a large adult class that I am not part of the body called Sunday School.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that each person God has called and gifted, as he determined, to serve through the Sunday School will feel an appropriate sense of importance and fulfillment. Pray that as a member of the body we would understand who makes up our Sunday School faculty and will appreciate the importance of their role to the whole body. Pray for growing appreciation of the roles and importance of each teacher by the rest of the Sunday School -- director, teachers, and workers.

Monday

The Body of Christ at Work

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” I Corinthians 12:12

One of the best demonstrations of the Body of Christ at work is during times of crisis. When natural disasters befall a community, the Body of Christ is always at the forefront offering relief and assistance. Yazoo City, Mississippi, was one of many communities hit by a powerful tornado that ripped through the state on April 24, 2010. In the hours that followed God’s people were on the front lines of rescue and recovery operations. In less than 24 hours feeding units were up and running, chain saw crews spread out across the community, and others were assisting neighbors and total strangers in clearing debris and sorting through rubble trying to salvage whatever they could. In the hours and days that followed, local believers gathered to pray and begin to organize to assess needs and offer a helping hand. Churches in other parts of the state began sending teams of volunteers and God’s people from other parts of the country began to arrive to offer whatever help they could. Some came with chain saws, some came with tools, while others came bearing water and other necessities. One man drove down from Minnesota to do what he could – sharpen chain saws. We saw the Body of Christ at work!

Not everyone had skills to operate a chain saw, but many were able to move the limbs and logs that had been cut to make a path for others to come in and cover with tarps damaged roofs and walls.

Chain saws can become dull quickly, so another person was standing by to sharpen the saws so they could continue to cut away the thousands of downed trees that were covering the area. Some actually cooked meals while others served them into containers for even others to transport to places where they were needed. The Body of Christ at work.

God has gifted each one of his children with specific gifts and unique abilities for building up the Body of Christ. All are necessary for the church to function as God intended it. While we see great evidence of this during times of crisis, these are just as important during the “normal” course of life. God’s love, mercy, and power are displayed when God’s people use the gifts and abilities He has given them.

“There are diversities of gifts but the same spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”

I Corinthians 12:4-6

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that every leader will maximize their gifts to enrich the class.

Tuesday

How to Get the Most Out of Your Church - I Corinthians 12:12-16

In the novel 1984, George Orwell predicted many social and technological changes which would have enormous impact on all facets of our lives. He was correct! We live in a day of e-mail, computers, Facebook, and shopping via television. Our web of interpersonal relationships continues to decline. The church and our own personal lives can and will suffer from the same.

Pray for the unity of class membership (12:12-13). Paul reminded the Corinthians that the body “has many members” and yet is “one body” (v. 12). Paul also leveled the spiritual playing field by telling them that their entrance into the body was “one Spirit” and consequently equal in value to one another (v.13).

Pray for the equality of the ministries of the church. Paul’s use of physical body is a graphic analogy to describe the inter-working and cooperative functioning of the church. Each part is valuable and no one is “less a part” than another (v. 16). God’s sovereign choice causes the body to function efficiently (v. 18). To neglect to function causes a dysfunction and therefore a void in the ministry of a church.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray for the inter-dependence of our relationships (12:21-26). Notice that we all “need” each other. The “eye” is hampered in functioning if it assumes that the “hand” is unnecessary (v. 21). In this spiritual web of relationships, a Sunday School class emerges which ought to come for the weak, the less honorable, and the unseemly. Notice our interdependence in v. 26. The Christian life is in relationship with God and others – not an isolated experience.

Wednesday

The Magic of Love - I Corinthians 12:28 – 13:3

In the early 1970’s, many in the nation set spellbound and teary-eyed before the screen as Ali McGraw and Ryan O’Neal starred in Love Story. The memorable line, “Love means never having to say you are sorry,” made for great TV yet had bad theology. Chapter 12 reflects diversity in the body. Chapter 14 regards the use of the gifts in proper orderliness, and Chapter 13 adds the required ingredients of love!

Spirituality without love is divisive (12:28-31). Paul gives us a sampling of perhaps eight of the 21 or so gifts listed in the New Testament. Note that the order is emphasized according to their relative use in the body. He concludes the list by telling the Corinthians to “desire” the gifts which are “greater” comparative of good. For an analogy – paint helps a house but nails are necessary, yet houses benefit from both. Love, however, does not diminish any member’s contribution but rather the glue that unifies. It is the “excellent way” (v. 31)

Love without knowledge is innocence. Knowledge without love is arrogance!

Prayer Suggestion: Pray for every member to exhibit Christ’s love in their daily walk.

Thursday

God's Plan for Service - I Corinthians 12:18-20

Verse 18 says "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased."

As you are praying today for your Sunday School leaders, thank God that He has placed them where they are according to His plans. And...remember the words of Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts for peace and not of evil to give you a future and a hope."

God says He wants to bless us according to His perfect plans. Sometimes we may not understand how God is working, but it is ALWAYS for our good and His glory.

Today, pray a special word of blessing and thanksgiving for ALL of your Sunday School leaders. They all sacrifice time, energy, and resources to meet the needs of their class members each week. They prepare, pray, and put forth extra effort to make each class time meaningful. As a result they should pray that God will raise up new leaders to touch new believers and new members for new classes to reach even more people.

Paul wrote to young Timothy, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that every Sunday School member will follow God's plan. He wants all of us to be involved in His service. He wants us to be available and willing to serve "as He desires". As you pray *for* Sunday School leaders, ask God to use *you* in the place He desires.

Friday

Praying Through the Spirit for Others - I Corinthians 12

This chapter focuses on the importance of the spirit guiding and directing us to use our spiritual gifts. The gift/s that God has richly given each one of us enables us to confess Jesus as Lord. Henry Blackaby refers to verse 14 saying, "The Spirit gives gifts that make members different in their function, but not independent. All depend on the Lord and all minister for the church."

Consistently praying for God's gifts to unify, not separate the church, should be a daily passion for each Christian. Verse 20 talks of the many parts of a church, yet it all operates as one body. Verse 25 speaks of the care we should have for one another and also that divisions should not exist within the church. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." states verse 26. This prayer for unity amongst the parts of the church is so important. By loving and supporting each other through times of hardship as well as excitement, we are honoring God and working effectively. God has given each of us different gifts. It is important to remember that there is no gift that is greater or more prestigious than another.

We should also pray for each other in the way that Jesus prays for us. In John 17:17 Jesus prays for us, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." Paul mentions in Philippians 1:3-5, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now". Paul says that he prays for them because of their 'partnership in the gospel'. As Christians we're all in this together. We certainly need the prayers of others and others certainly need our prayers. Praying for others is one of the best ways you can love others.

We should be guided by Jesus' words in Luke 9:23, "And he said to all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" There are three things that can be taken from this verse. The first is to deny yourself, a good example of this was shown to us by Jacob. Jacob had to work for his Uncle Laban for 14 years in order to marry Rachel (Genesis 19: 11-31). The second is to take up your cross daily. We have seen this before especially when Jesus talks of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). The third is when he states, follow me. A great picture of this is when God talks of Caleb in Numbers 14:24, "But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully." Caleb served Him fully having a wholehearted prayer life.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray today for every member to understand their importance in serving God through the Sunday School.

Saturday

Pray for the Future Teachers of your Sunday School - I Corinthians 12

Future teachers are very important to the continued ministry of our church and its Sunday School. New teachers will come from current church members who grow in their faith. Paul tells us in verse 25 “that the members should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.” Paul implies that as Christians grow more Christ like they will come to the point that “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” I Corinthians 12:26. Children growing up in our church are often called the future leaders of the church. And they will be if they grow in the way just discussed for fellow church members.

We should pray for future teachers. Pray that they will hear and respond when the Holy Spirit calls and gifts them. Another type of future leader is those who are not currently part of the church body because they are not yet Christian. We need to pray for their salvation, baptism, and for their addition to the body of Christ in a local New Testament church. Then, we need to put feet to our prayers and share the Gospel with them.

Paul begins by reminding his readers that pagans [those not yet Christian] are influenced and led astray to “mute idols.” We cannot understand about spiritual gifts for ourselves or anyone else until we allow the Holy Spirit to enable – empower us to say and truly believe that “Jesus is Lord.” This is the way we should pray for future teachers that will say, teach, and live out the personal motto “Jesus is Lord.” Many early Christians were often martyred for stating that “Jesus is Lord” and refusing to say “Caesar is Lord.”

God’s plan is for each believer to understand that they are a vital part of the Body of Christ. Remember verse 27-28 “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually”. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” Understanding this part of God’s plan will cause us to pray for ourselves and for fellow church members that we will live up to I Corinthians 12:31. In this verse Paul challenges followers of Christ to “But earnestly desire the best gifts.” Read this in context you will understand Paul is teaching you should seek a meaningful role in the Body of Christ. We should pray that fellow church members will become meaningful functioning parts of Christ’s Body.

What a great plan for staffing a Bible teaching ministry.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray today that God would help every member understand they have a special place of opportunity to minister through Sunday School.

“Praying Up Your Sunday School” Daily Devotional Guide - Week 3
Every Sunday School class member will pray for every member of the class of which they are a member. (Written by Angie Boydston, Sunday School Dept., Preschool/Children Consultant, MBCB)

Sunday

The Flock - John 10:1-2

Often, Christians are compared to a flock of sheep. Most of the references are centered around Jesus being our shepherd. The picture created is a serene group cared for by a compassionate and capable master.

Have you ever stopped to think about what it means to be one of those sheep in the flock? Did you know that sheep have a strong tendency to congregate with others - especially if they are in an area where there are strong predators? Did you know that sheep actually show stress when they are separated from their flock?

Another fact you may not know about sheep is that their internal systems are designed with several defense mechanisms. For instance, when sick they show very little outward sign of illness or disease. Aren't we humans also very good at hiding our struggles and fears?

Verse 1 of John 10 mentions the sheep pen of ancient Hebrew times -- a place where sheep were protected as they gathered together. Your Sunday School class is the safe surrounding where a group of folks who might be trying to hide their issues come to hear God's Word on a regular basis. Each person makes up part of the flock, and all are responsible for creating the safety that comes from being together.

A Sunday School class, as a flock, can congregate together to avoid the strong predators that are facing us daily. Being part of such a group should help us know that we are not alone -- we are part of a group with a loving and living Savior Leader.

Even though we are lead by the Great Shepherd, each individual bears the responsibility for the well-being of the entire group. That responsibility can begin with prayer for each person in the flock.

Prayer Suggestions: Today, pray for the flock you are part of - your community -- the specific group that makes up your Sunday School class. Pray that your community becomes a place to see God work.

Monday

Called by Name - John 10:3

“He knows my name.” This is the opening line from one of my favorite praise and worship songs. To me, the idea that Jesus knows who I am means He really cares about me. John 10:3 paints the picture of our shepherd knowing each of our names in a large flock. It even says He calls them by name as He leads them.

Names are important! They represent who we are. In early Hebrew times, parents placed great importance on the naming of each child because they believed the name of a person was closely related to their very essence.

When someone calls me by my formal name instead of the shorter moniker I normally use, I know they must be someone who doesn't know me very well. When the insurance agent sends me a birthday card each year addressed with a pre-typed label with my full name on it, there is nothing personal to me about it. Instead it means to me that I don't have a real relationship with someone who doesn't know what to call me.

We want to be with people who know us and care about us instead of those who seem only to be using our name as a means to an end. Sheep who are part of a flock can't call each other by name, but research shows that they do recognize each other's faces. As part of the flock, we should recognize our classmates.

Prayers for the people in your flock are not the equivalent of warm fuzzy thoughts. Don't just simply say, “God bless my class.” Make specific requests to the Father calling each one by name. If the shepherd knows each of our names, we should follow His example and know our flock as well.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for each person in your class – by name. If you do not know specific requests for each one, ask for the Father to protect them and their family, to provide wisdom, to help them resist temptations. Pray for them to have strength and knowledge of God, to have spiritual understanding and to know God’s will. Pray for their steadfastness in the faith.

Tuesday

Knowing His Voice - John 10:4-9

Have you ever watched an infant when they learn to follow the voice of a loved one? The entire demeanor of a baby will change when he hears that sound. There is comfort and peace – even excitement at times - in hearing the voice of someone who cares about us.

Verse 4 of John 10 describes a shepherd who leads the flock just by the sound of His voice. There is a great security in hearing the strong voice of the one who leads us. We know the voice of our shepherd. But what about the young sheep in our flock who don’t yet recognize His voice? Or what about those who know Him but have “tuned Him out?”

Jesus describes Himself in verse 9 as the gate to the sheep pen. The only way to truly enter safely is to go through Him. Don’t we want that for all of our flock – real life in Christ? Those who make up the flock are probably all at different places in their personal walks.

As a class, our responsibility is to pray for one another and our relationship with the Father. Just as Christ is the gate of salvation, our job as part of the flock, is to stand in the gap for others who need to know Him.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for each member of your class and their relationship with Christ. For those you know are saved, you can pray for them to know Jesus’ voice more each day and to have opportunity and be bold to share Him. For those who might be struggling in their walk, pray for reconciliation and for them to know the joy of daily being in communion and communication with Christ. For those in your class who might not have a personal relationship with Christ, pray that their hearts will be prepared to hear His voice.

Wednesday

Experiencing Life Abundant Together - John 10:10-11

There are thieves who threaten the flock. The one mentioned in verse 10 wants to steal and destroy. His interest is solely in his own gain. While we might not be thieves, sometimes our own interests get in the way of our being part of the flock.

In this same verse, Jesus explains that He wants His sheep to have “life to the full.” If we truly believe that then we will want a full life for every member of the flock. Sometimes that means that we must put aside our own personal agendas.

What does “life to the full” mean to you? For most of us, it means to be fulfilled in all aspects of life – personally, professionally, spiritually, etc. Deep inside we all want these things. Too often, however, we can only see our own desires, ignoring those of the rest of the flock.

Can we honor and respect people in the flock who come from different backgrounds than we do or who have different personal or professional desires than we do? What about those who express themselves differently or who travel in different directions than we do? Can we look at them through the eyes of Christ whose interest is in them?

Being able to pray for our fellow classmates may mean we need to get to know the other sheep better. Having a genuine interest in the people in your class will mean that you seek things to have in common. It means that you want to get to know them. It means that you share things with them about yourself. It means that you are open to pursuing a friendship with them.

We need wisdom to pray for each other. You cannot pray for someone else if you do not know what is going on in her life. We must cultivate a heart that puts others’ “life to the full” before our own.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray to find commonalities with those in your class that you do not know well. Pray also for opportunities to learn more about your classmates so that you can pray for them

with an interest in their lives. Begin a prayer sheet for each member, jotting down notes as you come across things you can pray.

Thursday

Never Abandoned - John 10:12-13

Look at the hired man described in verses 12-13. As he tends the sheep, he has nothing but his own gain in mind. At the first sign of danger, he takes off, leaving the flock vulnerable to attack. He has no personal investment in what happens to the sheep. He has no concern for what harm might come to them after he leaves.

Many kinds of dangers lurk around a flock. Being part of the flock should mean that we are prepared for the predators that might attack us – individually or collectively. We do live, after all, in a sinful world where temptations and confusions abound. Each of us should be as concerned about our fellow classmates being in danger as we are about ourselves being in danger.

There are countless examples of men in the Bible who stepped up to plead for those around them. Abraham chose to come before God on behalf of his neighbors in Sodom. Isaiah prayed with King Hezekiah for the nation to be saved from destruction at the hands of Assyria. Habakkuk even argued with God to save Judah from wickedness. The key motivation for each of these men was the compassion they felt for those facing the judgment of God.

Each sheep bears responsibility for the flock. Being part of a Sunday School class means we want to protect our fellow members from the dangers that face them everyday. Our compassion for one another should cause us to feel like we have a stake in the spiritual well-being of each person in our group.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for each of your classmates to be strong and steadfast in their walk. Pray that they avoid dangers and temptations. Pray for a real compassion for one another so that each of you holds up the other members of the flock.

Friday

Known - John 10:14-16

The Father knows each of us, and in our connection to Him we should know one another. Remember - the sheep within the flock recognize one another by face.

The perfect argument for this connection among the members of the flock can be found in verses 14-16. Jesus basically says that because of the nature of His relationship with His Father, Jesus nurtures an intimate relationship with His sheep. If we follow that example, we too should have deep personal relationships with all of those within our flock.

Having a personal interest in and intimacy with the sheep stresses the reciprocal knowledge of one another. This is modeled in the trusting relationship between the Father and the Son. The same model should be evidenced in the family of faith. The flock should represent a family with each of us knowing about our fellow members. Knowing our family like family means being thankful for them. No doubt we get on each other's nerves from time to time. But once we start to look at our class members like family, our reaction will tend to be more about how we are thankful that they are part of our lives. We will also be grateful for the things they bring to the family.

Being thankful for our family should mean we have enough love to add to the family. Even as we love those in our flock, there are more who need to be part of our family. These are the ones that Christ desires to have a relationship with. Our hearts must be big enough that we are on the lookout for those sheep who need to be brought into the fold.

Prayer Suggestions: Thank the Father for each person in your class and for what they bring to the group. Pray that those who need to know Christ will find a place in you flock.

Saturday

Prayer and Priority - John 10:17-18

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and he gave as an example the Lord's Prayer. Every pronoun in this model prayer is communal – "our Father," "our daily bread," "forgive us," "deliver us." There is no "I," no "my," no "me."

Each of us may enter into our prayer closets as individuals, but when we connect with God, we also connect with each other. As a class, you are linked by your love for Christ, who was commanded by the Father to lay His life down for the flock. As followers of Christ who desire to be like Him, sacrifices might be necessary for the flock.

Jesus is our model for interceding for others. An intercessor is one who takes the place of another or pleads his/her case. In verses 17-18, Jesus describes His choice to give His life for us. He clearly indicates that the Father gave Him a command, but that He also has the authority to lay down and take up His own life. He made the choice based on His obedience to the Father's will.

Daily as a member of the flock, we have a choice to make – to lay down our personal agendas and pray for one another. God has given us a command to love others. How will you respond to that command?

Prayer Suggestions: Pray that you will continue to take on more of Christ's characteristics, shepherding one other and creating a strong sense of community among your flock. Pray for each person in the class that they feel this commitment to your group.

“Praying Up Your Sunday School” Daily Devotional Guide - Week 4

Every Sunday School member will pray specifically for inactive members and seek to make contact with them to encourage them and invite them to attend their class. (Written by Mrs. Sharon Neff, President wMu, MBCB)

Sunday

Precious - Luke 15

Do you believe that every member of your class, whether they attend most Sundays or are hardly ever there, is precious? This week we will be focusing on the three parables in Luke 15 and praying for the inactive members of your class.

I must admit that as a young adult, I had little patience with those who rarely attended church or Sunday School. I would just as soon have those “Easter bunnies” (who hopped into church on Easter Sunday) hop right on back home if that was the only Sunday they were going to come. I’m so grateful that time and some spiritual maturity cured me of that.

The Lord graciously showed me that each person was precious to Him and should therefore be precious to me, regardless of things like their church or Sunday School attendance. In these three parables, each of the lost things has value and is precious. Each one is worth finding and bringing back. The lamb is precious even though it is only one out of 100 and the coin is precious even though there are nine left. The son is certainly precious, even though he breaks his father’s heart. The “good” son cannot replace him.

Ask the Lord to confirm to you that the inactive members of your class are as precious as the active ones. If you need to change your mind set about this, ask Him to help you. Obtain a list of the inactive members of your class and begin to pray for them.

***Prayer Suggestions:** Father, show me how precious these inactive ones are to You. Help me to open my heart to them this week as I focus on their needs and situations. Amen.*

Monday

Pursue – Luke 15:4

When something of value is lost, you try to find it, you pursue it. The shepherd went out and looked for the lost sheep. He was not content to have 99 out of 100 sheep in the flock, so he did something about it.

Your class may have many inactive members or just one. Yet, you should not be content to carry on with those “regulars”, even though that is the easy thing to do. You need to pursue them – gently. My pastor husband calls those members who are inactive MIA’s, for Missing In Action. As he led the church to contact them, he encouraged gentleness and not confrontation. We sent birthday cards or made “just thinking of you” phone calls and visits without berating them for not attending church. We did not let them languish out there forever without any contact, we pursued them and encouraged them.

As you continue to pray for your inactive members, be thinking of non-threatening ways you can contact them. Depending on the situation, email or text or a Facebook message might be best. I discovered for myself that a handwritten note made a big impact since people get so little personal snail mail these days. If you enjoy talking on the phone, that might be a possibility.

Keep on praying for your inactive members. But ask God to let one name begin to touch your heart and be open to whomever He wants you to pursue.

***Prayer Suggestions:** Father, as I pray, lead me to the specific person You wish me to pursue. Show me what method I should use and prepare their heart even now to be receptive to this contact. Amen.*

Tuesday

Potential – Luke 15

Review the three parables today. In each instance, the seeker realized the potential of that which was lost. The sheep had the potential of increasing the value of the flock. The coin probably completed a set of coins which very likely was the woman’s dowry. The son had the potential to be a vital part of the family once more.

Can you see the potential in your inactive members? Could they potentially be faithful class members? Would they provide an interesting viewpoint in class discussions? Do they have an interest, hobby or expertise that potentially could contribute to your class meetings or fellowship times? Could they grow spiritually as you all studied the Scriptures together? Could they become class leaders...or even teachers in time? If all of your inactive members became more active, how would your class change for the better?

Prayerfully consider the positive potential impact these people will have on your class. And on the flip side, prayerfully consider the potential impact your class can have on the lives of the inactive members. What would a little encouragement from you mean in their lives? How could participating in your class positively affect them?

Continue to pray for your inactive members. Has the Lord laid someone on your heart yet to contact?

Prayer Suggestions: Father help me to see the potential benefits to Your Kingdom represented in these inactive members. I pray that You will help me to help them realize their potential and to encourage them. Amen.

Wednesday

Perspective – Luke 15:12-13, 17

Today, let's consider the perspective of the inactive person. We see that the perspective of the son in the first two verses was that escaping from his father's control and having a great time doing whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted to do it would be a wonderful thing. In time, his perspective changed (v. 17).

It may help you to more effectively contact and encourage an inactive member if you try to see things from his or her perspective. Were they hurt by someone or something said in class? Has there been a change in their family situation – a death, divorce, caring for aging parents or even a new baby? Are they in a rebellious stage or a depressed state? Do they think it's just too hard to get up that early on Sunday?

Attending Sunday School is in part a habit and sometimes we just get out of the habit. I remember when I had surgery quite a few years ago and was unable to attend church for several weeks. I hate to confess this, but it was a little hard to get back into the habit of Sunday School and church, even though I had missed it when I couldn't go.

Can you begin to understand why someone might have become inactive? You certainly don't have to agree with their reason, but ask the Lord to give you compassion for them and to help you be an encourager to them. Maybe their perspective has changed, just as the son's perspective changed, and they are just waiting for a caring invitation to return. Have you made that contact yet?

Prayer Suggestions: Father, help me see things through the eyes of these inactive members so that I may understand and encourage them better. Let Your love flow through me to them. Amen.

Thursday

Persistence – Luke 15:8

Will an inactive member become a faithful member after one encouraging contact? Maybe, but probably not. It could take several contacts over a period of time. It may take persistence like that shown by the woman who lost the silver coin. She didn't just look around the room and think "Oh well, I guess it's lost forever." No, she lit a lamp in a murky room that was probably windowless and swept every nook and cranny until she found it. She was persistent.

One contact is a great start, but don't give up if it's not immediately successful. It may take a number of contacts by the same person, or by several different people. You are trying to let this person know that you care about them, that you would like to be with them more (in Sunday School), and to encourage them in their Christian walk. You may need to be gently persistent.

An inactive member might respond to the initial contact and attend one Sunday, then miss the next one or two. Be supportive and don't give up. Remember that Sunday School attendance is, in part, a habit and it may take a while to develop that habit again. You may discover that you may need

to help the person overcome some obstacles. Maybe they need a ride, or for you to meet them at the church entrance and walk to class with them, or assurance that the nursery will take good care of their baby while they are at church.

Prayer Suggestions: Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and guidance as well as a healthy dose of kind persistence. *Father, please help me to not be discouraged if my initial contact is not fruitful. Guide me to know when and where to speak and when to back off for a bit. Give me the wisdom to be effectively persistent. Amen.*

Friday

Purpose – Luke 15:22-24

It might be a good idea to refocus on the purpose of our praying and doing this week. We are seeking to get inactive members back into Sunday School...but why? Looking at these verses about the reaction of the father when the lost son came home, we see that the father welcomed him back into the family as a full member. He gave the son all the symbols of sonship. He did not require him to spend time as a servant first, or keep him at a distance for a while. The father wanted him to be in full fellowship with the family.

We are not seeking to get inactive members to come to Sunday School to make our attendance numbers look good or so that we can pat ourselves on the back for completing a task successfully. We don't want these precious ones to feel as if they are our "project of the week". Hopefully you are seeking to get them to return as an active member of your class family and fellowship. You want them to attend and participate so that they can grow closer to the Lord and so they can see Bible study as a vital part of their lives. You want them to realize all the advantages Sunday School brings to your life can be a part of their life as well.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray that your inactive members will see that your heart's desire is for their ultimate good. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in the life of the person you contact and nudge them to action. *Father, help me to remember the purpose of praying for our inactive members this week. Help me focus on them and take the focus off of me. Amen.*

Saturday

Party – Luke 15:6, 9, 23-24

Now we get to the fun part. Each of the parables ends with a celebration. The shepherd calls his friends and neighbors to rejoice and celebrate with him because his lost sheep is back in the fold. In a similar way, the woman gathers her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her in finding her lost coin. And the father kills the fatted calf and has a feast to celebrate his son's return.

What will your class do? What will you do personally? God will surely bless your efforts in some way and you need to have a time of rejoicing. Could you have a class get-together soon and especially let those restored members know how glad you are that they are back? Maybe a time of food and fellowship during a class period would work better for you. You may want to invite the specific person you contacted to meet for lunch or coffee. Even if you see no visible results immediately, rejoice that you were able to pray for and have some sort of encouraging contact with inactive members of your class. Celebrate the fact that you were able to share God's love with them in even a small way.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in their lives and in your life.

Prayer Suggestions: *Father, thank You for the privilege of prayer. Thank You for the experiences I have had in praying for our inactive class members. Help me to continue to be mindful of them and their needs. Amen.*

“Praying Up Your Sunday School” Daily Devotional Guide - Week 5
Every Sunday School member will pray daily for at least one friend not enrolled in Sunday School. (Written by Dr. Alan Woodward, Director of Pastoral Leadership Dept., MBCB)

Sunday

“Can Any Good Thing Come Out of Nazareth?” - John 1:46

We live in an increasingly skeptical culture, especially toward the validity of Christianity. Many people wonder, “Can anything good come out of the church?” They question the exclusive claim of Christ that He is the only way of salvation. They question the importance of going to church or tithing or the church taking a stand on moral and ethical issues. Our syncretistic culture enables people to avoid accountability, deny the existence of objective truth and live for themselves. In fact, much that American culture embraces today is antithetical to authentic faith in Christ.

For ten years we lived in the greater New Orleans area. While attending our Southern Baptist seminary there, I served as a pastor. We soon discovered the amazing richness in variety of New Orleans cuisine. If you can’t find good food in New Orleans, you don’t know what good food is! We discovered something else; the quality of the food was not necessarily tied to the ambience of the restaurant. Some fancy establishments had okay food, and some places with very simple and plain décor had fabulous food. The first time I went to one of those simple places and looked around, I thought, “Can we get good food here?” I found out in a hurry we could.

Too often we tend to judge the value or effectiveness of a person by prejudice or our first impression. That is what Nathaniel did when he asked, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” This city was small and was not a city of choice in ancient Israel. It did not have the best reputation. How easy it was to question whether someone important could “come” from there.

Sometimes we tend to write off people or ignore them due to “guilt by association.” We assume that because some who are like them have acted irresponsibly that most or all other people of similar background will act irresponsibly. I am so glad God does not treat us that way. He is grieved when we prejudge people based on their background, social standing, economic assets or skin color. Some of the most influential people in history have come from very challenging circumstances.

Can any good thing come out of “Nazareth”? Jesus did. He was raised there. I wonder who else might fall in that category.

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for sensitivity for those we know who do not know Christ.

Monday

“Come and You Will See” - John 1:39

Sometimes the best way for us to learn is to do or discover something ourselves. Maybe we are trying to calculate how much wood laminate we need to lay on the living floor, which we did last year. Perhaps we are trying to determine how much food to buy for a huge family dinner at Christmas, which we do every year. What we are trying to do is to see how something will work.

Out of curiosity we experiment with different ways to find a solution for our challenge. As we work at it, we are excited by partial success. We often gain a better understanding of what is involved. We may also get frustrated because we are stumped and have run out of answers.

One day John the Baptist told two of his disciples that Jesus was “Behold the Lamb of God!” The disciples began to follow Jesus and asked where He was staying. Jesus replied, “Come, and see.” (John 1:35-39) Jesus sensed they wanted to spend time with Him but did not readily answer their question. Often in Jesus ministry he did not categorically state the truth or answer people’s questions. He challenged them and asked questions of His own. At times He did not share all of the truth at that time because people were not ready to hear it. He engaged people to think about spiritual reality and what that meant for their lives.

These early disciples spent time with Jesus, probably ate a meal with him and listened to Him explain spiritual truth. The result was life changing. One of the two disciples was Andrew. As soon as he sensed Jesus was the Messiah, he went and told his brother, Simon Peter, “We have found the Messiah”. (John 1:39-41)

When we do as those two disciples did, we will see wonderful things. No greater discovery exists in life than to know Jesus as the Promised Messiah and then in turn to tell others about Him. But as we do, we must remember that some people respond to, "Listen while I tell you." However, many others respond better to, "Come and you will see."

Prayer Suggestions: Pray for opportunities to invite friends to activities where you can better understand their needs.

Tuesday

"Do You Believe?" - John 1:50

Early in Jesus' ministry He encountered a man called Nathaniel. This man asked Jesus, "How do You know me?" Jesus said, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathaniel declared Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel. Then Jesus replied, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." (John 1:48-50)

This question resonates within our minds. There is much we would like to believe, but because of bad experiences we may have become skeptical. Will the government take care of us or the huge institutions who lavishly lobby for legislative favors? If we are sued, will we be treated fairly or will the judge and jury be prejudiced due to the hype surrounding the case? Do we believe our troops will ever come home from conflicts that are hard to understand?

For people who aren't Christians, another set of doubts emerge. Can they believe in the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible? Did Moses, Elijah and Jesus really perform miracles? Can they believe what Jesus supposedly said? Did He really rise from the dead?

Belief or faith in God, by its nature is the acceptance of what God reveals to mankind. The influence of Jesus has far surpassed that of any other human being. The Bible has consistently been the best selling book in history. When we take God at His Word and truly believe in His Son Jesus, we can claim the promise Jesus gave to Nathaniel. Jesus asked, "Do you believe?" Then Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". (John 1:50-51) Jesus was saying if we believe while alive on earth, we will enjoy the blessed presence of God in heaven. That is something I do not want to miss. How about you? Do you believe?

Prayer Suggestions: Ask God to allow the love of Christ to show through you to your friends.

Wednesday

"Follow Me" - Matthew 4:18-19

Learning how to find directions for a trip could not be easier than they are today in America. We have so many tools at our disposal. A few years ago my wife bought me a GPS, which I thought at the time was dumb. After all, I had my maps! But I soon changed my mind when I learned I could type in exact addresses and get more precise help than a map could give. Then I started using MapQuest. That was cool. I had three sources to consult for directions. Recently we bought new cell phones that have internet and a GPS system built into the phone. Wow! When I was a boy all I had was my Boy Scout compass. Ancient seamen gained directions by following stars. Now I have all kinds of sophisticated equipment to make direction-finding easier.

We follow many things in life. When something smells good, we follow our nose. When we are hiking out of the woods at night, we follow our flashlight. In a children's game, children follow the leader.

Our task in life is to follow the Leader, not just any leader, but The Leader, Jesus Christ. While walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Peter and Andrew, fishing. Jesus challenged them, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:18-19). They knew how to fish for fish. Jesus would have to teach them how to fish for people. The Bible says those two fishermen as well as James and John immediately left their nets to follow Him.

Jesus' basic orders have not changed. He calls each of us to change direction in life by following Him and learning how to fish for people.

Prayer Suggestion: Ask God to show you how to encourage your friends to want to know Christ.

Thursday

“How Do You Know Me?” - John 1:48

For twenty-three years I served as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Ellisville, Mississippi. One of the many fine Christian men in our church was Dr. J. B. Young, who served as President of Jones County Junior College for several decades. Dr. Young was known for several wonderful qualities: his prayers, compassion for others, capable administrative leadership, wisdom in decision making and memory. He had an amazing capacity for remembering people’s names. If perchance, he could not remember someone’s name, he would ask someone else for that person’s name. In that way he could greet people by name. I am sure some people wondered, “How do you know me?” or even, “How did you remember me?”

Our great God knows us all by name. He knows all there is to know about us! He even knows our thoughts. Jesus indicated to Nathaniel He had knowledge of his character. Nathaniel’s response was amazement. He declared, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49)

What is your response to Jesus’ complete knowledge of you? He knows your every word (kind or harsh), every action (helpful or harmful) and every thought (pure or perverted). Yet He loves you anyway. He wants to bless you and use you to bless others if you will just believe, like Nathaniel, you “will see greater things” (John 1:50). God’s goal is to reveal more and more of His ways and character to us so we can experience greater insight, greater strength, and greater usefulness. Why would we ever want to cheat ourselves, other people and our God by settling for less?

Prayer Suggestion: Pray specifically for three people who are not Christians. Ask God to give them understanding.

Friday

“What Do You Seek?” - John 1:38

What is it we are seeking in life? Very few people simply coast aimlessly in life with no direction or purpose. Most of us are seeking for things that lead to joy and satisfaction. We seek a good education because we want to be prepared for employment. Then we seek a good job, where the salary meets our needs, we enjoy the work, we can build relationships of trust and cooperation and we can invest in other people’s lives. We seek truth so we can understand despair and failure and not be led to embrace wrong values. We seek good food. When we move, we seek a good house and good doctors. We seek a good fishing spot, a parking place near the front door and safety from storms. As children we played “hide and seek.”

Jesus asked some of John the Baptist’s followers, “What do you seek?” (John 1:38) His question went far beyond the physical, emotional or even intellectual things we seek. He asked what they really were looking for in life. John had pointed to Jesus and identified Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What we actually seek may not be what we need. Jesus’ question forced them and us to assess what we are pursuing in life. Are we seeking what merely pleases us, or are we seeking what will please God? Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”. (Matthew 6:33) The Wise Men traveled on a long journey seeking the One who was born the king of Jews. The disciples of John were seeking the One who could enable them to experience forgiveness of sin and thereby ultimate joy, peace and purpose in life. They found what they were seeking, and it was exactly what they needed. What are you seeking?

Prayer Suggestion: Pray for a closer walk with Christ. Ask God to make your relation to Christ inviting to your friends.

Saturday

“Where Are You Staying?” - John 1:38

On the 2010 Census form, the first question is, “How many people were living or staying in this house...?” I sense this reflects the unsettledness of so many people living in our country, either due to immigration or the brokenness of families. The question suggests that where we are staying may be temporary. While in college I stayed in Polk Hall at William Carey College (now a university). When we are on vacation or a business trip, we stay in a motel. When we visit family we usually stay with them in their home.

Some of John the Baptist's followers asked Jesus, "Rabbi, where are You staying?" (John 1:38). They were not asking out of curiosity. They wanted to spend time with Jesus. And when they spent time with Him, these disciples found they no longer could "stay" in despair and grief. Overjoyed that Jesus was raised from the dead, they had to tell others the good news.

We too should desire to spend time with Jesus. When we spend time with Him, we discover there are places we no longer can "stay." We cannot "stay" in stubbornness and pride, at least not and become like Jesus, which is a primary goal of salvation. The more time we spend with the Lord the more we realize we must humble ourselves before God and consider others are more important than ourselves. Stubbornness and pride suggest that on most issues we are right, virtually perfect. Other people need to change, but not us!

We cannot "stay" in unforgiveness. After the record of the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, we see the only petition Jesus commented on was forgiving others (Matthew 6:14-15). Why? Our salvation was necessary because of our need to be forgiven of sin. When we refuse to show forgiveness, we reveal incomprehension of what we received at salvation. None of us deserves forgiveness. Neither do those who have offended us. However, because God shows grace and forgiveness to us, we must do the same to others, that is, if we are maturing in faith. Who really finds lasting satisfaction in being immature?

One other place we cannot "stay" is on a spiritual high. After the Transfiguration, Peter suggested to Jesus they build booths and stay on the mountain (Mark 9:5). Life is not that way. We face challenges, disappointment and grief. As we spend time with Jesus, He does two marvelous things for us. He enables us to endure life's hardships in His strength, and He reminds us that a permanent "mountain top" existence is yet to come. The One who dwells within us helps us make sense of life and enables us to anticipate our dwelling with Him in perfect fellowship for all eternity.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray for your abiding relationship to Christ. Ask God to impress more of His word in your heart.

“Praying Up Your Sunday School” Daily Devotional Guide - Week 6

Every Sunday School class member will pray daily for their friends not enrolled in Sunday School and make contact with them to ask them to attend. Pray for the opportunity to share Christ with those who are not yet Christians. (Written by Don Lum, Director of Evangelism, MBCB)

Sunday

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” Romans 10:1

Salvation – what a wonderful gift!! It is the thing that gives you HOPE for tomorrow. No matter what is happening in your life today, you know that the best is yet to come. The future is heaven because of the work that Jesus did for you on the cross and your response to Him. You are never without hope for change because you know that your salvation brings you into relationship with a God who can do anything. The God who parted the Red Sea, closed the mouths of lions, made Joseph second in command in Egypt, allowed a donkey to speak, brought Lazarus back from the dead, fed thousands of people with a few fish and a few loaves, healed a man blind from birth, and used a young man to kill a giant with a sling- that is the God who loves you and has given you salvation.

Salvation also gives you PEACE. It is not an absence of problems, but peace in the storm that someone bigger than you is in control and loves you enough to die for you. Maybe the most quoted passage in the Bible says that, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Sheep don’t worry because they know that the shepherd will take care of their needs. We have a good shepherd who can meet all our needs and take care of all of our problems. He sees tomorrow better than we see yesterday. He knows what is best, and He is able to do it for us. That kind of peace is not something the world offers.

Salvation also gives you PURPOSE. Because you are connected to the one who made you, you know how to live. There is meaning for your life that is bigger than you and your little world. You can get up every morning and meet with the creator of the universe. You can walk with Him through the day. You can see His hand on your path and follow Him. You can serve others because you are loved. The love of God in you directs you to meet needs. You have a reason to live.

You possess this great gift because you know God through Jesus. Many around you do not know Him and don’t have this gift. Most of them don’t even realize what they are missing. Because God puts in us a desire for Him, they do know that they want something. They just don’t know what it is. Many try to fill that need with things of the world that do not satisfy. Read John 4 to see an example of one who was doing that. We call her the Samaritan woman. You probably have friends like that or at least acquaintances that God has put in your path.

Prayer Suggestion: Begin praying that their eyes will be opened to the real answer to their need for completeness. Pray that they will understand that Jesus is what they are looking for.

Monday

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

Confess and believe- the two words that bring LIFE to a person. Of course, you must confess and believe the right thing that Jesus is Lord. Many people believe a lot of things. For years they ‘believed’ that the earth was flat. They were wrong and no matter how much they ‘believed,’ the earth is round and that is the Truth. Truth cannot be changed no matter what we ‘believe’. Jesus says in John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. That is the TRUTH.

We are so blessed to be able to open the book of Truth and read every day. We take that privilege so much for granted. Do you ever stop and think that you have direction and inspiration and promises and prayers and a written connection to your Father at your fingertips every day? In a society that has no absolutes, you have Truth you can count on. Read just a small portion of Psalm 119 to be reminded of the blessings promised to one who walks in the Truth.

When we realize that the truth is Jesus, Paul says we are to confess with our mouth. Do you talk about Him with people you live with every day? Do you acknowledge Him as Lord of your life? Can others tell by watching the way you live? After Peter and John were put in jail for preaching and

told to stop, they said that they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). Is that true of us? We seem to have plenty to talk about, but do we ever talk about Jesus to our friends?

Prayer Suggestion: Ask God today to open your eyes to people all around you who don't know Him. Think about the person at the bank, the cleaners, the one in line behind you at the store, your co-workers, your neighbors, the waitress at your favorite restaurant, the gas station attendant, the clerk, the policeman, your child's teacher-----the list could go on depending on your sphere of influence. Watch for opportunities to show the love of God as you go about your day. Be open to ways to talk about Jesus. God may have someone's heart prepared to hear what He wants to say through you. Just walk with Him and let Him use you.

Tuesday

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:10

How can I say thanks for the things you have done for me? The words of that old song come to mind as this passage is read. Believing in Jesus gives us righteousness- rightness with God. That is something I cannot buy with money or figure out with my brain. How can I ever say thanks for what God has done for me? Those of us who have children try to teach them to say thanks when they are given a gift. Saying thanks is a wonderful way to acknowledge that someone has done something for you, thought of you, or said something nice about you. Paul says it is a lifestyle to be thankful --that we are to give thanks in all things (I Thessalonians 5:18).

Giving thanks makes us remember the source of our blessings. We have so many blessings as Christians in America. The greatest blessing is being right with God. Jesus died so that could happen and all I have to do is believe. Some people don't really understand what the word 'believe' in the New Testament meant to early Christians. It is not just acknowledging the truth of something or that you agree with something, like you believe that George Washington was the first President. To believe is to surrender to the truth that you believe. It changes your life. When a person 'believes' in Jesus, he/she accepts the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but he/she also gives themselves to those truths, deciding to live from that day forward under the authority of Jesus and all He says to do. Jesus really does become boss of your life.

On the day that you believed, you gained righteousness and salvation. Read more about this in Philippians 3:8-9. What a gift that everyone needs! Some people are looking for cures for diseases and that is a wonderful thing. If you know of a medicine that has helped you, you are quick to share it with your friends. If you tried a diet that really worked, you want to tell others about it. If you learned something new that would help your business, you will not keep it a secret.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that you will have that same boldness in sharing what you know about being right with God and what a wonderful way it is to live. Ask God to give you wisdom to see opportunities to share and courage to do it. Surveys have been done and have shown that most people would like to talk about spiritual things. We have the answer that they are looking for. Pray for God to use you today.

Wednesday

For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' Romans 10: 11

There are many disappointments in life. We don't make the team. We don't get the job. We lose a job. We don't get the promotion. We don't get the solo. We don't get to go on the trip. Disappointments are a part of life, and we also experience them through our children and grandchildren. But one thing we will never be disappointed in is our relationship with Jesus. He will never let us down. He will always be there for us. We are always in His hand and He will always love us. Note the word 'always' used in the promises. Our guarantee of security with Him will never end - no disappointment.

The verse above was quoted by Paul from Isaiah 28:16 when God was pronouncing judgment on Israel because of their failure to honor and obey Him. As he pronounced judgment, He also gave a

promise that He would send a foundation stone (Jesus) someday that could be counted on to save the world and would never disappoint. Jesus has come and we are able to know the whole story and know Him.

At the end of His life, Jesus was encouraging His disciples because He knew that they would have problems in the world. He said to them as recorded in John 16:33b, "In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." This is what makes us different from the world and people who don't know Jesus. We are following the One who has not only overcome the world, but who has overcome death - our last great enemy. Jesus not only does not disappoint, but He makes life worth living and death a promotion. Remember Paul's attitude in Philippians 1:21- "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that God would help you live today in a way that would make others want what you have. Ask God to help you live like you know Him and to draw others to Himself through your life. Remember that life is more than you can see around you. God is at work and wants to use you in the places where you live and work and play.

Thursday

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved". Romans 10:12-13

One of the things that drives people today is their 'status' in life - how much money they have, what kind of car that they drive, how big their house is, how important is their job. It is a never ending struggle to do better and be better than my neighbor. What a refreshing thought that in the eyes of God those things don't matter!! The word is 'whoever'. Whoever calls on Him - we are all equally in need of a Savior and that is really the only thing that matters. Remember that the ground is level at the foot of the cross for all people. Even Jews, God's chosen people, are not ahead of anyone else. God loves us all!!

When disaster strikes, we get the right perspective for a few days. We realize that the things that really matter are not bought with money or measured by how much power and authority we have. Why do we need a disaster to understand and live by this truth? God's word tells us over and over to 'Seek Him first'. The verse above says that He is abounding in riches for us - the riches of joy and peace and direction and so many blessings.

What a message we have to share with friends! God loves you and wants you to know Him and walk with Him. You can relax about all the pressure you put on yourself to succeed in the eyes of the world and the people in it. Your Father owns it all and wants to bless you. He is abounding in riches for us. That gives us real rest to understand and live by this truth. Psalm 50:10 says that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Read the rest of that Psalm to get the message from God about how He wants to care for you.

Prayer Suggestion: Now that you have been reminded of all you have in Jesus, think about those around you who don't have a clue. The Bible says that they are blind and walking in darkness. Some are your friends, think about them like that. If they don't know Jesus they are in the dark and you have so much to offer them. Pray that God convicts them for their need for Him and gives you wisdom and courage to speak up when the opportunity comes. Watch for times of struggle and offer hope. Watch for times to share the blessings you have experienced today.

Friday

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Romans 10:14

When Philip was on the road to Gaza, he met a man reading scripture. He asked the man if he understood what he reading and the man said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:26-31) The Holy Spirit directed Philip to that road and the Holy Spirit was convicting the Ethiopian eunuch in the chariot. Because Philip was sensitive to what God wanted him to do. The man was saved and who knows how many more were saved as he went back to his home in another country. This is a good

example of what God can do millions of times a day with those of us who are listening to Him and obeying.

You would think in America there would be no one who has not heard about Jesus and how to be saved. There are people who have given testimony that they lived in the Bible belt their whole life and never knew how to be saved or that 'abundant' life was even a possibility. Most have heard the name of Jesus and know that there is a book called the Bible, but many have never opened it to read and apply it to their life. Some think of Jesus as someone you talk about at church on Sunday or someone who doesn't really affect them during the 'regular' week days.

How can they know if we don't live, talk, act, speak, think, or react differently than they do? Paul mentions a preacher, and God does call special men to full time ministry. But He gives us all a mandate to tell the story to those we know. First, we must live in such a way that it is compelling to them - something that appeals - something that they want. We have so much to offer. Remember the old saying, "You may be the only Bible that some ever read". What is your life saying?

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that your life today will show others the 'abundant' life that Jesus offers. Experience all God has for you and as you do, you will be sensitive to the needs of others. You will see then with God's eyes and know if you are in a place to ask someone if they understand who Jesus is. Look for opportunities to meet needs and be a safe haven for those who are searching for peace. As you minister to people's physical needs you will be surprised how God will open doors to let you share your faith.

Saturday

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17

The book of Romans is written to Christians. It is Paul's statement of faith. He wants us to understand how God has pursued us, provided everything we need to be saved in Jesus, and given us the Holy Spirit so we are empowered to really 'live' while we are still on earth. There are so many verses pertaining to salvation and faith. It is a book that should be read regularly.

Chapter 10 is Paul's heartfelt concern for his own people, the Jews. He begins the chapter by praying for their salvation and ends it by quoting Isaiah where God says that He is reaching out to His people who are disobedient and obstinate. The great truths of salvation and faith and LIFE that Paul was trying to teach fell on deaf ears many times. But that never stopped Paul. He kept speaking the word to those who would listen to him.

Many in our world are eager to know Jesus. They are doing the best they can to survive and never really understand how God designed them to live. There is a better way. There is more to life than you can see. That is the message that they need to hear. That is the message that will lead them to faith and LIFE. The blind need sight, but because they are blind they cannot heal themselves. The thirsty need water, but they are too weak to get it for themselves. The dead need to be resurrected, but have no power in themselves to do that. Jesus offers the answer to all of these seemingly hopeless kinds of people. They are our neighbors and our family members. We have HOPE to give them. Watch for people who need hope. They cry out every day.

Prayer Suggestion: Pray that God would open your eyes to see the needs of people around you. Many play a good game, put on a smile but inside they are dying. Take time to stop and really listen to people. Satan loves us to be busy and noisy so we cannot hear and really listen. Don't let him steal your 'abundant' LIFE or stop you from sharing the message with someone today. You can be light and peace in a turbulent world. Jesus wants you to show unbelievers what it looks like to 'really live'. Enjoy your journey with Him today!