

Sunday School

READING

Deuteronomy 6

John 5

Romans 12

If closing your Sunday School will kill your church, then I would guess in most cases that means it is already dying.

So how do you think it would go if you stood up next week and demanded that your church close down it's Sunday School? What kind of reaction would you get? Would you be asked to leave or would you just be carried out?

How would you feel if someone else did that?

How would you feel if your church decided that this was indeed the right course of action and they were going to close the Sunday School?

Sunday School is part of how we do church. It's part of who we are. You cannot have church without having Sunday School because Yeshua cares about children. And on top of that, almost all our conversions come through Sunday School, so if we close them down our churches will eventually die.

Really?

Sunday school originally started in Britain in the 1780's. But its original purpose was to provide actual school - reading, writing and arithmetic, for poor children who couldn't go to any kind of regular school. Once that need was satisfied elsewhere, (by the government run school system), it was no longer needed and Sunday School morphed into what we have today.

So I guess you can have church without Sunday School... at least we did for almost 1800 years. But since then it has become an institution and it is very rare to find a church without one.

I wonder how they kept the children quiet before that?

Sunday School has become such an integral part of our church life that we can't imagine church without it. And it is true, we do most of our evangelism through Sunday School. But is that right?

We deliberately teach these children to believe something fundamentally opposite to what their own parents believe. With good intentions of course. And with the hope that their parents will eventually believe it too.

But in between we have divided the family and undermined the parents. Is that a good thing?

How would you feel if someone did that to your kids, and undermined your position as their parents?

What if we had Sunday School for the parents instead? And then when they became Christians we could help them teach their own children the truths of the Bible. Wouldn't that be better?

In Deuteronomy 6 we read of God's plan for spiritual education... teach them to your children as you walk along, when you sit down, when you stand up... Basically God's way is that parents should be teaching their children as they go through life together. Taking the opportunities as they come along to discuss spiritual things.

God should be part of your everyday life and you should show and teach that to your children too. (By the way, your children should be part of your everyday life too).

Wouldn't it be better to reach the parents, and then help them, and the parents who are already in our church, to teach their own children? Apart from actually doing it God's way, this would also reinforce the family structure and build and strengthen the parent-child relationships. Wouldn't that be a good thing?

If closing your Sunday School will kill your church, then I would guess in most cases that means it is already dying.

If all your conversions are coming through Sunday School then I would also be asking whether that is because that is the only place you are doing any evangelism? Why aren't you out there trying to reach the parents directly?

Is it just because it's easier? The kids come to you. You don't have to go to them. You can stay in your safe church comfort zone and talk about stuff you know about. Sing a few songs, play a few games, do some activity and a short Bible talk and that's it. Evangelism done for another week. Easy.

Evangelising adults is much harder. They argue back. Usually you have to go to them, and that might mean going to some places which are not "nice". You might see sex and drugs. You will almost certainly hear some language you don't usually find in Sunday School. You might find some aggressive people who don't want to hear your message. You won't usually get to sing nice Christian songs and play games. Not so easy.

Now, before I go too much further let me make it clear that I am not against Sunday School per se. Some Sunday Schools are great. Some Sunday School teachers are fantastic. In fact the famous preacher D.L. Moody was introduced to Yeshua by a Sunday School teacher... Edward Kimball. And that makes him a hero in my book. And having someone in your church who loves God and who loves your children and is prepared to give up time every week to help you nurture them is a real blessing.

But I am concerned about our reliance on Sunday School to do what the whole church should be doing every day of the week.

If you have Sunday School as part of a balanced church life, and there is a definite need for it, (to supplement the teaching of church children which is already being done by their own parents), then that wouldn't concern me at all. But if your Sunday School is your only outreach to the community, or if you are persevering with Sunday School when it is clearly not working in your church or in your community... then I think we have a problem.

The other thing that worries me about Sunday School is that it is a given. We just assume that we have to have one.

Yeshua said, (in John 5), that the son only does what he sees the father doing. I think church should be thinking like that too. We should only do what we see God doing. If we see that God is reaching out in a special way to the children of our community then we should do something for them too. Perhaps Sunday School. Perhaps something else. But if we don't see that. If we see God reaching out to the drug addicts in our community, then we should jump on board that and focus on that. Perhaps there are no children in our community. Perhaps we are an inner city church that meets in a pub on Sunday night... (That church probably won't have a huge outreach potential for 6 year olds... at least, not yet.)

Deciding to have a Sunday School should be a very conscious decision, backed by a lot of prayer. And that should be reviewed if circumstances change. And I really think the focus should be on building up the children of the church, not just reaching out to the children of the community.

I know this is a controversial topic. And I'm actually pretty happy if you read this far.

But as hard as it might be. Would you at least consider praying about it? Ask God to show you what he thinks of Sunday School. In particular of your Sunday School. And ask him whether that is actually something he is doing in your community. Ask him to show you what else he is doing there.

Let's just ask Yeshua. After all, it's his church not ours. We are his body. It's not up to us to make assumptions ... we should be doing as the head directs. And only as the head directs.

What if he is trying to get us to go in a new direction?

What if Sunday School has had its day?

What if we're stuck on one idea and that is stopping the church from moving where Yeshua needs it to go?