

Today is World Sunday School Day, and I would like to briefly touch on the history of Sunday School. Robert Raikes of G. Britain was the first person to initiate the Sunday school movement, a movement that started with a school for boys in the slums. Robert Raikes had been involved with those imprisoned at the county jail and saw that bad behavior would be better prevented than cured. He saw schooling as the best intervention. The best available time was Sunday as the boys were often working in the factories the other six days. The best available teachers, were lay people. The textbook was the Bible, and the originally intended curriculum started with learning to read, and then progressed to the Bible study. By 1831, Sunday schools in Great Britain were teaching 1.25million children weekly, which is approximately 25 percent of the population.

From there the SS progressed through the years and it has taken the form we have today. The Marthoma Sunday School Samajam was founded in 1905. The growth and development of the SSSamajam as one of the leading Christian Educational organization in India was the result of the extraordinary organizing ability of Rev V.P. Maman and his untiring efforts for 47 years. The goal of our Church SS is to teach today's kids the right path so that they become better role models in society tomorrow and live a better Christian life as adults. The motto of our Marthoma SS is, "Come to Jesus, bring every child to Jesus."

Now, for our meditation today I have taken the verse from our Bible reading. Deut 6verse 7. It says, *"Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

Let us look at the first part of the verse "**Impress** them on your children". Moses, here, is speaking about the commandments and how God wants us to use them. God wants us to impress his words on our children. So what does impress mean? Looking into the dictionary , you will find the meaning as "To produce by pressure a mark, or image, etc. or to fix deeply in the mind; to present forcibly to the attention

While when we take the King James Version, the word used is "teach them **diligently**" again if we look at the meaning of the word diligent and it is "Marked by persevering, painstaking effort."

These words pressure, perseverance, painstaking effort, are words we want to get rid of from the parenting dictionary in today's world.

We as Christians, too, sometimes feel the same. Why? It is not because of our Christian way, but our human nature. Today, in every part of human life, we want to feel light. So, if we buy milk it should be low fat, butter should be **light** butter, pizza should be **thin** crust, our tea should be sweet but sugar **free**. Why do we do this? It is because we believe that this way we can enjoy it for long time. If we have the wholesome stuff we will not enjoy it for long. Maybe it is OK for our physical needs but the problem is, this concept spreads into our spiritual life. So now we want a **light** and short Sunday school with **thin** books if possible and keep it test and homework **free** and still have the feel that the child has been nourished with all the Christian values. If we keep it this way the Sunday school will keep growing. But if you make it too wholesome it becomes less inviting. This is not what the bible wants. The bible wants us to put in painstaking efforts, persevere and apply positive pressure to learn Gods word.

In Luke chapter 18 verse 16 *“Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me, and do not **hinder** them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”*

Children are the most precious gift of all, so bringing your kids regularly to Sunday school and being a willing participant in your child’s Sunday school activities will definitely involve pressure, perseverance, painstaking effort and this(I know it through my personal experience). But that is exactly what God wants us to do.

Now here, at Sunday school, we share the task of teaching the word of God diligently to the kids. Let us look at what Sunday school tries to impress on our children?

(1)Sunday School Teaches them the word of God:

The bible tells us that Jesus was a great teacher. Jesus didn't just come to die for us, he also came to TEACH us how to live.

Matthew 4:23,it says, *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues.* If we keep reading on, Matthew 7:28-29 says, *“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”* So, we try to make this an example through the Sunday school by teaching the Bible.

Again in Matthew 28:19-20 we read, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded u.*

At Sunday school we try to plant the word and commandments of the Lord in their life, and to obey and follow them.

Speaking of commandments, a Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year olds. After explaining the commandment to "honor thy father and thy mother," she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" Without missing a beat one little boy answered, "Thou shall not kill."

From this you can see that when we teach them, they do learn, but when they apply their knowledge, we learn what we didn't teach them. So, for a big part of teaching in Sunday school we learn from them what and how they understood through the discussions or questions.

(2) The SS tries to make them part of the church:

Our church has a rich heritage and culture. These values are sometimes quite difficult to understand unless they are carefully taught. This also adds meaning to the church service and the order of worship in our children's life. This keeps them interested and involved in the church when they grow up. In Proverbs 22:6 it is said, "Train ^[a] a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Now apart from the values they learn from what we teach, they also learn a lot of values by observing us in church. This is very important.

Once a Sunday school teacher asked the children just before she dismissed them, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" An observant child immediately replied, "Because people are sleeping".

(3) Sunday School imparts in them the ability to share the knowledge with the world around them:

This is another important part of the Sunday school teaching. The lessons from our Sunday school text tries to explain the biblical meaning by relating it to recent history or today's life examples. This develops the children to be more strong and clear about their Christian values.

Once, a Sunday school teacher was trying hard to achieve this goal. He was talking to a children's Sunday school class about kindness to animals. He spoke about the Biblical references to justify his case. "Now let's suppose," he said, "that you saw a bad person cutting off the tail of a cat. What Biblical quotation would

you use to tell him of the terrible wrong he was doing?" "Sir, I would point out to him," one of the students said, "Therefore What God has joined together, let man not separate. (Matthew. 19:v6)"

So to summarize Sunday school, teaches God's word, the values of the church and guides them how to use their knowledge in today's world.

Now let us go back to the verse and look at the second part of the verse, **"Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up"**.

This is where we, as parents, should step in. In our daily life, our children go through different situations. We, as parents, should be there to talk to them and relate the situations to what they learn at church and Sunday school. This training cannot be done without the parent's full involvement. Many times, I, as a parent, have felt that after Sunday school, I notice no change in my child. When I reflect why, the answer is clear. How many times have I looked into my child's lesson and understood it myself? How many times have I related those values and teaching when my child has faced any situation? Probably never. This is why our teaching most of the time go meaningless.

Today, how many of us would turn off the TV or the internet and ask our children to read the bible or sit with them to read the bible? It's quite a task to do, from my personal experience, I wouldn't try unless I have at least have half a day to spend arguing and convincing my kids.

This reminds me of another Sunday school story.

Nine-year-old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday school. "Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge, and all the people walked across safely. Then he used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters and call in an air strike. They sent in bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved."

"Now, Joey, is that REALLY what your teacher taught you?" his mother asked.

"Well, no, Mom, but if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it."

This is how our messages are understood, through their little eyes. Here, Joey never believed in his teacher's lesson because his mind

has been nurtured to underestimate the power of God compared to the power of his walkie talkies and bombers.

In Romans 12:2 it says, “²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” In Proverbs 19:18 it says, “Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.”

So in these 2 verses we see that we have to resist conforming to the worldly patterns, and discipline our children to keep them on the right track. This once again shows that talking to and teaching them at every opportunity is critical.

Secondly, all the teachings will be no good if we are not good examples to them in our daily life.

Albert Einstein once said “Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.”

Kids watch everything we do and understand it based on their level of knowledge.

Once, two boys were walking home from church after hearing a strong preaching on the devil. One said to the other, "What do you think about all this Satan stuff?" The other boy replied, "Well, you know how Santa Claus turned out, it was just your dad."

So when we treat the kids to a lot of make believe stuff they do doubt all that we say.

Living in today's world is a big challenge for us and our children. They are exposed to so much. We have to make them strong enough to filter out all those worldly wrong influences, stay away from it and not crumble under pressure when we face it. They should know that as Christians we have God with us, and so life should be easier for us with his Hand over us. We have this advantage to the rest of the world. So bring them to Sunday School give them that advantage.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, “⁹ only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

So, as parents, impress the word of God upon them, talk to them, discipline them when necessary. Be a teacher, be their guide and above all, be an example to them. Let us pray that God showers his wisdom on our church, Sunday school, and us parents, so that we can lay a solid foundation for our children and plant the word of God in their hearts.