



THE SCHOOL OF SABBATH SCHOOL! (Sabbath School Program)

June 18, 2022

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Suggested Songs:

Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, No. 373, “Seeking the Lost”
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, No. 280, “Come, Ye Sinners”
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, No. 69, “Lord, Make Us More Holy”

Scripture Focus:

1 John 2:9, 10
Ephesians 2:19-22
Acts 20:28
1 Timothy 1:15

Program Goal: To encourage the members of the Sabbath School, and the church in general, to be more welcoming and embracing of the new members, the seekers of truth, as well as those members who left the church for one reason or another.

Hotels are ranked by stars! So, you can have a 7, 5, 4, 3, 2, or even a 1-star hotel. Adventist members are also sometimes ranked — by generations. In the church, we can have a first-generation Adventist, a second-generation Adventist, and so forth. Apparently, the more Adventist generations you have, the more privileged you are, aren't you? I tend to believe that such attitudes contribute much to losing some of our church members or even hindering people who may be interested in joining our church from doing so. Let's remind ourselves that we are all one in Christ. “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:3-5, NIV).

Coming from an Adventist educational background, both as a student at Adventist institutions, or later as a teacher in some of them, I tend to view our Sabbath School as a regular school with all that this institution may imply. When we consider the aspect of reclaiming our students (members) who for one reason or another decided not to attend the Sabbath School, or even not attend the church in general, we must reflect upon and analyze all the components of the Sabbath School and all other church services and try to figure out what may have contributed to losing some of our Sabbath School students (members), who may be our church members as well.

The curriculum is a vital component for an effective teaching and learning experience. In the Sabbath School programs, as well as in all our other church worship services, the Bible is the main textbook. Along with the writings of Ellen White that have the main and ultimate purpose of directing us to the Bible, we also refer to other materials that are in complete harmony with the Bible teachings. It may occasionally happen that some Sabbath School teachers innocently give the students (members) attending their classes the impression that the writings of Ellen White are more important than the Bible's, especially when the topic of the Sabbath or any of the other unique Adventist doctrines are the center of discussion in a Sabbath School class. Such an approach may confuse some of the new members, or even the old ones. So, let's make sure to keep emphasizing the centrality of the Bible in our Sabbath School programs, particularly in the Sabbath School classes that we teach or attend as members. Let's remind ourselves, and our members, of Ellen G. White's famous statement: "The Lord has sent His people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light" (*A Call to Stand Apart*, p. 68.6).

Closely connected to the curriculum is the lesson plan. It is the guide that the teacher uses which describes in detail what the students ought to learn and how the material will be taught. It also highlights how learning is to be measured. This lesson plan takes learning and the learners into consideration. Since the subject matter is already provided by our specialized church departments, it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that this subject matter is taught faithfully and clearly. Any explanatory examples that the teacher may need to use should be in harmony with what is being provided by our SDA Church, which takes the Bible as its ultimate source. The lesson plan should be directed towards building unity, harmony, and love between all the Sabbath School class members. Let's avoid all teachings, techniques, and methods that create hostilities and disagreements among the class members.

Once there was a university professor who was so excited to see the students quarrelling among themselves due to a statement that the professor uttered which aimed at making the students fight together. Let not such spirit be present in our Sabbath School classes. "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Romans 14:13, ESV); "Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble" (1John 2:10, NIV).

Speaking of the teachers and superintendents, could it be that some of those who oversee the Sabbath School programs are quite discriminative, judgmental, or biased in their teaching or in their leading? People come to the church hoping and expecting to be embraced and welcomed rather than to be rebuked or put to shame. Some, if not most, of our church members are individuals who chose to leave their mother churches because they thought that they will find in our Adventist Church what they were missing in their own church. Sometimes, some of our entrenched church members get overly excited about a certain topic in the presence of guests or new members who are still trying to acquaint themselves with our church doctrines. Such visitors are usually not familiar with our doctrines, which may sound strange or even radical to them. So, let's be careful when we discuss our beliefs and

convictions in the presence of our guests and visitors. Our attitudes can either attract or push away others from joining our church and accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. “But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 2:8, NASB1995).

Other members may take advantage of the Sabbath School class and try to project their ill feelings and bad impressions about other members in their class or in the church in general. Such attitudes have a negative effect on new members and may become a source of discouragement to them. So, let’s not be a hindrance or a stumbling block to such individuals, and let’s not deprive them from getting the blessings they come to look for and expect to find in our churches and our Sabbath School programs. “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Mathew 23:13, NASB1995).

Sometimes, church employees and church officers for the various church institutions may become a stumbling block to regular church members who do not work for the church. They are not members of the “School Board!” Such employees may unintentionally or even unconsciously tend to misuse their positions during the church service or during the Sabbath School programs, including the Sabbath School lesson study discussions. Such undesirable practices may include the seats those members choose for themselves in the church, the way they express their opinions about a given topic of discussion in the Sabbath School class, or even the way they greet other members. Sometimes, you will notice that warmer greetings are shown towards important personnel while lukewarm or cold salutations may be expressed with respect to those who are poor, less influential, or less well-known. We must be careful in the way we meet, treat, and greet people. Sabbath School teachers and superintendents are to be welcoming and cheerful when they deal with all those who attend our church worship activities, whether those individuals are church members or visitors. Let’s remember that many of our church members were just visitors when they first came to know our church. Unfortunately, some of them, including prominent old church members, may decide to leave our church for good if they are not cared for properly or if they are not shown the love of Christ through the way we deal with them.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3: 12-17, NIV).

Conclusion

Nurturing and reclaiming members should involve showing the love of Christ to others through the way we deal with them. The Sabbath School with its various activities is a very ideal setting for us to show our love and compassion towards others. Abiding with the biblical teachings of love, mercy, and justice can help us treat others the way we would like them to treat us. When Christ's love is reflected through us, people will be attracted to our church. Not only that, but they would also love to remain in our church and join us in proclaiming the "Good News of Salvation" to many others who would eventually become part of God's church "in the last days".