

Ephesians 1:11-23

Trust Fund  
June 5, 2011

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*<sup>11-12</sup>It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.*

*<sup>13-14</sup>It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.*

*<sup>15-19</sup>That's why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus, I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks. But I do more than thank. I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!*

*<sup>20-23</sup>All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence. Ephesians 1:11-23 (The Message)*

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When you think of Sunday School, what name comes to mind? Is there a particular teacher that stands out among all the rest? Why?

This is a terrible thing to say, but for the most part, I don't remember much about Sunday School. I can't remember many particular lessons or Scripture verses we studied. In fact, there were many times I just zoned out on the lesson. I wasn't the most attentive student.

Had we been more into interactive learning, I probably would have done better with paying attention. But here are the things that do stand out for me:

I know that what my parents and grandparents taught me about God's love for me was reinforced in the lessons we were taught. I know that, while I can't remember a specific lesson, I did learn the stories of the Bible, particularly about Jesus and who he is.

I did develop a sense of belonging to the family of God, and learned what the Church was about, and that I was a part of it.

I learned that I have a responsibility, as a member of the church, to do my part, to help it grow, and pass the faith on to others - to be active, attend worship, give generously, and to participate in the life of the church.

I learned about salvation, and I developed a strong sense of understanding that Jesus not only died on the cross for the whole world, but that it was personal, it was for me. That has been a

foundation I have stood on all my life. In times when I was in trouble, or in pain, or feeling guilty for something I had done, the lessons I had about grace and forgiveness, found in Jesus' death and resurrection, gave me hope and assurance that, in spite of myself, I am a child of God – forgiven, loved and set free.

Most of all, what I remember is the teacher. I don't remember ALL my teachers. And there was one, when I was in about the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, who was wonderful, but I can't even remember her name. She went the extra mile, had us come to her house for a meal, she made us feel very special. She showed us love and concern. I remember her face because it was full of love for me.

My grandmother was that way too. She was the superintendent of the Middler Department at church. I was proud to be her granddaughter, even though I was a step- granddaughter. Everyone loved Mrs. Buckner.

We always met for the first 15 minutes with singing, offering and prayer. That was my favorite time of Sunday School. She had parties for us, and for every child's birthday she baked a small chocolate cake. Her homemade cake from scratch was something to behold! I can still see her walking down the hallway at the church carrying that little cake with a candle in it, smiling and eager to give it to one of the children. I wished it were my birthday every time I saw her with a cake!

I think when we teach Sunday School we are doing so much more than sharing knowledge. In fact, I hear so many teachers say they don't feel qualified to teach. I wonder how many of us have been asked to teach Sunday School and declined because we didn't think we knew enough about the Bible.

There are certainly wonderful teachers who have in-depth knowledge of the Bible - the history, the stories and the meaning. And for that we are truly grateful and say thank you for sharing your knowledge, time and talent.

But to those who have not been sure of your qualifications, we also say thank you. You may never know how you touched a young person's life because you gave your time; because you spent time reading and learning and growing yourself, and praying for your class.

You may never know how God answered your prayers for that particular child whom you knew was struggling with something. That child you wanted to reach. That young person you smiled at and listened to.

I'll never forget the first day of my seminary class on Pastoral Care with Adolescents. Dr. Bob Dykstra was the Associate Professor of Pastoral Care – a very young man himself. One of the first things he said in that class was a quote (and I've not been able to find out who said it). The quote was: "everybody needs a face that lights up when they walk into the room."

Think about that. As little children, it doesn't take much to get faces to light up. Most little children are pretty cute and sweet, even when they are ornery. But it often changes when we become adolescents. We're not little anymore, we're not really children, yet we aren't quite adults yet. People either become more critical or they just don't know what to say to you.

If we are honest, we adults sometimes feel intimidated with teenagers. We aren't quite sure just how to relate to them, or teach them. That's not true for everyone. But sadly, it is true for some.

The best gift any of us can give adolescents - or any child - or any adult for that matter, is the gift of our time, our attention, our love and our concern. They may not remember any particular lesson you worked so hard on and worried over. But they will get the message – the message that God loves them, that Christ died and rose for them, and that you genuinely care for them as

well. And in your caring and loving, you are representing the church family as a whole. It is an awesome role that you play as a teacher.

If you think about it, it's like you teachers are the investors of a trust fund – a trust we learn to have in Christ. It's in Sunday School where we often come to discover our identity as part of Christ's church. Paul writes:

"It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone."

I didn't know it at the time, but my Sunday School upbringing – even though I don't remember a lesson – gave me the foundation for being the church member and pastor that I am today. I don't know what the lesson was, but I do know that something spoke to me at the age of 10 that was my first sense of call. One day, I went home from Sunday School and told my family I was going to be a missionary.

Paul says: "It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life."

Sunday School is a trust fund. The first installment in knowing our place in the family of God, in seeing that we are created for a purpose – to praise and love God and to serve Him in various and wonderful ways.

Paul gave thanks to the people in the church at Ephesus, commending them for their faithful work and love for others. He wrote:

"... when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus, I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks."

Today, after worship, we will have a potluck – a Sunday School picnic in honor of all those who have taught this past year, to give thanks for all of you.

We do give thanks to God for those from this year and all teachers from the past, who have given those first installments in the trust fund of faith – a lifetime of knowing we belong to the family of God – the joy of being cared for, listened to, and prayed for.

We celebrate with gratitude your face being a face that lights up when we walk into the room.

Thanks be to God for the teachers in this church. May the peace of God fill you, his love and grace surround you, his blessings pour over you, and his face shine on you always and forever. Amen.