

Move Up And Step Up!

Psalm 25:4-15

September 15, 2024

Please open your Bibles to Psalm 25 today. Pew Bible. In March of 2011, I was reviewing the children's story with the preschoolers. I taught them earlier about the 10 Commandments and we were reviewing what some of them were. I was so proud as they responded, "Do not steal, do not lie, Worship only God, Honor your mother and father, etc." One little girl raised her hand and said, "Don't pee your pants." After regaining composure, I replied, "If that's something your parents told you to do, then so be it." Her parents had obviously been drilling that one into her. We all have commandments we'd like to add, don't we? And some to take away. God didn't give us that option. We have what we have. Today we're going to be talking about teaching and learning what we have.

If you are able, please stand as we read Psalm 25:4 Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; 5 guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and **my hope** is in you all day long. 6 Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. 7 Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord. 8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. 9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. 10 All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. 11 For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great. 12 Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. 13 He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. 14 The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. 15 My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Like many of the Psalms, this one is a prayer. And in it, David is asking God to teach Him, to lead Him, to guide Him, to instruct Him. In Vs 4, he begs God, "Show me your ways... teach me your paths...guide me in your truth..." How many of you want God to do that for you? Praise God! But we have to put ourselves in a position to be taught, led, guided, and instructed. One of the best positions for that is in a Sunday School class each week. And in a Bible study or small group. For our children, in BLAST. If we are sincere, then we really want God to guide us in His truth. He is truth, His Word is truth. His Spirit leads us into all truth. But one of the tools God uses to do teach us His truth is the local church and its various Christian Education or Discipleship ministries.

When I go hunting I try to pick the best spot. A spot I can see from, shoot from, be comfortable in, be safe in, where there's plenty of game. The best spot to be

successful. I can't sit in my living room and expect to get a turkey or a deer. For an elk, I have to go out west. And to grow in Jesus, we must put ourselves in positions to be successful. That's not in front of the cell phone or the TV. There are many good options for Sunday School that were listed in your bulletins last Sunday and there's a huge stack of those bulletins with those inserts on the table in the fellowship hall. Pick one up and pick a class out and go to it.

We've called this Sunday, move up Sunday for the day when younger children move up to their next Sunday School class as they get older. We do that to roughly coincide with the school year. But I'm also calling it Step Up Sunday for us to step up in our discipleship. In our spiritual growth. In our learning to live like Jesus. The days in which we live are demanding more and more wisdom, insight, courage, and faithfulness. We live in dark times. To be a faithful Christian today is harder than at any point I remember in this country. The time for lazy Christianity is over. We must step up! For ourselves and for our families. Will you step up? Will you step up and attend SS and Bible Study if you don't?

I know it takes effort and time to get children ready for worship and for Sunday School. I raised children. I know that. But if we don't lead our kids to positions where they can grow in Jesus, they won't. Obviously we need to do our part at home. We've preached on Deuteronomy 6 before where it tells parents to impress God's Word on our kids, to teach them the ways of the Lord when they go to bed and when they get up, at the dinner table and on the road, and every chance we get. But one of those excellent chances is Sunday School! When we bring them to Sunday School, they hear from someone besides just mom and dad at home. It reinforces parental teaching. I'm so thankful for the SS teachers I had growing up: Eva Gochenour, Gertie Sager, Patsy Bauserman, Harold Ebersole, Shirley Fuqua, my mom. They supplemented my Deut 6 teachings I had across the road at home from my family. But, like David, I also ask for God to forgive the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways I committed in some of their classes.

When children are young and growing, they are like sponges absorbing what they see, hear, and read. There will come a dry time they will need the moisture they soak up now. A time when other voices and other influences will weigh upon them and seek to lead them into lies, error, and death. Why in the world wouldn't we want to get the most Biblical moisture into those sponges now so they can survive those dry times later? Or do we not care?

While I was teaching a youth class a while back, one of the kids was reading our study book. When she read the word Apostle, she pronounced it Aéropostale. She was much more familiar with the clothing brand than with the 12 original followers of Jesus. How did that happen? Exposure. Through phones, TV, friends, etc. What are we exposing your children to? Yourself?

There is a spiritual battle going on for your children, your grandchildren, for you. We do have an enemy who wants steal, kill, and destroy us and our children. Why wouldn't we want to armor up us and our kids before going out on the battlefield of this world? Imagine an Israeli soldier today going into Gaza without his Kevlar vest, without an army helmet, with shorts and t-shirt and no rifle. If we fail to prepare our children, that's how we're sending them out! And some of us are going out that way ourselves. Failing to recognize the enemy, his methods, his weapons, and falling prey. We've got to move up and step up.

Prov 22:6 commands us to train up our children in the way they should go. It's not a suggestion. Are we preparing our children for the spiritual challenges in life? To fill roles in the church when we're gone? If your child moved to Maine, how could he or she help the church they attend? By helping with the finance commission? Play or sing music? Preaching or teaching? Anything? Are they being trained to be a blessing to Jesus and to His church wherever they end up? Tomorrow's pastors and church leaders are in our Sunday School classes and our BLAST sessions today. Or not.

This year, our theme is what? The Great Commission, Matt 28:19-20, "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 you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Praise God we've been sharing the gospel all year long so that people will get saved. Praise God we've baptized 16 people this year so far! But that's not all the Great Commission commands us. Baptism isn't the only thing on our Job Description. It also says we are to **teach them to obey** everything Jesus commanded us. And those who have been saved have to put themselves in a position to be taught those things. Praise God for many committed, talented, dedicated teachers who are faithful to prepare lessons every Sunday for children and adults. How disappointing, discouraging, and depressing it is when no one comes. Or just a few when so many could. It's like fixing a big dinner, inviting many guests, and then none of them show up. God is here, His Holy Spirit is here. Truth and life and light are here. But too often, we're not here.

Just before Ps 25, we're all familiar with Psalm 23 and we share it often. Ps 23:3 says that God "guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Praise God for that amen? But how does He do it? He does it through His Word, through His Spirit, but also through Sunday School teachers and Bible Study leaders. Through BLAST leaders, through sermons, etc. He will guide us in paths of righteousness, but we have to follow Him in those paths! We have to put ourselves in a position to be led, to be taught, to be instructed in His Word. He wants to lead us to some incredible heights, great lookout points from which we can see Him, His heaven, life most clearly. But if we're too busy playing around at the trailhead, we'll never hike His righteous paths to those glorious vistas. Move up. Step Up!

We haven't talked about our Mission Statement in a while, but let's walk through that and see how Sunday School classes, Bible Studies, BLAST, and other Christian education ministries fulfill it. It starts out by saying we are Bible Based. Say Bible based. Obviously the Bible is our primary textbook and everything we do must come from it! But to be Bible based, we have to study it! Our Discipleship Commission will be reviewing all curricula to ensure we **are** Bible based since there is so much false teaching today, even from some churches. The New Apostolic Reformation says the words of their apostles supersedes that of the Bible and that we can create heaven on earth if we just ratchet it up. No. That's garbage. They use many songs to promote this idea that have become very popular. There's also the Word of Faith movement that is a name it/claim it teaching. If you speak it, it will happen. Our words are powerful to be sure, but we are not God. There's plenty of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, etc. There's the New Age idea of "the light" being in all people if we just wake up. No, the Bible says we are all sinners bound for eternal hell unless we come to the Light of Jesus Christ. Of course there's the heresy of embracing LGBTQ lifestyles as compatible with Jesus' teachings. No they're not. But there's also the Westboro Baptist church in Kansas that runs off the road on the side of hatred. In order to recognize the many counterfeits, we must know the truth and in order to know the truth, we must read and be taught the Bible and we must teach our children the bible so they can avoid the rocks that will shipwreck their faith. We have to get them in a position for that to happen. We have to move up and step up.

The second part of our Mission statement says we are a Family of God. Say family of God. We're not lone ranger Christians. As we emphasized a few Sundays ago, we need to step up and be there for each other. One of the "side benefits" of Sunday school, Bible Study, blast, youth groups, small groups, etc is that these are places where Christians can make connections with other believers and build friendships that can keep us faithful. Friends that can be there for each other. The worship service is different. We don't have a chance to interact and ask questions and share burdens and joys. But in these groups, we can and as we do, we strengthen our ties in our family of God as we move up and step up.

Our mission statement says we are led by the Holy Spirit. Say Holy Spirit. The Spirit leads us in our own souls, but He also leads us through Christian leaders, teachers, preachers, and others. Please allow Him to do that. Ask Him. Invite Him as David does in Ps 25. The Spirit leads us through His Word and one of the things the founders of the Brethren believed, the Anabaptists, was that the Spirit reveals God's will as believers come together around the Word of God.

We are to be helping others know Jesus. Say evangelism. As we mentioned, this is our theme for 2024, but it's also our perpetual mission. It didn't start on January 1 of this year and it won't end on December 31. As long as we're drawing breath, we need to be

introducing others to Jesus Christ, the only hope for our world. Sunday School plays a huge role in that. Many people have been saved through Sunday School. The goal is not simply teaching children to be good boys and girls, but to be saved boys and girls! To be in Heaven one day! To be redeemed Christians. To not just teach adults how to be good adults, but how to be godly adults. Every soul is eternal and we get to touch souls as we teach and learn and listen and grow together. Sunday School also provides a way to share ideas, skits, and roleplays, on how to witness at work, at home, at school, etc.

The next phrase in our Mission Statement says we are learning to be living examples of Christ. Say living examples. This has Christian education written all over it. Sunday School, BLAST, Bible Study, etc. We never actually graduate from the school of learning to live like Jesus until we die so we keep learning until then. We can provide a good foundation for our children in their classes now and for those who are older, we can build on that foundation that is already in place.

And the final part of our mission statement says we are in our community. Say community. Our studies together help us love the people at our jobs, schools, and who live next door who are difficult. Who bully us. Who think differently and vote differently than we do. We become spiritually sensitive to those who may be suffering and we learn to use some tools to help them. Maybe someone who is homeless or addicted, someone who has lost a loved one, or who is struggling with depression or schizophrenia. Instead of being paralyzed, our classes can equip us to minister to others in our communities as we move up and step up.

We love to read about the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when 3000 people got saved and baptized in one fell swoop! Amen? But it didn't end there. The last verses of that chapter tells us those believers, "...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Throughout history, the Brethren have been striving to copy the early church. How did the early church baptize? How did they do Love Feast? Etc. Here we are told what they considered important and we can become like them as we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to Love Feast, and to prayer. And so it's no surprise that just after this, the very last verse of that Pentecost chapter says, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." You want to see church growth? Real revival? Move up. Step up. Who knows what God will do for us if we copy those early believers?

Our Covenant Brethren Church Brothers and Sisters in Rwanda right now would give their right arm to have the freedom you have to come to Sunday School each week. The government has said they have to have a sound proof room, security, meet stringent building codes, and that all pastors have a college degree. This is in a country where the average annual income was less than \$1000 per person last year. They would love to have some of the crumbs of freedom that fall from our US table. That kind of restriction may come here at some point, God forbid. But when and if it does, it's too

late then to teach our children, it's too late to bring them to Sunday School or to come ourselves. It's too late then to meet together with other believers. Take advantage of the freedoms we have while we have them!!

So as we enter a brand new Sunday School year and start a new semester of BLAST and Bible Studies, I encourage you to recommit to participate. To move up and to step up. Tell the Lord what you will do in that regard as we pray.