



**PREVENTING 'TRUTH' DECAY**  
**Ephesians 6:10-18**

We live in challenging times. We live in an age where the half-life of a technical education is 3 years. That means half of what you read and learn today – will be obsolete in 3 years. We live in an age of accelerated motion and mobility. Blink – and you will be lost – inhaling the exhaust of someone leaving you in the dust.

Only a small percentage of our children will ever stay in the same town in which they are born. Mary and I and our children are prime examples of it. Families, which once were grounded in a community, are now flung across the state, country, and globe.

Values, which were once firmly established by the Judeo-Christian ethic – reinforced by family, community, and public education – are now almost non-existent. The computer, Internet, television, and other gadgets exert more influence upon the children than parents, teachers, and faith-based institutions. The average American child watches 1,825 hours of television each year. In that same child goes to Sunday School every Sunday for one year – they get about 34 hours of religious instruction. This is what we are up against today.<sup>1</sup> Now you know that Ray – Lori – Beth – and all who work here providing a foundation for Christian education have a difficult task.

John Nesbitt years ago shared the insight that – as our technology becomes hi-tech – it will increase the need for 'high' or 'the human touch.' This is especially true in the Christian faith. The Christian faith is more than learning a creed – or the book – or a body of knowledge. Christianity is about a living relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Jesus said, 'I am the Way – follow me.'

In that spirit, I want to share 3 considerations today on why the Sunday School and Christian Education are important to prevent 'truth' decay.

**THE FIRST WAY TO PREVENT TRUTH DECAY IS TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO GOD.**

The splendid work that our Multimedia team does week after week is for one reason – to enhance our worship and work of the gospel of Christ and draw

you closer to him. It is to educate and edify and never to entertain. It is to connect you and others to God's message and word.

Our multimedia equipment are tools to teach the truth of faith and spread the gospel. The message of the gospel of Christ never changes – only the methods to tell the old, old story in new and exciting way. The stained glass windows of this church building are a multimedia tool. The organ – the piano – our choir – our organist are other media. The altar – the cross – the pulpit – the candles – the flowers – are other tools. They all exist to connect us to God. God gave us five senses to hear, feel, smell, see, taste, and experience truth. The more you use – the more you will immerse and connect yourself to God.

In 1790, John Wesley – our spiritual mentor – wrote these words in a letter to Charles Atmore.:

“I am glad you have set up Sunday-Schools at Newcastle. This is one of the best institutions which have been seen in Europe for some centuries, and will do more and more good, provided the Teachers and Inspectors do their duty. Nothing can prevent the success of this blessed work, but the neglect of the instruments. Therefore, be sure to watch them with all care that they may not grow weary of well-doing.”

John Wesley knew the importance of connecting people to God and to each other beyond the Sunday morning worship service. He set up class meetings where people could be nurtured and challenged to spiritual growth and maturity. While faith is deeply personal – it is never private. There is no such thing as a 'solo' Christian. Christianity is a way of life that touches the totality of the human experience. The Sunday School teachers and Wednesday Night workers are vital parts of this connecting to God. These faithful teachers stand in a long line of faithful servants which extends from Christ to this very building today.

We have a duty and great opportunity to touch the future – to touch eternity. This mission is not just the responsibility of those with children of Sunday School age – it is the ministry of the whole church.

## **SECONDLY, THE CHRISTIAN FAITH PROVIDES A MORAL COMPASS – A CONSCIENCE.**

There is a legend of a small flower which grows in Texas. This flower is called a compass flower because its petals, always point north. If a traveler is ever lost in Texas, he only has to find one of these flowers, and he'll know the proper direction.

In the same way, Sunday School provides for our children the compass for Christian values and ethics. Whenever they are lost or tossed by troubles of life,

they have only to remember their Sunday School education, to find their way back.

In the world of business and on Wall Street, they talk about your ROI, which means Return On Investment. Well, the Sunday School is the greatest Return On Investment a church can make. I share the following story to demonstrate it.

I am intrigued with the following information concerning Jonathan Edwards, the great New England clergyman, and Max Jukes who lived in New York City.

“Jonathan Edwards lived in New England. He saw that his children were in church every Sunday, and he served the Lord to the best of his ability. He had 929 descendants. Of these, 430 were ministers, 86 became university professors, and 13 became university presidents. Seventy-five authored good books, 5 were elected to the U. S. Congress and 2 to the Senate. One was vice-president of the United States. His family did not cost the state one cent, but has contributed immeasurably to the life of many in this land today. They had a moral compass to give them direction.

Max Jukes lived in New York. He didn't believe in Jesus Christ or in church. He refused to take his children to Sunday School and church even when they asked to go. He had 1,026 descendants; 300 of which were sent to prison for an average term of 13 years, 190 were prostitutes, 680 were admittedly alcoholics. His family, thus far, has cost the state in excess of \$4,000,000. They made no contribution to society.” There was no moral compass to guide them.

This is convincing evidence, that Christian education that equips us with the whole armor of God is the best investment that we can make for ourselves, and for our children. We never outgrow the need to feed on the word of God. The flower fades, but the word of God endures for all eternity. This is truth which transforms.

Anne Lamott tells the story of a 7-year old girl who got lost and separated from her parents. She walked awhile and did not recognize one landmark. Finally she waved down a policeman. The policeman could see she was very frightened. The officer put the girl in his patrol car and they just rode around for awhile. She finally caught sight of her church. She said to the policeman, “You can let me out now. This is my church – and I can always find my way home from here.”<sup>3</sup>

May God use our church – our teachers – our staff – us – to help people find their way back home to God.

**THIRDLY, WE LIFT UP CHRIST FOREVER.**

Back in the early sixties Dr. Karl Barth came to America to lecture at Yale, Princeton, and the University of Chicago. This was the theological giant of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century who had stood up to Hitler and was exiled by Hitler from his teaching position in Germany to his native Switzerland where he had held the chair of “Church Dogmatics” at the famed University of Zurich.

The crowds jammed the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago to hear him speak on various subjects related to the Christian faith. After some thirty-five years now, all the importance of those lectures have lost their places in people’s hearts and minds all except one statement he made in response to a somewhat bellicose reporter who asked the question, “Dr. Barth, what is the single, most important discovery you have made in your years of theological work?”

After a pause for pondering, the great intellectual Professor of Zurich said, “Jesus love me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.” We never outgrow this simple message that is a compass and connection for us in every age and stage of our earthly pilgrimage.

Just like the name of Jesus – all other messages and names are pale in comparison to this Eternal Truth expressed in this simple song we teach our children to sing in Sunday School.

A few years ago a most provocative and revealing book about the American character was published. The title of the book was **THE DAY AMERICA TOLD THE TRUTH**. It was a sad commentary on how Americans would lie, steal, and cheat on just about everything from test scores to profit margins. It seems that there are no standards or measuring sticks for truth anymore. It is no wonder why the sports world has been shocked with stories concerning Barry Bonds, Michael Vick, and the NBA official. We are unfortunately reaping what we have been sowing for the past 20 years.

Recently, Dr. Charles Stanley reminded us that the average American father spends 37 seconds a day teaching and training his children. He further shared that the average American dad spends more time watching lite beer commercials on televisions than teaching his children the truths of the faith. It is no wonder that truth decay is so prevalent in our world today.

That is why we celebrate and I lift up the importance of Sunday School training and Christian education. Christian education is, at its very essence, the process of teaching disciples of Jesus Christ how to hear God’s word in the midst of all the world’s words. God’s word not only teaches us how to think – but where to walk. We never outgrow the need to know how to think or where to walk. Remember the Christian faith calls us to put on the armor of God for the battlefields of life – not the bathtub. Remember, Karl Barth says to read the Bible on one hand, and the newspaper on the other. Don’t forget the Bible hand.

The church is only one generation away from extinction.

Think about that!

**THE CHURCH IS ONLY ONE GENERATION AWAY FROM EXTINCTION.** If one generation stops telling the gospel story to its posterity, the church will be extinct. Stop teaching, close the Sunday School. That will spell doom for Christianity. Sunday School connects the present generation with the eternal truth. This is why it is the greatest Return On Investment a church can make.

That is why New Holland and Lancaster County is still our greatest – most vital mission field.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
September 9, 2007 Preached at both services  
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#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Israel Galindo, **THE CRAFT OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING**, Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA, 1998, page

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 57.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Lamott, **TRAVELING MERCIES**, Anchor Books, New York, 1999, page 55).