

Is Sunday School Destroying our Kids?

How Moralism Suffocates Grace



STUDY GUIDE

Instructions

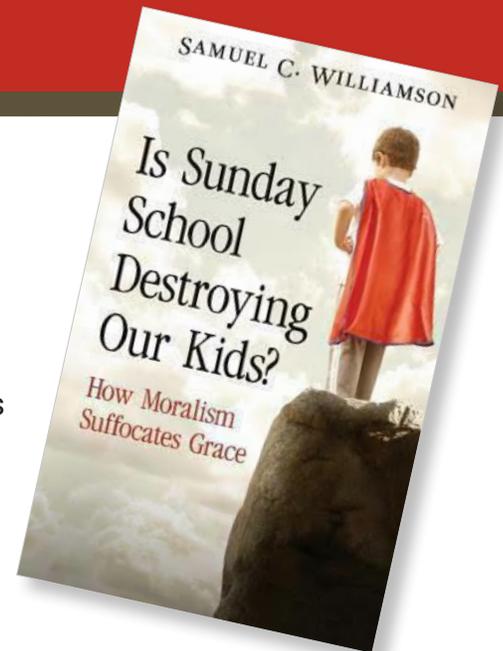
This guide is designed for both personal and group study. (If you are studying personally, some obvious “group” questions will not apply. If so, feel free to go at your own pace, faster or slower, not necessarily a chapter a week.)

Each chapter of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?* has a corresponding section in this guide. Prayerfully consider the questions posed for each chapter. Ask God to speak to you as you pray and think about your answers.

These questions are intended to be a guide to provoke valuable heart-to-heart conversations. Other questions may arise; that’s good. Feel free to choose a subset of these questions or to add additional questions.

When possible, answer these questions in advance in your own prayer time. Write down your answers in a notebook or journal, and bring those notes to the small group meeting.

May God be with you and speak to you. And grant you grace.



Chapter 1: Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?

PREPARATION:

- Read the foreword and chapter 1 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever watched someone you thought was “raised right” who then decided to reject the faith they once had? Without gossiping, describe what happened. What do you think went wrong?
2. In what ways have you heard Scripture or the gospel summarized like “be faithful like Abraham” or “be good like Joseph”? Describe one instance. How did it make you feel?
3. How have you ever—perhaps accidentally—equated moralism with the gospel?
4. How do you think Christians can hold both “the gospel” and “being moral” at the same time, while not being legalistic? What are the dangers on either side of the issue?
5. Think of a time you saw someone change *because they were loved*, and not the other way around (like the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*). What happened? How is that just like the gospel?

EXERCISE:

- Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And [Jesus] said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

- Share with each other how you would teach this parable "moralistically."
- Share how you would explain this parable in a gospel way.
- In the moralistic method, where do you see Jesus and where do you see yourself?
- In the gospel-centered method, where do you see Jesus and where do you see yourself?

PRAYER:

- Pray that God helps us begin to see the gospel in Scripture instead of moralism. Pray that God helps us explain Scripture to others in light of his grace.
- Pray that we begin to see our need of God's grace more than we see God's need for our perfection.

Chapter 2: Why Do Our Children Leave the Church?

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 2 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. “Our children lose fire because of our mother-of-all-assumptions: we assume the gospel” (p. 8). How do we see churches assume the gospel? How do we see ourselves personally assume the gospel? What does it look like in the church, and what does look in like in our own lives? List some ways we can address that problem.
2. Read this passage:

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. (1 Cor. 3:1-3a ESV)

What do you think Paul means? How does that meaning translate to our own understanding of the gospel?
3. What is the difference in your own heart if you focus on “What *did* Jesus do?” versus “What *would* Jesus do?” Give three examples of how the difference might affect your life, witness, confidence, or joy.
4. Explain and discuss this statement: “Morality is about willpower, and the gospel is about God’s activity.”
5. Why *should* Christianity look different from “mere morality”? How different do we really look in day-to-day life?

EXERCISE:

- Take three to five minutes to write down examples of teachings, books, sermons, or personal thoughts that “assume” the gospel instead of emphasizing the gospel.
- Share two to three of those examples with the group or with a friend.
- Share with the group (or a friend) two examples from your life of an inner-compulsion to “be good” so you can come into God’s presence or so you can ask God for a blessing.

PRAYER:

- Take several minutes as group to pray that God reawaken the meaning of the gospel in our lives, and that he shakes us up to remind us whenever we begin to assume instead of embrace his good news.

Chapter 3: Esther: Why Whitewash God's Scandalous Grace?

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 3 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think we paint our biblical heroes more heroically than the Bible does? (p. 13)
2. When you think of Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, and Esther, do you think of them as purer people than Scripture depicts them? What are some differences? What is the spiritual danger of thinking our biblical heroes are more heroic than Scripture says?
3. What does it mean to you that God uses broken people, who make mistakes or are complicit in sinful behaviors (like Esther), to further his purposes and kingdom? Reflect on your own heart. How does it make you feel?
4. In what ways do you tend to read the Bible with a black-and-white view of who is "good" and who is "bad"? Jesus said, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." (Mark 10:18). How do these words of Jesus change your perspective on yourself? How about toward other Christian heroes?
5. What does it mean that "we would see more of God's transforming grace if we spent more time acknowledging our own failures"? Explain how your life would be different if you believed this?

EXERCISE:

- Take three to five minutes simply to confess to God a short list of your sins, character flaws, mistakes, impatience, lusts, etc. Don't ask for forgiveness yet, and don't make determinations to do better. Just come into God's presence with confession.

After confessing your list to God, read the first verse in Psalm 51:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions. (Ps. 51:1)

- Discuss these questions with the group or with a friend:
 - What reasons does David ask for God's forgiveness?
 - What reasons do we normally give when we ask for forgiveness? (I'll try harder, I really feel bad, etc.)
 - Why are David's reasons better?

PRAYER:

- Read this passage from Romans 8 together as a prayer:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-34, 37-39)

Chapter 4: Graceless Goodness: The Problem with Moralism

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 4 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does this mean?: “Our moral teaching substitutes one form of selfishness (lying, cheating, and stealing) with another (identity and comfort.)” How have you adopted such a “good” substitution?

2. Read Jonah 1:1-3 and then 1:8-9 below:

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. (Jon. 1:1-3)

Then [the sailors in the boat] said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” And [Jonah] said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” (Jon. 1:8-9)

How do you understand these two seemingly opposite portrayals of Jonah’s heart? How do you explain these different portrayals? Give an example of how you sometimes do the same thing.

3. What are other biblical examples of people outwardly obeying but not having changed hearts?
4. What are examples of people obeying *because of* their changed hearts? Can you give a few examples in your own life where your behavior changed (maybe surprising you!) because God had changed your heart.

EXERCISE:

- Flannery O’Conner, a Christian novelist, once wrote of a character, “There was a deep black wordless conviction in his heart because he saw that the best way to avoid Jesus is to avoid sin.” Take three minutes and jot down ways our “goodness” (or our avoiding sin) subconsciously becomes a method for avoiding God.
- Share those jots with the group or a friend.
- Next, share how our failures can actually lead us to God..

PRAYER:

- Take time to pray that each member give not only our sins to God but also our “goodness.” That we come to God based on His goodness alone.
- Pray for your family and friends the same prayer: that we give all of ourselves—the bad and the good—and come to God based on his merciful love.

Chapter 5: The False Gospel of “Just Do It”

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 4 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Sam tells the story of a friend who asked his team to stop cussing. How have you seen moral victories celebrated as if they are advancements of the gospel? How might these demands be perverting the gospel?
2. Does heart change always follow behavioral change? Why or why not?
3. How is “sin less, work harder, give more” a false gospel? How is it dangerous?
4. “Sound moral behavior apart from the gospel can lead us – ever so slowly – to feel good about ourselves, which can lead us – ever so slowly – to self-righteousness.” Think of evidence of this in your own heart. Spend some time confessing it to the Lord, praying for the grace to love others around you.

EXERCISE:

- Take several minutes to make a list of unbelievers you know (or have known) who are (or were) pretty good people: faithful to their spouses, ready to help marginalized people, generous, and servant-oriented. Beside each name, jot down some of their good behaviors and attitudes.
- Take some time to think and pray about why the gospel would benefit them; why would you want them to come to know Jesus personally? Why would God want them to know him?
- Discuss with the group this question: what is the essence of the gospel?

PRAYER:

- Take time to pray for the non-believing acquaintances you listed above. Pray for their health, relationships, and life; and pray that you have a heart to let them hear of God's loving care in the grace of the cross.
- Pray for each member of the group, that each know their own "wickedness" more so that we can all know the love of God more deeply.

Chapter 6: The Temptations of Christian Publishing

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 6 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Describe what happens in each of these steps, the good and the bad:

- The gospel is Accepted
- The gospel is Assumed
- The gospel is Confused
- The gospel is Lost

How can we as Christians address these concerns in everyday life?

2. How is *Little Engine That Could*-thinking hazardous to the Christian life? How is “*I’m pretty sure I can’t*” a better place to be?

3. Think of a time you really felt that “*I’m pretty sure I can’t.*” Describe your relationship with God during that time. What is the risk of living in the opposite way?

4. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Who is *doing* all the activity in these verses? How can that truth affect our lives? How can we stop doing ourselves and let God begin the doing himself?

5. Why does moral living need to come from a God-changed heart and not the other way around?

EXERCISE:

- Take five minutes to rapidly write down a list of wise tips and techniques you have heard for living well; draw from books, teachings, sermons, TV shows, or any other source you can remember. The list might include sayings like: "Think before you speak," "Do unto others as you wish they would do unto you," or even, "Learn each person's love language."
- Share your list with the group or a friend; note down how many have similar wise sayings or which seems to be most common.
- Ask yourself this: Does your list make you feel better about yourself or worse?
- Ask each other why their list makes them feel that way, and share.

PRAYER:

- Pray that each member grow in a conviction of sin, a sense of how far short we fall from God's plan for our lives. Pray that any arrogance or self-confidence be removed.
- Then pray that each member see how Jesus did all those wonderful deeds for us, but that he took our punishment for failing to do them so that he could give us his reward for fulfilling them.

Chapter 7: The Ugliness of Religious Righteousness

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 7 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. How does true kingdom living nurture humility? What does a counterfeit look like (attempts at morality without the God-changed heart)?
2. Think of some good, God-changed things in your life. Spend time thanking God for his mercy in giving those good gifts to you.
3. List three to five difficulties you are facing right now. Spend time praying for those things, and thanking God for his faithfulness in the hard circumstances as well as for the good.
4. What two things does the Law tell us? Why does culture dislike it? What do you think about that distinction?
5. How does “standing humbly in Christ’s righteousness” change how we love others? How does it change how we encounter life’s struggles?

EXERCISE:

- Read aloud the following promises of blessing to those who are upright, pure, and holy:
 - For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield. (Ps. 5:12)
 - For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. (Ps. 22:24)
 - Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. (Ps. 32:6)
 - The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death. The Lord will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial. (Ps. 37:32-33)

- Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. (Ps. 41:1-2)
- For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. (Ps. 84:11)
- Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. (Ps. 91:14)

For each of these promised blessings, ask why Jesus didn't receive them. After all, he alone was righteous, godly, upright, knowing God's name.

- Ask why:
 - Wasn't Jesus covered with a shield in the time of his deepest need?
 - Wasn't the request of Jesus heard in the Garden of Gethsemane?
 - Wasn't Jesus saved his rush of mighty waters?
 - Was Jesus abandoned to the wicked and condemned when brought to trial?
 - Was Jesus not protected from his enemies, but given up to the will of his enemies?
 - God withheld "good things" from Jesus even though he walked uprightly?
 - Wasn't Jesus delivered and protected?

God is always truthful and always faithful, and yet God failed to keep his promises to Jesus. Why could that be? Could it be that Jesus took our punishments so that we could have his promised blessings.

- Discuss this verse: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20). How can we claim confidence for us in the promises of God, because of our goodness, or his?

PRAYER:

- Pray that each member discovers a renewed confidence in the promises of God, because Jesus "lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died."
- Pray that we can bring this renewed hope in the goodness of God to our family, friends, and colleagues.

Chapter 8: The Insidious Danger of “I’d Never Do That”

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 8 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. List various ways the inner-thought of “I’d never do that” sets us up for failure? What is a better heart-posture to have?
2. How can we grow in that better heart-posture?
3. How is moralism—getting inner strength from our absence of mistakes—a shaky foundation for right living?
4. How does “I’d never do that” hide other unsavory acts that we do participate in? How does it make us feel morally superior, or (in another word) arrogant?
5. About what kinds of things do you think, “I’d never do that”?
6. “Restrained behavior is good, but a Spirit-changed heart is better. Only God himself can strengthen our hearts.” Spend some time asking God to strengthen your heart, and to change your desires.

EXERCISE:

- Take a few minutes to pray and think about “restraints” that currently help keep you on the path you wish to live.
- Make a short list of your own, “I’d never do that’s.” Next to each item, list something else you might do that is also sinful (for example, you might say, “I’d never commit adultery;” but might you judge others with less will-power?)
- How does the knowledge of your own potential to fall help you cling to God?

PRAYER:

- Take some time to pray for each person: that God change their inner-heart through his Holy Spirit so that we grow to want his ways.
- Pray for people we have judged in the past for their own failures; pray they come to know God’s grace and that God give us grace in our hearts for them as well.

Chapter 9: Why Can't We Admit the Evil Within?

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 9 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Sam discusses the humble versus the arrogant. In light of the history of arrogant oppressors, what is surprising about our modern cultural push for people not to care what others think?
2. It seems counterintuitive that acknowledging our evil can lead to a deeper understanding of our value. How do you think failure to admit our own evil will prevent us from knowing our value? (p. 55)
3. What does it mean that “love without cost isn't grace”?
4. Read the passage below:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Matt. 5:43-47)

What do these verses say about love that differs from our natural inclinations? If you could only describe one way to grow into that love, what would it be?

5. How is Jesus the only path to “humility without hopelessness” and “confidence without arrogance”? (p. 56).

EXERCISE:

- Make a list of times you may have been “attacked” (or embarrassed or humiliated) in the last several years. List at least ten incidents, whether small or large; more examples is better. They can be examples of someone else criticizing you, or they can be times you simply attacked yourself.
- After making the list, describe the ways you calmed yourself, anything including eating a piece of cake, drinking a glass of wine, yelling at a spouse, or simply telling yourself you aren't that bad.
- How many times did you actually say to yourself, “You don't know half the bad things I think or the bad deeds I'm capable of”?
- How can “the grace of God” become the comfort we instinctively turn to?

PRAYER:

- Pray that God speak his grace into your heart, that his love become so instinctively our refuge that we can begin to admit our most evil inclinations.
- Pray that we can begin to pour out that grace into the lives of others as we admit our mistakes and forgive the mistakes of others.

Chapter 10: When Willpower Runs Out

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 10 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is “why?” a helpful question when facing our sin patterns? How is asking “why?” more spiritually helpful than just trying to stop?
2. What practical ways can we depend more on God and less on our willpower?
3. What would a prayer time look like if we really felt how our willpower is can run out?
4. How can we let our sin turn into an invitation to intimacy with Christ? What—instead—is our natural reaction? Is that reaction from spiritual humility or natural pride?
5. Take some time to go to God in the midst of your emptiness. Spend time now praying through temptations you felt recently, or sins that you have previously felt like drove a wedge between you and God. Accept his grace, because “we can’t clean up our act until we come to God.” (p. 62)

EXERCISE:

- Make a short list of ill-behaviors in yourself that you normally have under control, maybe: irritability, speaking before listening, impatience, complaining, questioning the motives of friends, short-temper, etc.
- Next to the list of behaviors add four columns and indicate on a scale of 1 to 3 (3 is best) how well you control it when you are: (1) exhausted, (2) sick, (3) stressed, and (4) late.
- We all handle our behaviors best when we are doing well; but sometimes our veneer cracks. It's time to ask God the "why?" question of our temptation.
- Pick two of your least controllable behaviors, take time to pray, and just ask God, "Why? Why does that temptation so easily find me susceptible?"
- Go to God in prayer and say, "I can't do it on my own anymore, I just can't fake it. Please let your Spirit live in my heart more to change my deepest desires."

PRAYER:

- Pray for each other that Godly shaped desires will shape our hearts, that we come to him in our emptiness.
- Pray for each other's family and friends, that our lives shower a God-given grace on them, rather than our ever-dying man-centered will-power.

Chapter 11: We Read the Bible the Wrong Way

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 11 of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do a little humble self-reflection: what built-in biases do you think you come to Scripture with? Even if they are only slight bends in your heart, confess them to God and ask him to help you “behold wondrous things out of [his] law” (Psalm 119:18).
2. What are practical ways you can combat those biases?
3. How do our biases affect moralism? How do they impact our tendency to “buck up and try harder” instead of resting in grace?
4. C.S. Lewis said, “We come to Scripture not to learn a subject but to steep ourselves in a person.” How is this an encouraging thought to you? What do you think of Jesus as a person?

EXERCISE:

- Page 70 lists three exercises that help us learn to see Jesus in Scripture. Try the second one: read Psalm 56 below, and as you read it, imagine Jesus praying it.

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me;
my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.
When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?
All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil.
They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.
For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!
You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.
In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?
I will perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you.
For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk
before God in the light of life. (Psalm 56:1-13)

- As a group, answer these questions:
 - Describe a few ways Jesus was (and is) trampled upon.
 - How did Jesus “put his trust in you?”
 - What does the psalm say about a God who would “keep account of my tossing” and “put my tears in your bottle”?
 - If Jesus was so good, the only one who truly put his trust in God, why didn’t God save his soul from death?
 - Could it be that Jesus lived perfectly, and perfectly deserved the reward of the righteous; and then gave that reward to us?
 - When you see Jesus praying this psalm (and others)—when you see the psalm about Jesus, what promised does it hold for us?
- Spend some time journaling about the experience, jotting down thoughts and insights as they come, then pray for eyes to see Jesus throughout Scripture.

PRAYER:

- Ask God to “open the eyes of our hearts” to actually see Him as we read Scripture, hear sermons, and remember the great deeds of God.
- Ask God to open our hearts to his Holy Spirit who will “will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13-14)

Chapter 12: If Grace Is True, Why Be Moral?

PREPARATION:

- Read chapter 12 and the Afterward of *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*
- Consider in advance the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS:

1. Start with some self-reflection. Where do you get your own sense of significance? Confess to God the subtle ways your heart bends toward things other than his grace.
2. Read Jesus' parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30. Then read Jeremiah 9:23-24.

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matt. 13:24-30)

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me." (Jer. 9:23-24)

How do these two passages relate? What kind of person would prove ultimately to have been from "good seed"?

3. What kinds of self-saving do you need to put to death, for the sake of following Christ? Reflect on the past week. What things did you boast about or find significance in?
4. In light of chapter 12, what does grace have to do with morality? How does it shape us?
5. How can we encourage and teach our children that they can become good as they rest in God's love and grace, rather than earning his love by being good?

EXERCISE:

- Consider the two following scenarios: (a) I give my sixteen-year-old son twenty dollars to take his grandmother to the mall to return her new shoes, or (b) my sixteen-year-old son hears his grandmother needs a ride to the mall and he volunteers because he loves her. Both are good—grandma gets help with an errand; but which is more virtuous? Motivation is always considered when morals are judged. It's great that good deeds are done, but it's better when done out of a heart of love. One method is giving to get, and the other method is getting to give.
- Read the parable of the Pearl of Great Price below and discuss the questions below.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13:45-46)
- Pretend you are that merchant who finds that one, great pearl. Could you ever give all that you have? This included your money, the clothes off your back, your self-defensiveness when you are judged or misunderstood, and all your friends and family.
- If you did succeed in selling all to gain the pearl, what would you think of your friends who couldn't quite do it?
- Now picture Jesus as the merchant who emptied himself of everything: his glory, his relationship with his father, his earthly beauty, all comfort (foxes have holes and birds have nests...), and even his own sense of purity when "he became sin" for us.
- What is the attitude of Jesus toward us when we couldn't do the very thing he did? Is he haughty or arrogant, or sympathetic ("For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin")?
- What is your attitude toward this beautiful one who emptied himself for you? Do you want to earn his favor—which he's already bestowed by calling us his pearl—or do you want to let him live his life through you?

PRAYER:

- Let us all pray that the sense of grace—God's free gift of love which we can never earn but always enjoy—let's pray that his love overwhelms us and we invite him into our lives in ways we've never imagined.
- Let us pray that see Christianity not so much as a set of duties we do but a relationship; that it is not merely us asking God into our lives, but God asking us into his.
- them, rather than our ever-dying man-centered will-power.

Acknowledgments

I've always learned best in the lab not the lecture hall. I watched my older siblings ride their bicycles and thought I knew it all, but I didn't discover bike-riding until I got in the seat and began to pedal. And skinned a knee or two.

From the beginning, I planned to have a study guide accompany *Is Sunday School Destroying Our Kids?*, but I just couldn't create it. It's easy for me to create exercises and yet feels impossible for me to create questions.

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—Sam

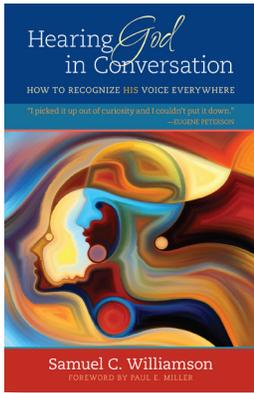
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