

LOVE AND CHOCOLATE CAKE: WHAT WILL YOU GIVE TO BRING THEM BACK?

By Devin G. Durrant

First Counselor in the Sunday School General Presidency

Sister Babata Sonnenberg was discouraged. As a young mother of five girls age eight and younger, she was surprised to be called to teach the 16- to 17-year-old Sunday School class in her ward. Months into her calling, she found class attendance sporadic and usually sparse. One Sunday a single boy showed up for class. Rather than teach just one student, she combined her class with another. She was ready to give up. But as she pondered and prayed about her bleak situation, inspiration came, and she had a change of heart.

Team Effort

Her husband, Ken, was the ward mission leader. The two of them felt prompted to combine their efforts to reach out to the youth of the ward. She would make chocolate cake, and he would invite the young people in

the ward to come to their home each Sunday evening to eat the cake and discuss mission preparation. While the teens ate her cake, Sister Sonnenberg would invite them to her Sunday School class.

As a result of this “sweet” invitation, attendance climbed in the Sunday School class. But one young man, Nate, was not swayed by persistent invitations. Sister Sonnenberg felt she was losing one of her sheep. Her response to that feeling was to “go after that which [was] lost, until [she found] it” (Luke 15:4). So rather than give up on Nate, Sister Sonnenberg came up with a plan.

Home Visits

One Sunday evening she went to Nate’s house. She found him home with another member of her class, who also hadn’t attended that day.

She told both of them she had missed them in class and proceeded to teach them the lesson right then and there. Nate’s father, who had been recently released as bishop of the ward, was touched by this teacher’s persistence. He sent a text message to her husband that read: “Ken, please tell your wife thank you for me. Coming here and teaching Nate and McKay was inspired.”

Nevertheless, the next Sunday Nate again chose not to attend Sunday School. So Sister Sonnenberg went again to his home to have a gospel discussion with him. Nate figured that might happen, and he had gone to a friend’s house to hide. Sister Sonnenberg discovered him a few doors down from his home and shared the lesson there.

Finally, Nate decided to return to his Sunday School class.





What Worked?

Why did Nate come back?

Was it the chocolate cake Sister Sonnenberg served in her home?

Was it the visits she made to Nate's home (and the neighbor's home) to find him?

Was it encouragement from friends and family to attend church?

Or was it the love he felt from Sister Sonnenberg, his Sunday School teacher?

The answer is probably all of the above. For all these reasons and more, Nate began to attend Sunday School consistently, along with his friends.

The Rest of the Story

So let me add the rest of the story. Because of how Nate came to feel about his Sunday School teacher, he didn't pass up the opportunity to buy her chocolates when he later saw her at the mall. Sister Sonnenberg, who had shown him so much love, became a recipient of his love.

Soon thereafter, in September 2015, Nate completed his mission application and is now serving in the Mississippi Jackson Mission.

Other class members who struggled to attend Sunday School also decided to serve missions. Five young men and three young women who attended Sister Sonnenberg's 16- to 17-year-old Sunday School class during her time as the teacher have

served, or are serving, missions, and several others may yet serve.

Reach Out to Those Who Do Not Attend

“Love Those You Teach,” part 1 of *Teaching in the Savior’s Way*, includes a discussion topic titled “Reach Out to Those Who Do Not Attend.” The topic reads: “Reaching out to less-active members is not only the duty of a home teacher, a visiting teacher, or a priesthood or auxiliary leader—teachers can help with this work as well. Teaching is much more than presenting a lesson on Sunday. It involves ministering with love and helping others receive the blessings of the gospel, and this help is often exactly what a less-active class member needs. We all need to work together to reach out to those who struggle, and as a teacher you may be in a unique position to help.”¹

Sister Sonnenberg recognized the unique position she was in to help her class members. She was blessed with a weekly opportunity to touch their hearts, and she was determined to do so—either in her classroom or in their homes. Clearly, all teachers may not be in a position to visit the homes of those who do not attend class each week, nor is it always possible, but we all can do something, even something small, to show love to those in our stewardship.



Remember the words of the prophet Alma: “By small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).

Invite with Love

The “Invite with Love” section of this same discussion topic includes this perspective: “Sincere expressions of Christlike love have great power to soften the hearts of class members who are struggling with the gospel. Often these individuals simply need to know they are needed and loved.”²

As a result of Sister Sonnenberg’s efforts to reach out to Nate, he felt needed and loved. As full-time missionaries, Nate and his classmates now have the opportunity to help others feel that same Christlike love. What a blessing that they can

remember and emulate the example of their Sunday School teacher.

Until You Find That Which Is Lost

As a General Sunday School Presidency, we are grateful to Sunday School teachers throughout the world who, in a variety of ways, invite their class members to come unto Christ. We pray that the Lord will bless you in your efforts to love those you teach and, because of that love, to “go after that which is lost, until [you] find it”—as He did during His mortal ministry. ■

NOTES

1. *Teaching in the Savior’s Way* (2016), 8, teaching.lds.org.
2. *Teaching in the Savior’s Way*, 9.

To learn more about teaching as the Savior taught, you can watch the video “Love Those You Teach,” found at teaching.lds.org, as well as the other *Teaching in the Savior’s Way* videos.