

Mama's Monthly Letter to Teachers—Letters 1-9
From Mama Lorella Rouster of Every Child Ministries
To all who teach children in Africa
www.teachingforafrica.com Email: Lorella@ecmafrica.org

Letter 1

WINNING THE CHILDREN—TEACHERS' LETTER 1

Dear Sunday school teacher or youth leader,

This is the first of many letters I hope to write to you, one each month. My hope is that these letters will help you to understand that you are doing a great service for the church of Jesus Christ and for the future of the nation of God's people of Africa. My hope is that it will encourage you to know that we have not forgotten you. Certainly the Lord knows the service you are rendering to Him.

Each month I hope to send a verse or thought of encouragement. This month I have been thinking about 1 Cor. 15:58. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Notice first of all that Paul calls the Corinthian believers beloved brethren. They were very dear to him. I want you to know that I feel the same way about you. If you teach children and young people about the Lord Jesus, you are dear to me. You are beloved brothers and sisters. Then I want you to notice the words steadfast and unmovable. Both of these words give a picture of someone keeping on and keeping on and keeping on, in spite of any and all difficulties. We all know there are many difficulties in the Lord's work. You may have a very unfavorable place in which to teach. The class may be crowded. You may sometimes lack materials. Paul's advice to all of us as teachers is, be steadfast. Keep on teaching. Don't quit because the job is difficult. Then notice that Paul says our work should be always abounding. That means do the best job we possibly can. Don't do just enough to get by, but work hard as unto the Lord. I love the way this verse ends. Paul reminds us that our work is never in vain. It is never for nothing. It is important to God. Even though we may or may not see results right now, our work is not in vain. It counts for something in the sight of God.

This month, I encourage you to bring your teaching before God. Ask Him to help you serve steadfastly. Ask Him to help you do your very best as unto Him. Be encouraged in knowing that there is no way your work will ever be in vain. It is important in God's sight.

Each month I also want to present an idea to help you teach better. This month, I want to remind you that in addition to singing and memorizing a Bible verse, the Sunday school children should also be presented with a Bible lesson or Bible story each week. I challenge you, if you have been leaving that out, to begin to include a simple, short Bible lesson or Bible story in your Sunday school hour.

I want you to know that I am praying for you all. Look for a new letter from me each month. May God bless you and cause you to always abound in the work of the Lord.

Blessings to you,

Mama Lorella



Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers
Letter 2

Dear Teacher in the service of the King of Kings,

"And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" Galatians 6:9

Recently I watched a television report on a terribly difficult race in Tibet involving survival skills like mountain climbing at heights where the air is very thin, swimming in rapids where there are lots of rocks in the water, going over waterfalls, hiking through a burning desert, rappelling down cliffs (going down cliffs that are straight up and down supported by ropes), etc. The course involved hundreds of miles and took about a week to complete. It followed the struggles and setbacks and difficulties they endured. Through all of it, they faced enormous hurdles, but they all kept on. Especially interesting was an American team that knew they were going to come in last place, but they kept on anyway, because it was important to them TO FINISH THE RACE.

All of you began a good race when you agreed to become Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, or club leaders. You committed yourselves to a worthy goal. Yet along the way the race sometimes gets tougher than any of us envisioned in the beginning. We get tired. We get discouraged. We feel unappreciated or unrecognized. We don't see all the results we had hoped for as quickly as we thought they should come. We nearly faint along the way. We feel like quitting. We contemplate the idea of giving up the race. I know. Like the racers facing the challenges of the Tibetan mountains and deserts, I have faced hurdles too. I have sometimes felt like giving up.

We can't do that. I want you to notice that Gal. 6:9 promises rewards ("we shall reap") but it has a condition attached to it. We will only reap the harvest, we will only receive the reward "IF we faint not." If any in the tough Tibetan race had given up, they would have lost everything. Yet all who went on and toughed out the hard times and endured the challenges won recognition on international television, even those who came in last in the race, a full day behind all the others.

When we get to heaven, Jesus is not going to ask who was the best teacher or who had the biggest class. He is going to ask who was faithful. He is going to reward those who finished the race.

This month I want to urge all of you to take heart. Take new courage. Don't give up, no matter how hard the going may be. Seek help if you need it. Seek extra prayer support. Seek counsel. But don't give up. Keep on teaching for the glory of the King of Kings. Put your name in these blanks, and say it to yourself every day: "In due course

_____ shall reap because _____ will faint not." God bless you all.

Love, *Mama Lorella* Keeping on with you

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers
Letter 3

Dear Teachers,

Greetings to you all in the lovely name of Jesus! Last month I talked with you about not fainting, but keeping on serving Jesus faithfully. These same words, "faint not," are found again in 2 Corinthians 4:1-2. These verses are very important and very applicable to our ministry of teaching, so please read every word carefully:

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, fellow teachers for Jesus, we are teaching the word of God, and that is good. But listen! It is not enough to just teach the Bible. It is not enough to just have Bible verses in our mouths. Why? Beloved teachers, is it not true that many false teachers also have Bible verses in their mouths? Have you not heard of certain sects that use a Gideon New Testament in their occult rituals of sorcery and divination? Is Jesus pleased with the teaching of every person who has a Bible verse in his or her mouth? I hope not. I'm sure you remember that when Satan tempted Jesus, he came with his mouth full of Bible verses, too.

We need to read, study, handle, and teach the Word of God honestly. This means teaching what is really there and not using it just to make people do what we want them to do. This means not using it just to make money or just to make a big name. This means teaching the truth of God's Word not to control people, but because it is the truth.

Another thing. This also means submitting our own lives to the Word of God. When we read or teach, we read or teach first submitting our own lives to the Scripture's teaching, and then sharing it with others so they can do the same.

I'm likely going to be saying a lot more about this, because frankly I'm seeing a lot in the churches that makes me wonder how firmly we have all understood this principle. For now I want you to read 1 Cor. 4:1-2 again and think about it. Think about it when you are preparing lessons and teaching. Think about what you are seeing in the church around you. I am going to do the same for myself because none of us can ever grasp firmly enough to this principle.

Finally, I want to leave you with a practical tip for teaching. In each lesson it is good to have something related to the lesson that the class can see and touch. The touching part is especially important for small

children. If I was teaching the crossing of the Red Sea, for instance, I might take them outside and let them walk barefoot on wet sand. I might sprinkle water in their faces. If I were teaching about a raven feeding Elijah, I might let the children pass around a bird's feather or take a bite from a little loaf of bread. The same God who gave us ears also gave us eyes and fingers and a nose and toes! The more senses we can utilize in teaching, the more vividly the children will "see" the story, the more they will be interested, and the longer they will remember!

May God bless you richly. We and all the volunteers who help at our office are praying for you all. We would love to hear many stories about how God is using you. That would encourage our hearts.

Go Teach for Jesus!

Mama Lorella

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers

Letter 4

Dear Teacher for Jesus,

Recently I was in Ghana and was talking to our Board about being willing to accept suffering for Jesus. Our Board Chairman brought up a good point. He said something like, Yes, we are willing to suffer for Jesus, but sometimes we suffer because we just haven't prayed and asked God to help in the situation. I don't want to suffer when I could have had the problem removed!

Sometimes we teachers have that problem. We may look at the logistics under which we work—the place and time our class meets, the seating available, etc.—as if it could not be changed. So we are willing to suffer for Jesus by teaching under adverse conditions.

I am always happy when someone is willing to suffer for Jesus when God asks him to do so. I remember that Paul said, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:12-13). If you are teaching in terrible circumstances and you have exhausted all possibilities of getting something better and you have prayed about it and God has told you to be content and serve Him in those circumstances, God bless you! The world needs models to see how Christians can be faithful in all kinds of circumstances.

Yet, some of you, many of you may be able to do something to improve the circumstances under which you teach. You should not assume that what has been handed to you is inflexible and unchangeable. If you are finding the circumstances difficult, think and pray about positive possibilities for change, and then respectfully consult with your Sunday school and church leaders. Together you may be able to work out a more desirable arrangement.

There is no one set time that Sunday school must meet. Some meet just before church, some very early Sunday morning, some during church or during part of church, some on Sunday afternoon, some on Saturday or a weekday evening. Some of these other times may actually be preferable because they provide time (and proper attire) for games and activities that can help attract new members and new interest.

There is no one set place that Sunday school must meet. It could be under a shady tree outside, in homes or yards of private homes near the church, in the church itself, in a school, or any convenient place. Don't restrict your thinking only to the church property itself.

Every class needs some room to move about at least a little, and there needs to be some space between classes. If class quarters are too

cramped, discipline problems will inevitably result. If classes are crowded, think and pray about moving one or more groups to other quarters.

The Bible guides us in our thinking even about subjects such as this. Do you remember the story of Jesus feeding the multitude? He told them to sit down—not just any way, not just where they were, but by companies. The disciples guided them to sit down in an orderly manner, by groups of hundreds and groups of fifties (Mark 6:39-40). Jesus is interested in classes, too, sitting and gathering in an orderly manner.

Do you remember the story of Jesus teaching from the boat (Luke 5:1-3)? The crowd was pressing Jesus, so He borrowed a boat and pushed it out from land. Sitting there in the boat, there was a distance of water between Himself and the people, and He was able to teach them. Jesus' approach was creative. He did not just accept the circumstances. He recognized that the circumstances made it difficult for Him to preach, so He looked for a creative solution, and He found one. Jesus showed great adaptability. There were no "usual" solutions in sight, but Jesus found one by adapting, by trying something new. This story also shows how Jesus recognized the need for space. He needed space between Him and His audience in order to be heard, and He found a way to get it. He also made the best of the circumstances, for He didn't go away to another place. He stayed and taught in the circumstances where He found Himself, but He improved those circumstances. He truly made the best of them in a very positive way.

Let's stop being fatalists when it comes to the circumstances of our teaching. Let's look for creative solutions to improve things. If you can't think of a solution yourself, pray and invite others to think and pray with you. Be sure to consult church leadership about the need.

I am praying that many creative solutions to logistical problems will pop up all over Africa, and that you will be the ones God will use to find those solutions and to improve the circumstances for your class.

May God bless each of you richly.

Your Friend and Co-Worker for Jesus,

Mama Lorella

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers

Letter 5

New Beginnings

Dear Teacher,

Do you ever feel that you have failed? Do you ever feel discouraged with what you have or have not accomplished? Last year I had such an experience. I had an opportunity to teach in a certain village. I looked forward to the opportunity, sought God about what I should teach, prepared, and taught with enthusiasm and heart-felt conviction. The subject I taught about was of great concern to me, and I hit it hard.

I didn't feel there was a good response, and afterwards I felt bad about my teaching. I saw that the illustrations I used were largely unfamiliar to the village folk, and that I had been far too prone to add other illustrations I had not planned but which seemed to come to mind as I taught. Overall, I felt let down after I taught, even though I knew I had given it my all.

I think every teacher experiences something like this at times. And what do we do when we feel we have failed or fallen short in some way? Paul's words in Philippians 3 are a comfort and an instruction to me. He said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." I like those words. Paul did not think he had "arrived." He did not think he had it all together. He did not count himself as the perfect teacher or the perfect Christian. I can relate to this guy. I'm a long ways from perfect, too.

Then he told us what he does when he realizes he has not measured up. "But this one thing I do," he says. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul says that as far as past mistakes and shortcomings go, he forgets about them. He forgets the things which are behind. He does not let himself dwell on them. He does not let himself get bogged down by them. He deliberately chooses to forget. He lets it go, under God's grace and forgiveness.

He also tells us what he does in regard to the future. "Reaching forth unto those things which are before," he says. Paul reaches out toward the future. He embraces the teacher, the person, the success that he can become. Finally, he presses on. He does not give up. He does not sit and sulk. He does not quit teaching. He presses on. He keeps on, reaching forward to the future with new determination and purpose. He may have fallen short or failed or sinned or fallen, but this will not keep him from obtaining the prize God wants to give him, because he forgets the past, reaches out to the future, and keeps on teaching.

As we face a new year, I suspect we all must admit that we have fallen short a time or two in the previous year. This need not keep us from trying again. I encourage you to face your teaching assignment in the year ahead with new determination and purpose. Those who receive the prize are those who do not give up.

You can be a better teacher next year than you were last year, and so can I. If you have access to a place you can borrow books from, I want to challenge you to begin the year by borrowing a book about effective teaching. Read it carefully, prayerfully. Learn from it and try applying some of the principles you learn. Press toward the mark for the prize in the new year.

May God bless you richly in the year ahead,

Mama Lorella

Letter 6

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers

Dear Teachers,

Don't you sometimes wish there were an injection we could give our students that would make them mature Christians? I'd like to take that injection myself. Yet we know that God did not plan for us to become mature overnight. In both the plant and the animal world, it takes time and nurture for His creatures to mature. So if you are teaching your heart out and yet your students seem weak and immature, do not give up hope. In God's plan it takes time to grow.

Isaiah reminds us that when God teaches us, He does not dump everything we need to know and do into our laps at a single time. He says, "Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little"

(Isaiah 28:9-10).

These verses show us that teaching must be gradual. We begin with simple concepts, and we keep adding new ideas, not quickly, but slowly, gradually. These verses show us that teaching must be done in bits and pieces. No one can teach everything all at once. We teach a little, then add a little more and a little more. These verses show us that teaching must be done consistently over time. We do not teach a group one time and then leave for another place. We must continue teaching, over time adding to the foundation that has already been laid.

Do you know how long it took for God to give us the Bible? 1600 years! Why do you think God took that long? Surely He knew from the beginning what He wanted to communicate to us. You see, God knew that we are all slow learners. So He communicated His truth not in one giant treatise, but in bite-sized pieces. His progressive approach to teaching His people gave time for His people to grow. It gave time for His teaching to be assimilated into their life experiences.

We are building lives and character in human beings that will last for eternity. In our sense of urgency we must not go too fast. We must teach small pieces of the truth, but we must keep on teaching them, building consistently a faith that will endure.

May God show you just the right bite-sized pieces for your class this week!

I am praying for you all in the coming year. May this be a year of growth and blessing for you and for those you teach.

Love, *Mama Lorella*

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers

Letter 7

An old proverb says that a teacher became frustrated because his students were not learning. Finally the teacher became angry and asked the student why he was not learning. "Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying," the student said.

There is a lot of truth in that proverb. Teaching is a lot more than just talking, even if the teacher is saying the right things. One of the things that is necessary for teaching of moral values and right behavior to occur is for the student to see an example of the truth, value, or behavior modeled for him in the life of someone he respects. If the teacher who is explaining the value does not live it out in his own life, how can he expect those he teaches to take him seriously?

That is likely what James had in mind when he wrote, "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1). He encourages believers not to seek too hurriedly to become teachers. The truth is, God expects more from teachers. He holds us teachers to a higher, stricter standard. He judges us more severely.

Why is this so? Think of crossing over a weak little bridge with just one narrow board to hold you up. Below are the raging waters of a fast river that will sweep you away quickly if you fall in. It would be challenging enough to get yourself over such a bridge, don't you think so? Now think of taking a group of 30 young children across. Who has the greater responsibility—the individual who only has to get himself across, or the children's leader who has to get 30 children across? Isn't it logical and right that the children's leader is more responsible? If he does not cross correctly and safely, more people's lives will be lost. God holds the leader or the teacher accountable for more, because he is responsible for the lives of others.

Paul asked this question: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" (Rom 2:21a). You who teach Sunday school or Bible club or youth meeting, you teach others. That's good. But don't you teach yourself, too? Are you setting the example for your students by modeling in your own life the truths you are encouraging them to follow? The teacher who teaches himself first has a lot easier time when he tries to teach others.

We all know we are not perfect, but do your students at least see a determination, an earnest seeking to live out what you are teaching them? Your actions don't have to speak loudly against what you are teaching. They can be a powerful tool and a powerful motivator when they back up what you are saying.

This week, try teaching yourself first. Then go to teach your class. I will be praying for you.

In Christian Love,

Mama Lorella

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers

Letter 8

God's Big "No"

Dear Beloved Teacher Friends,

This morning I was reading Joshua chapter 5, and I noticed something I had never "seen" before. Joshua was leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land. They had miraculously crossed the Jordan River at flood stage, and were about to take the first city, Jericho, by God's direction. Joshua was standing near Jericho, perhaps thinking about how they would take the city. He looked up and saw what looked like a man with his sword drawn. Not recognizing the supernatural character of the man he asked what seemed like a natural question. Since they were about to go into battle, he asked, "Are you for us, or for our enemies?" (5:13) Joshua was asking whether the man was friend or foe. It was obvious he was ready to fight in the battle. What was not so obvious was whose side he was on.

Joshua laid out the choices as he saw them. There were two sides preparing for battle—The Israelites and the Canaanites. Choice A or Choice B. Us or them. Us or our enemies.

The man undoubtedly surprised Joshua by choosing neither of the two sides. He said "Nay," (KJV) or "Neither of these," (NIV), "but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come" (5:14). The messenger may have been an angel warrior. Some even think it was Jesus Himself, since Joshua later worships him. What is certain is that he came from God. He came not to side with one people against another, not as a helper of even God's people against their enemies, but as a messenger from God. He came to do God's bidding, to fulfill God's program.

Joshua had just experienced God's miraculous intervention at the Jordan River, yet he had apparently forgotten for a moment that he was involved in God's program. The people of Israel were in God's will in taking the land, and they went on to win a great victory at Jericho, no doubt through the unseen intervention of God's angels. Yet the angel rebukes him gently. To Joshua's Choice A or Choice B option, God simply replies "No," or "Neither." Negative. Joshua was not asking the right question, and not presenting the right options for an answer. God is not there to promote any human program, whether his or anyone else's. God has His own program. Aren't you glad? It would be pretty scary if God bought into our limited programs, wouldn't it?

The response God gave encouraged Joshua to shift his thinking from his own program to God's. He needed to realize that he was not there in Canaan at his own initiative, but in obedience to God. Therefore he should never think in terms of his own program, his own group, his own battle. He needed rather to get in tune with God's program and to realize his part in it.

God was with the Israelites, but He was not against the Canaanites in the sense of hating them. The truth is, although God sent the captain of His host to execute judgment, God loved the Canaanite people. He created them. God did not come to oppose them. He came to execute judgment on sin.

As I thought about these few words from Scripture, I felt that I have too often fallen into the same kind of shortsighted thinking that troubled Joshua. Have you? I too often have thought in terms of success for my group, my friends, my people. I too often have looked at even my teaching in human terms. Did I get compliments? Did people seem to respond? The truth is, teaching is God's program. If I know I am called to that aspect of His program, He is the One I need to please. I am not serving my church alone. I am serving God. It is His program. There's no need, then, for jealousy, no need for competition. There's no need for pride when things go well and no need for despair when the response to my teaching is not what I'd hoped. It's God's program. I only need to be concerned that I have aligned myself with His program, and that I am faithful in carrying out His will.

I hope that your service to God as a teacher will be such that He can say not "No," but "Yes" to you. I hope you are not pursuing your own program, but putting yourself in alignment with God's. If so, God's answer must be "Yes" and "Amen" to you.

May God bless you in your personal life and in your teaching this month.

Your Mother in Christ,

Mama Lorella

Letter 9

Mama Lorella's Monthly Letter to Teachers

Being Led by the Spirit in our Teaching

Dear Beloved Teachers,

Sometimes teachers tell me that they do not need to spend much time preparing lessons because the Spirit of God will lead them in what they say. Others slavishly prepare lessons as if they were entirely on their own and could not depend on the Lord for help.

When I talk to the first group, I always wonder why their lessons are not more interesting and compelling, since the Spirit is leading them. I wonder why their students do not respond and why they are not seeing fruit in their ministries, since the Spirit is leading them. I also wonder why God always leads them when they get up to speak, but never when they are preparing.

When I talk to the second group, I wonder if they really think that God must be dead and so they have to do everything on their own effort. I wonder if they follow some new translation that has removed God's commands to pray and to seek Him for help.

The truth is, there is a balance between these two extreme views. If we are led by the Spirit, we will surely be led by the Spirit in our preparation. God is a God of order. He gave a plan for the building of the tabernacle. He did not tell the workmen to show up and be led by the Spirit as they worked. We can count on God's help if we seek His help, for His Word says, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). As you read and study the lesson Scripture, be praying for God's guidance. His Spirit will lead you to understand what the Scripture says. His Spirit will lead you to understand how to apply the Scripture to the lives of your students. His Spirit will lead you to understand what activities to include in your teaching so that it will capture the hearts of your students.

As you seek God's help, you will know that you are by no means on your own in this task. You are working together with God. The Apostle Paul described it this way: "For we are labourers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9).

You as a teacher are a labourer together with God. You do the studying, the praying, the teaching. God guides in all of it so that your labors will be effective. He works in the hearts of the students. He brings forth the fruit.

I am praying for all of you this month, that you will know the joy of truly being led by the Spirit of God in every lesson you prepare, in every lesson you present, and in your own daily lives. May God truly bless each

of you. Isn't it thrilling to know that you are a laborer together with the God who made the Universe?

In Christian Love and With Many Prayers for You,

Your Mother in Christ,

Mama Lorella