

A Coach's Guide to Sunday School

Sunday School Director's Manual



TMB Tennessee Baptist
MISSION BOARD

Table of Contents

Introduction: What Are We Talking About?.....6

Chapter 1: Vision (by Sean Keith) 8

Chapter 2: The Team (by Daniel Edmonds) 16

Chapter 3: Outreach (by Kiely Young)..... 22

Chapter 4: Inreach (by Jeff Ingram)28

Chapter 5: New Groups (by Bob Mayfield) 38

Chapter 6: Planning (by Darryl Wilson)..... 46

Chapter 7: Discovering and Enlisting Workers (by Wayne Etheridge) 54

Chapter 8: Getting Started (by Tim Smith)..... 72

Chapter 9: Coaching Teachers (by David Bond) 78

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the Golden Offering for Tennessee Missions make TBMB ministries possible.*

SUNDAY SCHOOL

SMALL GROUPS

LIFE GROUPS

Or [your church's name] groups...

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?!

We are talking about plans to reach and teach the Bible for life transformation.

Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and for building on-mission Christian through open Bible study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, worship, and prayer.

Bible teaching for life transformation is *foundational*.

This sets the direction of the local church for reaching people and growing disciples. It is a strategy that takes lots of work, planning, prayer, patience and determination. It is a great strategy for evangelism and discipleship.

For Sunday School to succeed, the Sunday School director and Pastor need to work together!

WHAT DOES THE PASTOR HAVE TO DO WITH SUNDAY SCHOOL?

He is the leader, the primary player, the one who sets the pace for disciple building. He must take the lead and encourage the entire church to participate if the Bible teaching strategy of the church is to be successful. He must lead the Sunday School Planning Team (Council) to set goals and evaluate the Sunday School strategy to fulfill the biblical functions of disciple building.

WHAT IS THE PASTOR'S GAME PLAN?

1. Provide overall leadership to the Sunday School Planning Team.
2. Lead the team in keeping the Sunday School focused on its purpose.
3. Give vital and visible support to Sunday School and its leaders.
4. Communicate the overall mission (purpose) and message of the Sunday School to the entire church.
5. Guide team members toward spiritual maturity and assist them in developing skills that enhance their ability to fulfill their responsibilities.
6. Set a positive example for others by living as an authentic witness of Christ and through full involvement in the life and ministry of the church.
7. The pastor and other leaders will give frequent opportunities for members who are not Christian to confess Christ publicly, and urge them to do so.



Chapter 1

[VISION]

Sean Keith



WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

When I was around 4 years old, my 7 year old brother decided to run away. My mother told him that she loved him, that she would miss him and hoped he had a safe journey. She then made him a lunch, put it in a paper sack and went back to her tasks around the house. My younger brother and I just stared at him as he sat in the chair for another 10 or 15 minutes. Eventually, my mother asked him, “Well, I thought you were going to run away”. My brother replied, “I am. I’m just waiting for you to take me. I don’t know where to go.”

We have become content with people just showing up at Sunday School and Worship. Most of our goals and vision for Sunday School have been about getting more bodies, more buildings and greater budgets. But what do you want to see happen in people’s lives? When they show up at church and attend Worship and Sunday School, what should be the result of all that time, energy and resources they expended to be there?

Et Stetzer once said we are good at making people “fans” of Jesus, but not “followers” of Jesus. I know, in your heart you want people to know Christ, understand His plan for them, and equip them to be and live as Christ made them. Do you know how to lead them there? What is your vision for what that looks like? How will you know you are leading them in the right direction? How will you help them discover the right path?

Where are you leading them to? Do you know where you are going? A vision for your church and your Sunday School is a clearly articulated picture of what God desires your church to be, look and act like 6 months, a year, two years or five years down the road. What is your destination? Can you draw it on a napkin, can you explain it in a brief outline? Is it clear enough and functional enough for the average person to state or restate in their own words? Is it simple enough for each member to adapt their mission and purpose around this vision and find their role in achieving it?

WHERE DO I START?

Pray! Pray! Pray! God is not hiding His will for you and His church. He will reveal His vision for the Sunday School or Small Group Ministry you lead when you are ready for it. Don't take what I'm telling you too lightly. You are God's person, leading His ministry in fulfilling His Mission for your people and your community. Therefore, we must hear His voice and lead His people to accomplish His purpose. Pray with your leaders. Pray alone. Fast and pray. Ask others to pray. Then, when God gives you His vision: **ACT** on it.

Evaluate – Accuracy is not your first concern, but having a realistic picture of the nature and status of your Sunday School or Small Group ministry is vital in achieving God's vision. God's vision is unique. Your church is unique. The people in your church are unique. It is necessary to take the time to know your people, know your leadership and know your community. You can't lead people where they don't want to go. You must show them not only where God wants them to go, but how you plan to lead them there.

Understand your Mission – Let's be clear. The purpose of Sunday School is to assist the church to accomplish the Great Commission. Simply put, our job is to make disciples. We are to make disciples who we hope and pray will in turn become disciple makers as well. These are simple words but a huge task.

Jesus gave all believers and the churches to which they belong, the assignment of making disciples. Whether you have a Sunday School, Small Group, or hybrid organization in your church—the goal is still the same...to make disciples. Historically, as Baptist we were taught to assign the responsibilities of the disciple-making process to multiple programs like Sunday School, Discipleship Training, Missions and more. Unfortunately, the dynamics of today's church is very different. Sunday School and Small Groups now play the primary role in the disciple-making process.

In Matthew 28:18-20, we see a clear picture of the disciple-making process.

- 1. We have the POWER - Verse 18 reminds us that the power and authority to do Kingdom work as a church, small group or an individual is available through Jesus Christ.*
- 2. We have a PURPOSE – Verse 19 states that we are to go and make disciples. Our purpose is to make disciples as we are going.*
- 3. We have a PROCESS – these verses describe our method for making disciples: which is to baptize (connect people with God and a local body of believers), teach them to observe (teaching believers how to live, act and worship like Christ), and to go (we are equipped to serve and minister as we go).*
- 4. We have a PRESENCE – Jesus reminds us that He is with us—always. If He is with us; He is IN us and working THROUGH us. We are never alone.*

Jesus' intent was for us to do more than make converts. He wants us to make disciples who will in turn also make disciples. In order to do that we must lead them to Christ and make them a part of a vibrant community of believers who will assimilate and nurture them. Then we are to “teach them to observe everything I have commanded you”. Put another way: we teach people the Bible in order that they might love Christ and live like Christ. In today's world, it is not enough to simply believe. It really has never been about just believing something to be a true fact. We also have to live, be, and do as Christ would have us to. Jesus tells us in verse 20; “and lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age”. Christ has arisen, but He has sent His Spirit to dwell in us. In His power, we represent Christ in this world. We are to be a city on a hill, a light in the darkness, and salt to season the earth that it might see Christ as Savior.

As leaders in this movement we call Christianity, we must ask ourselves what we are leading others to do. How is our disciple making going? Are the folks we are leading becoming more like Christ? What is expected of them? Do we anticipate or expect something to happen in their lives? If so, what is it and how do we describe it? (Quote from the book, The Value of a Vibrant Sunday School by Sean Keith, pp 11, 12)

KNOWING WHO YOU ARE

Your Sunday School or Small Group Ministry is three things. In some ways, it is and always will be a **SCHOOL**. We still enroll people. People attend a class. There is a teacher. They teach Bible lessons. We keep records so we can keep track of people for ministry. All of these terms imply a school. But your Sunday School or Small Group Ministry is so much more.

Central to Sunday School and Small Groups is God's Word. Everything we do in this ministry revolves around God's Word. It is the tool God has provided. *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."* **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (HCSB)**. Those of us who lead in a Bible study ministry have an awesome task. Never grow weary in this great responsibility.

Your Sunday School or Small Group ministry is also **RELATIONAL**. It is and will always be about people. Our job is to connect people with God, with one another, with the lost and/or un-churched in order to fulfill the Great Commission. *"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* **John 13:34-35 (HCSB)**.

Your Sunday School or Small Group ministry is also **MISSIONAL**. Your ministry should be shaped by the fact that it is a small group of people functioning together to fulfill the Great Commission. We are in this together.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT!

I love football. When I was young I loved playing it. Looking back, I value the discipline and skills it taught me physically and mentally. The lessons I learned then still are foundational to how I think and live today. Principles that I learned then now illustrate how I execute my work and ministry today.

Practice – When game day comes, what you practice—you execute in the game. Great coaches throughout the years have taught the mastery of the basics in football like blocking, tackling, running and passing. At practice the coaches utilized drills to reinforce the skills and abilities that were foundational to the game of football. I remember best the tackling drills. We did these over and over and over. The more we practiced tackling the “right” way, the more natural it came to us during the game.

In leading a Sunday School practice is critical. There are just some things that we should be doing regularly. We do them so often and so efficiently, that we almost don’t notice that we are doing them. And yet, they are critical to the work of Sunday School. Things like starting new groups, enlisting new leaders, training leaders, keeping accurate records, outreach, follow up, care groups and more. So much of what happens in Sunday School doesn’t happen on Sunday morning or whenever your “Groups” meet. It is vital that you are leading a Sunday School that does the little things; the mundane things that are necessary to have an effective Sunday School ministry.

Over the years, many of our Sunday Schools have stopped “practicing” these often overlooked fundamentals of our ministry. Thus, the reason many of our Sunday Schools are failing. Let’s take a look at one of the most overlooked practices of a healthy Sunday School—Starting New Groups. New groups help you: reach new people, see people saved, minister to more people, assimilate people, make connections, develop new leaders, engage people in Bible study, prayer, scripture memory, tithing and more. Even more significant; new groups help you better fulfill the Great Commission.

A COACH'S GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

My question as we begin is; do you value the best practices of Sunday School? We not only need to value new groups but also developing leaders, quality teaching, quality resources, effective outreach and follow up, efficient ministry to ALL members and connections with the community.

What does your vision for your Sunday School look like? Do you envision a Sunday School that reaches and connects new people, teaches the Word of God effectively and transformationally, and cares for the needs of members and your community. If so, your practice must demonstrate that.

Let me be candid. Leading a small group ministry of any kind that reaches, teaches and ministers effectively takes a lot of hard work. Let me identify three key areas that your vision needs to address in order to achieve the results you desire to see.

Clarity – Your vision needs to be clear. If you can't explain it with a picture, a story or words that give people a clear understanding of what you are leading them to accomplish; they probably won't. You know that you can't do everything and meet every need. Prioritize. Focus. People need to know what is important. For Sunday School and Small Groups, three things everyone should prioritize: God's Word, people, and His mission. God's Word is central to a healthy, vibrant small group ministry. Except nothing less. People are important too. Leaders, members, prospects, lost people; all are important to an effective ministry. Lastly, our mission is to make disciples. God's Word—impacting God's people—to accomplish God's mission; now that's a statement.

Simplicity – If you can't draw it, write it or explain it on a napkin; it's too complicated. Amazingly, things like texting and twitter have forced us to get to the point. People need to know the bottom line and it needs to be shared and reminded often. Keep it simple and keep it clear.

God-Sized – To be honest, we don't dream big enough. If we can accomplish a task using our skills, resources, and energy; why

would we need God? Instead, pray and ask God to lead you as you lead your people to do something only God can do. Let God change you, then God can use you to change others. Together you can change a church. Your church can change a community. Your community can change a city, a state, a country, even a world. Not possible you say! With God, ALL things are possible. Don't settle—that's so ordinary. Let God use you to do the EXTRAordinary.

Take time to write some things down. Let God speak to you. Read His Word. Read the book of Acts. Pray. Pray with others. Share your concerns and desires with other leaders. Develop a plan and work the plan.

God is ready to pour out His blessings. Be faithful to the people and mission He has given you. I can't wait to hear what God has and will do in your life and ministry.



Chapter 2

[THE TEAM]

Keily Young



WHY BUILD A TEAM?

Have you ever had a Moses moment, where you believed you alone should handle the entire task? Every leader is tempted at times to ‘go-it-alone;’ however, that will lead to severe limitations, poor ministry, and burnout. This type of leader needs to hear the words of Jethro to Moses, “What you are doing is not good.” (Exodus 18:17)

Have you experienced an Elijah moment, a time you felt isolated and alone while facing a challenge? It’s not wise to address the mission of Sunday School alone. Like Moses, the mission requires a team, and like Elijah, every leader should have an apprentice.

The church is commissioned to make disciples. Discipleship demands the building of relationships. Paul built relationships in order to disciple numerous leaders, like Timothy, and challenged them to do likewise. Build a team, make disciples, and multiply.

TEAM CHARACTERISTICS

Jesus, the ultimate leadership example, called a team to a clear mission. Once the vision and mission of Sunday School is clear, it is time to call potential leaders to join the team. When calling the disciples, Jesus issued this call, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) Look for team members willing to spend time together, learn together, and be on a mission together. For any team to be effective, spending time together is essential. Game day is not the time for meeting and strategy planning; it is time to reap the reward of all the planning, practice, and prayer. Look for team members who will commit the time it takes to strengthen the work and accomplish the goals that are set.

The team that is willing to learn together and from each other will prosper. Training is a key to health and growth in any organization. Leadership should set the pace by attending and providing leadership training. People will respect and listen to leaders who are willing to undergo the rigors of training. Proper training enhances conversation, troubleshooting, strategy development, and team cohesion. Enlist team members who will commit to being trained.

A unified commitment to a common goal is also an important characteristic in team members. Numerous Sunday School teams have been sidetracked and rendered ineffective by members committed to the status quo rather than attaining a new, challenging goal. Enlist team members who are willing to commit to the mission.

TEAM MEMBERS

Every team needs a head coach, and clearly Christ is the head of the church. He has also called pastors, overseers, to give guidance and to equip His bride for the work. Every pastor is encouraged to be the leader of the Sunday School team.

In many churches, a nominating committee is used to put together the Sunday School Leadership Team or Council. Work with the nominating committee to recruit leaders willing to submit to the team characteristics and mission. The team should represent the various age divisions of the Sunday School, as well as the Sunday School Director, Pastor, Staff and other key leaders.

In the book, *Growing Sunday School Teams*, Lawrence Phipps (www.itslifeministry.com) and Daniel Edmonds presented an acrostic using the word TEAMS (Teaching, Evangelism, Administrating, Ministering, Serving) to recommend a leadership team in each adult class. One way to approach building a Sunday School leadership team would be to enlist coaches by the five positions. Additional team members might be representatives of the age groups. Coaches would be responsible for recruiting and training in their specific area of expertise.

Whatever approach is utilized in building a team, be sure to keep the team at a reasonable size (5-10). If the team is too small, each member could be overloaded in responsibility. If the team becomes too large, it may be unmanageable or in danger of input-overload during meetings.

STAYING ON POINT WITH THE MISSION

Once the team is assembled, discovering the metrics that matter in accomplishing the mission is important. These metrics could include ministering to members, mobilizing for evangelism, engaging members in missions, and involving members in ministry. The team should address consistent recruiting and training in order to secure health and growth. Administrative matters will also need attention, such as curriculum, equipment, record keeping/analysis, budget preparation, and goal setting. Finally, the team should be involved in ongoing evaluation of mission progress and alignment.

TEAM MEETINGS

What do you do when you meet with the team? Meetings can often dissolve into a task-oriented administrative meeting. For the meeting to be effective, it needs to become a microcosm of the greater mission. For example, if the mission is to build relationships and make disciples, then the team meeting should be a time of building relationships and making disciples who can make disciples. Leaders on the team should be shining examples of what they want to lead others to become. You may need to spend less time training for the task and more time leading members to follow Christ and live sent. For example, instead of teaching teachers to teach, teaching them to live the disciplines of a disciple that the Holy Spirit can use would be better.

A SAMPLE MEETING SCHEDULE

(allow for 90 minutes minimum)

I. Inspiration & Accountability

(allow time for building relationships & discipleship)

- A. Devotional related to discipleship and/or leadership
- B. Time of sharing by group members from their personal walk
- C. Accountability for basic disciplines (daily quiet times, sharing faith, etc.)
- D. Prayer needs and prayer

II. Instruction

- A. Training for members
- B. Tips for improvement, latest trends, etc.

III. Information

- A. Updates
- B. Upcoming Events
- C. Accolades/appreciation toward team members

IV. Investigation

- A. Progress Report
- B. Record Analysis
- C. Needs – equipment, space, curriculum, etc.

V. Interaction

- A. Reports from team members
- B. Insights and ideas

VI. Improvement

- A. Troubleshooting and Brainstorming
- B. Planning for future events

VII. Involvement

- A. Assignments for team members
- B. Potential leader enlistment and training
- C. Events
- D. Fellowships, mission opportunities, ministry needs
- E. Calendar planning

VIII. Investing in the Future

- A. Prayer for prospects
- B. Prayer for current teachers and leaders
- C. Prayer for future leaders
- D. Prayer for events
- E. Prayer for mission opportunities
- F. Prayer for ministry needs
- G. Prayer for the membership

Obviously this schedule is more than can be accomplished in any one meeting. Some items are more essential than others, but all of these details (and more) will come into play during the years. The real key is to place an emphasis on making disciples and building leaders.

THE PLAYERS

Beyond the team, each church will have a variety of key players who are not necessarily on the leadership team. These may include staff members, department leadership, and class leaders. Wisdom dictates not only to train these key players, but also to build solid relationships with and show appreciation (publicly and privately) for them. Place a high value on effective and continual communication of the mission and mission priorities with these vital leaders. Give opportunities for them to have input in and ownership of the mission and vision. On occasion, conflict may arise that will need to be addressed; however, do so in love to honor Christ and His Church.

ALL TOGETHER

The ball is in your hands, but the game doesn't rest on your shoulders alone. Are you and the team up for the challenge?

Chapter 3

[OUTREACH]



“Say Coach, I heard this recruiting stuff doesn’t work anymore. Folks are more into social media these days. Is that really true?”

“Well, I guess we just have to go back to the Rule Book and see what it says. Let’s see, what does The Great Commission say? It is right here in Matthew 28:18-20.”

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

“Now that does sound a lot like recruiting for Jesus. Maybe we should check our strategies and see if we are following the directions of the Master Coach!”

We are commanded by our Lord and commissioned to build a team of multiplying disciples! But we seem to be falling down at that effort. We have to re-examine our efforts and upgrade our skills and our game plan.

What do we need to do to put a game plan in place that will produce multiplying disciples? Again we have to go back to the Rule Book and see what the Master Coach has to say. Dr. Luke records in his version of the Gospel message in chapter 10 as Jesus prepared to send His disciples out to share His Gospel message: *“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also , and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, ‘The harvest is truly great, but the laborers are few; pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest... But wherever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house” and if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not it will return to you. Remain in the same house.’”*

Jesus tells us to look for ‘persons of peace’, people who are receptive to the Gospel message and are also willing to share what they receive. Those can be multipliers.

Paul picked up on this strategy with young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, *“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”*

So we have to ask the question, “Who do we need to reach? When, Where, and How can we reach them.” What will be our strategy for reaching?

These who could be just the people we know, who are not presently participating in a small group Bible study. Recent information tells us those are the most likely people to reach. We must prayerfully ask them. We may need to provide the right environment to properly ask them.

But the following is a list of few ideas to stimulate your thinking:

- Have a cookout
- Take them to a ballgame
- Have a tailgating party at a ball game
- Play a round of golf
- Have a block party
- Go fishing/hunting
- Go shopping and to lunch
- Ladies night out
- Wild game dinner
- VBS follow-up
- Family Fall Festival
- Thanksgiving party
- Christmas party

Follow up with guests to church and Bible study.

And the list goes on and on, only limited by our imagination.

We must remember a very important statement made by George Barna. “God’s church is not about structures and systems and resources; it is about people. It is about you and your relationship to God.”(Re-churching the Unchurched, p.9)

God wants His disciples to multiply, to reach others who can be equipped to reach others. He does not want us to stay in the huddle or just sit on the bench. He wants us to get into the game. And He wants us to do so with *enthusiasm*.

There are some basic things about human nature that will affect our recruiting. Jesus compared it to the farmer sowing seeds. He said that some seeds (the Gospel message) we sow will fall on shallow soil, some on rocky soil, some on thorny soil, and some on good soil. The soil can be improved by proper cultivation, meaning intentional relational building. If we just sow seed anywhere, anytime, any way we can, then we are going to get low results. But if we properly cultivate the soil, we can improve our results.

Jesus said those in shallow soil receive the seed quickly, but because they are in shallow soil with no room to grow, they die quickly. We must have a good relationship and help them have better understanding, deepening the soil.

Those in rocky soil have no place for the seed to take root. They are robbed of the chance because of interference. Unless we help them remove the interferences they will never receive the seed. Again, there must be cultivation.

Those in thorny soil have room to grow, but they have some much other stuff going on, their relationship with God is choked out with other activity, sometimes church activity. We have to help them with priorities...cultivation.

Cultivation is hard work. It is not done in a worship setting alone. It has to be one on one over a period of time.

A COACH'S GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

I am reminded of Michael Ohr, who now plays left offensive tackle for the Baltimore Ravens. His story was brought to life in the movie “The Blind Side”. Leigh Anne Tuohy and her family saw him walking in the rain. He was a classmate of their daughter. The Tuohy’s took him home for the night, which led to his becoming a part of their family in a legal guardian relationship. Their relationship changed his life forever. Their Christian example, exhibited through patient love provided time for his life to be cultivated to receive the Truth of the Gospel.

There are times when we have to build intentional relationships over time to help soil be ready to receive the Truth of the Gospel.

At times we do have the privilege to plant seed in good soil where the seed of the Gospel takes root and rapidly multiplies. That only takes place about 20% of the time we plant seed unless we properly cultivate the soil.

The best place to cultivate the soil is in an environment where the relationship can be enhanced with the help of others. That may be in a small group at church. OR...it could be in a small group off campus, even at a different time. It could even be during lunch or on a break at work.

John Avant, a pastor in West Monroe, Louisiana told his congregation he was going to go recruiting where sinners are gathered. He took one of his church members with him and they went to a local hangout...a local bar. He found a room full of folk who needed “prayer”. He prayed with them and asked them if he could come back the next week and “talk” with them. They agreed and they did. They started a small group Bible study in a bar. That was “outside the box”, but they were “cultivating” the soil.

We are only limited by our availability to God to open relationship with folk who are in need. It might get messy...it will get messy. We have to be carefully prayed up. We will encounter folk in unusual circumstances. Some of these may not be “church friendly”, but all will be in need of the Gospel. As we are open, available, and

obedient, God will bring a fruitful harvest, some of whom will be great multipliers because they know lots of folk who need Jesus. We can disciple them to reach them, to reach others, who will reach others.

We will be on the winning team.



Chapter 4

[INREACH]

Jeff Ingram



HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED?

It started off as a good morning at Sunday School. Attendance was up and the mood was festive with laughter and catching up with friends from the past week. Someone noticed that a husband and wife who were normally present were absent that morning. As the class moved into prayer requests and completing attendance records, the teacher asked if anyone had spoken with the absent couple this past week. No one had, so a class member mentioned he would contact them.

The following Sunday the class met for Bible study and again, without the aforementioned husband and wife in attendance. The teacher asked if the member had made contact with them this past week and he sheepishly confessed that he had forgotten about it. A lady said she would be going to the wife's place of business that week and she would check on them then. The teacher also said he would make contact with the husband, but failed to write it down to remind him.

The third Sunday came and went and the class was busy planning an upcoming fellowship at someone's home, as well as discussing a possible mission project. The now inactive husband and wife were overlooked amidst all the activity. The fourth Sunday was an emotional hour as some difficult prayer concerns surfaced from class members who were struggling with work and family illnesses. The fifth Sunday the teacher was out and one of the other class members taught his class.

The sixth Sunday began with the teacher reporting to the class that he had spoken with the husband of the formally active couple. Sadly, the man said he and his wife had separated six weeks ago and had filed for divorce. Apparently there had been some issues in their lives that came to the surface and they refused to reconcile their differences. This was a painful day for the adult Sunday School class. This class kept asking how this could have happened.

What if someone from the class had made contact with the couple after they missed the first Sunday? Or, the second Sunday? Or the third.... What if this husband and wife could have had a couple visit with them the first week and helped them work through their marriage problems? What if the pastor or a staff member could have provided them with counseling? Would they still be filing for divorce? No one knows for sure. But the teacher said he sure would like to have tried. But now it appeared to be too late to stop a marriage from ending.

It's not that this Sunday School class didn't care about inactive members. Nor was it true that the class wasn't concerned about troubled marriages. The problem facing this class is the problem that faces most Sunday School classes: they are not sufficiently organized for ministry to those listed on their own class roll. A class should make adequate preparation so that no one will slip through the cracks.

Think about your Sunday School experiences.

Why do you keep coming back?

RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

Why do you think most people come to Sunday School? Is it for the Bible study? Maybe to share their prayer needs? Are they seeking the friendship and fellowship of others? Do they want to grow closer to the Lord? Do you think some people just come to Sunday School because it's their Sunday morning habit to go to church? Of course, none of these reasons are wrong in and of themselves. However each of these reasons is tied to relationships: with others and with God. People's needs are best met through relationships because there is a certain level of trust, empathy, and accountability.

A SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS ORGANIZED FOR MINISTRY

Teacher: _____

Ministry Group #1	Ministry Group #2	Ministry Group #3
(Leader) _____	(Leader) _____	(Leader) _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

What are some of the needs and fears of people today?

JESUS IS OUR MODEL

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ³⁶ But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. ³⁸ Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Matthew 9:35-37 (NKJV)

This Scripture reminds us of some applicable Sunday School principles. Jesus went about "teaching" people the Word of God; reaching people with the Gospel through "preaching;" and ministering to people through "healing." Jesus' ministry of healing was aimed at "every sickness and every disease among the people." This would include physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional illnesses of all kind. Why did He do it? So He could share God's love for the people.

What do you “see” when you look at other people? What about the people you see at work or school, your neighborhood, when out shopping and at sporting events? Luke 9 tells us that when Jesus “saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (v. 36).

Life is tough! It always has been and it always will be! Let's face it: we need each other. People outside our class need us as well.

SUNDAY SCHOOL IS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.

Most people do not drop out of Bible study classes because the teacher wasn't a good Bible teacher. Most people do not drop out of their Sunday School class because the class didn't pray enough. Most people do not drop out of their small group because the class didn't have enough fellowships or mission projects. However, most people that do drop out of their Sunday School class may say something like this: “I had a death in my family and no one contacted me.” Or, “We had some sickness and missed several weeks; no one called us, so I guess it doesn't really matter if we come or not.” Or even, “My wife and I separated and no one from our class called to check on why we quit coming. I guess we just didn't matter.”

We can do better! So much better! A Sunday School class organized for ministry to its members will go a long way toward closing the proverbial back door and preventing people from slipping through the cracks.

LET'S AT LEAST START WITH TWO THINGS

A class needs two things in developing an effective in-reach ministry: organization and training.

1. *Organization*

The teacher cannot do it all. He can try to do all the teaching, out-

reaching, in-reaching, and the planning of fellowship and missions projects. He will eventually burn-out and in the meantime, rob class members of the opportunity to discover and develop their God-given gifts in fulfilling the Great Commission.

A better, and more biblical way (Ephesians 4:12), is to enlist class members to help the teacher minister to the class. Call them care group leaders or ministry leaders, but the name is not as important as the function. Each care group/ministry leader is assigned three or four names of class members, maybe one active member, one semi-active member, and one inactive member. His or her job is to make contact with their care group members each week. This way the teacher is not trying to keep up with every class member every week. He has help, other leaders are discovering and using their spiritual gifts to minister to others, and there is a safety net preventing people from being overlooked and their needs not being met.

This plan will work with adult and student Sunday School classes. Leaders in the preschool and children's Sunday School departments are encouraged to enlist others outside their group to assist them in ministry to children and parents.

1. *Training*

Enlisted ministry group leaders will need to know what's expected of them and how to best minister to his or her care group members. The teacher can explain the importance of making a variety of weekly contacts, share the four-week plan, ask for testimonies from ministry leaders in Sunday School, and encourage them when group members have issues or seem apathetic. Teachers will find it helpful to see themselves as the care group leader for the care group leaders. The most important thing is that the ministry leaders contact everyone in their care group every week being sensitive to needs God may reveal through the person.

MINISTRY LIST, NOT ATTENDANCE RECORD!

It may seem like a small thing, but create a mindset that the Preschool, Children, Student, and Adult Sunday School Attendance Rolls are not just for recording attendance or absences. Of course, we want people to be present, but we also want to minister to them whether they come or not. This highlights the importance of enrollment; that is, recording individuals' names along with contact information so we'll know who to contact and how to contact them.

Think about this. If our class rolls are only used for recording presents and absents, then what do we do with people that never come? If the focus is only on *attendance*, then class leaders want to start dropping people who don't come. But if the focus is on *ministry*, then it doesn't matter if they come or not, the class will still minister to them, and build relationships with them.

As mentioned earlier, people often drop out of Sunday School because they felt the class let them down when they had a need. It will take time for relationships to heal and trust to be restored. Class leaders and members can begin the process of reclaiming inactive members, as well as strengthening relationships in the class.

Remember: when reaching out to members of your class or department, *Focus on ministry, and the attendance may come!* Always minister in Jesus' Name and leave the results to the Holy Spirit.

What are some evidences that a class has become more of a "club" with requirements for membership, rather than a group seeking to fulfill the Great Commission?

WHAT ABOUT CHRONIC ABSENTEES?

Every age-group in Sunday School has had to deal with inactive members enrolled in their class or department. Sometimes it is difficult to get these chronic absentees to return to Bible study and fellowship with the class. However, remember, you may be the only person in his or her life that is trying to point them to God. Don't give up on them just because they've quit coming. Keep trying to build a relationship of trust and acceptance with them. You never know how the Holy Spirit will use your love and patience in a person's life.

What about the person whom you've contacted several times and who keeps telling you: "I'll be there Sunday." It's easy to get discouraged and think to yourself, "Yeah, right, I've hear that before!" Maybe what you need to do is to *stop inviting them to Sunday School*. That's right, stop inviting them to Sunday School! Now, this does not mean the same thing as forgetting about them. Rather it means to continue building relationships with them through other ways than just trying to get them to come to class. For example, ask them if they have any prayer requests. Share those requests with the class on Sunday, pray faithfully for the requests, and call the person back in a week or so to get an update. Notice, you're still making contact, but not trying to force them to come to Sunday School when they don't seem interested in coming.

Below is a four-week contact plan that works well on the chronic absentee, as well as with prospects:

Week One - Make a telephone call to contact for prayer requests.

Week Two - Write a postcard, letter, or email to let them know you are praying for them.

Week Three - Pray specifically for the person throughout this week.

Week Four - Make a quick front door visit dropping off a Sunday School book, magazine, or devotional guide. Placing a mailing label on the front of the book with their name on it elevates the importance of the visit.

Of course, birthday and anniversary cards are always a good way to help build relationships with inactive members, prospects, and members.

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES

Adult Sunday School classes contain all the leaders for the preschool, children, and the student Sunday School classes and departments. It is vital that adult class teachers see beyond their own class by recognizing the adults serving in other age-groups. Just because someone is not in an adult class doesn't mean they should be excluded from in-reach ministries.

For example, an adult class can adopt the teachers of a preschool department. Each week someone from the adult class should visit the preschool class and ask where they need help and what they need to be prayed about. These adults serving in preschool, children, and youth classes should be invited to their appropriate adult class fellowships, parties, and get-togethers. They should be included in receiving class announcements and prayer lists, and resources. These few simple ideas, plus others, will provide a ministry of encouragement to those serving outside of their adult Sunday School classes and help them to be more effective at reaching, teaching, and ministering to preschool, children, students, and their parents.



Chapter 5

[NEW GROUPS]

Bob Mayfield



NEW GROUPS

The book *Transformational Groups* shows the incredibly positive effect a small group has on the spiritual development of the individuals in the group. Research by the authors of the book compare people who attend a worship service only with people who attend a small group or Sunday School. The results are staggering. People that participate in a small group read the Bible 40% more often than people that attend worship only. Small group participants give 42% more money per person; confess sins 25% more often; and 21% more serve in the church.

Since a biblical small community has such a powerful impact on the spiritual lives of an individual, the question to be asked is: shouldn't the church do all it can to get more people into small groups? The obvious answer is yes!!

Churches are full of people that love Jesus and have sound theology. Church members want their church to fulfill the Great Commission and make disciples. What most churches lack however, is a plan. The default growth strategy many churches appear to have is to simply place new people into existing groups, many of which are already full. This default plan is similar to pouring water into an already full container. The church needs a strategy that engages men and women, boys and girls, in biblical small groups. What is needed is a passion to form new groups for new people.

WHY DO CHURCHES NEED NEW GROUPS?

Many people do not understand the reasons for launching new groups in order to involve more people in biblical community. Here are five reasons for starting new groups.

Social Circles. We are all human and we all have a social circle. When our social circle has openings we are more open to welcome new people into our circle. As our circle fills with friends we become less interested in adding people into our already full circle. As extensions of the people in the group, small groups also form social circles. The longer the small group stays together, the

tighter social fabric of the group becomes. Perhaps you have had the experience of being new and trying to break into a closely knit social circle. It is not an easy thing to do. This is the same experience a new person has when attending a small group that has met together for more than two years. A new group has a more open social circle and is easier for a new person to join.

Span of Care. One person can generally take care of about ten people. Jesus had 12 disciples. Most businesses ask their managers to oversee 6-10 employees. In the church setting, as more and more people are added to an individual group's enrollment, it becomes more difficult for the group leader to care for all of the people in his or her group. New groups help the church offer a better span of care for more effective personal ministry.

Participation. Smaller groups generally require more personal engagement than larger groups. As a general pattern, groups of all sizes talk, share, and pray for each other. However, a group of 35 people has stricter time limitations on how many people can discuss the Bible study; share prayer requests; and can pray aloud. If every person in a 12 person group speaks for 5 minutes, the total time is 60 minutes. That same 5 minutes for everyone in a group of 35 would be over 2 ½ hours in length!! Smaller groups provide a better environment for personal participation in the Bible study and other discipleship opportunities.

Evangelism. According to research by Ed Stetzer at LifeWay Research, a new group will engage three lost people with the Gospel in its first twelve months of existence. People that help form a new group are excited about their group and tend to invite their lost friends to their new group at a higher rate than church members that attend an existing group. Because of the personal nature of being involved in a group, new groups are usually the most effective way for the church to reach new people for Christ.

Leadership. By necessity, new groups expand the church's base of leaders. A new group requires expanding the church's leadership base. Involving new leaders helps the church deploy more people

and also involves the spiritual gifts of its new leaders. As a church engages more people in leadership, the church also expands its sphere of influence in the community.

More groups mean more disciples. The Great Commission that Jesus gave to His church is to make disciples. Beginning new groups increases the church's capacity to make disciples in greater numbers, therefore helping the local church fulfill the Great Commission.

Sunday School Director as a New Group Catalyst

As the Sunday School Director, you can be a powerful influence in making more disciples by teaching, training, and encouraging your leaders to make disciples through new groups. Below are some ideas for your consideration in starting new groups.

- Be a catalyst. No one else in the church is going to talk about beginning new groups. Accept this opportunity and bring energy to it.
- Take the long-term perspective. Many small group leaders do not understand why new groups are needed. Be patient, positive, and persistent.
- Discover the average per-group attendance of your church. Divide the average church attendance by the number of ongoing small groups (preschool through adult). This is the average attendance per group. For most churches, this number is going to be about 10 people per group.
- Set a goal. How many new people would you like to reach in average Bible study attendance this year. Divide that number by 10 (or your church's average group attendance above). That is the number of groups you will need to start this year.
- Involve your pastor. Pastoral involvement and support are vital if the church is going to develop a culture of beginning new groups.

A COACH'S GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

- Develop an expectation for new groups. Talk about new groups at every leadership meeting.
- Lead teachers and group leaders to have a positive mindset about new groups. Equip and train leaders about why new groups are needed. Remember that people are “down” on what they are not “up” on.
- Have a new group trigger point. Determine the optimum group size in your church and when a group reaches that size, immediately begin launching a new group.
- Develop a plan. A plan communicates to your group leaders and participants that you have thought this through. A plan also provides communication regarding expectations and involvement from your leaders.

A suggested plan to launch a new adult group from within an existing group (branch a new group).

1. Ask the teacher or small group leader to enlist and train an apprentice leader.
2. Meet with the leader and apprentice to select a launch date for the new group.
3. The leader and apprentice select people from the current group to enlist as core members of the new group (suggestion: select core members that attend 50% of group meetings or more).
4. Direct all new guests to the new group until it is healthy.

FIVE METHODS TO BEGIN A NEW GROUP

Form. One way to begin a new group that works very well with people under the age of 18 is to simply form a new group from an existing group. For example, if the church has one Bible study group for 1st – 6th grade children, simply form a 1st – 3rd grade group, and a 4th – 6th grade group. Children and youth that are under 18 years old generally respond well to this new group method.

Target. Observe the people that are attending a worship service. Is there a specific group of people attending worship that are not participating in a small group, such as single adults or empty nesters? Begin a new group especially for this particular area of your church. Another option is to look at who is not being reached for the Gospel in your community and begin a new group for them. Examples might be medical professionals, apartment complexes, or single parents.

Branch. Branching is an effective method to start a new adult group. Rather than split or divide an adult group, branching provides group members with the choice to either stay in their current group, or join the new group that is forming. This method requires the group leader to develop an apprentice who will eventually begin the new group. Group members can be enlisted to help begin the new group, or simply given the choice of which group to attend.

Connection Group. This style of starting a new group is focused on people that attend worship but do not participate in a group. A connection group is a short-term group that meets from three to six weeks and is led by the pastor or a church staff member. After six weeks, the group members have made friends and developed the habit of coming to group meetings. Then, the pastor hands the group to a new leader (usually from within the group) and it is rolled into an ongoing group. A connection group is designed to address the following three reasons why many people will not attend an existing group.

- a) They do not know the leader. Many people are afraid that the leader may embarrass them in the group, or ask them to read from Habakkuk and pronounce names that they do not know.
- b) They do not want to try breaking into an already existing social circle.
- c) They are afraid of a long-term commitment. Today's culture typically does not make long-term commitments.

A COACH'S GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

A connection group addresses these three concerns. First, the new connection group is led by the pastor or a church staff member. The pastor is often the most trusted and well-known person in the church. This addresses the issue of not knowing the group leader. Second, because the group is new, the social circles are open. Finally, because it begins as a six week group it is easier to join for people who do not like long term commitments.

Tips on beginning a connection group:

- Publicize the connection group three Sundays prior to the launch.
- Insert sign up cards in the church bulletin.
- Mail an invitation to all church members that have not attended any Sunday School or small group in six months.
- Enlist another adult group to provide the refreshments for the first meeting.
- Wear nametags.
- Use curriculum that a novice leader can easily lead.

The pastor should plan to only lead the group through its initial launch stage. Then the group should be given to a new leader, preferably one from within the group. This method allows the pastor the freedom to begin another new groups as often as possible.

New Groups Campaign. A campaign is similar to the connection group method, but instead church members are asked to begin the new groups, not just the pastor. A campaign focuses on starting as many groups as possible, with the hope that many people not involved in a group will continue on after the campaign ends in six to eight weeks. Because many of the group leaders are untrained, most campaigns use DVD curriculum to provide the biblical content and the group leader facilitates the discussion. As a goal,

many churches try to begin as many new groups in a campaign as they currently have in existing groups. For example, a church with 10 existing groups would try to start 10 more groups, for a total of 20 groups. If half of the new groups continue after the campaign, then the church would net five new groups.

New groups are vital to a healthy growing church. The pastor and the Sunday School director are the primary catalysts to develop a church that is consistently beginning new groups. Although the work can often seem slow at first, be persistent and as your leaders realize the new groups are important they will begin to support them, too.



Chapter 6
[PLANNING]
to win
Darryl Wilson



Imagine a coach who meets with his team on opening day of practice. He says, “Guys, we recruited you because you are the best. You know how to play. You have a good work ethic. You know how to win. Now, get out there and practice hard. I will see you in six weeks for our first game.”

What would happen during practices over those six weeks? In what kind of conditioning shape would players be at game time? How much would they improve in their individual skills and positions during that time? How prepared would they be to play together as a team? What would happen in that first game? Winning requires teamwork which in turn requires planning and practicing correctly together.

The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital.

- Joe Paterno

A good coach knows that a winning strategy is developed with a good understanding of those involved and of what must be accomplished to arrive at the preferred finish line. This will include annual and ongoing planning sessions. For that planning to come to fruition, ownership of the vision and plan must include every player. What planning steps are essential for success as a Sunday School team? Consider the following:

1. **PRAY.** Sunday School work is spiritual work. To attempt the work in our own strength is foolish. Direction, conviction, and power are needed from time spent with God in prayer. The coach will spend time on his knees and will lead Sunday School teachers and workers to join him in prayer for what God wants to do through Sunday School. Prayer times will be scheduled. They will be intentional and focused. They should infuse the organization at every level, in every age group. A special time of prayer annually and quarterly can be the reminder needed by every Sunday School leader. *Calendar this now.*
2. **GET TO KNOW THE TEAM.** Relationships take time

initially and perpetually. Sometimes we need help when the number of relationships is high. That may require focus upon a leadership team. Who are some of your team members?

- The pastor
- The Sunday School director, Sunday School secretary, and other general leaders
- Teachers, apprentice teachers, and others
- Class leaders such as secretary, outreach leaders, and others.

For the Sunday School coach, the pastor is a key relationship. Time must be spent in getting to know one another, sharing vision for Sunday School, and planning Sunday School work. This will require spending monthly time together. An hour will often produce amazing results. But the coach will also want to invest time in teachers and other members of the Sunday School team. Trust is best developed through time invested in team members at another time than game time (Sunday morning). Visit homes. Eat meals. Pray together. Do ministry together. Get to know one another. Listen. When needs are discovered, meet them. When resources are requested, provide them.

- 3. COMMUNICATE WITH THE TEAM.** Teamwork requires communication. Notice the word ***WITH***. Coaches observe, listen well, and communicate frequently. They share vision and high expectations. They affirm. But they also listen to individuals and to groups. They build ownership of the work by seeking input and working toward consensus plans. Sunday School coaches avoid surprises as often as possible. They establish and calendar regular meetings and plans and communicate them well in advance and in multiple formats. Those who miss meetings receive notes about what was discussed and the importance of their involvement in plans.

Understanding and relationships are pursued. Conflict, when it occurs, is resolved.

4. **HAVE AN ANNUAL TEAM RETREAT.** Effective planning takes time. For ownership of plans, all team members should be present (or as many as possible). Make sure you allow enough time (the agenda below could take from 3-6 hours). Share the agenda in advance. Meet away from church, where possible, to avoid interruptions. Make assignments. Provide food/snacks and childcare. Budget for expenses related to the retreat. Gather resources: Sunday School statistics, goal progress, calendars, budget, class rolls, prospect lists, organizational chart, and whatever else you may need. Then include the following in your retreat.

- a. ***Prepare spiritually*** (20-30 minutes). Prepare a time of private prayer and Bible study (perhaps facilitated by the pastor) for looking at scripture and listening to what God has to say about the tasks of Sunday School.
- b. ***Evaluate progress*** (30-60 minutes). Evaluate how you did at carrying out last year's goals and plans. Evaluate growth, Sunday School and class organization, age group balance, outreach efforts, ministry and fellowship plans, assimilation/first impressions, training, and all aspects of the work during the last year.
- c. ***Envision the goal*** (30-60 minutes). This is critical for forward movement. How can Sunday School help the church to have the most Great Commission impact in the community, region, and world? Where does God desire Sunday School to be in a year? What is the motivating picture toward which Sunday School needs to work this year? What are your dreams for where Sunday School can be in a year? What would it look like if you were

overwhelmingly successful in carrying out your Great Commission work through the Sunday School? Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan. - *Tom Landry*

- d. *Identify needs and priorities*** (30-60 minutes). Sunday School is ineffective when it attempts to do too many things at the same time. Instead, begin by identifying the top half dozen needs on which Sunday School must focus this year. Then prioritize that list. Which is the most important one? Which is the second? Is there one on the list that must be accomplished before others on the list? When you have numbered them, then make sure you focus goals and planning efforts on the first one first. Realize that you may not get past the top three before you need another planning meeting to evaluate the list to see if there are new needs and priorities.
- e. *Set goals/make plans and assignments*** (30-60 minutes). Set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable (with God's help), realistic, and timely (deadlines). An example could be, "We will start a young adult (ages 18-30) Sunday School class by April." Then write out the plans/actions that are needed to accomplish that goal. For our example goal, those plans might include: (1) enlist a leadership team for the young adult class, (2) train the team, (3) decide on where/when to meet, (4) invite the church to pray for and invite young adults to the class, (5) introduce the leadership team in worship, (6) send out invitations to all young adult Sunday School and worship prospects, etc. Then you will need to make assignments and set deadlines for each of plans.

- f. **Calendar progress checkups** (30 minutes).* To carry out your work, coaches will want to gather their Sunday School leadership team together for regular times of planning. These monthly meetings will include the following: prayer, training (brief), vision check, evaluation and progress reports, celebrations, adjustments of plans, preparation, and announcements. These meetings will be added to the church calendar along with dates for prayer, promotions, training, budgeting, outreach events, and other plans.
 - g. **Team-building** (30-60 minutes).* As a coach, you understand the importance of working together. Your team can accomplish much more when they know and trust each other. That is why time is well-spent during a retreat for getting to know one another and building a sense of team. Get everyone involved. If the group is large, divide into age groups. End with your team-building exercise with debriefing and a time of prayer in pairs.
 - h. **Training** (30 minutes).* Since you have your Sunday School team together, include some training. Where do you anticipate a stretch in the coming year which needs reinforcement? Where does teamwork need to be improved? Focus your training in one or at most two areas. Be practical. Be hands-on. Be clear. Be brief. Get them to practice—that will produce best results.
- 5. RAISE TEAM SKILLS.** Training is essential for improving effectiveness and teamwork. In order for your Sunday School team to win this year, where is training needed? Regular doses of training should be sprinkled throughout the year in monthly team meetings, annual planning, articles, and more. There should also be special training events planned during

the year. These can be for the whole Sunday School team, for age group teams, and for task teams (like outreach leaders), and for new team members (like new teachers). Regularly assess training needs. Ask questions. Listen. Observe. Address needs but balance topics. Make sure Sunday School essentials get regular reinforcement. Balance training between teaching, reaching, and caring. Focus on organization, enrollment, and fellowship. Some training ideas/plans will naturally flow out of the annual retreat.

- 6. PROVIDE RESOURCES TO WIN.** As the coach, it is your job to go to bat for your team. Meet with appropriate church leaders to ensure your Sunday School team has everything it needs. Provide space. Be proactive and plan ahead. Make sure the space is well cared for, furnished, and properly equipped. Provide resources, supplies, and curriculum. Plan a budget that will help the team carry out the annual Sunday School plan.
- 7. RECRUIT TO WIN.** A coach cannot win alone. It takes a team. Work together with the church nominating team to ensure pursuit of God-called Sunday School teachers and workers. Spend time praying for those God wants to serve. Observe the lives of those he lays on your heart. Spend time with potential leaders in life and ministry activities. Debrief those experiences. Then invite those God has pointed you toward to join the Sunday School leadership team. Do this face-to-face. Paint a vision of the importance of the role. Give individuals a few days to pray. Then follow up. Provide training and coaching to help them achieve even more for God.

Your job as a coach is important. Planning helps your team achieve even more as you work together. Planning done well results in ownership of goals and enthusiastic pursuit of plans. Sit down now to make plans to lead your team to win! *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm*

you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

PRACTICE SESSION

- Pray. Pray. Pray
- Conduct Annual planning
- Conduct monthly, if not weekly leadership meetings



Chapter 7
[DISCOVERING]
and enlisting workers
Wayne Ehleridge



“The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” According to this proverb, what other people have or their situation is viewed as better or more desirable than our own.

This principle appears in churches too—we look at another church (often a larger one), see what they have (more people, property, buildings, money, so forth), and think such thoughts as, “If only we had that many people, we would never have to struggle finding and enlisting workers.”

Many (if not most) times, this is only a perception, not reality—the other people have difficulties, obstacles, or challenges we may not know about, recognize, or understand.

Recently I was in a church that in their Sunday worship bulletin included a large card with the numbers 3-3-2 printed vertically on one side and the following statement on the other: “Any given Sunday it takes 332 ministry volunteers on campus.” The remainder of the card listed those positions by category—over 80% (270) were for preschool, children, middle school, and high school. This card encouraged people to “Join the 332 Team.”

Since the typical (median) Southern Baptist church has less than 60 people total attending Sunday School each Sunday, likely you do not need to enlist 270. **However, every church, every Sunday School—regardless of size, location, age—must enlist people for leadership.** Every team must have players enlisted, equipped, and engaged in the game in order to accomplish the team’s purpose and achieve its goals.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

You are the God-called, church elected ministry leader of the Sunday School. Get your heart, head, and hands around that fact firmly before going any further.

You will lead best if you enlist a Sunday School Planning Team to serve with you. Refer to that content in a previous chapter. As the Sunday School “coaching staff,” this leadership team works

together in the critical matter of discovering and enlisting workers and all that goes into that process as shared in this chapter.

With that in mind, let's use a pro football draft process as an analogy to illustrate key aspects of your work in discovering and enlisting Sunday School workers.

The draft itself is not an isolated event—it is the culmination of a year-round process involving scouts, coaches, and front office personnel. Many hours are spent studying, interviewing, evaluating, and discussing before the 3 days of actual selection take place. A successful draft—or lack of it—can and does have a significant impact on a team for years, and it does not happen by accident, coincidence, or luck

So how do you apply this to your role as Sunday School director? Discovering and enlisting workers is so much more than simply filling slots on a roster—it is a spiritual process by which we seek God's guidance to invite people to be engaged in a life-changing ministry, nothing less. Therefore, doing it well and doing it right are vital.

Below are 4 key actions to take before beginning the actual enlistment process, and taking the time to do these on the front end will make the experience more meaningful for everyone.

1. Know what you are looking for before you start looking

Your church likely has some leadership standards or requirements identified in its constitution and bylaws. A typical example is that a person must be a member of the church and have been for a minimum amount of time (often 6 months-1 year).

Essential qualifications that most churches include are

- Christian
- Baptized as a believer
- Church member of that congregation

- Called by God to serve and to serve in that age group
- Relates well with others
- Growing as a believer through prayer and Bible study
- Willing to train to improve as a leader

As you develop your own list, remember that you are enlisting people for a life-changing ministry—Serving the Lord through the Sunday School IS a big deal. Having low expectations or taking shortcuts on worker qualifications virtually assures problems in the future.

Every pro football team has a playbook and each player on the team has specific responsibilities on each play. Some teams provide their playbooks on tablet computers for ease of use by the players. If your church does not have any written Sunday School worker job descriptions, then work with your Sunday School Planning Team to develop them. This process allows all age groups to be directly involved in defining of each position and elevates the responsibilities and roles of the leader. Prospective workers need to know what is expected of them and what responsibilities are involved as they pray and decide about service.

2. Know what you need and where you need them

Pro football teams must decide what kinds of predominant offensive and defensive schemes they intend to run in order to know what types of players need to be drafted. Certain schemes require more players at one position or another.

Similarly in Sunday School, the organization needs to be planned before workers are enlisted. As Sunday School director, you need to know how many total workers are needed AND how many in each age group (preschool, children, youth, adults). Planning the organization should be an integral part of the annual planning done by your Sunday School Planning Team.

Example: your current Sunday School organization is comprised of 2 Preschool classes, 2 Children's classes, 1 Youth class, and 2 Adult classes. In annual planning, the team sees the need for 1 more Youth class and perhaps 1 more Adult class. Now you know not only how many total workers are needed but that additional Youth and Adult workers will be needed beyond those presently serving.

3. Know who else is in the room and communicate well

On draft days, a variety of persons are in the “war room” of each pro football team and other people may be available via phone or computer links.

Many churches use a Nominating Committee (or similar group) to recommend to the church all workers for various church ministries for the next year. If this is true in your church, you will want to work with them in the enlistment of Sunday School workers.

The key principle is that workers need to be enlisted by the person to whom they are accountable for their service. Why?

- The spiritual and ministry relationship is established in the enlistment process as you pray and share together.
- You have the most in-depth knowledge of the work to be done, the Sunday School goals, how that person's gifts and abilities will help accomplish them (why they are needed on the team).
- You are in the best position to answer any questions, issues, the prospective worker may have.

The Nominating Committee's assigned task is to recommend people for leadership roles. You are doing the “leg work” for them in relation to the Sunday School portion of their task.

4. Know when the completion date is

Pro football teams know when draft days will be held—the exact dates may change from time to time, but no team gets caught by surprise.

Every church has a date for when the new church year begins. Obviously all workers need to be enlisted and approved by that date. If your church has a Nominating Committee that presents all workers for all church ministries for church approval in a single business meeting, then you work backwards from that business meeting date to know when the Sunday School workers portion of all church workers must be completed.

Example: the new church year begins on the first Sunday of September and the church has a business meeting on the first Sunday evening of August. In that scenario, all Sunday School workers should be enlisted and names given to the Nominating Committee no later than July 15 so that the list can be prepared and ready for distribution at the business meeting.

DOING THE WORK OF DISCOVERING AND ENLISTING WORKERS

Coaches develop a game plan for their team when facing an opponent—that game plan is the coach’s strategy for calling what plays at what time in what situation.

In order to accomplish the aspect of your work addressed in this chapter most effectively, you need:

- A strategy for discovering workers
- A strategy for enlisting workers
- A strategy for retaining workers

Do not get overwhelmed by the word “strategy.” It simply means having a plan and a process for carrying out a task.

A STRATEGY FOR DISCOVERING WORKERS

Matthew 9:35-38 shows us Jesus’ heart for people and for engaging His disciples in a life-changing ministry to people. He called people to follow Him, learn from Him, then go out to share His message and continue His mission.

One approach to discovering workers used quite often in churches is for the Nominating Committee to go through the church membership roll and identify potential workers, compile a list of those, and then seek to enlist them directly or, better yet, provide the list to various ministry leaders in the church (such as the Sunday School director) for them to enlist the needed workers and share the names with the Nominating Committee to recommend to the church.

This process can be effective. However, too many times the result is that familiar and/or popular persons are sought, and lesser known individuals are omitted, not considered, or ignored. That results in a bad outcome for the church and for the workers. New people are not involved and therefore do not grow as disciples nearly as much; the church loses new energy, spirit, and opportunities to reach and teach more people; current workers are recycled and may be asked to take on additional tasks.

As Sunday School director, you and the “coaching staff” (Sunday School Planning Team) will want to develop an ongoing (year-round) strategy for discovering workers rather than limiting this to only 1-2 months. Here are 4 practical steps for the strategy:

1. Go where the people are first

Remember one simple truth—all Sunday School workers, regardless of where they serve, are adults. And your point is...? Therefore the Adult Sunday School classes are the places to start.

Daniel Edmonds, State Sunday School and Discipleship Director for the Alabama State Board of Missions, has profoundly and correctly said, “The measure of success in a Sunday School class is not how many people show up but how many grow up and go out to serve.”

Talk with Adult teachers (and other class leaders) about potential workers in their classes. Discuss such questions as “What spiritual gifts, ministry passions, and abilities do they see in people in the class?” “Who are people who have volunteered or agreed to serve in a class project?”

Begin to compile a list of potential workers by classes.

2. Observe people yourself and encourage the Sunday School Planning Team to do the same.

Jesus saw fishermen going about their business and called 2 sets of brothers to follow Him (Matthew 4:18-22). Jesus observed Matthew handling his responsibilities as a tax collector and called him as well (Matthew 9:9). Jesus called them as they were and for what they could become in and through Him.

Do not just look at or for the people currently serving. Seek to expand the leadership base of the Sunday School. Look for people who are not serving presently.

Look also at new people who have joined the church over the last 6 months-1 year.

Look for ways to move people into simple, informal ministry roles to help assimilate them into the life and mission of the church. Ask new members if they have served previously and if so, where and in what type of ministry. When people are involved, they are more committed because they have a “stake” in the work.

Here are 2 key initial questions to ask in regards to a potential worker:

- Could this person serve if he or she was willing?
- Would this person be acceptable to the church?

3. Intentionally use Vacation Bible School to find potential workers

VBS is one of the very best places and opportunities any church has to find new Sunday School workers. Several reasons explain why this is true:

- VBS offers a wide variety of ways to be involved as a leader so most anyone can find a place to serve.

- The planning that leaders need to do helps people develop relationships with other church members and to develop teamwork.
- Participating in the associational VBS training (and any training conducted by the church) helps sharpen knowledge, skills, and builds confidence for doing their ministry task.
- The real-world experience of actually serving in VBS helps workers grow spiritually as they see lives touched and changed through a church ministry.

Work with the VBS director to identify last year's VBS workers who are potential Sunday School workers AND to set a goal to purposely enlist at least 3-5 new people to serve in the next VBS.

4. Move to having an apprentice

An apprentice who learned from a master, a veteran, an experienced craftsman is a model, a process that has been followed in many fields throughout history, even to this present time. Some professions even require on-the-job training as part of the certification process.

In the Old and New Testaments, we see examples of a God-called leader enlisting and equipping a successor, and part of that experience included the successor serving as an apprentice who learned through participating in the work.

Some notable ones are:

- Moses and Joshua
- Eli and Samuel
- Elijah and Elisha
- Jesus and the disciples
- Paul and Timothy

- Timothy and faithful men who can teach others

An apprentice is much more than a standing substitute, assistant teacher, or associate—an apprentice is not the backup quarterback who only comes in during a crisis or when the score is such that the outcome is assured.

An apprentice is a leader-in-training, who prays, plans, prepares, and regularly participates in actually doing with the intention of leading a class in the future. This is the biblical means of having workers available and ready as the need arises.

Work with the Sunday School Planning Team to guide the Sunday School from having a substitute/assistant focus to the apprentice. Here is the question for each current Sunday School worker: “Who are you raising up as a new worker?”

A STRATEGY FOR ENLISTING WORKERS

Much of the time, we enlist our problems—just not deliberately or purposefully. We do this by what we say to a prospective worker during enlistment, by what we don’t say, or how we actually handle the process.

Examples:

- “The job isn’t that demanding; it doesn’t require much time.”
- “Yes, we really do want you to make contacts with the members and guest periodically. Forgot to mention that when we talked before”
- “I just thought you understood that all the workers were expected to go to training. It really is important.”
- “I know you are in a hurry but if you would just agree to do this, it would really help. Here’s the teacher’s book”
- “Thank you for taking this. We had already talked to several other people and were really getting worried we couldn’t fill

the position.”

Then we wonder why we have ineffective workers, discouraged workers, confused workers, or short-term workers. Honestly, it is no wonder at all!

HOW we enlist workers sends a powerful message. The following 5 actions will provide a healthy strategy to enlist workers so that most problems are prevented rather than having to be fixed later:

1. Prayer

Prayer by everyone involved in worker enlistment (Nominating Committee, Sunday School director, Planning Team, so forth)

Begin the process in prayer; pray throughout the process; pray for those who accept and for those who do not—this is God’s work so be sure He is directly involved through prayer.

Once you have sought and received God’s leadership about a particular person for a position, then proceed to the next step.

2. Personal visit

Text messaging, email, and social media can be very helpful ways to communicate with family and friends, but they are very poor ways to enlist workers. Church hallways, parking lots, or sporting /recreational events are not desirable either. Talk by phone or face-to-face to make an appointment (phone call also works), then in-person about the ministry position.

3. Presentation

- Be prepared. Do not rush or prolong the conversation. Be sure to listen and answer questions. Share why they were selected, how they can make a difference, what the responsibility includes, the expectations, and the names of others with whom they would be working.

4. Prayer

Do not ask for or press for an immediate response. Remember, that you are approaching this person after a time of prayer and thought, so they need to do the same.

Pray for the person that God would show His will and give clear guidance to the prospective worker. Pray with the person before you leave—this is not spiritual manipulation, rather a genuine petition for God to reveal His direction.

5. Plan a follow-up contact

Generally, one week is sufficient time to give a prospective worker to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider a ministry position. Phone call or in-person is best. If the person declines, you can clarify the reason(s) if necessary. If the person has further questions or concern, you can respond quickly and directly.

If the person accepts, thank the individual. If the person declines, thank the individual for prayerfully and thoughtfully considering the position. In either situation, share the results with the Nominating Committee so that group can continue to serve as a clearinghouse for prospective workers.

6. Background Checks

Conduct background checks for workers with preschoolers, children, and youth (persons under 18 years old)—your state convention can provide you with appropriate information for obtaining this information. Each state has its own laws and reporting requirements.

This action is vital for everyone—the kids themselves, their parents and family, the workers, and the church.

A STRATEGY FOR RETAINING WORKERS

Coaches know that filling the roster with good players is not enough—you also have to keep the players you select. Many factors go into keeping players long term, and teams are not always able to do so for a variety of reasons.

Two key factors in retaining the best players are compensation and communication. When players are paid well, and there is open, honest communication among coaches, players, and others in the organization, it is much easier to keep the best people and build a winning team.

The same 2 factors are just as true regarding Sunday School workers:

Compensation

Since Sunday School workers are volunteers and not salaried employees like pro football players, the type of compensation will not be identical obviously.

However, seeing lives changed for the Lord and serving because He called us to serve are far greater “compensations” than money.

Two key ways you can “compensate” Sunday School workers is through recognition and appreciation. Below are some practical ways to do so.

Appreciating Sunday School Workers

1. Sunday School Leadership Banquet—annual
2. Birthday card
3. Age group Recognition Sundays—Preschool, Children, Youth, Adults (one each Sunday in the first month of the new church year)
4. Christmas—an ornament for Christmas tree

5. Valentine's—coffee mug with candy and note
6. Summer—coupon for ice cream treat
7. Certificate of Appreciation (could distribute at leadership banquet)
8. Cards, notes, emails not related to a particular occasion or season
9. Imaginative expressions of appreciation include:
 - Lifesaver® candy with a note “You’re a LIFESAVER in our Sunday School.”
 - A box of animal crackers and a note “We know some days are a zoo in _____ Sunday School. Thank you for serving.” (age group)
 - A rubber band with a note “Thanks for stretching yourself to serve in Sunday School.”
 - Play money with a note indicating “No amount of money could pay for your influence with _____ in Sunday School.” (age group)
10. Other ways to express appreciation (check about allergies):
 - Gift certificate for DVD rental
 - Handmade item(s) from children
 - Movie theater pass
 - Baked goods
 - Potted plant or flowers
 - Pieces of fruit or small fruit basket
 - Devotional book or Bible commentary
 - Card signed by all class members

Communication and Support

If the only time workers hear from us is when it is time to sign the next year's "contract," they get several messages, none of them good:

"I am not really concerned about the job you are doing just as long as you agree to keep doing it."

"The job isn't that important."

"Your contribution to the kingdom is not valued."

The workers respond with such things as:

"If they don't care about how I am doing, why should I?"

"Since this job isn't that important, I don't need to keep preparing so hard."

"Why do I need to participate in training? What's the big deal?"

"Do you still want me to serve? I never hear from anybody."

End result—everyone loses, especially the students in the classes, family members, the community because people are not reached, the church, and most importantly, the kingdom of God.

Three actions in a strategy to retain workers are:

1. Several actions listed previously under Appreciating Sunday School Workers work well for providing ongoing communication.
 2. As Sunday School director, ask every Sunday School teacher three things at least once or twice during the year (Planning Team members need to do this with their age group workers).
- How is your ministry with (age group) going?
 - Do you have everything you need?

- How can I pray more specifically for you?

3. Establish “Our Class Missionaries” in each Adult class

Remember the simple truth that all Sunday School workers are adults and come out of Adult classes. Sometimes prospective workers are reluctant to leave their class because they are afraid of losing relationships or being forgotten. Sometimes current workers want to return to their Adult class because they miss the connection with their friends.

“Our Class Missionaries” addresses both of those situations and more. This simple plan encourages people to consider serving outside the class because they know they will be supported and cared for when they take a ministry position, thereby helping to discover more workers.

Here is the plan:

OUR CLASS MISSIONARIES

Target:

Each Adult Sunday School class

Preparation:

Each Adult Sunday School class prepares, displays, and uses a poster that contains the following visuals and information:

1. a picture of each person in that class who is serving in Sunday School outside the respective class;
2. each person’s name, age group in which he/she is serving, and leadership responsibility (for example, John Smith, Grades 1-3, teacher) written below the picture

Implementation:

1. **Prayer Support**—Each week at the beginning of the Bible study, prayer is offered for each person whose picture is displayed and for that person's Sunday School ministry.
2. **Relational Support**—All class missionaries are assigned to a care group; When the class has fellowship activities, all class missionaries are included as honored participants.
3. **Ministry Support**—When class missionaries have a need related to their ministry (such as for a substitute while they are away), they contact their adult class for that kind of support.
4. **Commission them and send them out**—on the Sunday before they begin serving in their leadership role, the class needs to gather around them and pray specifically for them by name and the fruitfulness of their ministry.

The discovery, enlistment, and retaining of Sunday School workers is one of the most exciting and yet challenging aspects of serving as Sunday School director. Do it well under God's leadership and lives will be changed for Christ as people grow in the Lord and serve Him faithfully.

Chapter 8
[GETTING]
started

Tim Smith



Being a Sunday School director is a lot of work. Just like any coach, there are many expectations and tons of pressure. As you look at your situation you might be asking yourself, “Where do I start?” Every church is different and there is no mass produced program that will work in all of today’s churches but remember the key to developing a winning Sunday School is to improve day by day. By taking small steps every day you will see progress. Consider this quote:

“It’s all about self-improvement, about being better than you were the day before.” - Steve Young, former NFL quarterback and Pro Football Hall of Famer

Steve Young didn’t become a great quarterback overnight. It took time. Slow, but steady improvement. He became a world champion and a hall of famer by just trying to become better than he was yesterday.

Time Out:

Can you name two or three activities you will lead your team to accomplish in the next two or three months to move your Sunday School in this process of improvement? Write them here:

Looks like the beginning of a game plan. As you work to complete your game, here are some other aspects of the game you need to consider:

COACHING ASSIGNMENTS

Spend Time with God Every Day

Read the Bible!

Pray for...

Your Teachers and Workers
God's Guidance, Wisdom and Vision
New Workers

Listen and obey what God says and shows you!

Invest Time with your Pastor and/or Minister of Education.

Pray for him every day.
Meet with him every week.
Get to know his vision for the church.
Share your vision with him.
Seek and share ideas.
Become good friends!

Give Time with the Sunday School Planning Team

Meet with them monthly.
Have an agenda.
Coordinate the efforts of all age groups.
Conduct annual goal setting retreat.
Set goals for
Enrollment, Attendance, Classes, Space, Leaders, Training,
Contacts, Prospects, Outreach and Baptisms

Make Time for the Sunday School Leadership Team (all teachers/leaders)

Walk through all hallways on Sundays.
Keep classes accountable to start and end on time.
Meet with them at least quarterly.
Appreciate them both publicly and privately.
Pray for them by name at least monthly.
Encourage all to enlist an apprentice.

COACHING ON SUNDAY

Arrive 30 minutes early.

Greet everyone as they arrive to Sunday School.

Make sure classes are staffed.

Periodically observe teachers/classes.

Elevate Sunday School during the worship service.

Communicate necessary information.

Keep everyone focused on being teams of people on mission with God.

Make sure all are doing their jobs and are in position.

COACHING DURING THE WEEK

Know and communicate the mission of Sunday School.

Focus on spiritual and numerical growth.

Training of self and others.

Discovering, enlisting and training new leaders.

Starting new classes.

Understand the needs of all age groups (preschool, children, youth, singles, young adults, median adults, and senior adults)

SUGGESTED YEARLY GAME STRATEGY

AUGUST

- Make sure all Sunday School Directors, Teachers and Leaders have been properly enlisted.
- Plan or attend a Training Event for your Sunday School Directors, Teachers and Leaders.
- Plan to start one or more new classes.
- Plan for the new-year by having a planning session with your Sunday School Planning Team.

SEPTEMBER

- Conduct a Kick-off event for the new Sunday School year.
- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team meeting.
- Start new classes.

A COACH'S GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

OCTOBER

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team meeting.
- Plan an outreach activity or promotion.
- Consider a high attendance day.
- Order Literature for the Winter quarter.

NOVEMBER

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Encourage classes to conduct a holiday outreach ministry project.

DECEMBER

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team Meeting.
- Plan to start a new class after the holidays.

JANUARY

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team Meeting.
- Conduct Sunday School promotion to get your Sunday School back on track after the holidays.
- Start new classes.
- Begin preparing for Vacation Bible School.
- Order literature for the Spring Quarter.

FEBRUARY

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team Meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School teacher appreciation event.
- Conduct a “spring training” event.

MARCH

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team Meeting.
- Begin the process for enlisting new Sunday School Leadership team for coming new year.
- Conduct a potential director/teacher/leader search and consider a training event for them.

APRIL

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team Meeting.
- Consider a high attendance day.
- Order literature for the Summer quarter.

MAY

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct a Sunday School Leadership Team Meeting.
- Plan summer attendance campaign to keep a focus on attendance.

JUNE

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Conduct Vacation Bible School.

JULY

- Conduct a Sunday School Planning Team meeting.
- Order literature for the Fall Quarter.

Chapter 9
[COACHING]
teachers

David Bond



On a visit to an eye doctor, patients are sometimes asked to look at a chart posted on a wall some distance away. The chart contains rows of letters that are very large on top and increasing smaller as the rows move closer to the bottom. A patient's ability to focus on the eye chart tells the doctor something about the strength and clarity of his or her vision.

Enter any Sunday School class, in any church, in any part of the country and one thing is likely to happen in every gathering. At some point, someone is going to attempt to teach the group. Teaching is so central to the Sunday School experience that coaching leaders to teach good lessons is critical.

In coaching Sunday School teachers, the following "I-Chart" can serve as a guideline for developing lessons that are clear and focused for those who will lead and participate in them.

INSIGHT

Allan Taylor, Director of Sunday School, Lifeway Christian Resources and former Minister of Education at FBC Woodstock, GA, has said that a leader should not speak of teaching the Bible in Sunday School. His reasoning is that "you can't teach the Bible anything". In reality, leaders must understand that we are instead teaching *people* the Bible. The difference in this approach is of vital importance.

In order to teach people the eternal truths of God's word, leaders must have **insight** into the people whom they are attempting to teach. Who are the people in attendance each week? What are their concerns? What questions will they likely have concerning the truths found in this passage of Scripture? What life experiences are happening among people in this group? What contemporary issues present in the world might be on the minds of the people here? These questions and others will give the leader valuable insight that will help the teaching connect in a powerful way.

Insight in to lives of learners can be obtained through the following ideas:

1) Create Time for Ministry Needs to Be Made Known

Most classes likely have a time for prayer needs to be made known. This can be a valuable resource for insight into the lives of individual learners. Even better, consider assigning learners into smaller care groups and provide opportunities for each group to share with and pray for one another. The teacher can compile information from each care group so that especially urgent needs can be addressed.

2) Identify a Target Group that Will Be the Focus of Your Class

Many classes are made up of adults of all age ranges, life stages, and family structures. More effective insight can be obtained when groups are especially focused on a narrower “people group”. For example, a leader of a class for married couples with children can become an expert on how the Scripture speaks specifically to issues related to this group. Leaders of classes in which there is no such focus will be forced to be much more general in how they relate truth to the group.

3) Spend Time Among Your Target Group of People

With a target group identified, the leader can choose to spend some time at places where the people of and prospects for the class will likely gather. Observing the people group in settings outside of Sunday School will yield tremendous insight into behaviors, popular activities, habits, patterns, and priorities.

4) Become a Student of the Culture that Surrounds Your People

One key way to develop insight into your people is to simply pay attention. Popular movies, music, television, and other events all affect the people in your class. Read news items and opinion pieces, including those who are not in line with your personal views. Even casual conversations can yield valuable nuggets that will inform your teaching preparation.

5) *Use Social Media*

Finally, the rise of social media is a gift to those who seek to gain insight in the people in your class. Following posts and interactions on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram will yield amazing insight into the lives of your students. Information that they freely share and likely more than you care to know!

Effectively teaching people the Bible begins with knowing the people who will gather in your class each week.

INTEREST

The second line on the “I-Chart” is about creating **Interest** in the lesson that you desire to teach. Researchers in adult learning have found that adults are motivated to learn something if they believe it will help their lives in some way. For example, a man who wants to save money on an auto repair will consult a manual or watch a video on how to do the job himself. A woman might enroll in a community college course because she believes the education will qualify her for a promotion and a raise at work. When adults are convinced that what they are about to learn has a tangible benefit for their lives, their motivation to learn increases dramatically.

In Sunday School, the temptation for many leaders is to dive directly into the “what” of the lesson; Instead, teachers of adult learners should spend time at the beginning of the teaching time to demonstrate the “why” . . . why will what we are about to talk about change the life of an adult learner?

In their book, *Creative Bible Teaching*, Lawrence Richards and Gary Bredfeldt call the beginning of the lesson plan the “Hook”. This crucial moment is necessary to draw the learner out of their private thoughts and concerns and be motivated to focus for the next half an hour on a truth that will make a difference. How will you “hook” your learners into participating in the lesson?

1. ***Share a Story*** – Draw from personal experience or from a recent news account of a person whose life dealt with the truth from the lesson. The more “localized” the story is to the class, the more powerful it will be.
2. ***Intrigue the Mind*** – Interest can also be generated by sharing the results of a survey or a research study. Ask a difficult question. Present two sides of a debate or contemporary issue. Pose a hypothetical situation. Anything that peaks the curiosity of the learner will engage them in the lesson to follow.
3. ***Use an Activity*** – Have the group come up with list related to the topic at hand; divide into smaller groups and look up passages of Scripture to identify recurring words or phrases; begin a group brainstorming session; have someone read an anecdotal situation and engage in a brief time of “what would you do”.

Try to vary the type of “hook” from week to week. In doing so, leaders will provide opportunities for a variety of learners to connect. Ideas for creating interest are a great way to promote collaboration among teachers in the Sunday School ministry.

INFORMATION

Information has gotten a bit of a bad reputation when it comes to teaching in Sunday School. One oft-repeated admonition to Sunday School leaders is that we teach for transformation, not information. While it is correct that we don't teach *for* information, we don't teach *without* information either! In his *Discipler's Model*, Dr. William Yount notes that life transformation happens when the “correctly handled” truth of God's word intersects the lives of learners at the point of their need. Making sure that the Bible is related accurately to the learners is essential to effective teaching.

The wide variety of good curriculum choices and teacher helps make accurate information readily available to every Sunday School leader. Pastors and Sunday School Directors can alleviate a great deal of concern over accuracy by choosing a curriculum that

offers a clear plan for teaching the whole Bible as well supporting materials for each leader.

In the absence of such a printed curriculum, Dave Veerman created a helpful outline for teachers to follow when preparing lessons from Scripture. The complete outline can be found in Veerman's book, *How to Apply the Bible*. When considering a passage of Scripture, each of these elements contributes to our ability to rightly understand its truth:

1. **People** – Who are the people in or addressed in this passage of Scripture?
2. **Place** – What is the original historical and cultural context of this passage?
3. **Plot** – What is going on here among people or between God and people?
4. **Point** – What was the application to the original audience?
5. **Principles** – What transferrable principles are embedded in this passage for all people in all times?

Getting people to sit still while the teacher spouts information is never the goal of a Sunday School teaching time. But, because accurate information (truth) is the fuel for life transformation, teachers will want to represent the Word of God with great care.

INVOLVEMENT

The fourth element in the “I-Chart” is involvement. In his classic book *Teaching to Change Lives*, master teacher Howard Hendricks shared his Law of Activity which states: Maximum Learning is always the result of Maximum Involvement. One of the key components of preparation for the Sunday School teacher should be directed toward how to involve learners in the teaching time.

A COACH'S GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

Ways to involve learners are almost endless. Regardless of how you choose to involve learners, some basic principles and tips may be helpful:

1. Commit to the idea that involving learners is not optional. Making planning for learner involvement a regular part of your teaching preparation each week.
2. Choose involvement methods that relate directly to the point of the lesson.
3. Use a wide variety of methods so as to appeal to the greatest part of your group over a period of time.
4. Do not be discouraged by a slow start to class participation, especially if the learners have been used to an environment that has been predominantly lecture driven.
5. Collaborate with other teachers on ideas for learning activities.
6. Don't be afraid to give simple assignments for learners to complete during the week. These assignments can provide a "built-in" way of creating interest and promoting involvement from week to week.
7. Use learner involvement as a spontaneous teaching tool. For example, if someone poses a question in the group, the leader should not feel as though he or she has to provide an answer. Put the question back to the group and have them consult the Scripture for insight.
8. Be flexible in your preparation. Remember that learner involvement may come during any part of the lesson plan: Creating Insight, Sharing Information, or Making Application (Internalizing).
9. Keep learner involvement constantly moving toward the ultimate teaching aim of the passage—avoid rabbit chasing!
10. Take time to craft good, open-ended questions that initiate and sustain good discussion.

Effectively involving learners in the teaching will greatly increase their attention to and retention of the truth.

INTERNALIZE

Finally, teachers should seek to help learners apply the truth to their own lives. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include Jesus' parable of the seed and the soil. The seed that finds root in good soil is the seed that springs forth, grows, and bears fruit. Likewise, when the word is "implanted" (James 1:21), learners experience spiritual growth and fruit.

A key aspect of adult learning is the inescapable presence of life experiences. Adults evaluate truth through the lens of their own experiences. For accurate application to be made, leaders should guide adult learners to interpret their life experiences on the basis of God's truth and not the other way around. God's truth is not interpreted, confirmed, or debunked by our life experiences. The word of God is our authority – absolute and eternal. However, leaders can demonstrate love, compassion, and grace as they help learners align their lives to truth in response to the conviction and counsel of the Holy Spirit. Application and sanctification (becoming more and more like Jesus) is the lifelong journey of every believer.

Internalizing God's word means being willing to ask the right questions. An infamous common question heard in many class is "what does this passage of Scripture mean to you". This is a dangerous question! This question allows us to manipulate meaning according to our experience. Believing in the authority of God's word causes us to instead ask "what does this passage of Scripture mean for me". In light of God's truth, how should I respond?

From *How to Apply the Bible*, Dave Veerman again offers these steps:

1. **Present** – What do the principles of truth found in this passage mean for today?

2. ***Parallels*** – What do the principles found in this passage of Scripture say about my own personal life? My home? My work? My actions?
3. ***Priorities*** – What immediate adjustments does this truth require? How does this truth affect my values, beliefs, attitudes, or motives?
4. ***Plan*** – What are some “I will” statements that can help me begin to act today upon the truth that I have learned? What is the first step? Who can help me make sure that I follow through? Where do I pray that the application of this truth will take me in the future?

As leaders prepare to teach each week, consider the “I-Chart” as a tool for bringing clarity and focus to the teaching:

Insight – Do I know how the people who are gathered here learn?

Interest – Have I motivated adults to learn?

Information – Can I confidently and accurately represent the truth of God’s Word?

Involvement – Have I maximized the potential for learning by planning for learners to participate?

Internalization – Have I considered how this truth will be implanted into personal hearts and lives?

These five keys will help teachers prepare and lead better lessons each week in Sunday School.



*Tennessee Baptist Churches giving through the Cooperative Program and
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