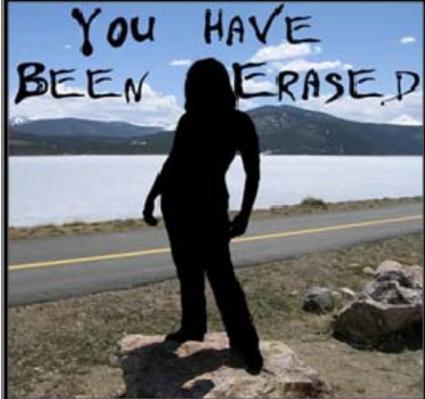




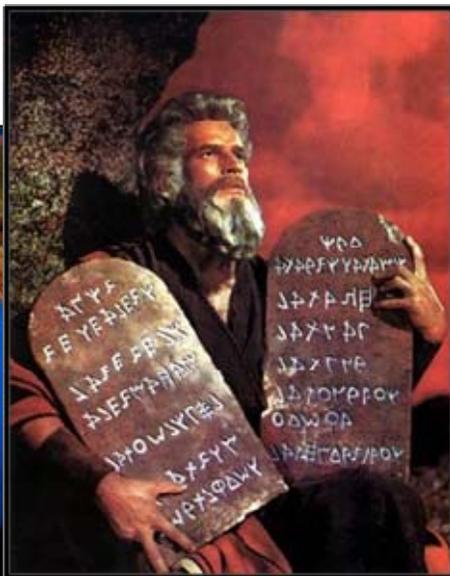
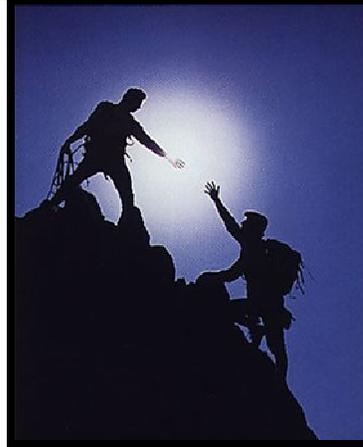
# 31 DAYS TO A BETTER SUNDAY SCHOOL



## BOB MAYFIELD

prayer

AUGUST 2009



## Day 1

### Knowing Your Purpose

As a Sunday School teacher, it is imperative that you know your purpose. Why do you study all week, make phone calls, and teach on Sunday mornings? In an average year, I will lead about 50 Sunday School seminars. In most of those seminars, I will ask the participants what they believe is the purpose of Sunday School. The top three answers, in order, are:

- Bible study
- Fellowship
- Ministry

All of them are wonderful answers, and all of them are wrong answers. The purpose of Sunday School is to help the church carry out its mission of making disciples all over the world! Now **that** is a great mission. In fact, if you want to put the purpose of Sunday School in modern terms, read Colossians 1:13. Did you see that "rescue" word? Your Sunday School class, whether it is a senior adult class or a newborn class, is part of the greatest rescue mission in world history. We are part of our Leader's rescue mission to save lost and perishing souls from a Christ-less eternity and bring them into a personal relationship with Jesus.

My friend Ed Stetzer says that each expression of the church *owns* the mission of the church. Back in the old days, we used to say that the Sunday School is the church organized to accomplish its mission. Ed is saying the same thing, but in a different way. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says that our mission is to "make disciples". One of the most effective ways of making disciples is by gathering together in small groups for Bible study, prayer, ministry and evangelism.

So why is knowing your purpose so important? Because when you know your purpose i.e., the mission of your class or group, then it helps you prioritize what you are doing. Knowing your purpose also helps you evaluate how you are doing. Understanding your mission gives direction to where you are going.

### Knowing Your Mission

*What* you are doing;  
*How* you are doing;  
*Where* you are going.

We are going to be sharing more over the next 31 days about some practical things that you can implement to help you have a better Sunday School. But if you miss this most important first step - the purpose of your Sunday School class - you missed it completely. Even if you develop some wonderful teaching skills over the next 31 days, if you miss the purpose of your class's existence, then you are "leaning your ladder against the wrong building". So as you pick up a useful idea this month, make sure that you are using it to help your lead your class or group to be on mission with God.

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## Day 2

### Dealing with the "SSA"



We've all been there, haven't we? That moment in time whenever you as the leader ask a question and you get the classic "SSA", also known as the "Sunday School Answer". We all know the joke. A Sunday School teacher asks her class of 2nd graders this question: "What has a bushy tail, climbs trees, and likes to eat acorns." A boy raises his hand and the teacher calls on him to answer her question. He says, "The answer is Jesus, but it really sounds more like a squirrel to me."

Before we talk about how to respond to an SSA, what causes people in our classes to give them in the first place? There are several possible reasons for the SSA, but here are two of them.

One, there is something about being in a Bible study that causes people to give religious answers. Most people do not want to sound like a spiritual idiot, so we give an answer that others in the class will recognize as church "cw" (conventional wisdom). People nod their heads in agreement when they hear a response that rings with their conventional wisdom about the Bible. The classic answer that many people give in response to a question from the Bible often revolves around "God's will". Let's face it; no one is going to touch that answer!

But a second, and very sad reason why people give an SSA is that they don't feel safe in the group. There is a level of insecurity in all of us, and sharing something personal is too intimidating for most people. People might think less of me. So instead, we default to the SSA and opt for the safe answer. We breathe a sigh of relief as heads in the group nod approvingly at our answer, but on the inside we sometimes experience that, "if people here really knew what I think..." feeling.

So how do you cope with the Sunday School answer? Even more importantly, how do you get your people to open up so that a more honest, robust time of sharing can occur? This Sunday, when you go to teach your group, write these three words in the palm of your hand to remind you to use them.

**Tell me more.**

Yes, that's it. After someone gives you an SSA, just look at them and say, "That's interesting Jim, tell me more." Jim will look back, take a deep breath... and his next answer will have some depth behind it. Listen to him carefully, and then repeat back to

him what you heard him say. "Jim, I heard you say... blah blah blah... did I get that right?" After Jim nods in approval, say the three magic words to Jim again. "Great Jim, tell me more!"

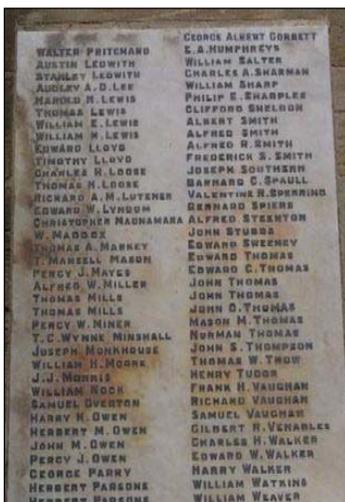
Jim's pump is primed! You have done three key things with Jim. First, by sharing "tell me more" the first time, you expressed interest in his answer. He feels safe going just a little deeper. Then, by repeating his answer back to him, you have given him what every person really wants when they talk... someone who will truly listen! Finally, you encouraged him even more by asking him to share further when you said, "tell me more" a second time. My experience with this process is that Jim will go even deeper. Also, other people in the class who a few just a few moments ago were sitting back in their chairs and uninvolved in the discussion are now sitting on the edge of their seat and can't wait to get into the conversation.

Now here is the bottom line. If you really want to develop that sense of community in your class, you have got to go beyond the SSA and get people to open up. It is a skill, but you can do it. Using "tell me more" is a way to bring greater depth of discussion about the Bible and about ourselves so that your class can truly function as a biblical community. You will not achieve biblical community in a class that only shares SSA's!!

By the way, I've seen this process work with 50 year olds, 15 year olds, and 5 year olds! If you are a man and married, some day when the love of your life is talking, look at her and say, "That's interesting honey, tell me more." It's better than a box of chocolates!

## Day 3

### Who Are These People on My Roll?



Who are all these people on my roll? Whether you teach 1st and 2nd grades in Sunday School, or youth or adults, most of us probably look at the list of people in our class and wonder who a few of them are. You may even wonder occasionally why the church doesn't just take people who rarely attend off the roll permanently. After all, if they never attend... what's the harm?

Along with starting new groups, enrollment may be one of the least understood aspects of Sunday School. We recently took a look at the 100 most evangelistic churches in Oklahoma. These 100 churches included big and small; rural, suburban, and inner city. 63% of the 100 fastest growing churches surveyed had an average attendance less than 100. We discovered a direct corollary between

enrollment, attendance, and baptisms. In fact, over a 5 year period (2001-2005), here

are the averages of these growing churches compared to the fastest declining churches over the same period.

<u>100 Fastest Growing</u>		<u>100 Fastest Declining</u>	
Enrollment	+48%	Enrollment	-32%
Attendance	+44%	Attendance	-25%
Baptisms	+59%	Baptisms	-34%

Almost any time a church focuses on enrolling people in Sunday School, attendance and baptisms follow along. For most people, attendance makes sense. The more you members you have, the greater your attendance. But baptisms?

A church that is growing through enrollment will eventually run out of church members to enroll, and begin asking lost people in the community to join their Bible study. This is a vital change in attitude. We will discuss this mindset in a later post during our 31 Days of Sunday School, but for now let's understand that some great things start happening in a church when people who do not know Jesus as Savior and Lord are asked to join small group Bible studies. The most important thing that happens is that these people get to study God's Word and participate in ministry and fellowship. Barriers they may have had about the gospel are broken through and many of them will receive Christ.

Those names on the roll of your Sunday School class (my friend Ken Marler calls the roll a "ministry list", I like that) are people who are on a journey to Christ. Even the people who never attend are part of that journey. The question many of us as teachers need to ask ourselves is: Am I helping everyone on my "ministry list" discover Christ as Savior and grow in Lordship?

Here's a simple test that may help. You have a list of names in front of you. Do you see ministering to the people on this list as an obligation or an opportunity? Many people on your ministry list may have stopped attending. Many times, people can tell when the occasional phone call is made from obligation or from true compassion. You have the opportunity to be the person, the teacher, the leader who breaks through into a person's life with the message of hope, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Tip: August is when many churches are preparing for a new Sunday School year. Why not offer every single person on your ministry list (regular attenders and chronic absentees) a chance at a fresh start with God and with your group. Call every person on your ministry list once or twice this month. Don't scold absentees for not attending. You're not the Sunday School Nazi! Ask them how they are doing and ask if you can pray for them about a need they may have. I am amazed that when offered compassion, how well people will respond... both to you and ultimately to the gospel.

## Day 4

### Your Target Is...



My dad was an artillery officer back in the day at Fort Bliss in El Paso. This was before the day of GPS aiming and tracking systems, infra-red spotting, etc. It was WAY before the day in fact. Back then, an artillery unit had a "spotter", who had the dubious honor of sneaking close enough to the enemy target to radio back aiming instructions to the artillery unit. Aiming an artillery piece was measured in "clicks". So one artillery round would be fired, and (if the round didn't land on him) the spotter would radio back, "you're a quarter mile short and 100 hundred yards east. Adjust sights three clicks north and one click west." When the cannon was essentially "on target", the spotter would tell them they were "spot on", and instead of one artillery piece firing off the next round, several dozen would fire on the target. The key in artillery is to know where your target is and keep adjusting until you are hitting it.

You might be thinking, "Okay, today's article is about knowing your community; its demographics, culture, etc." No, not really. It's not about knowing your class or your church either. You see, the real target of your Sunday School class isn't the people sitting in the classroom or the lost people in Starbucks while you study your Bible.

Your target is Jesus. Yes, that's who your target is. You are pointing every boy and girl, every man and woman, saved and unsaved, attendee or absentee, to this one target - Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God! He is the hope of your salvation and the reason for your existence. Jesus is the exact representation of the living God. Know Jesus... know God!

You, my friend, are the spotter. Your mission is to point people so that they are aiming at Jesus. No other target is good enough. Each time you meet with your class, your job is to help them take better aim at Jesus. Every day when you are at work or at a Little League game, your job is to point people to Christ. By the way, have you noticed where the spotter is in an artillery unit? That's right; the spotter is way out in front, often behind enemy lines, in the most dangerous position. Teachers, in order to point people to Jesus, we need to be out in front. There should be no place for armchair disciple making in the Kingdom. Being a Sunday School leader is meant to be dangerous!

So as you prepare your Bible study this week, remember your target. The target of your Bible study is Jesus. The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was once asked why his sermons were so powerful in reaching lost people with the gospel. Spurgeon's reply: "I read my text (Bible passage) and then make a beeline for the cross!" Spurgeon knew his target. Jesus said, "if I be lifted up, I will draw all people to Myself".

Your mission as a Sunday School leader is to make Jesus the most famous person in your class! The more clearly you make Jesus the target, the easier it will be for your people to calibrate their lives and make those adjustments; those personal "clicks" that will help them follow their Leader.

Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Listen to your class discussion about the Bible study. Be sure to redirect discussion from what people think to Jesus' words and actions;
- After you prepare each Bible study, look over it carefully. Does it point to Jesus as the solution, or to a political agenda, business, etc.
- Take a step back occasionally and look at your class as a whole. Do you see your class exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 6; or the transformation of their minds from Romans 12?

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## Day 5

### The Power of Prayer



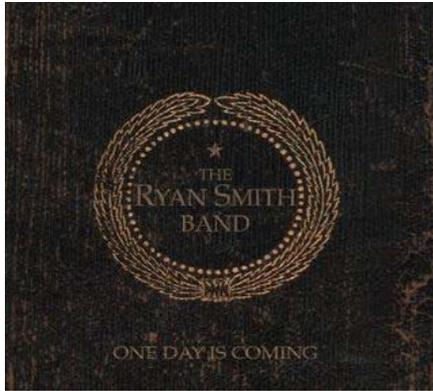
Quick! Get your Bible and find the list of prayer requests that your group had last week. Look that list over and put the requests into categories. It will look something like this: general prayers; personal requests; group requests; etc. After you have got them grouped, how many are in each category?

Look at the categories of requests again. Is there a category for people who are lost and bound for a Christ-less eternity?

It has been my experience that Bible study classes naturally turn their focus inward over time. The more stable the group grows, the more inward it becomes. This self-centeredness (yes, that's what it is) and self-reliance (it's that too) is reflected in the group's prayer life. Honestly, I don't want to beat people up here, but I very rarely find Bible study groups that strategically pray for the salvation of their lost friends and neighbors - by name! I even remember teaching a group of Sunday School teachers about evangelistic prayer one time, and one of them argued with me... and said that prayer for the lost is not biblical! He argued that Jesus did not pray for the lost, He prayed for laborers for the harvest.

Read John 17:20. "I pray not only for these (His disciples), but also for those who believe in Me through their message." Whoa, who would "those" people be? Yeah, Jesus is praying for people who have yet to believe, aka... lost people! Or how about Romans 10:1. "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them (unbelievers) is for their salvation!"

Something that can happen very easily to us as Bible study leaders is that it becomes very easy for us to operate in our own strength. Even many of our growth strategies can become mechanical in nature. We need to remember that rescuing lost souls from hell is a spiritual exercise and we need to employ spiritual tools. Along with a God's Word, prayer is a vital part of our spiritual work.



Let me challenge you. Go to your class and talk about the importance of praying evangelistically. Then follow up with this idea. Take a few minutes in class and develop a class "Evangelistic Prayer List". Write the names on a poster board. If it's a youth class, write the names on the wall! Then take time every Sunday to pray for the names on your list. These should be names that people in your class know personally. If it makes you uncomfortable, just

in case someone should visit the class whose name is on the list... take "evangelistic" off and just call it your "Prayer List".

How important is it for us to pray for those who are apart from God? Well, for too many Bible study groups, it has been a long time, perhaps a very long time, since anyone came to Christ as a result of the group. James 4:2 states, "...you have not because you ask not." I sincerely believe that one of the reasons we do not see people coming to Christ through our "evangelistic" Sunday School classes is that we do not pray for it to happen. It is that important!

What are some things your class does to encourage your people to pray evangelistically?

Tomorrow, I am going to pursue this idea of evangelistic prayer one step farther, provide a prayer resource, and follow through with some encouragement too.

And also, comments are not just welcome... they are encouraged! I'll be the first to tell you that I don't have all the answers. Something your class is doing might be just what someone else needs to enlarge the Kingdom!

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## Day 6

### Impacting Lostness Through Prayer

I often find myself reading something and thinking, "That sounds like a great idea, but does it actually work?" Many of you may be wondering the same thing after reading my post in yesterday's blog "The Power of Prayer". Sounds great, but does it work? Wanna hear some stories?

How about a Sunday School class of high school girls from Mannford, Oklahoma. Their teacher asked them if they would like to start praying for the salvation of their lost friends. The class put together a list and wrote the names of their friends on a poster. The following Wednesday was "See You At the Pole". One of the boys on their list walked by and asked what was going on. One of the girls talked with him and invited him to come to their See You At the Pole rally that night at church. That evening, he got saved.



The following Sunday, he invited his friend to come to church with him. While in Sunday School, his friend got saved too. Within one week of making their list... two people made a profession of faith in Christ. Coincidence? I don't think so. Yes, that pic to the left is of the two boys, Chase and Chance, proudly standing in front of the poster that the Sunday School class put together. Their names are circled.

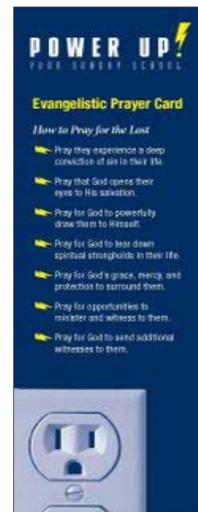
I could tell you about the 11 year old girl from Hugo whose Sunday School teacher asked her class to pray for their friends who do not know Jesus. She prayed for her best friend and then invited her to attend Sunday School with her the next week. Three weeks later, her friend accepted Christ as her personal Savior.

Then there is the lady at a church in Oklahoma City whose best friend was strung out on prescription drugs. Her class put her friend's name on their class prayer list and they invited her to join their Sunday School class. A month later, the class rejoiced as this young woman turned from drugs and turned to Jesus.



Imagine sharing a prayer request with your class for your son-in-law, who had been arrested and convicted of dealing drugs, and had been sent to prison. Put yourself in the shoes of this senior adult lady as, week after week, her Sunday School class prayed through the list of names on their evangelistic prayer

list, and they prayed for the protection and salvation of her loved one serving his prison term. Now imagine the scene in class one Sunday when this saintly mom and grandmother took the highlighter from her teacher's hand and marked her son-in-law's name off their evangelistic prayer list. He got saved in a prison Bible study! Yes, that's the list to the left... there are 77 names on the list... and 22 names are highlighted as having made a profession of faith in the year that this list stayed up on the wall in this ladies' Sunday School class.



Leading your class to pray for the salvation of their friends and neighbors is leading your class to step out in faith and exercise their

belief that God really does want people to come to faith in Him. It is exhilarating as a group to be part of the supernatural work of salvation. This is the edge of faith that so often we shy away from, both personally and as a group. But it is this act of obedience that so often turns our groups from holding pens for Christians into rescue boats for believers.

I really believe that many of the people in our groups are yearning for that experience that is beyond human definition. Something that only can be described as a supernatural act of God.

We have a bookmark which you can order from the BGCO that includes how to pray for the lost on one side of the bookmark, and room for your class members to write the names of people they are praying for on the reverse side. These bookmarks are available at a cost of \$10 for a packet of 50. To order a packet, email us at [sundayschool@bgco.org](mailto:sundayschool@bgco.org).

Remember to make a comment to this post today and we'll send you a Ryan Smith Band CD "One Day is Coming". After you've made your post, email us at [sundayschool@bgco.org](mailto:sundayschool@bgco.org) and provide your name and shipping address.

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## Day 7

### Creating a Warm Environment for New People

Warmth counts! Until recently when I became the interim at Northwest Baptist-OKC (a great church, check it out [here](#)), I would often have the opportunity to visit Sunday School classes in different towns and churches. Since I'm not a familiar face in most places, I go "incognito". Often, I encounter a very warm reception upon stepping into a Bible study class. Occasionally... well, using the word "chilly" might be a more apt description.



Most of us really believe that our class is the friendliest class in town. Maybe the state. Perhaps the universe! But often, what we experience as a warm friendly environment personally may be less than that to a new person. A warm, welcoming environment is a critical part of who we are as believers. Let's face it, we all are sinners saved by grace and the warmth in which we receive a guest is a way for us to reflect the graciousness that God has given

us. The reception a guest receives from believers in a class or small group can either encourage or hinder their receptivity to the gospel.

Warmth is also disarming. Many people, especially those far from God, may bring a lot of baggage with them about who Christians are. They may be hurt. They may be defensive. I read a report from LifeWay Research in which they interviewed a young woman who compared going to church with visiting a used car lot...ouch!

Here are some suggestions to help make your Sunday School class a warmer, more inviting place:

1. Nametags! My friend David Francis from LifeWay is "Mr. Nametag". Have you ever been a newcomer and had a bunch of people introduce themselves to you? A few minutes later, how many names can you recall? The simple act of wearing a nametag is a great help to a newcomer. Plus, they get to wear a nametag too, so people can call them by name as well.
2. Do lunch. My wife and I visited a church together a few months ago. Following the Bible study hour, the teacher invited us out to eat lunch after worship. We went, and had a great time with the teacher and several other people from their class. What a great experience!
3. Fellowship. Always invite guests to your next class fellowship... and fellowship often. My friend Josh Hunt has made hosting a fellowship an art form. Visit here for some ideas from Josh about how to have a great fellowship.
4. Notes. Send the guest a note, especially a handwritten note. Personalize it. Most of us don't have so many guests in our class each week that we don't have time to write a couple of notes to a newcomer. Be sure to put something personal on it so that they know you remember them.
5. Email. Take the time to add them to your class e-newsletter.
6. Enroll. We will talk about this next week, but ask every guest if they would like to join your group. People like to belong.
7. Phone. Call your guests on the phone and after some chitchat, just ask them how their experience went and if there is anything you can do to help them.
8. Welcome their kids. When a guest arrives with children, be sure to accompany them along with their kids to every Sunday School class for each of their kids. Preschool and children's leaders - it is imperative that when a guest arrives in your class that you give them your complete attention! Mom and Dad will feel so much better when you greet their child properly and show them respect. Involve them in a learning activity as soon as you can. Youth leaders - be sure to introduce a guest to several students in the group and stay with them until it is obvious they are expected.

**IMPORTANT note:** For most Americans, children choose the restaurant where the family goes to dine. In many cases, children choose the church too!

Finally, be sure to engage their story. We will talk about this more in a later post, but everyone has a story and most are eager to share their story if asked. Simply asking a guest to share their story (not in the large group in front of everyone, but in the hallway or on the phone) is one of the best actions you can take to make a person feel warm and appreciated.

I know there are other ways to engage people so that they are less intimidated by a group. We are learning from each other so please feel free to share something you or your class does to take the frost off your group and how you extend warmth to new people.

Also, remember that every person who posts a comment to this post receives a free CD by the Ryan Smith Band!

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## Day 8

### Suggestions For New Teachers (and Veterans too)

We have all had that first experience of speaking in front of a group of people, right? I remember the first time I had to make a presentation in a speech class in college. Was I nervous? You bet I was! Was my knee bobbing up and down as I waited my turn? Yes it was, like a jigsaw on high speed! If you are about to become a new Sunday School teacher, the chances are you are nervous too.



If you are a veteran teacher, I would like for you to hang around and provide some insight by making a comment or two at the end of this post. You may be one of those new teachers who have been enlisted to teach Sunday School for the first time. If so, then this post is especially for you, although I'm sure that our experienced teachers have some insight too.

Whether you are about to teach a class of three year olds, 13 year olds, or 30 year olds; there are some things you can do to help make this initial experience better. Here are some thoughts and suggestions:

First, prepare your lesson. Don't think that because you have sat in a Sunday School class for a few years that you will be able to pull this off in your sleep. Read that lesson. At first, follow the recommended teaching procedures closely. By following the teaching plan, you will be well equipped to present the Bible study to your group. If you teach children or students, don't think that the learning activity in the lesson plan is corny. Go ahead and do it anyway and learn as you try them. Later, as you gain experience and learn about the different personalities in your class, you will develop the confidence to try some new thoughts and ideas.

Call everyone on your roll (ministry list) in advance of your first class time together. Let everyone know that you are their new leader and that you are excited about what is

ahead for the group. If you are starting a new class, call and invite as many people as you can. People respond better when they feel like they know you, so calling them in advance pays off well and it gets you off to a good start.

Take the list of your members, and pray for them during the week. You may not know who they are yet, but rest assured that God knows everything about them. Pray for God to illumine your mind as you prepare your Bible study. You definitely want the Bible study each week to be about Him and not about you!

Plan a fellowship as soon as you can. And make it a fun one! Do a progressive dinner together. Do something unusual, but plan something so that people have the opportunity to interact during the fellowship. Watching a movie together is generally NOT an interactive event!

Be early and late. By this, I mean arrive well before class begins and stay around after class is over. Teachers that arrive late and then leave as soon as they can after class is over are sending a signal... that they are too busy to be bothered. People pick up on this attitude, and they will not want to call you or make any effort to get to know you. In essence, you are telling the people in your class that you are too busy for them, and teaching the class is almost an intrusion on your "busy schedule". Once members pick up on this, it is hard to change their mind and let them know that you are available.

Also, be sure to delegate the class ministry. As a new leader, you will be tempted to try to do it all so that you can prove yourself to the people in your group. Don't go there. Start involving people as soon as you can. Enlist people in advance to make the coffee, or bring the donuts or whatever. Ask some people if they would mind making a couple of phone calls during the week to absentees. This goes for children's leaders too. It is okay to call a child's home during the week and ask them (their parents) to bring the snack on Sunday. As a new teacher, you really do have the opportunity to help a class make a fresh start. Involving class members early and often sends a signal that you value them and their ministry.

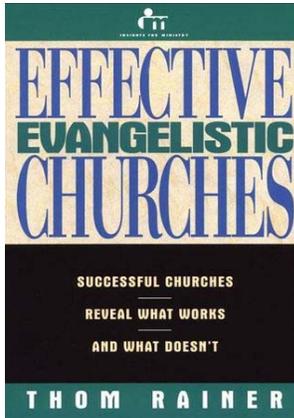
Finally, be a learner! You really don't have to know all the answers. A big suggestion here... find a veteran teacher and ask questions. Ask them how they prepare their Bible study. Ask if you can tag along some time when they visit the hospital or share the gospel. I'm convinced that some of the best training can be found in your home town, and probably in your own church.

You veteran teachers, feel free to leave a comment on things you did, or wish you had done, when you were a new teacher. Also, if you are a new teacher and you have a question you would like to ask, go ahead and post it in the comment section.

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## Day 9

### Healthy Sunday Schools are Evangelistic



Dr. Thom Rainer's book *Effective Evangelistic Churches* is built from research of 576 churches that are evangelistic. These churches have a baptism ration of 20:1 (20 members per baptism). That is about double the SBC average. Dr. Rainer surveyed these churches to discover not only IF they were evangelistic, but HOW they were evangelistic. This book shares his research, and also reveals that an overwhelming number of the churches were intentionally evangelistic through their Sunday School classes. Here are some highlights of Rainer's research. Tomorrow we will look at some practical ways to implement these four key points.

#### Some lessons from *Effective Evangelistic Churches*:

1. Healthy Sunday Schools are evangelistic. The reverse is also true. Unhealthy Sunday Schools are not evangelistic. This is more than just playing a word game. Remember that the mission of Sunday School class is to be the arms and legs of the church's mission focus. That's clearly on lost people. Looking at this logically, if a Sunday School never evangelizes its community, then over time it will cease to exist. Take a look at your church's growth over the past 5 or 10 years. About 80% of Southern Baptist churches are declining.
2. Healthy Sunday Schools provide a biblical education to all age groups. Healthy Sunday Schools study the Bible. They refuse to get distracted by studying books, as helpful as those books may be; they are not the written Word of God. In addition, look at those last three words... "all age groups". Healthy Sunday Schools aim to teach the Bible to every person, no matter their age. No one is too spiritual for Bible study. What more practical way can there be to teach every person in the church a biblical world view, 52 weeks a year, than to involve every person in the church in small group Bible studies. In addition, Sunday School is a very practical way to teach people who have just accepted Christ as Savior a biblical world view.
3. Healthy Sunday Schools provide ministry to people, both members and non-members. Jesus not only sought to seek and save the lost, but He ministered to people along the way. Your Sunday School class is more than just a weekly Bible study, the ministry of your class is a reflection of your church's love and care for people. Bible study groups that provide genuine love and care for the people in their group and their associated friends and acquaintances in the community are sowing seeds of the gospel.
4. Healthy Sunday Schools assimilate members. 90% of the churches in Rainer's survey said that their most effective assimilation strategy was the Sunday School. If your church is going to reach your community with the gospel, Sunday School is not

only a key strategy for reaching but also for keeping those you reach. Many churches who do not understand how Sunday School works have one strategy to evangelize their community, another strategy to disciple the people they reach, still another strategy to minister to its members, and finally another strategy to engage their members in the church's mission. Churches that understand Sunday School properly use it as a strategy to do all of the above... in only one organization. No competing ministries for time, calendar, and budget. Competition for ministry leaders is reduced. The Sunday School becomes what it is supposed to be... the church organized to fulfill its mission!

Tomorrow we are going to look at some practical ways to help make sure your Sunday School class is evangelistic.

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## Day 10

### Essentials For a Healthy Sunday School



Yesterday we looked at four foundations for a healthy Sunday School. Today we are looking at some practical implications to help you as a teacher build a class that is reaching the lost in your community. So here we go...

1. Quality Leadership. In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins uses the image of a bus to illustrate how effective corporations get the right people on the bus, and in the right seats. While the church is not a business (non-profit right), there is a good principle to learn here that Rainer's research discovered. Evangelistic churches put their best leaders into the Sunday School leadership. If you truly believe that the Sunday School is the church organized to accomplish its mission, then doesn't make sense to put the best leaders in the Sunday School? But these churches went beyond leadership placement! They also had leadership training!

- Training is focused on quality;
- Training is periodic and intensive;
- Training honors time and resources.

If you are a teacher, agreeing to be a teacher was just the initial step. You also need training. Nobody knows everything about Sunday School. If your church does not provide training for its leaders, ask them to help out and provide it. We are offering training that you can download off the internet that is qualitative and resourceful. Check out One Day and put some of this training to use. Best, it's FREE!

2. Responsibility. Let's face it, as a Sunday School teacher you have more responsibility than most other church members. Read James 3:1 just to refresh your memory. A major part of your responsibility is to care for the people in your class, and the surrounding

network of friendships spinning out of your class. I used to require my leaders to fill in those organization charts. Although I am still a fan of this style of organization, I encourage you as a teacher to use a system that works for you and your group. The bottom line is that every member in your group needs consistent contact and ministry.

3. Organizational Quality. Healthy Sunday Schools are not slipshod organizations. There are quality controls. One of my Sunday School mentors has been Bill Taylor. Bill told me once that "what gets inspected gets done". He is right. As a Sunday School teacher, you need to be open and accountable to your pastor, Sunday School director, and your education minister if you have one. Teachers who become protective of their class and refuse to be accountable to their leaders are, well can I just say this... you are being rebellious! Your class will learn to be rebellious through your leadership. Submit yourself to your church leadership.

4. Evangelistic Intensity. Sunday School classes do not become evangelistic by accident. In fact, of all the things a class does, being evangelistic seems to be the most difficult. We human beings just have a tendency to turn inward. Inwardly focused classes are not evangelistic! One of your primary goals as a teacher is to lead your group to be evangelistic and fight the natural tendency of a class to become introspective.

#### **Some practical suggestions to help your class be evangelistic:**

- Pastors - start small. Focus your efforts on helping one class become evangelistic and let success build success!
- Teach your class a gospel presentation at least twice a year. Use One Verse Method or the Roman Road;
- Have a class evangelistic prayer list;
- Involve your group in evangelistic opportunities that your church provides;
- Memorize verses about evangelism. They should roll off the tip of your tongue upon request;
- Take one or two class members with you on evangelistic visits;
- Be an evangelist yourself. It encourages others when they know their leader practices what he/she teaches.

Leave some questions or comments about your experiences with healthy, evangelistic Sunday Schools.

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## Day 11

### The Principle of Community



Every person was born with a desire to belong, to be involved in a group. This is why we think hermits are so strange, because deep down inside we have this need to belong. When God looked upon Adam, he recognized Adam's need for human companionship and voila: a nap and one rib later we have Eve! In fact, God wants us to be involved in a community, a biblically supportive community committed to His cause.

Sunday School is supposed to be that kind of community. Don't think that your Sunday School class is a place or a time; your class is a group of people... a community. A true biblical community is beyond location and time. This kind of biblical community is happening whenever people in the group are praying for each other, helping each other, and supporting one another. This kind of community happens not just on Sunday morning, but when two or three gather at the coffee shop ,or rally to help another person in their group. To be honest, when most people think about "community", this is what they are thinking.

But community goes much deeper than this aspect. The best, and I believe this absolutely, the best way to bring a person who has yet to make Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior is through a biblical community. Think about it. Imagine that a person apart from God, maybe a friend of yours, visits a Sunday School class or small group. An incredible experience is about to happen right before their eyes. First, they are going to see God's people take prayer requests and then pray for each other. For many unbelievers, this may be their first experience with real, corporate prayer.

Next, they listen as we organize how we are going to take care of a family where the breadwinner has just lost his job. They hear the class plan a baby shower for an expectant mom. They watch as this group of Christ-followers organize themselves to take care of each others' needs, and they take care of each other with joy and a serving spirit.

Then the Bible study begins. This big book that has been a mystery to them for years suddenly comes alive and the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of their heart so they can understand God's Word. Even better, they ask questions and get responses! In his book, *The Sunday School Growth Spiral*, author Andy Anderson states that 1 out of 3 lost people enrolled in Sunday School will make a profession of faith in one year. I know of education ministers who have stated that for their church, it is one out of two! There is a practical reason for this: we are engaging lost people with the truths of Scripture.

The principle of community is more robust than we realize. We often mistakenly think that community is for the member's benefit. It is, to a degree. But when we stop community with just the believers, what we have is one, or at best two dimensional community. When a group reaches out to their friends and neighbors and offers community to them as well, we have community in 3D, a much broader and impactful experience. The community we enjoy is a great "evangelism incubator" for those who do not know Christ as Savior. In community, unbelievers have a safe environment to explore the truths of Scripture, ask questions of God and Bible, and have a group of people help them grow in their understanding.

This is why as Bible study leaders; we must be inviting lost people to our Sunday School classes every week. Sunday School is still one of the most incredible evangelism strategies our churches have... when we understand its mission and become intentional about extending community to those who are apart from Christ.

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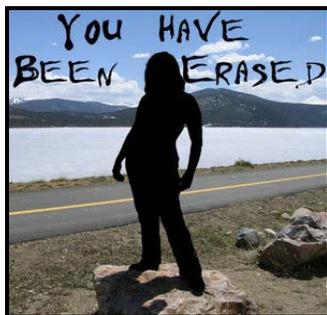
## Day 12

### Let's Purge Our Rolls of Absentees

It is August and for many churches it is the beginning of a new Sunday School for many. Teachers are looking at the people who rarely or seldom attend their class and wondering why they can't just take these people off their ministry list. Good question. I'm going to list some reasons why they need to stay on the class roll, and also give you a couple of ideas to help.

First, I tell people that we only remove people from our Sunday School roll in Oklahoma for one of four reasons:

1. They pass away. Respectfully speaking, if someone passes away it is all right to remove them from the roll.
2. The person joins another church.
3. The enrollee makes a request to be removed from the roll.
4. Finally, if they move to Texas it is automatic removal. No triplicate form required!



Okay, I was kidding about the Texas thing, but if a person has relocated it is okay to take them off your ministry list.

What is not okay, however, is purging your roll. Purging is not the same thing as cleaning your roll. Cleaning your roll means you have personally contacted (or no longer have contact information) a person on your roll and have found that they meet one of the four criteria above. By the way, cleaning does not have to be an arduous task, if your class maintains a consistent, organized system to minister to everyone on your

ministry list. If you don't maintain such a list, well...

Purging is different. Purging is indiscriminately removing people from your class roll against their will with no effort to contact them. As an education minister, I have seen attendance sheets from classes with names that have been highlighted. Someone in the class has written the word "drop" by the name. Nope, sorry... not going to happen. Enrollment is one of the most misunderstood concepts of Sunday School, so let me give my thoughts about why every class should safeguard their ministry list (roll).

First, I know of very few people who were put on the roll indiscriminately. The church clerk was not bored one day and pulled out the phone book and started entering names. At some point, the person behind the name on your roll asked to join your Sunday School. No one forced them to join, they did it themselves.

Second, I have found that most people who do not attend Sunday School anymore do so because of some unmet needs. Perhaps they had a medical crisis, or lost a job, and no one from the class contacted them so they quit coming. I find that the vast majority of people who quit attending our groups do so because the class did not organize itself to minister to them.

Third, and this is what I believe is the most compelling reason: for the most part, the people we want to drop (purge) from our roll are the very people who need it the most. I am unaware of a person being dropped from the roll who attends every week with Bible in hand. No, the people we routinely want to remove are the lost people, the carnal Christians, the lonely, the social misfits; in other words, the people who need it most!

My last reason in this post against purging people from our rolls is, well it's mechanical and I'm kind of embarrassed to mention it. It is numbers. From a purely pragmatic reason, purging your roll will decrease your church's attendance. That means fewer people studying God's Word, fewer people in community, and fewer people in worship. It means, and this is important, fewer lost people in a Christian community where they can interact with God's Word, ask questions, and learn through observation. A class will always purge a lost person from their roll before they purge a deacon. (Yes, I expect some comments here.) Purging means fewer wayward Christians who have the opportunity to be encouraged toward repentance and restoration.

So what do you do? Here are my suggestions: Contact every absentee as soon as possible and encourage them. Let them know you care. Ask if you can pray for them. We have an excellent resource at the BGCO called "Contact Countdown", which is aimed at the individual class to help you minister to chronic absentees. Organize your group for ministry. Many of our people became absentees due to a perceived lack of personal concern. Commit your group to remedy this situation. Face it; your group may be too big. Large classes seem to encourage absenteeism and low commitment. Smaller classes tend to foster action. As a leader, do you really have the time to minister to 40-50 people a week?

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## Day 13

### Cordless Sunday School: Portable Tools for Youth Leaders

*by Andy Harrison  
Student Specialist*

*Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma*



With all due respect to Mr. Gutenberg and his printing press, I believe perhaps the most revolutionary invention of all time is the cordless power tool. I know, I know, Gutenberg printed the Bible on his press, and that ought to at least earn some extra credit. I agree, but can you imagine how quickly ol' Johannes could have assembled that press if only he would have had access to a cordless drill or circular saw?

The fact is, cordless tools have so revolutionized the housing industry, many experts believe that *corded* tools may be obsolete in just a few years. Oddly, this brings me to Youth Sunday School. What if the tether of the church Sunday School classroom becomes obsolete?

In Oklahoma, up to 80% of students aged 12-18 have no real connection to any church, so perhaps this scenario is already closer to reality than we would like to think. Can Youth Sunday School still occur when kids aren't coming? Should youth leaders abdicate influence if students are reluctant to attend? What we need to do is adapt and overcome. The tools are there for the using.

#### **Cordless Communication - Texting**



In a recent survey of several hundred students, the vast majority of them reported sending over a thousand texts a month. This has become the preferred method of communication for teens. Texting students is a great way of extending your influence with those students who are attending your Sunday School and a great way to engage those who are yet to come. Texting anything from short

prayers to scripture verses to engaging questions can be an effective way of communicating with teens.

#### **Cordless Guidance - Social Networking**

I recently portrayed a character at camp, who was a French Professor. As that character, I invited students to add me as a friend on Facebook. My stated goal was to help and encourage them to stay committed to accountability groups during the year.

As of the writing of this article, 2670 students had invited me to be their friend on Facebook. I have had more online conversations about scripture, life, struggles, and relationships through these contacts than I ever had in hallways around the church. I'm not suggesting these should replace face-to-face conversations, but they can be vital relationship building tools. And you can have them anywhere you have your computer and an internet connection.

### **Cordless Support - Prayer**

Too often the prayers we pray for our Youth Sunday School class members are uttered only within the classroom. We need to visit students and pray with them. We need to take students to their schools and prayer walk with them. We need to take students to impoverished areas and pray with others. Prayer needs to be real and prayer becomes real when it is portable. This is perhaps the greatest cordless tool in your bag. However, prayer is a tool students will consider powerless unless they see it in action...so fire that baby up!

So stop moping around your classroom wondering why students aren't coming and go cordless. You might just find a bigger classroom than you've ever imagined.

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## **Day 14**

### **Faith and Growth - New Groups**

I was driving one Sunday morning to our church's facilities and I remember my skin was crawling and I was incredibly nervous. I was the minister of education, it was August, and that day was "Promotion Day". You know Promotion Day, the day the 1st graders move to 2nd grade, the 9th graders move to 10th grade, and the adults who are 47 finally leave the 35-39 y/o class. Okay, how about two out of three there? We had just arranged to use a lot of off campus space for Sunday School, AND... we were moving to two Sunday School hours. Because we had moved a lot of our children's classes off campus, we had chartered city busses to transport people to their off campus locations.



Now do you see why I was nervous? But above it all, our church was stepping out in faith, a lot of faith. We had spent the summer enlisting and training new leaders to start new classes, 44 new classes in fact. Yes, forty-four new Sunday School classes - and they were all starting that day! 44 new classes, over 100 new Sunday School teachers were beginning their new groups that day. And what happened?

I'll tell you what happened... our attendance increased by 500 people... and the police showed up! The traffic jam of people trying to get into our parking lots backed up into a major intersection and the police ended up directing traffic to get the people into our church parking.

Here are some principles of starting new classes we can apply today:

The Principle of 10. The Principle of 10 simply means that for every new class you start, attendance will eventually increase by 10 people. For us that Sunday in August, it took one day for attendance to increase by 10 people per new class. Sometimes it takes five or six weeks, sometimes even six months. But it will increase to about 10 people per class. So if you want to grow your Sunday School by 30 people next year - that's three new classes. (note: 44 new classes multiplied by 10?)

Make space. Many times we tend to think of space in terms of rooms available on the church campus. Our church at Indiana Avenue in Lubbock had more people meeting off-campus on Sunday morning than on-campus. Restaurants, schools, and homes make great places to meet for Sunday School. We even had one class meeting in the basement of an insurance agency. We had a class meeting in the pastor's office and the church kitchen.

Educate your class. The feelings church members have about starting new classes is similar to their feelings about seeing their dentist for a root canal. One of the most important things we can do is to show the people in our group why starting new classes is so important (tomorrow's post by the way). When the teacher of the class understands why starting new classes is important, he or she becomes the point person to starting a new group.

Just Do It! Nike's world famous motto is appropriate to starting new groups. I have been in numerous churches that know they need to start new classes. They have known it for some time, but still they have not started them. I have led Sunday School clinics and had teachers tell me that they know they need to birth a new group, and I've returned to lead a clinic the next year and they still have not done it. The biggest issue seems to be the timing. Can I share something with you? The timing will never be right! Now don't try to force something that just isn't there, but let's face it. Many, no, most Sunday School classes have "excusitis" when it comes to starting new groups.

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## Day 15

### First One Day Seminar at Chisholm Heights

The first One Day Seminar was held at Chisholm Heights Baptist Church in Mustang, Oklahoma on Wednesday, August 12. I will post an interview with Scott Badgett next



week about their experience, but let's just say that after visiting with him on Thursday, they had a great experience and some inspired lay leaders!

One Day is new concept in equipping lay Sunday School and small group leaders. Instead of bringing in a team of experts from the state convention, denomination, or other professionals; One Day is decentralized. The local church is in control of its own

leadership training. Instead of traveling to another church, the training is held in the local church's facilities.

One Day is also customizable. Many times the local church has little influence into what is being presented. The church must simply adopt whatever their denomination's emphasis is for that year. So if your leaders need evangelism training, or missional equipping; and the denomination is emphasizing ministry... well you will just have to wait a year or two. This year, One Day offers five topics in all five major age groups plus a small group track, for a total of 26 topics for the local church to choose from. In 2010, that number will increase to over 50, and our goal is to have 100 Sunday School and small group topics in 2011, so a local church can highly customize their small group leader training.



But we want more than just information at a One Day seminar, we want inspiration. So we have a DVD with a 35 minute video of Ed Stetzer sharing the vision of missional small communities. The lay leaders at Chisholm Heights were so motivated by this video that they are passing the video around. The youth leadership team even recommended that they show it to the whole church!

There is one more idea. Instead of getting information and inspiration about being missional through your small group structure, we actually want each group to start being missional. So we encourage every small group or class in the church to conduct a mission project in their local community right after their One Day Seminar. In some pilot efforts, we have found the class mission projects to be the most rewarding part of the One Day experience.

For more information about One Day, click [here](#) and browse the One Day resources and register to participate in One Day.

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## Day 16

### Why Start New Groups?



A young couple is visiting the church and looking for a place to find friendship and community. They began visiting some of the church's Bible study groups and although the people are friendly, they are having difficulty breaking through the network of pre-existing friendships. They overheard someone in the church mention a new group was beginning and the following week, they attended. They were amazed at how quickly they were adopted into this new

group. People asked them out to eat, and there were no prior friendship webs like there were in other groups they had tried. This married couple had found a home.

New groups are a necessity for any church wanting to reach new people with the gospel. The story above is lived out weekly in many churches. Often, it is the people who have been attending Sunday School or small group for a long time who are unaware of how closed their group has become. They are not bad people, it's just that time lends itself to familiarity, and familiarity closes the group to new people.

So why should your class begin a new group?

Change. Yes, change is good for a church. It is human nature to try to create consistency and familiarity. But consistency and familiarity make it more difficult for a person outside the group to break into the network. Change creates excitement and this is good for us.

New friends. New groups create the potential for new friends. We have the opportunity to share our story with new people, and they can share their story with us.

A place to belong. The more groups your church has, the more opportunities you are creating for people to belong. Yesterday we learned the Principle of 10, which for every class a church has; about 10 people will be in attendance. If you truly want your church to grow and reach new people, then you have got to create space for these new people to belong.

Leadership Opportunities. New classes require new leaders. It is always good for us to be developing new leaders in our churches. New classes provide opportunities for more people to use their spiritual gifts and talents and serve their Lord.

Evangelism. New groups provide room for more people to belong to the Sunday School or small group ministry. Many of these new people may be lost, and you are providing an opportunity for them to be in a biblical community where they can study God's Word and come to faith.

Organizational Quality. New groups provide more organizational structure. Eventually, as a church grows it must depend more upon its small group organization to provide the glue to keep the new people it is reaching. If the organization becomes overloaded with too many people, ministry to the individual begins to fail and people become disenchanted.

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## Day 17

### How to Start a New Group



Many churches realize that they need to start new groups or classes, but how? What is the "best" way to start a new group? No matter what you may hear on the street, there is more than one way to start a new Sunday School class. Be sensitive to your particular context as you plan your new class start. I do recommend however, that you be careful not to use the words "split" or "divide". "New" sounds so much better. So does the word "birth" or "form". Here are some of the more

common ways to begin a new group.

**Birthing.** By birthing a group, what you are doing is giving people the option to stay in the current group or help start a new one. Birthing a new class means that there must be a teacher who is prepared and ready to become the leader of the new class. Birthing works best when several class members opt to go with the new teacher to birth the class. Simply give people in the current group the option of staying put or starting the new group. Birthing is very effective when the leader of the new group has been a member of the former class and has had some teaching experience.

**Forming.** Forming a new group is recognizing that there are people who are not attending who may be reached if a new group is formed especially for them. For example, you may recognize that there are multitudes of single adults in your

neighborhood. Enlisting a teacher and a seed group of singles who will organize to reach these singles is an example of forming a new group.

Enlarging. Sometimes new groups can be formed by simply enlarging the organization. For example, many churches have multiple grades in a children's Sunday School class. As the church grows, a department of both 1st and 2nd graders can be enlarged to two departments, one 1st grade and one 2nd grade department. Enlarging generally can be done along very recognizable groups, as in the previous example. Another example would be forming a new group for an existing college/career class, so that college students and the career students would begin attending different groups.

Promoting. Although I'm sure your church is different, many churches struggle to get their adults to move into classes that are appropriate to their stage in life. Many times adults will not move even if a new group has been formed in the age group appropriate for them to attend. Many times these classes contain a large age span of members. Here is the plan: Promote the teacher to the appropriate age group. Adults who are older will many times promote "up" with their teacher. However, younger adults in the class will not want to move with the teacher. Start the new group with the younger adults. In essence, by moving the teacher to the next age group, you create a vacuum which the younger adults will try to fill.

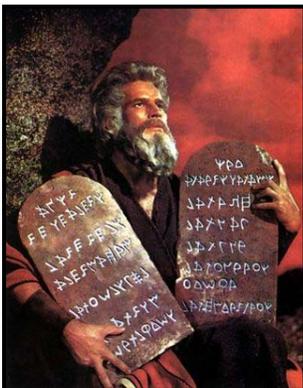
These are four of the more common ways to begin a new group. If you have questions or comments, be sure to leave a comment and we will address them.

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## Day 18

### Who is the Most Influential Person in the Church?

Even a casual glance at Scripture shows how God seems to relish in changing the course of human history through a small group of people; or even just one person. Take the story of Gideon when, against all odds, God uses one person to begin a movement.



Then God takes a small army of 300 men (does 300 count as an army?) to defeat a massive foe. How about Abraham, Joseph, and Moses? Solitary people that God chose to change human history. Remember the women too... Miriam, Ruth, and Esther. In the New Testament we have Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and John. In today's terminology, they were individuals against the machine!

As the leader of your group or class, you have an incredible opportunity to bring change to the people in your group. What kind of change will you bring? Many of us have gone through some type of building or stewardship campaign. During an emphasis like this, the pastor will preach powerful messages about how God can use our faith to change our neighborhoods. If a consultant is used, the consultant will often

share stories of other churches that have seen great growth as a result of this kind of faith effort. But eventually, someone is going to look at their teacher in their Sunday School class or small group and ask what they think. Whatever the teacher says will usually be what the group does. If the teacher comes out against the plan (or provides less than enthusiastic support), the class will not participate. But if the teacher expresses their support for the project, the class almost always participates.

For this reason, I believe that the most influential person in the church is a person's Sunday School teacher. As teachers, we need to realize that the people entrusted to our care take our words and actions seriously. As a result, it is imperative that we make sure that we are speaking and living our lives in such a way that will help grow our group.

Here are some suggestions to help you be a wise leader of your class:

- Remember to focus on individuals. It is easier to involve an individual than a group.
- Avoid sarcastic remarks about the church and its leaders. Even remarks intended for levity often cause our members who are weaker in faith to doubt the pastor and his leadership;
- Allow others to speak before you express your opinion. Once you express your opinion about a subject, it usually closes the dialogue;
- Always remember there are two sides to every issue;
- Silence = agreement. If a member of your group expresses his/her opinion in class and you do not give a response of any kind, then they will assume that you agree with them;
- Personal relationships are vital. If a class member feels comfortable with you, they are more likely to tell you how they really feel... and in a kind way!
- Reproduce yourself. A key reason that we struggle finding enough leaders for our classes and church ministries is because the leaders of the key organization of the church - the Sunday School - are not reproducing themselves.
- Finally, leaders lead from the front. If you want your class to conduct a class mission project, for example, dropping occasional hints is not as effective as saying, "What would you guys think about taking a Saturday and helping out a needy person in our community?" Then pick a date and organize the class to accomplish the project.

You are already a person of influence in your class. The question we each need to ask ourselves is: "What kind of influence will I be?"

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## Day 19

### The Aquarium Sunday School



I remember as a kid having the little fishbowl where my goldfish lived. I really remember when we upgraded to an aquarium and I got to have more than one fish! My parents even let me have one of those black snails that crawl around the sides eating algae! I fed them every day, cleaned their water, and my fish lived nice, comfortable lives. I remember how careful I had to be when I cleaned the aquarium. These fish are very delicate and easily disturbed. If they got stressed, they might even lose some scales and change colors. My fish lived very nice lives...very nice, very comfortable, and VERY artificial!

Let's go back to the purpose of Sunday School, which is to make disciples. Making disciples does not mean creating an artificial environment for people to attend! It does not mean that we pretend that we are all wonderful people. When Sunday School is at its best, it is a place of healing, transformation, and sending. Sunday School is not about spiritual navel gazing!

If you are an adult leader, your mission is to lead your class to be compelling witnesses to their lost friends and neighbors and provide a safe environment where people who do not know Jesus can explore the truths from Scripture and begin a relationship with Christ. You are to provide an environment where your people can become more and more like Christ and begin serving others. One thing your class is not meant to become is a holding tank where people can hide from ministry and service. Your class is not an aquarium!

How do you know if your class has become an artificial environment for church members to hide from ministry? One way to know is this... how many members are you sending out? Remember that the word "mission" means "sent", so if your class is on mission then it is sending people into the mission field, not to the back row of the class.

So who exactly could people in your class serve? I have now gone three consecutive days (and today is early) where I have had teachers in preschool or children's Sunday School classes tell me that they will be teaching alone this Sunday. From the desperation in their eyes, it appears that no help is coming soon. Sunday, a children's leader told me that she is 17 leaders short of having enough adults to minister to her church's kids. At the same time, each of these churches will have adult Sunday School classes this Sunday that are full of people who should be serving instead of sitting. Their teachers have created a Sunday School aquarium where these "disciples" can be happy.

If you perceive that today's blog has taken a personal turn, it has! Just to be honest, it galls me to have boys and girls in our Sunday School departments, many of them who attend do not have a stable family life, and so few of our adults are willing to invest a little time each week to leave a legacy in a little boy or girl's life. I mean seriously, we have grown men who are afraid of a 6 year old! But I digress...

Here are some ideas to help lead people out of the Sunday School aquarium:

- Elevate the mission of serving instead of sitting;
- Pastor - support the children's Sunday School from the pulpit, you can make a hero of those who minister to kids;
- Children's leaders - attend class fellowships. It is much easier to enlist someone to help you if you already know them personally;
- Adult leaders - make sure your group is inviting your associate members to class fellowships.
- Adult leaders - take pictures of adults who have left your class and serve in the children or youth departments and post them prominently in your room. Include the kids they serve in the pic.
- Take the focus off of your group's attendance. Whatever you focus upon will be perceived by your group as what is important;
- Share with your group that for many of those attending, their next step of growth is to leave the aquarium and venture out into ministry;
- Pray - pray for leaders because the opportunity to reach children with the gospel is great!

I have focused much of this article on the opportunity we have to minister to children, but there are many more opportunities to be "on mission" with other people too. Opportunities such as serving the homeless, ministering to widows and orphans, and more. I would love to hear how you are leading your class so that it is not an "aquarium".

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## Day 20

### What's Your Perspective?



*Mark Jones  
Childhood Ministries Specialist  
Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma*

I was walking down the hall at church, peeking in classrooms as Sunday school was starting when I heard it. I noticed the church vans had arrived and were unloading a crew full of kids. The children were very excited to be there and then it happened. The greeter at the door

smiled as the children piled into the building except for one unhappy, self-appointed “Homeland Security Director of the church” who began barking at the children, “SLOW DOWN AND BE QUIET!” I never said a word but rather followed the kids upstairs and helped them find the correct classrooms. The kids were warmly welcomed and classes continued their learning. Although our bus ministry was going well, something was missing. We had faithful bus drivers, someone who contacted the children regularly and classes for everyone, but still something was missing.

In hopes for evaluating and improving our children’s ministry, I invited all the workers to my house. There we enjoyed some fellowship and time together before I asked them these questions. “What do we do in our children’s ministry?” I listed everything they said on a white board. “Now, what do you think we do the best?” I circled five things and readily agreed. A good leader will celebrate his workers strengths. Finally I asked, “What do we need to improve?” It was quiet for a moment, and then a few suggestions were made. I quickly circled the items and we prayed. We needed to ask God how He wanted to use us and how we could improve our effectiveness in ministry to children. After the prayer, a quiet voice spoke up and said, “We don’t love the bus kids like the other kids. I think we could love all the kids.” Then it happened. God helped us understand how we could be a missionary to each child.

It is possible to do the ministry and miss the kids. In Dr. Ed Stetzer’s book, “Breaking the Missional Code” he challenges us to fall in love with the people. For your children’s ministry to become missional, you must evaluate your practices and not only your programs. Gather your leaders and ask, “Do we really love the children?” Identify how you love them and how you can improve building relationships with kids. The relationships you create become the foundations for children to understand a relationship with Jesus. Then, evaluate your programs. Are you providing programs that help kids learn the truths from the Bible? How to use the Bible with ease? How to serve and love others? This provides solid steps toward teaching children to become missionaries themselves. Please note, children will do what they see their leader doing.

When our children arrived the next Sunday, they were greeted by new teachers. No, it was the same teaching staff, but we had all changed. After our evaluation meeting, we had become advocates for kids. We loved each one of them and especially the bus kids!

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## Day 21

### Interview with Scott Badgett about One Day

Our very first One Day seminar was held last Wednesday at Chisholm Heights Baptist Church in Mustang, OK. Dave Bryan is the pastor at Chisholm, and like every great pastor... he has a great education minister! Scott Badgett oversees Chisholm's Sunday School, small groups, and discipleship ministries. Scott has been one of our leading ed guys in Oklahoma the past few years and he did an absolutely incredible job getting his leaders ready for their orientation to a missional Sunday School through the One Day



Initiative. I had a chance to interview Scott right after their One Day orientation.

(For those people who may be wondering, CHBC has an average weekend attendance of about 600 people. Mustang, OK is a suburb of Oklahoma City.)

Bob: How is the One Day training event different from how you have trained your leaders in the past?

Scott: In the past, we have trained our leadership by either attending an association event of several churches or we just put one together ourselves. Our leaders generally are reluctant to travel to other locations, so our turnout for those types of training events is generally low. When we do our own event, we struggle looking for resources that match where we are trying to go at Chisholm.

Bob: You had 93 people attend your One Day Leadership training. You say you generally have a low turnout for training you have to travel to, but you have more attend when you host it. What do those numbers usually look like?

Scott: When we go to another church we usually take about 6 people. Previously, when we have had the training at our church we had around 30-40 people. I was actually expecting about 60 people for the One Day seminar, which would have been phenomenal for us. As you said... we had 93. I was blown away with the response from our leaders!

Bob: You obviously had a great numeric response, but what was the attitude of those attending your One Day seminar?

Scott: The general session began with hearing Ed Stetzer on video sharing about Missional Leadership. It really fired-up our people in attendance and for some I believe it was a life-changing message. The concept of a Sunday School class being missional was a totally new idea for many of our people. Ed brought a fresh perspective about what a class could be and our folks loved it. The support materials that you and your team put together are great, and we needed the breakout times after the video to digest what we heard and explore the materials

Bob: Did you use any high profile people for your training?

Scott: You mean besides the video of Ed? No, with one exception, they were our own church members.

(Note from Bob: One key concept of One Day is to elevate the role and gifting of local church leaders. We encourage churches to equip their own people to lead the breakout sessions in One Day.)

Bob: How did you publicize your event?

Scott: We publicized this event for all leadership and Sunday School members to come and see how Sunday School can be the tool to change not only our lives, but our community. We worked through our Sunday School directors and teachers, but also used Ed Stetzer's promos for two Sunday morning services to build anticipation. The personal invitations by leadership worked well.

Bob: How well were the breakout sessions received? Did you folks like them, or was most of the positive response aimed at Stetzer's video?

Scott: I have received tremendous/positive feedback from the adult leaders. In speaking with the age-group breakout leaders, they were very pleased in the response and the excitement of those that attended. Several of our adult group leaders spoke of the training as being the best they had ever received. This goes to show how God can use any tool to deliver His message.

Bob: How well was the video about Missional Leadership by Ed Stetzer received? What have been the responses to the video?

Scott: Ed Stetzer was a "hit" with his message. The crowd responded well outwardly during the general meeting, but following his message, people shared how pertinent his insights were. It was motivational, gave a vision for pastors and lay people, and is laced with just the right amount of humor. Several people have suggested we show this video to the entire Adult SS. The Student leaders are requesting that those not in attendance be given the opportunity to watch this video.

Bob: What recommendations would you make to other churches who are considering a One Day Seminar?

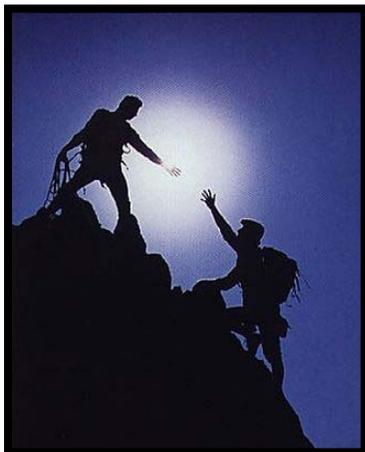
Scott: Do it! Invite not only the Sunday School leadership, but also the Sunday School members. Encourage the congregation that this training will make a difference. Again, the Ed Stetzer videos, the training materials, and even the promo videos have made organizing this event less complicated and purposeful.

So there you have it, the results from the first One Day seminar. It is not too late to register for One Day and equip your leaders in the missional Sunday School concept. Go here for information and registration. If you are not a member church of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, you can still download the breakout sessions for free and receive the "Missional Communities" video by Ed Stetzer for only \$10.00.

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## Day 22

### Growing Leaders in Your Group



As a minister of education in Arizona, I had a great young adult department director named Wade, or "Weighed" as he liked to put on his nametag each week. He was a tremendous leader and a tireless worker. His department was one of the liveliest ones I've ever had and one hot August day he stopped by my office to tell me that he was over being mad at me. What? We had just had leadership training for all of our Bible study leaders and our keynote speaker was Ken Marler. Ken said the highest compliment a teacher could ever receive from the church's leadership was when they enlisted people in the class to become leaders elsewhere in the Sunday School. That month, we had enlisted about a dozen people from "Weighed's" class to teach in other areas. Ken's presentation had changed Wade's perspective about his role as teacher - no longer was it to have a big class. His new vision was to send his people to serve.

Tuesday's post discussed the need for getting people out of the "Sunday School Aquarium" of sitting and serving and into servant leadership. Part of your ministry as a Bible study leader is to replace yourself. Moses had Joshua, Elijah had Elisha, and Paul had Timothy; but who are you investing in to become a new leader? Realize that in our day and culture, we are not necessarily talking about who will replace you after you depart this planet, but who will be the person who will become a new teacher alongside you? There should be more than one person in the process!

So how do you grow a leader in Sunday School? Here are a few suggestions:

- Take them with you! When you make a hospital visit, take a class member with you. Do the same when you visit a guest. Moses took Joshua with him so that Joshua was ready for leadership.
- Delegate! Have lots of jobs. Give people the names of class members to call when they are absent. Ask people to bring food, or make the coffee. If you're a childhood leader, give those kids responsibilities.
- Share stories. Ask a potential leader to share their testimony with the class (give advance notice). Begin enlisting them to teach parts of the Bible study each week.
- Start sharing your secrets. Tell them your secret to encourage discussion when people aren't talking. Show them your favorite commentary, or show them the book you use to journal and write your lesson outlines in.
- Encourage them. Reward people when they venture out and try something in the group. Rewarding people when they try will turn hesitancy into boldness.
- Share your failures. Nobody is a success all the time. Be honest and frank, but often you can share a failure in a humorous way so that people can learn from it.

Although the bulk of this post has obviously been aimed at Bible study leaders of adults, it is appropriate for children and student leaders as well. Giving our kids opportunities to serve teaches responsibility, and it is counter-cultural. Our kids live in a "top-down" world. Teaching our children to serve at young ages helps them learn the biblical value of servant-leadership.

Finally, when people do leave your group to serve in another class or ministry, celebrate it. This coming Sunday, our married young adult department at the church I serve is having a celebration! They are beginning a new Bible study group next week and they are going to party. Reward what you want done!

## Day 23

### De-centralizing Convention Sunday School Ministry

We are trying an experiment in Oklahoma. Okay, I'm referring to the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, not the Sooner football team! With our new "One Day



Initiative", we are de-centralizing the way we have equipped lay Bible study leaders. I know many conventions follow a similar model for equipping the leaders of their small groups and Sunday Schools. In the past, we have generally focused on associational or statewide clinics and encouraged churches to bring their leaders to these events. Before I proceed, I want everyone to know that I am not opposed to these models. Oklahoma may indeed return to something

similar someday for their Sunday School leadership training, the pendulum swings one way and then the other. We have all seen churches call a new pastor who is the polar opposite of the previous shepherd.

But for now, we are in our first year of a three year emphasis of trying something new. Instead of asking our pastors to bring their leaders to an event hosted by the BGCO and led by BGCO personnel or consultants, we are encouraging our churches to host their own training. In essence, we are saying that leadership development belongs to the local church, and we want to assist the church in this endeavor. We want to uplift and encourage the development of the leaders that God has put in our local churches. I believe that we have many "Davids" and "Esthers" who are waiting to be discovered.

So how are we de-centralizing the equipping of our Sunday School leaders?

1 - the BGCO is producing resources to assist with the training.

- To provide a consistent vision to encourage missional groups, we invited Ed Stetzer to Falls Creek where we recorded an outstanding video titled, "Missional Small Communities"; (there are actually 3 videos total)
- Age-appropriate conferences were written and developed, primarily by people in the field: pastors, education ministers, student leaders, and childhood leaders from across Oklahoma were enlisted for this task. We not only want to encourage lay leaders in our churches, but we also want to uplift our own pastors and staffs as well;
- All of the One Day Conference breakout plans are online, and include: conference plan, listening guide, powerpoint presentation, and handouts.
- Materials are FREE to BGCO churches. As part of our Cooperative Program partnership, I wanted to make the materials available so that any church, no matter their size or budget, could afford the materials. Non-BGCO churches can still download all of the Conference materials for free. They can also purchase the DVD album (that's right, 2 disc album) with the Stetzer videos, music videos, and promo videos for \$10.00. Next year, these materials will be available in Spanish too;
- Churches of any size can host their own One Day training. I had a pastor ask me how his rural church of 25 people and 3 teachers could host their own training. My response was to invite his leaders into his home for dinner, show the Stetzer video on his DVD player, and then lead himself, or ask a teacher to lead one of the Conference plans for general leaders. He was thrilled!

2 - Customization (ownership). Remember that the intent behind One Day is that I believe the local church knows its mission field better than I do, so we encourage customization. That is why there are 26 different Conference plans. You can't do them all in one evening, so pick the plans that best fit your situation. Next year, we are going to add at least 25 more conference plans to this list, so a local church will have over 50 topics to choose from to train their leaders. By the end of the third year, there will be 75-100 topics!

3 - Local church leadership. The final piece of our de-centralization process is the leadership. Although we have a great staff here at the BGCO, we are encouraging the local church to use its own lay people to present the Conference plans to their peers. We live in a day and age where celebrities draw crowds. But I do not believe that there is any way to replace the peer-to-peer learning that takes place when we equip someone who has their "shoulder to the plow" alongside us. Sunday School is a lay movement; so is the small groups movement. I believe that by growing lay leaders in the local church, we are also supporting and broadening the ministry and leadership of the local pastor.

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## Day 24

### What Kind of Disciple am I?

The wicked stepmother in story of Cinderella would stand before her mirror each day and ask it the rhetorical question, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?" She was flabbergasted one day when the mirror did not respond with an answer she deemed appropriate.



As I reflect on the wicked stepmother, I wonder if I really want the spiritual reflector I use in my own life to speak to me honestly, or just state what I want it to say. If I want the answer that reinforces my opinion of myself, I want my spiritual mirror to say, "You may not be perfect Bob, but look at so many other people. You are way *better* than they are." I find that sometimes, I need to be shocked. I need an honest reflection and an honest answer of what I truly look like and not what I want it to

say.

I read Thom Rainer's blog this week, and found that Dr. Rainer has some "mirror, mirror" questions on it. These are questions that any Christian leader should ask themselves before they ask these questions to someone else. Dr. Rainer's 10 questions are listed below.

1. Do I read and study my Bible daily so I can know what the Word says about a Great Commission lifestyle?
2. Do I pray each day that God will lead me to a Great Commission lifestyle?
3. Do I need to reconcile with someone so that God can truly use me in the fulfillment of the Great Commission?
4. Am I willing to change my lifestyle materially so I might give more and be less dependent on the things of the world?

5. Do I really show concern for the poor and hurting in this world and in my community?
6. Would my family testify honestly that I lead a Great Commission lifestyle with them?
7. Do I have a gentle and loving spirit that reflects the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life?
8. Do I major on minors?
9. Do I see the speck in others' eyes without seeing the plank in mine?
10. Does my life reflect genuine joy?

As a Sunday School leader, you are a leader to the group of people in your class. It may be frustrating at times to try to lead a group of people into transformational life change, whether they are kindergarteners, students, or adults. But that is our challenge. However, it will be very difficult for us to lead them into life transformation if our own lives are not showing evidences of transformation.

I have generally been ending each daily post in the 31 Days of Sunday School with some practical suggestions to help you with your Bible study ministry. Today, I want to encourage you to find some time during your daily activities, and invest time reflecting on Dr. Rainer's 10 questions for a Great Commission lifestyle.

To read Dr. Rainer's post about these 10 questions, go [here](#).

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## Day 25

### **A Missional Small Community is NOT**

I am in Phoenix this weekend for their annual ACE Conference (Arizona Church Equipping Conference) at North Phoenix Baptist Church. This is a great church growth conference by the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention. The entire ASBC staff participates in this conference and it is a pleasure to be asked to be a presenter at it.

One of my topics while here is about missional small communities. Small communities is a term that has been coined by Ed Stetzer to try to span the Sunday School and small group movements. While I have been trying to deliberate how to present this topic, I decided to go with a "not" and "is" style of presentation. What a missional small community is NOT and what a missional small community IS.

There is way too much material here for one post, so I will split it up over 2-3 days. First, let's look at what a missional small community is "not".

A missional small community is not:

- A weekly gathering of the biblical intelligentsia. Now I truly appreciate great Bible studies that help us understand the scope and context of a Bible passage. But seriously, when a small group or class gets so focused on impressing each other at Bible Trivia, I think we have lost the point.
- A biblical separatist movement. Classes sometimes huddle together in an attempt to protect each other from the big, bad world out there. The talk begins to center around keeping oneself unstained by the world, and apparently the best way to do that is to avoid all contact with it. This worldview is the total opposite of a missional worldview. Remember, Jesus hung out with tax cheats and harlots (In light of the next point, I'll make no political commentary here). Stetzer says it well, "A Christian should have dirty hands and a clean heart."
- Moral Majority attitude. Christianity is not a political movement. Period. Classes that attempt to change the world through laws and politics miss the point of Romans 13:1-5. The Kingdom will not be advanced through human, political means.
- Outsourcing evangelism. A group that expects the pastor and denominational missionaries to do the evangelistic work has outsourced evangelism to the hired guns.
- Organized for ministry. Read this carefully, I'm not saying a missional small community does not minister to each other. Tomorrow's post will explain this more fully.
- A group that seeks comfort. Getting comfortable may be one of the more telling attitudes a non-missional group has. Comfort is another opposite of missional.
- Protective of class identity. Non-missional small groups are protective of their group. Self-preservation becomes a driving class principle.
- Come to our class. Non-missional groups have a "come to us" mentality. We have often heard it stated as "the community knows where we are, if they need us... they can find us".
- Authority is acknowledged on Sunday and denied during the week. Non-missional classes are not living under authority. They study God's Word in the group, and then rarely put it to practice in their daily lives. Non-missional groups grumble under church authority too.

Okay, the bad list is over. Sunday and Monday we will look on the bright side - what a missional small community does that makes it missional.

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## Day 26

### A Missional Small Community Is...Biblically Functioning



Since my last post, I have been leading seminars about missional small communities in both Phoenix and Oklahoma City. My presentations in both locations were full; we had to bring in chairs in OKC! I am learning that there is a lot of interest about "missional small communities". Reports from churches participating in Oklahoma's new One Day Initiative to equip lay Bible study leaders to lead their groups to be missional are incredibly encouraging. I believe

that there are many Sunday School or small group leaders who are hungry for something more. I believe that people really want their group to have a Kingdom-driven purpose. These leaders are connecting with the idea of having a missional group.

In my last post, I talked about what a missional small community is *not!* In this post, I am going to share some things that a missional small community *is*, and because there is so much to dissect on this topic, we are going to look at just one aspect of missional small communities each day.

A missional small community is: Biblically functioning. There are two key words here; biblical and functioning. Small communities are focused on God's Word. While this may seem rather pedantic, the second word, "functional" helps describe the situation. Have you ever been in a dysfunctional situation, like maybe your home or workplace? In dysfunctional situations, people act as if everything is fine and ignore glaring problems for the sake of "unity". Mom and the kids ignore Dad's temper out of fear of an explosion. Dad and the kids ignore Mom's drinking problem. No one ever asks the oldest son what he was doing when he comes home at 2:00 in the morning. Dysfunctional families accept the status quo because addressing the situation is painful.

A biblically dysfunctional small group may acknowledge Scriptural authority in class, but refuse to live under biblical authority during the week. You know the drill... everyone nods their heads affirmatively in support of the lesson that day, like say, I don't know... let's pick evangelism. Every single person supports the importance of sharing Christ in their relationships at work or on the ball team. But a simple glance at this group shows that they have not led one single person to Christ... in years! Or perhaps the Bible study is about controlling the tongue, and earlier the group used their prayer request time to gossip about a church situation. Dysfunctional Bible study groups settle for less rather than expect more of their group members.

A missional group chooses to help each other live under the authority of God's Word in their everyday lives. They hold each other accountable. We choose to live "life on life" with each other. When someone in the group shares how that week's study has

impacted them, they get a couple of supportive phone calls during the week to see how they are doing.

So you may be thinking, "Okay, I get the idea of being biblically functional, but how is that missional?" An essential component of being missional is that ordinary people's lives are being transformed by the power of the gospel. This transformation is exciting and contagious. Missional small communities are contagious! But also, as we are engaging the people in our workplaces and neighborhoods, we are examples of heaven on earth. How can we ask people to make a commitment to a lifestyle that they perceive is no different than their own? To have a missional group, the group members need to live a lifestyle that is real and authentic, and this kind of lifestyle is darn near impossible in a biblically dysfunctional group.

Here are a couple of ideas of how we can develop biblically functioning small communities:

- First, leave more time at the end of each week's Bible study for application. In far too many of our groups, we spend so much time in Bible study that there is no time for personal application. This is a recipe for a biblically dysfunctional group! Now, if you are afraid of allotting 10 minutes of unstructured time for application at the end of your Bible study because you might have a lot of silence, guess what? You probably have a dysfunctional group! Allow more time for application and your group will gradually begin to respond.
- Second, as a group leader, you need to make a phone call or two each week and support and encourage anyone in your group that shared a personal commitment. Yes, technically this is called accountability. Your group needs to learn that we take this life on life thing seriously.
- Third, when someone in the group has a transformational experience, let them share what happened and how God worked in their life. In other words, start sharing stories of God at work in your group. Let's make the transformed life the "norm" instead of the exception.

You may have some other ideas about how to lead your group to be a missional small community. Feel free to leave your ideas in the comment section.

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## Day 27

### The Small Group Identity Crisis



The Sunday School Director has just left a classroom after sharing his vision of a new group that this class could start. As the door shuts behind him, the class which sat quietly through his presentation and request erupts in opposition. In so many words, they let their teacher know that they are NOT going to let "that man" split them up!

The following scene occurs so often that it has now become the common experience for just about any leader who has asked a large group to begin a new class. Speak to most Sunday School

classes or small groups about reproducing themselves and "resistance" will be the word of the day. This attitude did not happen overnight. Reluctance to begin new groups became a part of the Sunday School culture years ago and it is now entrenched. I believe that one of the primary reasons behind this attitude is that our groups have become more concerned with being protective of their identity rather than planting their identity.

So obviously, groups that refuse to plant a new group have an identity crisis! When a group takes its eyes off of Jesus and puts its gaze on protecting the group, it has exchanged its identity in Christ for a human identity. I'm really weighing my words here carefully, and I'll probably get in trouble for this but... here goes. Folks, this is a form of idolatry. The identity of your group or class is not in yourselves, it is in Jesus.

Another thing that happens when we choose to protect the group rather than plant a group is that we lose focus on our mission. Our mission is make Jesus famous and the more groups we have doing that, the better! By refusing to start new groups, we focus more on group protection than expanding the Kingdom of God into our neighborhoods.

Here are some reasons why your class should consider beginning a new group:

- New groups grow faster. They just do. Existing classes are virtually guaranteed of having people in attendance each week. New groups have no such guarantee. They must labor to build the new group. The result is that they are more driven to reach out.
- New groups provide more opportunities for lost or unchurched people to "stick". The more groups your church has, the more people it can both minister to AND involve in the mission.
- New groups put our faith into action. Do we really believe that Jesus is building His church? If so, we should begin new groups and put action to our faith. James said, "Faith without works is dead".

- New groups put more people into leadership and therefore more people are using their spiritual gifting.
- Finally, new groups are adventurous. New groups bring excitement and adventure to the church, and let's be honest... some of our churches could use a little excitement!

Missional small communities have group planting as part of their DNA. In fact, I am going to step out on a limb and say that if your group or class has not started a new group in two years or more, then you have not yet become a missional small community.

## Day 28

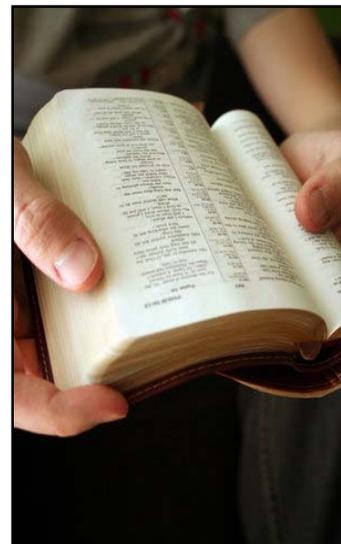
### A Biblical Small Community... Denies the Separatist Movement

A visit to just about any small group or class seems to indicate that they are a little schizophrenic. Group conversation often swings back and forth between two extreme topics. One topic is the role of the class in fulfilling the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. The other topic centers around the phrase "not being in the world". The first topic addresses the need to take the gospel of Jesus to the remotest parts of the world. The second topic is about keeping one's heart unstained by the world.

Both of these views are biblical and both are right and are actually compatible. As the teacher or leader of your group however, you must understand that the latter view will become the dominant view of your group - if you do not intervene.

There is a separatist movement in the American church today. It is promoted by well-meaning followers of Christ and it is based in fear, fear of that big bad world out there beyond the walls of the church and the confines of the home. For a follower of Christ to live in fear of the world is to live as if the gospel has been stripped of its power to free the souls of men from captivity to sin. Fear of the world is an outright denial of the power of cross.

I believe that this fear of the world is expressed in our churches and groups by the word "come". "Come to our church" and "come to our class" are two examples. I often hear people in our groups talk of evangelizing their neighborhood with this phrase, "If we could just get them to come to our church..." The word "come" is the antithesis of being a missional small community. Missional



terminology uses the phrase "attractional evangelism" to describe this attitude. It is kryptonite to our message. The world is not going to come to your class! Instead, your group is going to have to adopt a new word... "sent".

This is why we send missionaries to other cultures, because it is not likely that other cultures are going to come to us. Your small group must begin to think in terms of "sent". Every believer in your group is a missionary and their mission field is that big bad world out there. In fact, your group should look at itself as a gathering of missionaries who are sent into the neighborhoods in which they live.

Here are some suggestions to help you lead your group out of the separatist movement:

- Each week, ask your group what they did to be "salt and light" in their work or neighborhood.
- Share as often as possible from your personal experiences of being a missionary at work, school, etc.
- Be a student of your community. The BGCO has recently done a study called Oklahoma Life, which is available at: <http://www.bgco.org/5034>
- Lovingly address moments when your class is functioning more like a separatist group than a missional group.
- God's Word is full of missional verses. Focus your group on these passages as you study the Bible.
- At least annually, lead your class to do a class mission project, which is tomorrow's topic.

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## Day 29

### Class Mission Projects... Essential for Missional Small Community

It was a beautiful spring day last April, and the members of the small community my wife and I belong to were gathering at a trailer home in Logan County for our class mission project. As we pulled my truck to side of the dirt road, people from our group were already assembling. We were about to have an experience that would change the fabric of our group.



Rather than share all the laborious details of that day (the pics the next couple of days are from that project), I'm going to give some highlights and then share some reasons why I believe every small community should do a mission project at least once a year. But before I proceed, I want to make sure we understand that doing a class mission project does not make your group missional. But...

missional groups do mission projects. The involvement of a group in a mission project helps the group look outward at its community rather than inward at itself.

So why should your group do a mission project together? First, it will help your group get over yourselves! Read Isaiah 58. The Israelites are complaining to God because they fast and pray and God did not seem real interested in what they are doing. The fact of the matter is... He wasn't! Read further down the chapter and you will see that the people were ignoring the needy, the hungry, the homeless, basically anyone having a tough time. God actually tells the "pious" people of Israel that they are oppressing these people and that no amount of prayer and fasting will soften Him up.

If your church is like mine, there are certain things that are expected each week. You read your Bible, pray, attend your Bible study small group, attend worship, and tithe, for example. No matter the size of your church, you have many people that participate faithfully each week in the activities that make us "good Christians". In spite of these faithful people (and I'm not criticizing these people or their activity-may their tribe increase!), the statisticians tell us that my denomination is slowly declining in size. Obviously, the church in many places is losing its impact in the culture. My belief is that the aforementioned spiritual activities are not wrong, but they are incomplete. At some point, our spiritual disciplines have to put us in a position that we can be salt and light in the culture, not just in the church building.

A class mission project that is focused on the community around the church will help the people attending your group see its community through a new lens, the lens of the gospel. I have seen these projects get some good people involved in meeting community needs, and it changes perspective. The gospel suddenly becomes something we can touch and grasp, because we are seeing Christ at work through our own hands and feet. In essence, we are becoming incarnational. The church is no longer trapped inside a building but is spreading good news in its neighborhood.

This post has gotten rather long, so tomorrow I will post some benefits of doing a mission project and also provide some ideas to help your group get involved in your community.

## Day 30

### Class Mission Project Suggestions



Do you like the idea of a mission project for your group, but you don't know where to start. Here are some suggestions for you to get your group involved:

- Have a class dialogue about a mission project. A big help here would be if your church's entire Sunday School is being challenged to do class mission projects, which is what we encourage through PowerUP Your World or the One Day Initiative. But regardless, your group needs to have a discussion about the whole

concept of a class mission project.

- Decide what type of project you want to do together as a class. This will obviously be determined by the abilities of your group. The "He-Man Ex-High School Athletes" class could bring chainsaws to a neighborhood and do some tree clearing for some elderly people. The senior adult ladies class might want to consider something else however.
- Choose a project that will involve the whole group if possible. A hint here: If your group is a coed group, choose a project that will involve the men. If you get the men involved, the project is more likely to involve everyone. It's not that the men are better; it is that the women are more mature and will do something they may not enjoy if it makes the men happy. Sorry guys, it's a shame but that is how it is. For an idea of projects for your group, the BGCO has put together a pamphlet with mission project ideas and also contact information at various agencies, including NAMB and IMB.
- A note to pastors: I strongly discourage assigning projects to your classes or groups. It is very important to the group that their project is their choice and not an assignment from the pastor. Ownership is valuable.
- Select a foreman to direct the project. Many classes have people who are not gifted teachers, but they are excellent point people. This person needs to be able to organize the people, and also oversee any supplies that need to be obtained. Our class has a man who is a great guy, generally quiet during our Bible study time (although when he shares something it is almost always deep). He became our foreman and when we got together for our project, he was in his element! Later, we realized we could not have completed the project without him.
- Select a date. It is likely that you will not have the perfect date that everyone in the group can make. Select one that seems to be most workable and go with it.
- Take pictures. Your group will love looking at these photos for a long time.
- Do the project. In all likelihood, it will not only be a great project - it will probably be the best fellowship your class has ever had.

- Remember to have food. The old saying is, "An army marches on its stomach." So does your class!
- Strive for relationship with the people you are helping. Refuse to let this be a project your class did on a particular day. Instead, realize that you have the opportunity for an ongoing relationship with the people you are serving in Christ's name. For most people, it takes time and a relationship for them to come to Christ.

Realize the potential. Your class is representing Jesus Christ to a person, a family, and maybe even a neighborhood. Also, your group is going to change. The more your group sees how you are bringing the gospel to the world, the more impact the project will have on your group.

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## Day 31

### Enhancing Sunday School through Facebook

Years ago, Bible study leaders discovered a new way to connect with the people in their class... the telephone! Yes, Bible study leaders discovered that they could call every single person in their class in about one evening if they wanted to. They might receive a prayer request from a group member, and then call the rest of their group to share the request. A teacher could contact absentees to see how they were doing. The telephone became a vital part of Sunday School ministry.



Today, another powerful method of communication exists. The tool is the internet and one of the fastest growing ways to contact others and stay in contact is through a social network, specifically Facebook. I am going to take few moments and encourage you to seriously consider using this tool to connect the people in your class. We will also look at some practical ways to use Facebook in your group's ministry.

How can Facebook help your class or small group? First, it provides a central point where people can go for information. Have a fellowship this Friday and a class member has forgotten what time it starts? Go to your group's Facebook page and look it up. A Facebook page can be a great place just to put information about your group.

Use Facebook to help you teach the Bible. Do you want your group to do some study or some work before this week's lesson? Put your questions or requests on your group's Facebook profile. Perhaps you want the group to follow-up on this week's study. You can post follow-up assignments on Facebook. You can post some preview information about the week's study so that your group will be better prepared. Bible memory verses can be shared with your group too.

Post discussion questions on Facebook. You might want to generate some discussion about a particular topic. Post the question and then let your class members interact with it during the week. The people in your group will not only interact with your question, they will also interact with each other's responses.

Post prayer requests. Using some reasonable restraints, you can post some prayer requests and also answered requests on Facebook. A class member who has been unemployed has found a job. He can put that answered prayer on the group's profile himself! A parent of another member that the class has been praying for made a profession of faith in Christ! That member can share this great news and answered prayer with the entire group with just one post.

Email everyone in the class at once. A feature of Facebook is the ability to email all of your members with one simple email. Reminders about the upcoming class breakfast before Sunday School can be sent, as well as other needs or reminders. The emails you send are not part of your group's public profile, so non-group members cannot see them.

Write on your wall or in your group's discussion box some encouraging notes, meaningful Bible verses, etc.

You can choose if you want your group to be open, public, or closed. Which you choose is determined by how you want to use Facebook. An open group let's anyone post on the discussion board. A public group lets others view the group's posts, but only members can write a post. A closed or private group means that only group members can view or write on the group's profile. If you want to use Facebook as an evangelism tool, obviously the private option is not the best.

Facebook is not perfect, but neither is the telephone. Facebook can be a powerful tool to help you quickly communicate with your group and also provide a way for them to network with each other. By the way, although Facebook is heavily used by young adults, research is showing that the largest growing segment of users on Facebook is women, ages 55-65!

An essential thing for you to remember: if you really want to use Facebook to help network your group, then you must make posts on it frequently and often. The more you use it and refer your group members to Facebook, the more valuable it will become.

A great e-book that you can download for free is: Facebook for Pastors. Yes, it is written to pastors but you can peruse this e-book and learn how Facebook works and also some practical ideas about how to use it.

While you're at it, add me as a Facebook friend at [www.facebook.com/thebobmayfield](http://www.facebook.com/thebobmayfield).