

Extreme Sunday School Challenge

Engaging Our
World Through
New Groups



Bruce Raley and David Francis

 LifeWay
Biblical Solutions for Life

Extreme Sunday School **Challenge**



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World Through
New Groups

**Bruce Raley
and David Francis**

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Introduction

In January of 2011, Donna, and I (Bruce) joined a church within a few miles of our house. I had served in interim leadership roles for several area churches and it was time to find a more permanent place for worship and ministry.

Within a few months of attending our new church home, we felt led to begin a new Sunday School group. As we prayed, we were particularly drawn toward the possibility of starting a new class for young adults. This made no sense to us. We were not young adults. In fact, we were empty-nesters. Our young adult children had graduated from college and were on their own. We knew very few young adults in our community. We did not hang out at places where young adults gathered. How could we begin a Sunday School group for young adults when we knew almost none in our community?

The more we prayed, the more we sensed the Lord was leading us to start this new group for young adults. A launch date was set for August 11, 2011.

As that day approached, we fretted that no one would attend. One week before the first Sunday, we happened to meet a young couple who had been married for only two weeks. Casey and Dawn had recently moved to our community and knew no one. We invited them to our new group and they said yes. All four of us were excited!

From that first Sunday, the group has reached young adults. On one Sunday in the spring of 2012, eighteen people were present. On that spring day, I asked them about their Sunday School attendance prior to coming to this class. Only four had attended prior to the start of this class. If you include the six children brought by these young adults, 20 more people were in Sunday School than had been prior to the start of the new group eight months earlier.

Here's the reality: the creation of new groups is essential if Sunday Schools and churches are going to make an impact on our world and communities in the days and years ahead. This is nothing new. It has been true for every generation. The issue is the willingness of each generation to engage their world through Bible study groups.

Sunday School continues to be one of the most effective ways to engage our world. Why is Sunday School effective?

Sunday School connects people through Bible study groups as they live and share the Gospel.

Sunday School is not about the delivery of biblical information alone.

Sunday School is not for fellowship alone.

Sunday School is not for ministry alone.

Sunday School is about people living and sharing the gospel!

Do you see it?

It was hard for Donna and me to see the possibilities at first. God had to open our eyes before we could really see what a new group for young adults become. When you look at your Sunday School (or whatever you call your Bible study ministry), what do you see? Vision is simply the ability to see a preferred future. Our friend Bill Taylor is fond of saying: "If you can't see it before you see it, you will never see it."

How do you perceive the future of your church and community?

Do you see additional Bible study groups reaching new people each week?

Do you see more people coming to faith in the Lord?

Do you see more people being brought into the life of the church?

Do you see more leaders engaged in using their abilities for the Lord?

Do you see more resources available for Kingdom

IT'S TIME TO ENGAGE THE WORLD THROUGH NEW GROUPS!

Chapter 1

THE POTENTIAL

Over the last few decades, the word “purpose” has become popular in church jargon. Books abound with titles that include the word purpose.

As Sunday School leaders, identifying the purpose of Sunday School is vital. We must ask the question of why and clearly define the strategic purpose of our Sunday Schools.

We historically associate a group with occasion and location. Sunday School meets on campus on Sunday morning. Discipleship groups meet on campus on Sunday or Wednesday evening. Small groups meet off-campus during the week. It is all about occasion and location.

Defining a ministry by occasion and location may have served us well in the past, but we can't continue to live in that past. The reality is some small groups meet on a church campus, even on Sunday mornings. Some Sunday School classes meet at times other than Sunday and in places other than on campus. Some groups that meet during the “Sunday School time” are actually discipleship groups. “When” and “where” seldom paints a clear picture of the purpose for any group.

When I talk about a Sunday School, here is what I mean:

Sunday School is an organization of open ongoing Bible study groups designed to intentionally balance biblical content and biblical community with a view toward producing disciples.

An Open Group

For many years, Sunday School experts have subscribed to the standard of the open group. An open group is one that expects and plans for new people every time the group meets. Extra seats are ready for new attendees. Extra copies of Personal Study Guides are on hand for new people. Trained and prepared volunteers are ready to greet and welcome new people into the group. And most importantly, there is openness among group members to welcome new people into the group, and ultimately into their lives.

Let's be clear; if Sunday School groups are to produce disciples, each group must be open to new people. Openness requires more than an empty chair or a blank name tag. Openness to new people must be at the very core of why the group exists in the first place. The deepest desire of each group should be reaching out to new people and including them in the group on a regular basis.

An Ongoing Group

An ongoing group is simply that; a group with no set ending date. Once the group begins, the intent is for the group to continue in some form or fashion, welcoming new people and saying goodbye to others. On the converse, a short-term group has a defined life cycle which is often determined by the length of the particular study and typically "closed" to new participants once the group has begun the study.

Most organizations have a predictable life cycle. The same is true with Sunday School groups. No group will actually continue forever. Children graduate to the next class. People move. People die.

No one ever fully arrives at his or her ultimate spiritual maturity in this life.

The group changes, but the existence of a group can continue regardless of who leaves or joins.

At the same time, making disciples is not a project. Disciple making is an ongoing process. One study or course does not make a disciple. No one ever fully arrives at his or her ultimate spiritual maturity in this life. There is always more to learn and experience in our lifetime journey of discipleship. Discipleship is always ongoing.

A Balanced Group

In the effort to strike a balance between content and community, Sunday School may not be able to provide the depth of some discipleship groups, nor the deeper relationships of some small, home-based groups. Maintaining the balance between content and community, places the Sunday School organization in a position to be the primary evangelistic arm of a church as well as the entry point for the assimilation ministry. When one organization can serve in both ways, the church structure becomes less complicated and more easily communicated.

A Disciple-Producing Group

I (Bruce) enjoy saltwater fishing. In particular, I like to fish for “bottom fish,” such as red snapper and grouper. These fish are usually found around some type of structure (sunken boats, artificial reefs, etc.) or where the ocean floor has a ledge, cave, or uneven surface.

When preparing for a day of saltwater fishing, the first thing a person must determine is the type of fish he or she will seek to catch because different equipment and bait are needed for different fish. Fishing for grouper requires entirely different rods, reels, and tackle than Spanish mackerel or sailfish.

A fisherman can't just jump in a boat, ride 20 miles offshore, and drop a line with the expectation of being successful. To catch bottom fish, you have to go after them on purpose and that means you know their characteristics and habits. You cannot catch what you can not

identify. Who is your group trying to catch? Are you being intentional? Once you catch them, how are you helping them mature as disciples?

What exactly is a maturing disciple? How do we know if our groups are actually producing true disciples of the Lord Jesus?

How would you define a disciple of Jesus Christ?

What are the qualities of a disciple?

A principle to be remembered is the desired end product determines the process. Churches and groups cannot simply arrange a calendar full of hot topics, study courses, monthly gatherings, and ministry opportunities and expect to produce maturing disciples. When that approach is used in Sunday School, there is no telling what the end product will be. More than likely, it will be a confused Christian!

Paul called on Timothy to follow a specific plan (see 2 Tim. 2:22). Timothy was living out that teaching and it transformed his life. Timothy had a responsibility: he was to take that which he had learned and embraced, and teach it to others. Third generation learners would then teach even more people. Paul's plan continues to provide a model for church leaders in establishing clear direction in making disciples.

Sunday School groups strive to reproduce disciples--people who embrace the gospel, live the gospel and take the gospel to others.

The Real Potential

Have you ever stood between a set of railroad tracks and looked down the rails? The tracks appear to begin to get closer and closer to each other in the horizon. Eventually, they appear to merge together into one rail. But you can walk down those same tracks and discover the tracks do not get closer to one another, nor do they merge.

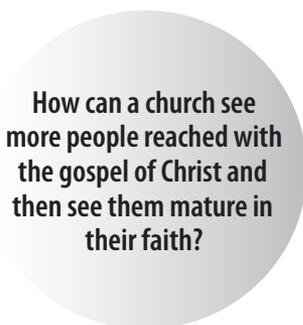
Most Sunday School leaders see two tracks of desired ministry outcomes:

- More people being reached with the gospel
- More people being matured in Christ

These two tracks get treated as if they somehow merge together: as more people are being reached, these same people will somehow become matured in Christ. But one does not guarantee the other. A Sunday School organization can plan all kinds of things that will increase the number of people attending. Through the years, churches have used various creative methods and promotions to get large crowds to show up. But, those things did not necessarily help people mature in their faith.

At the same time, some Sunday School groups chose to focus on going deeper and deeper. The desire is for the Sunday School to become a university from which members graduate with a higher degree in biblical knowledge. Unfortunately, some of these same groups do little to reach lost people. Evangelism is just not a part of why they exist.

Both sides of the track must be given attention. So, how can a Sunday School successfully accomplish both goals? How can a church reach people with the gospel of Christ and then see them mature in their faith? A practical expression of how these issues can be addressed is through the creation of new, ongoing, open groups.



How can a church see more people reached with the gospel of Christ and then see them mature in their faith?

Real Potential for Evangelism

Historically, Sunday School was considered the evangelistic arm of the church. Every Sunday School class was created to reach lost people with the gospel of Christ. The primary purpose of the Sunday School was evangelism.

In recent years, evangelism has been separated. Sunday School was cast singularly in the role of educational ministry. When that view took hold, the primary ministry of Sunday School became educating people about the Bible. Sunday School was relegated to a one-hour-a-week Bible study, with a secondary function of ministry to members and prospects. With this new direction, evangelism was expected to take place in revivals, worship services, and other special events.

There are some real dangers in this direction. Of course, there is nothing wrong with calling leaders or ministers to concentrate on evangelism. However, to separate Bible study and evangelism takes us away from the biblical model. Biblically, education and evangelism are intricately related. Jesus explained that everyone who learned from the Father would come to Him (see John 6). We learn from the Father through the study of His Word. Evangelism is a natural result of Bible study.

The Bible teaches that faith is essential to salvation (see Eph. 2:8-9). If faith is necessary for salvation, then how does someone gain faith? Paul declared that faith is gained through hearing the gospel (see Rom. 10:17). One must hear the message about Christ in order to have the faith needed to receive the gospel. Sunday School of course is one of the best places for hearing it.

Here is the pattern that continues to surface:

1. The Gospel is heard.
2. The hearing of the Word leads to faith.
3. Faith moves people to salvation.

A Case Study

In Acts 8:26-39, an Ethiopian who had been to Jerusalem to worship was returning home. During the trip, he was reading the book of Isaiah. In particular, he was reading prophetic passages about the Lord Jesus and His sacrificial death (Isa. 53). The Holy Spirit instructed Philip to go to the Ethiopian. Philip found him and explained how Jesus was the fulfillment of the passage being read. The Ethiopian responded by accepting Jesus and being baptized.

1. The Lord drew the Ethiopian to Himself. The man traveled to Jerusalem to worship (verse 27). The only way one would have the desire in his heart to worship was the Lord had drawn the man to himself. Jesus declared that no one comes to Him unless the Father who sent Him drew the person (see John 6:44).

2. The Lord drew the Ethiopian to Himself through the Scriptures. He was reading Isaiah 53. This particular passage pointed to the death of Jesus. It spoke of Jesus being an innocent lamb. It spoke of His humiliation. The passage clearly drew the man to Christ.

3. The Spirit led Philip to instruct the Ethiopian in the Scriptures. Philip was called by God to be a teacher—a Bible teacher. The Spirit led Philip to teach a one-person class. The Spirit led Philip to the right person in the right place at the right time. God was already at work. He simply wanted Philip to be a part of that work.

If we are to have the same kind of impact as Philip, then here are the actions we can take:

1. Be open to the leadership of the Spirit (v.29).
2. Be intentional in our teaching (v. 30, 35).
3. Teach the truth of the gospel (v. 35).
4. Give an invitation (v. 37).

Real Potential for Maturing Disciples

Salvation is a step, but it is not the only step. The day a person in your group accepts Christ is a great day and worthy of being

celebrated. But that day marks the beginning of a new role for you.

Think of an outstanding teacher who made a difference in your life.

What were the qualities of that teacher?

What made that teacher unique?

How did that teacher disciple you?

Most teachers desire to be effective. They want to make a difference in the lives of people. Paul identified our role as teachers when he declared that we proclaim Him, "warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

Paul said we are to proclaim Jesus by teaching everyone. We are to teach everyone of every age, both the lost and the believer. Certainly, we want everyone to accept Christ, but more than that, we want everyone to become maturing disciples. We must learn to teach so that all are challenged. Some will need milk, others will need solid food, and a few will need some meat. All these types of people will be in your class. To teach effectively, you must know the needs of the people in your class. It will take time, but it is essential if the goal is to teach and disciple everyone.

Starting new groups makes it possible for a teacher to be a better teacher. The larger a group becomes, the more difficult it is for a teacher to know the needs of the people in his or her class. He may be able to make a great presentation, but real teaching requires a relationship.

"Everyone" means everyone. We are to take the gospel to all through teaching. Why? So that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Real Potential for More People Engaged in Ministry

Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that every believer receives some type of spiritual gift to be used for the benefit of the kingdom. He also reminded the believers in Ephesus that God calls different leaders to fulfill different roles so the church, the local body of Christ, can be built up (see Eph. 4:11).

Both passages imply that Christians are to be engaged in ministry. The Lord blesses every Christian with some spiritual gift for ministry and provides church leaders to equip (train) Christians for ministry.

Clearly a variety of gifts and people are needed to fill the diverse needs within a church. There must also be a place for those gifts to be exercised within the church. Where can a person with the gift of teaching exercise that gift? What about a person with the gift of service?

Small groups and Sunday School are great places for people to engage in ministry through their giftedness.

Think of ministry opportunities Sunday School provides:

Bible study leader

Bible study apprentice

Class administrator

Care group leader

Greeter

Fellowship organizer

Outreach leader

Class secretary

Mission leader

Name additional ministry opportunities in Sunday School.

It's plain and simple: each new group provides additional opportunities for people to be engaged in more ministry!

Real Potential for More Resources for Kingdom Work

Many church leaders, particularly Sunday School leaders, get really quiet when the subject of money is raised. While it is one of the most addressed subjects in the Gospels, we seem to be shy in bringing up the topic.

Let's be frank. Money funds ministry. The church light bill, the church mortgage, salaries—they all take money.

In the community where we live, a church recently voted to close its doors and disband. The church had been strong and healthy at one time. But through the years, the church declined and gotten into financial difficulties—difficulties so severe the bank was forced to foreclose on the property. Thankfully, another church in the community took on the debt and is working to establish a new mission in that location.

Money is a necessary resource and additional funds needed for new groups. The church will need to buy curriculum for those new groups as well as other supplies. The cost of doing ministry just went up.

The curriculum for a new group of 10 will cost less than \$200 for the year (10 personal study guides, 1 leader guide, and 1 leader pack). Even though this represents a \$200-a-year investment, that group will most likely give over \$10,000 if the average person in the group gives \$20 a week! (See Appendix for more on this subject.)

Real Potential...

Starting new groups also gives the church an opportunity to grow beyond its present scope of influence. Most groups become closed after they have existed for 18-24 months. Even new people who come into an established group may find it difficult to build relationships. A few probably will, but seldom more than the number of group members who leave for various reasons. So, even though a few new people may “stick,” there will rarely be any net growth. New groups will move your organization beyond your present sphere of influence and into the next circle of influence in your community.

A new group will bring an average of 10 new people attending Bible study within a year if properly begun.

The group itself may not grow by 10, but the Bible study organization will. The key is the group must begin properly.

A class begins properly when:

a target audience is identified,

leaders are enlisted and trained, and

emphasis is given to the birth of the group.

So, if you want your Sunday School to grow by 50 people next year, start at least five new open, ongoing groups. Your class, should it birth another class, could be responsible for at least 10 new people becoming engaged in Bible study and ministry in your church.

Reflections on Chapter 1

Would you consider your Bible study group to be an open group? To what evidence over the past 3 months would you point to validate your response?

Would you consider your Bible study group an ongoing group? Explain.

Rate your group's balance between biblical content and biblical community by placing an "X" on the line below.

biblical content _____ **biblical community**

What could be done to move your group closer to a balance or to maintain the balance you already have?

What is your group's plan for reaching new people? For discipling everyone on your ministry list?

Chapter 2

THE ESSENTIALS

Earlier, I (Bruce) told you that I like to saltwater fish. When I go out, there are some things I always carry. Sure there is fishing tackle, but without a GPS or some type of location devise, fishing in the Gulf would be difficult. On board are flotation vests, flares and tools. And of course...I take plenty of water, food and sunscreen. There are just some things I will not go fishing without! They are essential for success and survival.

There are also some things that are essential if a new group is to survive and thrive. A catalyst, new leaders, enrolling new people and instilling the right DNA are all essential.

Essential 1: Catalysts

Both of us (Bruce and David) have been involved in Sunday School leadership for three decades. Through the years, we have witnessed dozens, even hundreds of new groups, started. These new groups have ranged from bed babies to senior adults in their 80s and older.

Looking back through the years, we have come to realize not one of those groups started on its own. Not a single one. No group just organically sprang up and succeeded. Instead, a catalyst was necessary every time.

A catalyst is one who causes an action to occur or one who incites activity. In Sunday School, a catalyst is the one who has a vision for a

new group, and then works toward the creation of that group.

The good news is that anyone can be a catalyst for starting new groups. The person just needs a commitment to starting a new group and starting them well. The responsibility to reach people with the gospel and to disciple people does not belong solely to the pastor and church leaders alone. The Great Commission was given to everyone—to all of us.

If new groups are one of the best means for reaching people for Christ, maturing people in Christ, engaging people in ministry, and increasing the resources available for Kingdom causes, then everyone should become a new group catalyst!

Essential 2: Leaders

When challenging Sunday School leaders to start new groups, a question invariably asked almost every time is about finding new leaders.

Without a doubt, launching new groups will require more leaders, more teachers, more caregivers, more outreach leaders, and even more administrative support.

If there are opportunities for the creation of new groups, there are people in your church right now who can provide leadership in those groups.

Every church has everybody they need right now to do the work the Lord wants that church to do *right now*.

Paul explained that the Lord places people in the local church as He sees fit (see 1 Cor. 12:18). Therefore, the Lord has placed everybody in your church at this time needed to accomplish what He wants to do.

If there are opportunities for the creation of new groups, there are people in your church right now who can provide leadership in those groups. The key is identifying, properly enlisting, and training these new leaders.

Identifying New Leaders

All new leaders are in adult groups right now. You might find some maturing young adults in the student ministry, but for the most part, new leaders are in your adult Sunday School groups.

The best source of identifying new leaders is to ask existing adult class leaders about the people in their groups. The adult teachers and leaders know the members of their class better than anyone. They are with them week after week. They have witnessed their faithfulness. They have listened to their comments, questions, and observations. They have observed their knowledge of the Bible.

Here is the main problem: some adult Sunday School leaders don't want to let go of their members. I can certainly understand why. The leader has worked diligently to grow the class through the years. They have personally invested time into discipling specific members. Most potential leaders will be the ones you want to keep (they are the one you know you can depend upon), making it even harder to send them out. Whatever the reason may be, many class leaders want to keep their group members like a mother hen shelters chicks under her wings.

In May 2012, my (Bruce's) daughter Sarah got married. At the ceremony, I walked her down the aisle and presented her to Stephen. (I refused to say I gave her away!) I then moved to face Sarah and Stephen and performed the ceremony, including the pronouncement of husband and wife.

Since the wedding, numerous people have asked me if it was difficult to walk her down the aisle and perform the ceremony. I almost laugh every time I am asked that question.

The answer is no! Donna and I had invested 23 years preparing for that day. We never dreamed that Sarah would live with us forever. We raised her to become a responsible adult who would create her own family and instill the same values in her children that we instilled in her.

In other words, we raised our kids to launch them to create families of their own.

I (David) have had the privilege of performing the wedding

ceremony for three sons. We love them dearly, but we're glad they have homes of their own. What was one family in Texas has become four families in Nashville, San Antonio, Boston, and Atlanta. God willing, we will get to see that number at least double again. That's the way family is supposed to work. That's the way Sunday School is supposed to work too. And it's something to be glad—not sad—about!

Week after week, a leader invests in his or her group members through the study of God's Word. But the goal is not to keep them "til death do us part," but to launch them into ministries of their own.

Certainly not everyone can be a leader of a Bible study group, but many can! Some could be a leader in a preschool class. Others could lead in groups for elementary children or students. Others could either launch their own adult group or take leadership of their present group while the present leader launches a new group.

The success of a Sunday School leader is not measured by how large the class grows, but by how many leaders are sent out.

I (David) like to challenge leaders to visualize a wall or bulletin board where they brag about the growing impact of their group. One part of the display would be dedicated to names or photos of the group's missionaries to kids—those who have left the class to lead preschool, or children, or student groups. Another part would be dedicated to names or photos of new groups that were sent out by this group. Can you imagine what that might look like after a decade of starting new groups every couple of years? If those classes started some new groups too, you could post photos of your "grand-groups." Just one group with this kind of vision could easily account for 100 new people growing in Christ—much faster than you'd think! It will take a lot of new leaders.

God's Plan for Multiplying Leaders

If you read through chapter 1 of Genesis, you will quickly discover an important strategy for multiplication. Vegetation produces seeds.

Seeds produce more plants that produce more seeds that produce more plants.

And the same was true with sea creatures and animals. God directed His creation to multiply, producing more sea creatures and animals that would multiply. Then God created humans. This first couple was then instructed by God to be fruitful and multiply, producing more men and women who would also multiply.

God's plan followed along an "according to their kind" pattern. In simple terms, apples reproduce apples, dolphins reproduce dolphins, dogs reproduce dogs, and people reproduce people.

When we apply this plan to developing leaders we discover that leaders reproduce leaders. We might say it more accurately this way: leaders reproduce leaders who reproduce leaders who reproduce leaders. Pretty simple!

If we take that a step further, preschool leaders reproduce preschool leaders who reproduce preschool leaders. Leaders of children reproduce leaders of children who reproduce leaders of children. Student leaders reproduce student leaders who reproduce student leaders. Leaders of adults reproduce leaders of adults who reproduce leaders of adults. Sunday School directors reproduce Sunday School directors who reproduce Sunday School directors.

You get the point. And, it is not only true with Bible teaching ministry leadership, but with every other area of the church. Ushers, choir members, greeters, etc. are to reproduce themselves. If we fail to reproduce, we will become extinct.

Sunday School leaders not only teach a group, but are reproducing themselves as they teach a group. So a preschool leader is not to teach preschoolers, but to reproduce themselves as they teach preschoolers. And that should be true for all. In fact, if you've never taught preschoolers, it can be a pretty scary idea. Vickie and I (David) have enjoyed using our classes as a "lab" for prospective teachers several times. It usually doesn't take long for them to decide "We can do this" and declare "Give us our own class!" Just ask someone to hang out and watch. Trust God to "hook" them!

The down side of this approach is everything gets reproduced. The good and the bad gets passed on. Ongoing training for teachers and other leaders is the best way to overcome the passing on of bad habits. It all starts with the leader investing in other leaders so they can invest in others who will be leaders.

Can you see what could result in this shift? Churches would always have a reserve corps of leaders ready to serve as new groups are launched.

Multiplying Leaders – Step-by-Step

The principle sounds easy: leaders creating leaders. But what are the practical steps leaders can take in reproducing leaders?

If there are opportunities for the creation of new groups, there are people in your church right now who can provide leadership in those groups.

Step 1. Pray

You expected that to be step 1, didn't you? It seems prayer always ranks at the top of instructions and lists. Because prayer always makes the list, we can easily overlook it and even ignore it. Please don't! Prayer must be first and foremost.

When we pray, we begin to see God's perspective. Let's admit it, our perspective does not always align with God's perspective.

As we (Bruce and David) discussed leaders we had enlisted through the years, we both can name Sunday School leaders and teachers we would have never dreamed would survive as leaders, much less excel. The Lord would place certain people on our hearts. We admit we even argued—or at least disagreed—with the Lord about the potential of some of these people. But, after enlistment and equipping, they became incredible teachers of God's Word and ministers to their groups.

Begin with prayer. Ask the Lord to show you His perspective on people. Remember the principle is everyone reproduces after its kind. So if you are a teacher, ask the Lord to show you a potential teacher. If you are an outreach leader, ask the Lord to show you a potential

outreach leader. Whatever your role, pray! Ask the Lord to show you someone in whom you can invest.

Step 2. Enlist

Meet with the person. Do not talk about the important issue of Bible study ministry leadership over the phone, text, social media, or e-mail. Don't try to catch the person at church just before group time or worship. Set an appointment so you can sit down with the prospect and get to know each other, hear each other's heart, and pray with each other. If you believe the responsibility is important, than you ought to recruit like it is.

Be sure to share that this meeting came about through prayer. Talk about God's plan for leadership multiplication. Explain that after asking the Lord to show you a person or persons in whom you could invest and equip, he or she was specifically identified.

Talk to the prospective leader about the ministry in which God has you serving. Share the joys and blessings you receive because of your obedience to the Lord's direction for your life. Tell him or her that you see potential within them to enjoy those same blessings and joys.

This is also the time to talk about the purpose and potential of the Bible study ministry. There are some people who have been engaged in Sunday School, small groups and other Bible study ministries, who do not understand the purpose. So many people still aim toward a goal of Bible knowledge as the ultimate purpose of Bible teaching. If people can know the details of the Scripture, even the deeper truths of God, then we have been successful.

Remind them that the ultimate goal is applied Bible knowledge. The Bible study ministry, whether it is Sunday School, small groups, or other expressions, should aim toward helping people know the full counsel of God and applying that truth in their life. Explain that the teacher, the outreach leader, the greeter, even the maker of the coffee has a role to play in helping people live and share the gospel.

Step 3. Equip

Multiplying leaders requires an intentional investment in others. We

must not only enlist, but equip. Equipping is not a one-time meeting or book recommendation. It is ongoing and may take weeks or months. But effective multiplication requires training, resources and the confidence for new leaders to begin service.

One of the best methods for equipping is modeling. Ask your apprentice (or whatever name you deem appropriate) to watch what you do and ask questions about why you lead the way you lead. Demonstrate how you prepare for your ministry. Provide resources for additional preparation or training. Keep in mind, most people will emulate the leader. What the apprentice sees the leader doing, he or she will do.

I (Bruce) attended my first Sunday School training at Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina in the Summer of 1982. I had just been called as Minister of Education and Youth at Walnut Street Baptist Church of Jonesboro, Arkansas. To say I knew little about education ministry would be an understatement. The only thing I knew was that Sunday School met at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings and I was in charge of it.

I watched the leaders in the conferences I attended. I took careful notes of not only what was being said, but also the manner and methods in which it was presented. I noticed the tools used by the leaders (overhead projectors in that day). I bought the recommended resources. I watched the various teaching and training approaches.

My eyes were opened that week to the potential of the Bible study ministry. Even more, the Lord put a burning passion in my heart for education ministry leadership. As a novice, I really did not know what to do when I got home. How would I communicate all this great information? Even more, how could I help my Sunday School leaders catch the passion I had experienced?

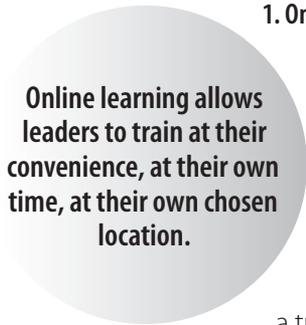
I went home and started Sunday School leadership meetings. We met every Wednesday night. Sunday School leaders would grab a dinner plate and come into our “worker’s meeting.” Guess what I did in those meetings? I taught the Walnut Street workers exactly what I had been taught at Ridgecrest. I taught them using the exact methods I had witnessed.

Never underestimate the power of modeling! It is perhaps the most powerful means of equipping.

Leader Training in Tough Economic Times

One area of church life that is often affected during tight economic times is leadership training and development. Funds for leaders to attend training and conferences are often cut. Plans for training for ministry leaders, such as Sunday School teachers, are struck from the calendar and budget.

At the same time, church leaders know that training, leader development and continuing education are essential even during financially lean times. Below are some practical ideas for training during tight economic times.



Online learning allows leaders to train at their convenience, at their own time, at their own chosen location.

1. Online Articles

LifeWay.com has hundreds of articles that can be used for training. Once the LifeWay page is displayed, use the search box in the top right corner to find articles on the subject. Print or email the link of the chosen article and distribute it to every Sunday School teacher. You might even want to print a training article for Sunday School teachers and display it in the room when the teacher arrives every Sunday. The only cost for this training is simply paper and ink.

2. Online Training

Online learning is a growing wave and will be growing even greater in the days ahead. Online learning allows leaders to train at their convenience and at their own chosen location. LifeWay has a series of ever growing video training clips on lifeway.com.

3. Sunday School Leader Guides

The leader guide for many of LifeWay's curriculum lines often have articles and tips that help the leader. These articles can be used as the

topic for discussion in leadership meetings.

4. Teach a Book

One of the most cost effective means of leader training is through a book study. The pastor, staff member, volunteer leader of Sunday School can choose a particular book, ask leaders to purchase the book, and lead group discussions in leadership meetings.

Over the past several years, I (David) have written annual Sunday School leadership books. The primary purpose behind these books is for training. Each of these can be downloaded for free. In addition, there are accompanying PowerPoint presentations and teaching plans for each age division. These can be found at www.lifeway.com/davidfrancis.

5. State and Associational Events

Many state conventions and local associations provide quality training events. These are often at little or low cost and usually require little travel. Church leaders can contact their state convention office and local association office to get a calendar of these training opportunities.

6. Ridgecrest Conference Center

The summer conference center event provides some of the best training for church leaders. The event provides more concentrated training than most other events, while also allowing for a setting of relaxation and inspiration.

While there is a cost involved in the conference center events, the costs can be reduced by traveling together as a group or with neighboring churches. Churches might also consider cutting costs by staying in lower cost housing or multi-room apartments.

Step 4. Empower

Effective ministry requires a delicate balance between total dependence on the Lord and personal confidence that He will use you to accomplish His purposes.

Overconfidence can be disastrous. Even more, it can be sinful. Whenever a leader begins to think that natural ability or confidence is

all that is needed to be successful in a Bible study ministry, a fall is likely just around the corner. God speaks clearly on pride (see Prov. 16:18).

Every ministry leader should regularly take a “pride check.” But at the same time, leaders should also have confidence God has called them and He will empower them for His service. You might call this a “humble confidence.” It is an assurance the Lord is going to use you to accomplish His purposes as you totally depend upon Him.

Talk about this balance with an apprentice. Give assurance of your confidence in their call and ability. Moreover, remind consistently of God’s power that will be made manifest as we depend upon Him.

Empowering also includes the provision of resources. Bible study leaders often need more resources than group members. Leaders are expected to have mastered the Scripture passage and be able to explain it well. Biblical application is expected. Additional Bible commentaries, suggested teaching ideas, Websites, and other resources may be needed in order to be fully prepared for the Bible study session. Providing these resources and showing others how to use them will empower them as well.

Step 5. Encourage

One of Satan’s greatest tools is discouragement. Leaders can easily become discouraged because of a negative comment from a group member. Discouragement may come due to the lack of faithfulness of group members. Slow growth or small numbers can also be discouraging.

Discouragement can be particularly paralyzing to new leaders. It can even led to a new leader quitting and never being willing to lead again.

Every leader needs encouragement. Experienced leaders should make it a practice—even a habit—of encouraging new leaders. Seek out new leaders and intentionally speak encouraging words. Write a personal hand-written note. Buy the new leader a Bible commentary or resource that will help them grow and develop.

Never underestimate the power of encouragement!

Essential 3: Enrollment

Andy Anderson was a pastor in Florida that reached and discipled hundreds of new believers through Sunday School. He is credited as being the developer of "The Sunday School Growth Spiral."

The more lost people enrolled in Sunday School, the more likely we are to see people come to faith in Christ.

Andy discovered that one out of every three lost people who were enrolled in Sunday School would accept Christ within a year. We have found this to be true though the years of ministry as well. It makes sense. The more lost people enrolled in Sunday School, the more likely we are to see people come to faith in Christ.

For many churches, Sunday School is not evangelistic. It can't be... there are no lost people in the classes! This should be a spiritual burden. This should be a prayer concern. This should drive us to action.

Since evangelism should be a priority of a Sunday School, enrollment of lost people must also be a priority. Lost people will not study the Word if they are not present. It begins with enrolling them, mixed with accepting them, loving them, and praying for them.

But it takes more than a stated philosophical purpose or a banner on a wall. It takes determination and a willingness to work.

Every person in the Sunday School can and should invite someone to attend with them. When we invite them, we can enroll them.

When a person is enrolled, that person is:

1. More likely to experience a sense of belonging.

- Softens the heart so people will be open to the truth.
- Provides a foundation of trust.
- Establishes the context for biblical community.

They are members not prospects!

2. More likely to attend.

- Encourages active participation in the Bible study group.
- Invites the beginning of relationships.
- Keeps people in the disciple making process.

Members are expected to attend.

3. More likely to receive ministry from the class.

- Initiates the caring ministry and regular contact.
- Allows everyone in the group to participate in the care of other group members.
- Reminds the leader of his or her role as shepherd to all.

It's a ministry list, not just a roll filled with names.

Essential 4: Start with the Right DNA

It seems like half the shows on television are about high-tech crime solving. Detectives from all over the country can solve any crime, apprehend any criminal, and bring justice to any situation as long as they can find a little DNA. A swab off a drinking glass, a minuscule drop of blood, or even a hair follicle is all that is needed to answer the mystery.

DNA is an abbreviation for deoxyribonucleic acid. DNA's main function is the storage of information. It can be compared to a set of blueprints for a building or a recipe when cooking. DNA uniquely identifies you as an individual. It shows how you are different from every other person.

Some groups fail within a few weeks or months after being launched. In many cases, these groups lack the right DNA.¹

So what is the right DNA for a new group that will establish it well?

1. Disciple-making at the core

It has already been said several times, the ultimate goal of Sunday School is to make disciples. That begins through reaching those without Christ. Through connecting with believers and the Word of God, the gospel is proclaimed.

The gospel is not only for our justification; it is also for our sanctification. We study the Word of God together week after week. As we do, leaders and members are challenged to apply the Bible. Through growth in Bible knowledge and appropriate application of that knowledge, we grow in our Christian faith.

2. Network of people on mission

New groups offer an opportunity for the development of relationships. In fact, the establishment of these relationships is essential for a healthy new group start. This may take a few weeks or even a few months. But over time, groups should begin to feel a sense of trust and openness. This allows for greater transparency and opportunity to minister to one another.

The goal of developing relationships within a group is not just to do life together, but to challenge one another in Christian growth and ministry.

While groups may meet one time a week to study God's Word, they have the responsibility to live out that teaching through the other 167 hours of the week. Groups should have the responsibility to care for one another, to minister to one another, and to reach out to those without Christ or a church.

One of the best ways for groups to develop and strengthen relationships is through mission projects. Every older preschool, children's, student, and adult group should have identified mission projects in which members can engage.

Both of us (Bruce and David) and our wives were members of the same Sunday School class for a while. We knew the names of most of the other class members and some information about their lives.

But it wasn't until our class worked together on a mission project one Saturday that we really got to know the other class members. That Saturday represents a significant turning point in the life of that group.

What is your group doing to regularly be on mission together?

3. Accountable for sending leaders and starting new groups

New groups are launched with the purpose of making disciples. But within that purpose are multiplication elements. Every group should begin with the intention of reproducing; sending out leaders and starting a new group.

The group leader should be the primary force in helping members find a place of ministry. That ministry may be within the work of the group. Very few groups are successful if there is only one leader. Successful groups utilize many leaders.

The group should also strive toward sending out group members to other places of ministry within the Sunday School. This is not simply to fill spots in other areas of ministry. Some members should be sent because it is the next step in their disciple maturation.

New groups should also begin with the intention of multiplying. Every Christian should make disciples and Christian groups should reproduce. A challenging, yet realistic goal, is for every group to reproduce every 18-24 months.

Reflections on Chapter 2

How have you seen the principle of multiplication lived out in your church? How has that principle impacted you?

What actions are you taking to discover and build the next generation of leaders in your church and group?

How does your group celebrate the enrollment of a new class member?

How can you help build another Bible study group?

What is your Bible study group or groups doing to instill these elements?

Disciple-making at its core

Network of people on mission

Accountable for sending leaders and starting new groups

Chapter 3

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Our world is changing quickly. Fewer Americans are attending church today than in past decades. The number of atheists and agnostics in the United States has quadrupled in the last 20 years. An estimated 1% of American college students attend worship on Sundays.²

Southern Baptists began collecting data on Sunday School attendance in 1972. The average weekly Sunday School attendance that year was 3.6 million. The population of the United States was approximately 210 million people.

Fast forward to 2006, some 34 years later. The number of people attending Sunday School in Southern Baptist churches that year was 4.1 million. Five hundred thousand more people were in Bible study each week than in 1972! That looks good on paper until you look at the change in the population. In that same time period, the U.S. population increased by 90 million people.³

The number of our neighbors is still growing. The population of the United States in 2012 is approximately 313 million. Sunday School attendance in Southern Baptist churches is holding steady at 4 million.

The numbers do not paint a pretty picture as far as Christianity is concerned in the United States. For several years, various experts have classified the United States as a post-Christian society. In simple terms, post-Christian describes a culture with language and assumptions that once were but are no longer rooted in Christianity. The decline in

Christianity and its influence on society and culture is a major indicator of a post-Christian culture.

In my opinion, our nation is no longer “post-Christian.” We have moved beyond that stage, coming full circle. Much of our society is now “pre-Christian.” That means many of our neighbors have very little or no knowledge of biblical foundations, stories, or principles.

Many of our neighbors today are second and third generation unchurched. Their grandparents or great-grandparents may have been involved in church and faith, but their parents were not. Therefore, the second and third generation of this population have very little exposure to the truth of the gospel. Most are not anti-church., they are simply apathetic toward the church.

There is Hope

While some people have given up, I believe there is still hope.

Hope is a word that has various definitions for people. When most people hear the word “hope,” it implies an anxious anticipation. I hope my football team wins. I hope I pass the test. I hope the price of gas decreases. This hope is simply a wish usually filled with anxiety.

Hope found in the Bible has an entirely different meaning. It is not an anxious wish, it is a joyful certainty.

Paul declared that this kind of hope was the source of rejoicing because it was produced by character and would not be disappointed (see Rom. 5:1-5). Paul certainly was not saying proven character produces anxious anticipation--not at all. Affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces a joyful certainty! A certainty that will not disappoint us!

Yes, there is hope through Sunday School. There can and should be a joyous certainty through Sunday School...an expectation of making disciples as new groups are started.

**Affliction
produces
endurance, endurance
produces proven character,
and proven character
produces a joyful
certainty!**

Life Cycles

For many years, church experts have bemoaned that fact that 80 percent of all American churches are either plateaued or in decline. From our observations, that is probably true—at least in any given year. I (David) find it a little encouraging that it's not the same 80 percent that are stable or declining each year, nor the same 20 percent that are somehow perpetually growing. Just like other organizations, churches usually experience cycles: growing, stabilizing, declining. Unfortunately, just one in five is in a growth cycle in any given year. But here is the good news: we think we know what causes growth cycles! It's new groups. Start new groups and you will observe growth. Keep all the groups as they are and plateau (and decline a little). Combine a few groups and decline.

Many churches today are once again seeing hope through Sunday School. New leaders are being enlisted and trained. Target groups are being identified. New groups are being started. People are being invited. The Bible is being taught. And... disciples are being made!

At Sunday School Weekend at Ridgecrest in 2012, Ben Pritchett shared the story of Sunday School at Houston's First Baptist Church. Ben has led the charge in the creation of dozens of new groups over the last five years. As a result, more than 500 new people are in life-changing Bible study groups today than five years ago.

At that same conference, Scott Payne, Executive Pastor at Liberty Baptist Church in Hampton, Virginia, shared a similar testimony. Through the creation of new groups—both on and off the church's campus—hundreds more people are in attendance every week.

They are starting new groups! But what about us? What groups are needed? Where do we even begin to dream about new groups?

Anytime, Anywhere...

Sunday is the day for many leaders of the education ministry of the church. In fact, it has often been said that "Sunday morning rules." Bible study groups meeting adjacent to worship services are not only

convenient for the participant, but also provide opportunities for the entire family to experience a group as well as corporate worship in one time frame and location. There are many advantages to having group Bible studies and worship together.

While Sunday morning usually gets priority in most churches, the present culture is now demanding that leaders expand that mindset and look at opportunities beyond a one-time-a-week offering.

In the 1960s and 70s, businesses were governed by “blue laws.” These laws regulated what businesses could and could not sell on Sundays. While the blue laws originated in response to the demise of prohibition, the laws went beyond the sale of alcohol. In fact, very few businesses could sell much of anything on Sundays. Therefore, few businesses were open.

Today almost every retail chain is now open on Sunday. Restaurants find Sundays to be one of their most profitable days. Manufacturers are operating weekends. While we are certainly not advocating that businesses should be open on Sundays, we cannot ignore this reality.

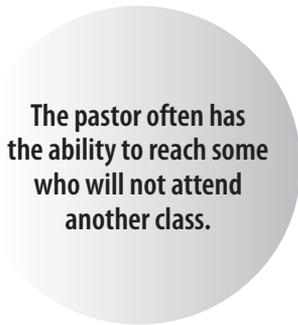
In discussing this with church leaders over the last couple of years, most believe 20-25 percent of their community population has some type of work or other obligation on Sunday morning. Think about this; if we offer Bible study and worship only on Sunday mornings, we eliminate the possibility of one out of every five people from ever attending.

We can keep our Sunday morning schedule, as long as we are willing to add to it. Think about your community. If people cannot attend on Sunday morning, when can they attend? Sunday evenings? Wednesday evenings? Saturday mornings?

There may be another, even greater question. If a percentage of people in your community cannot attend on Sundays, could you go to them? Could you create a Bible study class that met at the local hospital before or after a shift change? What about a class for restaurant workers that meets an hour before clocking in? Could Bible study classes be held in the fire station? Department store? Food court of the mall? Manufacturing plant?

Where to Start

Use the following as a guide to think through opportunities for new groups over the next year or two.



The pastor often has the ability to reach some who will not attend another class.

1. Created out of Large Classes

Do you have groups with 20 or more adults in average attendance? Can you enlist five or six to be missionaries to start a new group? Additional ideas for expanding grading of preschoolers, children and students are found in the last chapter of Missionary Sunday School. ⁴

2. Pastor's Class

Does the pastor have an opportunity to teach a Sunday School class? The pastor often has the ability to reach some who will not attend another class. The pastor will need other leaders to assist with the group organization, fellowship, and ministry.

3. Church Members not Enrolled

Compare the church membership and Sunday School ministry list (class rolls). Are there church members not enrolled yet attending worship? Do you have a Bible study group they could enroll in? If not, do you need to start a group just for them and others like them?

4. People on Class Rosters, but not Attending

Take a close look at your ministry lists (class rolls). Look for those who have not attended in the last six months. Is there a logical reason (illness, work, etc.)? If not, consider inviting them to a new group. This might be just what some need in order to reconnect.

5. Apartment/Condo Complex

Are there apartment or condominium complexes within the church field that might be a location for an on-site Bible study group? Many people will not, or cannot, come to the church facility. Go to them!

6. Coffee Clubs

Many members meet with other people from the community at a restaurant or coffee house. Ask these members to invite their friends who gather to meet once a week for a 15-20 minute Bible study. Take advantage of existing opportunities.

7. Work Place

As we strive to make disciples, ask group members if they would be willing to start a weekly Bible study in their work place.

8. Hospital

Hospitals are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Because they are open, employees are needed every hour of every day of every week. Those who work on Saturday night or Sunday often do not have a Bible study group opportunity. Why not start a Bible study at the hospital on Saturday evening and Sunday morning for the Sunday workers?

9. Campgrounds

While these groups may not provide many “permanent members,” offer a weekly Bible study at a local campground. Campers like to relax, slow down, and enjoy life. Many will find a Bible study would be a great place to connect with others.

10. Seasonal Residents

I (Bruce) lived in the Florida panhandle for 10 years. Each winter, thousands of temporary residents would travel to our community to enjoy the usual mild winter. We developed Bible study groups both weekday and Sunday for these special neighbors.

11. Migrant Workers

Many areas of our nation have workers that move in for a season. Because these workers know they will only be temporary residents, they often do not engage in local churches. Make connection with them and offer a weekly Bible study.

12. Childcare Centers

Offer services to local childcare centers to provide a weekly Bible story to the children.

13. Business Executives

Ask business leaders within the church to lead a Bible study for other business executives within the community. Many of these men and women are under constant stress and would welcome a weekly time of encouragement from the Scriptures and prayer.

14. Parents of Preschoolers

As you think and pray about new groups, think *affinity*. Many people would be interested in a group of people of similar life stage. Parents of preschoolers have challenges (and joys) that are different than parents of teenagers. Groups of similar affinity often discover they enjoy being together for Bible study and mission.

15. Parents of Children

16. Parents of Teenagers

17. Empty-nesters

18. Hobbies, interests

Just as people of similar life stage enjoy being together, so do people with like hobbies or interests. These might include interests such as: motorcycles, hunting, fishing, running, quilting, traveling, etc.

19. Newlywed / Nearlywed

While many churches try to assimilate newlyweds and nearly-weds into a young adult group, there are often obstacles to that becoming a reality. Begin a newlywed/nearlywed class at least every 24 months (if not more often).

20. New Members to Church

It is really difficult for many new church members to break into the relationship circles of many existing groups. New members may know only a few people in the church; offer the option of a new group for those who have joined the church in the last six months.

21. Weekday Home Groups

As earlier established, many people in every community cannot attend a group on Sunday even if they wanted to do so. Because of work or other obligations, Sunday is simply out. Create groups meeting at times other than Sunday and in locations easily accessible.

22. Other Languages (Internationals)

What languages are spoken in your community? Could you launch a group for those of different languages?

23. Recovery / Life Issue Groups

Addictions are rampant in every community and people are looking for help and support. Offer Bible study groups especially for those who are struggling with addictions and other life issues.

24. Choir / Worship Team

The choir or worship team often is preparing for worship services and do not get a Bible study group experience. Launch one just for these ministry leaders at an appropriate and convenient time.

25. Retirement Homes / Villages

As Americans' life span increases, so do the numbers of living accommodations for the elderly. While some of these complexes have weekly worship services, many do not have weekly Bible study groups.

26. Special Needs / Families

This is one of the great opportunities for churches today. Provide a group for special needs children and another for adults. Families of special needs persons might also like a Bible study group just for them.

Reflections on Chapter 3

What can you and your group do to change the trends seen in today's American church?

Re-examine the list of possible new groups. Add other ideas to the list. Which would be the most likely groups to start in the next weeks or months?

The Challenge

In the introduction, I (Bruce) told you about a special couple who were the first members of my new class for young adults. I need to tell you more of the story. I met them while doing a mission project. Every Sunday School class in our church was involved in missions projects in our community that Sunday. Casey and Dawn attended worship that day before we engaged in the projects. The pastor invited anyone who did not have a specific project to come to the one Donna and I were working.

Our mission project was at a school. We were almost finished when they showed up. I noticed their license plate was from Florida (my former residence) and that opened the door for a conversation. I told them about the new class we were about to start and we enrolled them in front of that school.

In the weeks following, they became active members of our class attending regularly. We prayed weekly with them concerning jobs. In time, Dawn was baptized. Both now have good jobs in their fields of study and interest. Casey has been enlisted to begin teaching our class occasionally. I believe in new groups because of people like Dawn and Casey. Starting new groups make a difference!

I wonder what would have happened if Donna and I had decided we were not capable of reaching young adults. Would Dawn and Casey have found a place in an existing class? Would they have found any friends in our community? Could it be that we started this new class just for them? I don't know because that is not how it happened. But,

we did start the group and God used it to help reach not only Dawn and Casey, but Sara, Matt, Lindsey, Jonathan, Sarah, Rachel, Emily, Brad, and others.

It's time for us to engage our world through new groups.

The launch of new groups is critical for every church. That's right, *every church*. Every church should consistently be creating groups in order to make disciples. There are more people like Dawn and Casey to be reached.

So, here's our challenge to you. Do more than just say you will start a new group. Set a God-sized goal. For every hundred you average in attendance, start that many new groups every year...with every church starting at least one! If you have 100 in attendance, start one. If you have 200 in attendance, start two. If you have 500 in attendance, start five. If you have 1,000, start 10.

Wow! What a goal!

Here's the reality: Southern Baptist see about 4 million people in Sunday School every week, attending approximately 400,000 groups. If every church took the challenge, we would see 40,000 new groups created every year. Within five years, we could see 2 million more people in life-changing Bible study!

Can it happen? Absolutely!

Will you take the challenge?

Appendix

The Economics of a New Group

To get a clearer picture of the economics of starting a new group, complete the following exercise.

1. Determine the per capita giving of your church.
 - a. Determine the total undesignated receipts (tithes and offerings) received during the last year.
 - b. Divide the total by 52 (number of Sundays in the year).
 - c. Determine the average weekly attendance.
 - d. Divide the weekly average of receipts by the average weekly attendance.

This is your weekly per capita giving amount

For example, if a church receives \$2,000 in offerings weekly and averaged 100 in weekly attendance, the per capita giving is \$20 per person. In other words, each person in attendance gave an average of \$20 each week.

If possible, research the past three years to get a clearer picture. Most churches find the per capita giving only fluctuates a few dollars from year to year.

2. Consider the possibilities.

Determine a realistic weekly attendance goal for the new year.

Multiply that attendance goal by your weekly per capita giving and you now know your anticipated receipts for each week if you reach that attendance goal.

Multiply the weekly figure by 52 and you now have a projected budget figure.

The point . . .

If a church averaging 100 in Sunday School with a per capita giving of \$20 a week grows by 20 in one year, that church will receive approximately \$400 more each week in tithes. That means an additional \$20,000 in a year!

And what did it take to reach 20 new people? Two new groups began properly.

Endnotes:

1 Daniel Edmonds, made at a meeting of Sunday School leaders, March 2012

2 <http://www.denisonforum.org/cultural-commentary/238-top-5-faith-and-culture-stories-what-is-the-future-of-american-christianity>

3 Southern Baptist Annual Church Profile

4 www.lifeway.com/Article/missionary-sunday-school-david-francis-conference-plans-downloads

Extreme Sunday School Challenge

Engaging Our
World Through
New Groups

Bruce Raley and David Francis draw on their wealth of experience as church leaders of Bible study groups to present a compelling case for starting new Bible study groups in the local church. Raley and Francis identify the potential that new groups carry in reaching a community and developing believers. Essentials for starting and growing successful groups are defined. Steps for enlisting and equipping leaders are provided. *Extreme Sunday School Challenge* will help you discover new opportunities to reach unchurched people, mature disciples, engage believers in outreach, and increase available resources for ministry.

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