

# MISSIONARY SUNDAY SCHOOL



One Mission. His Story. Every Person.

**David Francis**

 **LifeWay**  
Biblical Solutions for Life

DAVID FRANCIS

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Missionary  
Sunday School

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ONE MISSION.

HIS STORY.

EVERY PERSON.

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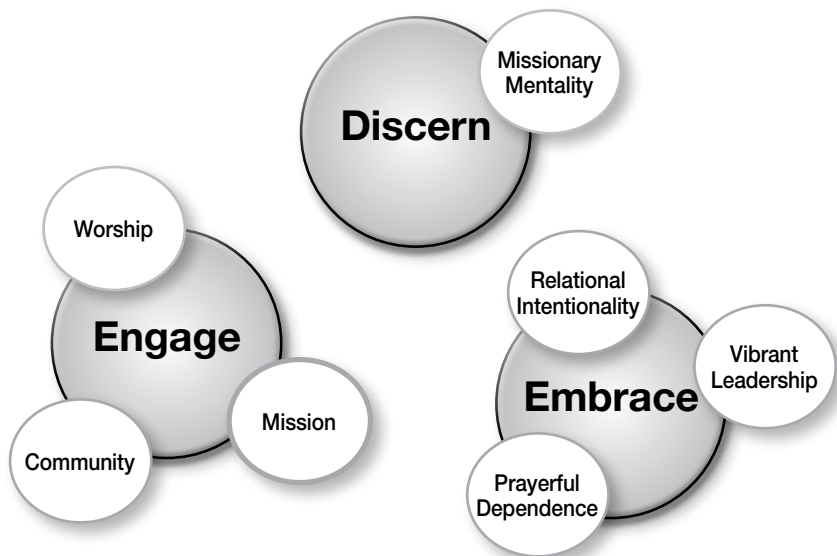
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# Preface



This is the second book in the series *Transformational Class: Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School*.<sup>1</sup> In the first book, I attempted to suggest some answers to this question:

What might a Sunday School class or small group look like if it demonstrated the seven elements found in Transformational Churches (TCs)?

Each of the seven brief chapters offered ideas about what a class might look like if it applied the seven elements in the illustration above. The research findings reported in *Transformational Church* by Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer demonstrated that these seven elements were significantly more likely to be reported by TCs.

In this book, the focus will be just one of the elements: *Missionary Mentality*. The question I'll attempt to answer is:

What might a Sunday School look like if it saw itself  
as a missionary enterprise: thinking and acting  
out of a missionary mindset?

The very premise of this question will be jolting to some! Over the years, Sunday School has become almost synonymous with *Bible study*. Likewise, the most common word to describe Small Group has probably been *community*. Most Sunday School classes enjoy community and most small groups enjoy Bible study. In fact, one of the modern names for Sunday School classes is Bible Fellowship Groups, a term that attempts to capture both of those ideas. It is the rare small group, class, or BFG, however, which discovers the joy of becoming a missionary enterprise.

In the past, I proposed some indicators to help a class or small group diagnose which of three progressive levels it actually reflected: Class, Community, and/or Commission.<sup>2</sup> The indicators are captured in the following chart, with each level inclusive of the preceding one(s):

LEVEL	CLASS	COMMUNITY	COMMISSION
<b>Churched People</b>	Member	Minister	Missionary
<b>Focus</b>	Me	Us	Them
<b>Biblical Mandate</b>	Great Confession	Great Commandment	Great Commission
<b>"K" Words</b>	Kerygma	Koinonia	Kenosis
<b>Organization</b>	Teacher, Secretary	Fellowship, Ministry, Prayer, Care Group Leaders	Apprentices' Missions and Outreach Leaders, Associate Members
<b>Records</b>	Class Roll	Ministry List	Prospect List
<b>Evangelism</b>	Be nice	Be attractive	Be intentional
<b>Conversations</b>	What we learned	What they did for me	Where we went; what we did
<b>Prayer</b>	General requests	Needs of others	People far from God

My hope is that this book will be sufficient to motivate your class or group to want to start thinking like missionaries and to provide some ideas for beginning that exciting journey.

# Introduction



## *The Gist of the Book: In Honor of a Great Missionary*

Stephen Paxson was America's most famous Sunday School missionary. Traveling across the pioneer west in the mid 1800s—which at that time was anything west of the Appalachian Mountains—Paxson organized 1,314 Sunday Schools where none had previously existed, enrolling over 83,000 students and teachers. He encouraged and strengthened another 1,747 existing schools with 131,000 additional participants. Much of his life and ministry is captured beautifully in a book by his daughter titled *A Fruitful Life: The Missionary Labors of Stephen Paxson*.<sup>3</sup> (I'll tell you more about him later.)

Paxson was incapacitated for the three months preceding his death. Those around Paxson attempted to help him pass the time by reading to him. On one occasion, a large biography was selected. Paxson, whose life had been a virtual flurry of activity, grew impatient after a few chapters and inquired if the reader had personally read the book. Paxson's request to the affirmative answer was recorded in his daughter's book:

“Will you be so kind as to tell me, in the fewest possible words, the gist of the book—what this man did in the world that was *worth* the doing?”<sup>4</sup>

Were he to ask me that question about this little book, here's what I think I would say:

*Missionary Sunday School* is based on three big ideas: One Mission, His Story, Every Person. The One Mission that runs through the remarkable history of the Sunday School movement is *transformation*: personal

spiritual transformation, transformation of churches, and cultural transformation in the communities surrounding them. These are the same qualities found in the *Transformational Church* (TC) research. The essence of the TCs was that they were places where people were becoming more like Jesus, the church was acting more like the body of Christ, and the impacted community was thereby reflecting more of the kingdom of God. The stack pole for the missionary Sunday School is *His Story*. Its textbook is the Bible. All of it. It is an inexhaustible treasure and should be studied all of one's life. Who should study it all their lives? *Every Person!* Persons at every age and every stage of life. Wherever they live. Whatever their educational advantages or limitations. Whatever people group to which they belong. The goal is that many might be so transformed, they'll join in the *One Mission*, sharing with *Every Person* how *His Story* has intersected with their story and with the stories of others in one of the transformational small communities we call a Sunday School class (or its functional equivalent by some other name: BFG, Life Group, Connect Group, or whatever they're called in your church!).

Paxson's daughter records that after Father Paxson, as this layman was known to many across pioneer Midwest, asked the question about the gist of the biography being read to him, he continued:

"There are too many fine-spun theories in this book for me: life is too short to hear them. I want an author to grant me the privilege of making my own deductions, based upon what the hero did."<sup>5</sup>

Stephen Paxson is a hero of the Sunday School movement. It is a movement with legions of heroes. I hope Stephen Paxson would be pleased with the relative brevity of a story that could consume volumes and perhaps want to know more. But beyond that, I hope the Lord Jesus will be pleased. After all, it is *His Story!* Its transformational power is the fuel of our *One Mission*. His commission propels us to make it available to *Every Person*. Sound interesting so far? Let's go!



## CHAPTER ONE

# One Mission: Transformation



*Sunday School was a revolutionary concept that common people should be able to read the Bible for themselves over against the argument that such skills should be reserved for the clergy.*

**T**he missionary Sunday School has One Mission: *transformation*. Personal, spiritual transformation in the lives of individuals, evidenced by their fruit that they are becoming more and more like Jesus. Congregational transformation within churches evidenced by the fruit that they're acting more and more like the body of Christ. Cultural transformation around and among the churches evidenced by the fruit that the surrounding community more and more reflects the kingdom of God. The Sunday School movement has a rich history of being used by God to provoke transformation in all three of these arenas.

### **More than a Program**

Some—maybe most—people think that Sunday School is a program thought up by leaders in their denominational headquarters. The reality is that Sunday School is a missionary movement that began

apart from the sponsorship of any church or denomination. In fact the movement initially faced significant opposition from some church and denominational leaders. Long before it was sponsored by local churches or embraced by denominations, Sunday School was a missionary movement that cut across (and sometimes against) the grain of traditional church structures. Its primary mission was to reach, teach, and minister to persons who were outside the church and far from God. In a missionary Sunday School, that's still the mission.

## **A Missionary Movement**

If a class decided to be part of a missionary Sunday School, wouldn't it be embracing something radically new? Actually, it would be embracing a radical movement that has been going on for more than two centuries! Many of us have only known Sunday School as a church or denominational program. But Sunday School is a movement that took root in England around 1780. A newspaper publisher named Robert Raikes is generally credited with accelerating the movement. Raikes established classes to teach child laborers to read and write on their only day off each week using the Bible as the primary textbook. He tested his idea for three years before even publishing a story about it in his newspaper. It was as much the power of the printed page that accelerated the idea as the idea itself, an idea so compelling that it spread—in print and in reality—with incredible speed. The marriage between the Sunday School movement and the publishing enterprise was made. The impact was simply phenomenal, impacting millions of children and adults in Great Britain and its colonies.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Idea of Sunday School in America**

The Sunday School movement started in England in the aftermath of an unpopular war with the American colonies. In the infant United States, this movement was predictably “Americanized.” Compelling evidence exists that a scattering of groups similar to Raikes’ Sunday School sprung up in the colonies even before 1780. Stories of the

implementation of the idea of Sunday School can also be found in England before Raikes. So the question remains: Who actually thought up the idea of Sunday School? One of the clearest indicators that something is a movement of man (if not indeed a heresy) is the claim that God entrusted the idea exclusively to one person. The best evidence that something is a movement of God is that He planted His idea in the hearts of many people—perhaps multiples of people—and some acted on it in obedience. I believe that’s the reason many people embraced the idea of Sunday School so eagerly, because it resonated with something deep within their spirit that this idea was not just a good thing, it was a God thing!

### **Sunday School in Urban America**

The movement gained momentum when it was embraced in America’s largest city of the day, Philadelphia. Led by an influential bishop William White, The First Day Society of Philadelphia was organized in 1790. A number of Sunday School societies began in the fledgling United States with goals similar to those in Great Britain: literacy education for the poorer classes using the Bible as a primary text. The cities were fertile ground for missionary outreach. Most Americans have romanticized the idea of colonial life in the cities. Our histories mostly revolve around founding-father personalities, who were generally well-educated and typically affluent. But most Americans were dockworkers, industrial workers, and agricultural workers—including those who didn’t get paid for their work because they were owned by masters. There was great need for the transformational work of the Sunday School in the country and in the cities. During the early decades of the 19th century, many of these societies affiliated with the Philadelphia-based American Sunday School Union (ASSU).<sup>7</sup>

### **An American Sunday School Revolution**

By the time of the organization of the ASSU, there had been a revolution of sorts in America related to Sunday School. The British idea of

Sunday School was primarily what we might call *social gospel* today. That's not to diminish its effectiveness. In fact, it could be argued that the Sunday School movement in Britain was a catalyst for what we call *social justice* today. It was quite a revolutionary concept to suggest that common people should be able to read and write over against political and economic arguments that such skills should be reserved for the privileged classes. Among some church leaders, it was also a revolutionary concept that common people should be able to read the Bible for themselves over the argument that such skills should be reserved for the clergy. Because of general sentiment against anything British (America had to secure its independence again in the War of 1812), because of the prominence of Protestant churches (though legal, such groups were labeled dissenters by the Church of England), because of the more egalitarian nature of America in general, or some other combination of influences, the American expression of Sunday School essentially departed from the British model—if indeed that model had ever actually been imported widely at all.

## **From Social Gospel to Social Evangelism**

In America, Sunday School would expand its work well beyond merely teaching the poorer classes to read and write. Its message and matter would match the frontier before it. Sunday School became an evangelical enterprise. Although there was some objection from American churches, Sunday School was embraced by many churches relatively early—especially evangelical churches. John Wesley's endorsement of Sunday School propelled the adoption of Sunday School widely among Methodists. Meanwhile Presbyterians, Baptists, and other groups embraced it as well. And where churches did not, individual members embraced it through the vehicle of various non-denominational Sunday School unions that were organized in cities, counties, and states. These unions advocated both church-based schools and mission schools and many were part of the American Sunday School Union (ASSU).

## **The Mississippi Valley Enterprise**

At its 1824 convention, chaired by Francis Scott Key (yes, Francis Scott Key!), ASSU adopted its most ambitious effort: the Mississippi Valley Enterprise. The stated goal: to “establish a Sunday school in every destitute place where it is practicable, throughout the Valley of the Mississippi.”<sup>8</sup> In those days, the western frontier was anything over the Appalachian Mountains. Ohio and Arkansas were considered part of the untamed West. Funds were raised. Missionaries were enlisted. Sunday Schools were established in 5,000 communities—about half of the country at that time. It took 50 years to accomplish what they had dreamed to achieve in two. But they stayed after it through the relentless work of Sunday School missionaries.

## **Sunday School Missionaries**

Most Sunday School missionaries raised their own support, sometimes returning East to raise funds and speak at Sunday School conventions (interdenominational events that trained and inspired Sunday School workers). Their work was typically slow and deliberate. They would go from farm to farm or house to house, talking to families about Sunday School, persuading the families to organize a school, enlisting a superintendent, providing initial resources, training teachers, securing an order for additional books and materials, then moving on to the next community. Some retraced their routes to check on the schools much as the apostle Paul might have done. Missionaries, also known as Sunday School agents, usually carried Bibles, papers, and books provided by the publishing ministries of the Sunday School unions. Most walked. Some used horsepower.

## **Fast-forward to Today**

Sunday School missionaries in Africa have traded in horses for motorcycles. Motorcycle Sunday School Mission operates in the African bush today with very similar goals.<sup>9</sup> According to their Web site, the goals are:

- Teach a complete Sunday School curriculum communicating God's Word

- Hold literacy classes for both children and adults using books, charts and phonics games
- Start Audio-Bible listening groups with organized discussions through each chapter
- Establish a Bible Memory Quiz Team (top finalists got to attend a TMI Boot Camp)
- Disciple and train local adults to continue the teaching of Sunday School classes

Sidewalk Sunday Schools operate with a similar strategy, taking Sunday School to kids of inner cities in America and around the world. The usual method is to take a truck or flatbed stage into an area and start a Sunday School, returning to the same location every week. It seems to be something of a mini-movement of its own, as several organizations use the Sidewalk Sunday School term. Although I cannot endorse the specific theology, methodologies, or leaders of these organizations, I do appreciate their goals—goals not too dissimilar from Robert Raikes in England or Stephen Paxson in America.

### **Stephen Paxson: Sunday School Missionary**

Stephen Paxson is perhaps the best known American Sunday School missionary. Because of an untreated childhood injury, he walked with a limp (but taught himself to dance). A stutterer, he was kicked out of school on his first day because of his impairment but taught himself to read. He traveled widely, plying his trade of hat-making. He married, became a moderately successful businessman, and settled his family in Winchester, Illinois. Well-respected and apparently fun to be around, Paxson was not a Christian. That changed in 1838.

### **A Daughter, a Daddy, and a Class of Boys**

One day Paxson accompanied his daughter Mary to the union Sunday School in Winchester so she might win a prize for bringing a friend. Trying not to show his shock at seeing Paxson there, Mr. Haynie, the

superintendent (a Methodist) introduced him to other leaders, including Mr. Carter (a Presbyterian) and Mr. Miner (a Baptist). Most of what Paxson knew of churches was their bickering so Haynie's remark "but we all unite to study the Bible" pleased and intrigued him. Yet Paxson was taken off guard when the superintendent proposed that he teach the 10-15 year old boys class that day since the teacher was absent. In response to his objection, one of the boys suggested: "I'll tell you what we'll do, Mr. Paxson; you tell us all you know, and we will tell you all we know." He agreed to those terms. It was not a particularly good lesson. But the boys liked him. He liked them. And he fell in love quickly with the idea of Sunday School, never missing a Sunday for the next four years. He was so captivated by the idea of Sunday School as a newly-professed Christian that he began to travel the surrounding countryside on weekends, starting and strengthening Sunday Schools. In 1846 he organized what may have been the first county Sunday School Convention, a convocation to train and encourage Sunday School teachers and leaders regardless of denominational affiliation. It was a model for a national movement of such gatherings. With much effort and God's grace, he also trained himself to largely overcome his stammering. God, it seemed, was preparing him for something greater.<sup>10</sup>

### **All Things Work Together for Good**

Paxson was remarkable for overcoming his childhood. Indentured to an uncle, he had less than one day of formal schooling. His aunt would read to him from the only book in their house. Daughter Mary writes:

True, he had little education, but this very want made him sympathetic with those denied, like himself, all opportunities for culture. He remembered that there were thousands of children in lowly destitute regions, hungering for the bread of life and longing for books, as he had longed in his boyhood. To carry books to such children, to gather them into Sunday-schools—for this he would give up everything. He determined

to persevere in his self-appointed task. He only wished he could give to it all the days in the week instead of one.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile in New York, Dr. John Adams (whose ancestry includes two presidents of the United States) learned of Paxson and recommended him for appointment as an ASSU missionary. His acceptance came at great sacrifice to his family, as the salary of one dollar for each day worked would hardly pay for his family to remain in town. For several years his family lived an isolated and rustic rural life while he traveled the Midwest. (You'll have to read the book if you're interested in the rest of the story. If you love Sunday School, keep a tissue handy!)

## **A Horse Named Robert Raikes**

Paxson's 15-year-old son traveled with his father and organized an additional 700 schools that enrolled 40,000 scholars and teachers. The Paxsons made a stunning contribution to the Mississippi Valley Enterprise, which ASSU records indicate established 61,297 schools, with 407,244 teachers, impacting 2,650,784 pupils over a period of 50 years while the population of the West grew to 4,000,000. Paxson made his rounds for many years in a buggy pulled by a horse named Robert Raikes. It is said that the horse would always stop without command when he approached a child! Paxson employed a simple strategy. He introduced himself to one child, one parent, one house at a time, inviting all to a meeting about starting a Sunday School. After he had it up and running, he would move on. He once organized over 40 schools in a period of 40 days. I'm looking forward to hearing how he did that!

## **Books and Libraries**

One tool Sunday School missionaries like Paxson used was Sunday School papers. It is common even today for kids who attend Sunday School to receive a take-home sheet that includes the day's Bible story, perhaps a memory verse, and an activity or two. One of the benefits of these papers is that parents can be exposed to the Bible as they review the lesson with



their children. Reading material was often scarce and therefore highly valued. Sunday School agents also carried catalogs of books published and/or distributed by the Sunday School unions. A community could purchase an entire Sunday School library. Families would share the cost and create the lending libraries in many communities. In 1859, there were some 50,000 libraries in America; 30,000 were Sunday School libraries.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sunday to Weekday**

Between 1832 and 1875, the number of Sunday Schools in America grew from about 8,000 to over 65,000. By 1889, ten million children were enrolled in Sunday School. As communities matured, many wanted to have a proper weekday school. The advent of the one-room, one-teacher school and the Sunday School movement are historically intertwined. Sometimes a Sunday School was started in the school building, or a school was started in the Sunday School building. Since many of the Sunday School missionaries were women, the volunteer Sunday School teacher often became the common school teacher. This was before the rise of taxpayer-supported schools. Just as in the establishment of a Sunday School, a library, or a church, members of each community pitched in to provide funds. The American Sunday School Union sold hundreds of thousands of its spelling books in the mid-1800s for use in both Sunday Schools and common schools, whose work overlapped a great deal. Sunday Schools taught reading. Common schools recited the Ten Commandments. It was not until the mid-1900s that a clearer separation between education and Christian education evolved.<sup>13</sup> The Sunday School thus ushered in and was displaced in frontier America by common, public schools.

### **Schools to Churches**

Communities grew—and grew up. Sunday Schools, which already commonly incorporated singing, desired to add a sermon which required a preacher. Often the affiliation of the new church was based on what denomination could provide a minister. As a matter of course, those of a different denomination would become numerous enough

to establish their own church and so it went. Likewise denominations largely displaced much of the work of interdenominational Sunday School unions. In 1974, the American Sunday School Union changed its name to American Missionary Fellowship in recognition that its primary strategy had extended to summer experiences like camps and Bible schools.<sup>14</sup> The Canadian Sunday School Mission has kept its name while also focusing on camps and summer Bible Schools, both of which are extensions of the Sunday School movement. The organization that employs me as a Sunday School missionary began in 1891 as the Baptist Sunday School Board and is now called LifeWay Christian Resources in recognition of its expanded ministry. Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and summer camp experiences continue to be a vital part of LifeWay's ongoing and diverse ministry.

### **“Sunday School Man”**

This book is too brief to mention all those who have championed the cause of Sunday School. In your denomination, state, county, and even your church, someone was probably known as “Sunday School man” (or woman!). Search the Internet and you’ll discover a number of people on whom this title has been bestowed, though few would dare take it for themselves! These champions of Sunday School number in the thousands. The fruit of their work stretches around the globe. The names Broadus, Manley, Frost, Flake, Barnette, Piland, and Taylor are among the champions of Southern Baptist Sunday Schools who’ve been given that mantle. For independent Baptists, the name would be Towns. For Midwesterners, Kilbreth. For Carolinians, Spilman. In New Jersey, perhaps Biscardi. For Nazarenes in Oklahoma City, Rice. Among evangelicals, Risley. On a crowded elevator during the 2011 Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix, a lady saw my messenger badge with my name and state and said, “You’re our Sunday School man.” She couldn’t have known that I was carrying the book *B.W. Spilman: Sunday School Man!*<sup>15</sup> Spilman was the first “Southwide Sunday School Secretary” who served Southern Baptists. I can only hope to be half as effective (or funny!) as Dr. Spilman.

## Your Place in the History of Sunday School

We may never be remembered as Sunday School Man or Woman on a denominational, state, or county level. But there is no sound sweeter to my ears than simply hearing “Mr. David” or “Ms. Vickie” coming from the mouths of the 4- and 5-year-olds my wife and I enjoy teaching in Sunday School. If you're reading this book, you're probably a Sunday School teacher or leader. Thank you! You are a part of a movement that has been a mighty tool for transformation in churches, counties, countries, and continents. I believe it's a movement that not only has a remarkable history but also a bright future.

## Does Sunday School have a Future?

Once in a while, you hear people say that Sunday School had its turn and it's time to move on to something new and innovative. I'm not against new and innovative. I think we should use the tools God gives us to reach the world for Christ. Internet conferencing, messaging, and smart phones all have their place. What disturbs me are the words *better* or *more effective* are usually left out of the discussion. When Sunday School is done right, with excellence and with a missionary purpose, it continues to be a proven and effective way of reaching the lost in our communities, involving the saved in service, and mobilizing the local church for ministry. There are other ways of drawing a crowd or taking a small group of believers deeper in their faith, but I'm talking about a Sunday School organized to think like and function as a missionary. I see it time and time again: Sunday School\* (people meeting in a small group for structured Bible study before or after a worship experience) works and works well ... if the leaders are willing to do the work. It is not easy, but nothing worth doing ever is. The future is in our hands.

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\* For clarity, I'll use the term *Sunday School* throughout this booklet when referring to the organization for ongoing group Bible study. Substitute whatever term your church uses for this organization.

## Two Streams

The Sunday School story is a missionary story. There are two major streams in that story: the church school and the missionary school. The first focuses primarily on people already connected with the church. With younger children, it is essentially pre-conversion discipleship for future Christians and church members. For older children, students, and adults, it is foundational discipleship and a remarkably effective tool to assimilate new members or to pre-assimilate prospective members. Where it is practiced best, it consists of classes that are open groups; that is, they expect new people every week and create systems of outreach, ministry, and Bible study to that end. However, even best practice Sunday Schools will still consist largely of regular attendees who are open and welcoming of a smaller number of newcomers.

The second stream, on the other hand, is comprised mostly of people—typically kids—who rarely or never attend church. In 19th century America, mission Sunday Schools were started on behalf of the children of seamen in a port city, the children of farmers on the prairie, the children of laborers near a factory, the children of slaves on a plantation, or anywhere else there was a similar need. Classes for adults—most typically the parents—often followed. But adult groups were never first or primary.

## Stories of Transformation

Millions of individuals have been transformed spiritually by the missionary ministry of Sunday School. Churches have been transformed by the missionary ministry of Sunday School, deploying a virtual army of Bible teachers and leaders over the past two-plus centuries. Almost every week, I hear the story of a church that has become energized anew by refocusing on Sunday School and reaching, teaching, and ministry. The rediscovery of Sunday School provided the catharsis for transforming a congregation. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the history of the Sunday School movement has been its remarkable impact in terms of cultural transformation—especially in America.

Sunday School and the United States essentially grew up together. As America expanded west, so did Sunday School. As cities grew, so did Sunday School. As denominations expanded, so did Sunday School.

### **From Literacy to Biblical Literacy**

As universal education became a cultural norm, Sunday Schools passed the baton of literacy and refocused on biblical literacy. Before African Americans were widely included in this cultural wave, Sunday School remained the primary avenue toward literacy—and a powerful missionary message that provided hope to a people who could say with Joseph, “You planned evil against me; God planned it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Sunday School played no small part in enabling people to read and encouraging them to read what could most transform their lives: the Bible and other Bible-based literature. The impact of Sunday School was not just individual; it was cultural. Communities were clearly different if they had a vibrant Sunday School!

### **From History to His Story**

You are likely not as excited about the history of the Sunday School movement as I am. Then why share it? Because I want you to understand that your Sunday School is part of a movement with a great missionary heritage. So is your class! Being a missionary Sunday School does not require a radical new direction as much as it requires a radical reconnection. To a movement ignited by a missionary mentality. To a movement fueled by a transformational textbook: the Bible. Exploring His Story, the story of redemption captured in the Word of God, is the primary vehicle by which Sunday School’s One Mission is accomplished. It is a Book no one completely masters this side of heaven. The Bible is worthy of study throughout the span of life, from birth to heaven! A missionary Sunday School therefore operates with this maxim: all the Bible for all of life.

# Reflections on Chapter 1

How did the church you attend (or lead) get started? What were the circumstances? How does that beginning impact what your church is today? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does your class or Sunday School organization reflect a missionary mentality? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are you doing to become a more effective missionary? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are you doing to model being a missionary to others? What have you done in the past three months that declares you are a missionary? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your class doing to become a more effective missionary? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your class doing to model for other classes what it means to be a missionary Sunday School class? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER TWO

# His Story: All the Bible for All of Life



*No one's story is complete until it has intersected with His Story which happens best in a community being enriched by the stories of others.*

Missionaries understand the power of story, especially when it's coupled with the power of community. Community provides an opportunity for folks to share their stories with one another and engage people in their stories. A Sunday School class, one that would be a transformational community, introduces and centers not only on those stories but on His Story—the Bible.

### **The Bible: The Textbook of Sunday School**

There is no argument: the centerpiece of the Sunday School movement is Bible study. More specifically, people gathered together for Bible study. And even more specifically, people of all ages gathered into as many groups as possible for Bible study at a level appropriate to their developmental, social, and ministry needs. Bible study is the stack pole of the missionary Sunday School but with an emphasis on the *why* of Bible study. In many Sunday School classes, Bible study is an end unto

itself. In a missionary Sunday School class, the purpose of Bible study is to equip members to be ... well, missionaries!

### **Basic Military Training**

If you joined the United States Air Force, you'd go to Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas, for basic training. I spent six memorable weeks there in 1972. Over the years, it occurred to me that the purpose of those weeks was less about being trained as an airman and more about embracing the fact that I *was* an airman. It was my identity. Part of my job was losing part of my identity (or superseding it) and identifying as a member of the Air Force team. While it was a physically strenuous experience, the main goal was to transform my mind and capture my heart, conforming them to the mission of the United States Air Force.

### **Basic Missionary Training**

If you were appointed as an international missionary for the Southern Baptist Convention, you'd likely go through basic training at Cauthen International Learning Center near Richmond, Virginia. Over 10,000 new IMB (International Mission Board) missionaries have launched their mission careers there since the campus opened in 1974. I suppose one of the primary outcomes of the intense training is for appointees to acknowledge, affirm, and embrace their identities as missionaries.

### **A Class for Missionaries?**

How would Bible study in your class be different if it was missionary training? You'd still study the Bible, probably using an ongoing curriculum suitable for an open group (a class that expects new people every week)<sup>16</sup> so the *what* of Bible study would not change. But the *why* of Bible study could be completely different! A class of missionaries learns for the purpose of being equipped—not just to understand His Story, but to share His Story in word and deed. It is about learning to live it.



## **Language School**

Following Air Force basic training, I was initially ordered to Monterey, California, to train as a Vietnamese linguist. Language school is usually the next step for an international missionary as well. Perhaps the most important skill required for reaching people effectively is the ability to communicate in their language. The most significant and powerful missionary tool is the Bible—His Story—communicated in the language of the people being reached.

## **The Power of Story**

It is important to learn the language of the people so that you might share your story in way that they understand it. It is even more important—and usually more difficult—to learn their language well enough so that you can listen and understand their story. Hopefully, this will lead to an opportunity to share His Story.

## **An Inexhaustible Story**

Perhaps you've had the experience of reading or teaching a familiar passage of Scripture, one you may have read a dozen times, only to be struck with a new understanding, insight, or application. The Bible really is “living and effective” (Heb. 4:12). That's why we don't expect anyone to graduate from Sunday School. This Book—His Story—can literally be studied from birth to heaven.

## **A Story for a Lifetime**

A baby may not understand the deep things of God's Word but a baby can understand some things. Church is a safe and happy place. The Bible is a special book. The name Jesus sounds beautiful. People who love Him love me enough to meet some very basic needs. Even if it's a smelly task, teaching a baby is profitable.

At the other end of the lifespan, a senior adult may need to rely on many deep things of God's Word. Church is so much more than just a happy place. The Bible is a precious book. The name of Jesus has only gotten sweeter over time. People who love Him love me enough to meet some very basic needs that have changed with the passing of time.

People at different ages and stages of life are capable of understanding His Story in different ways. For instance, consider the truth that Jesus loves you. At different stages in life that truth will mean different things. This truth will be fresh and fascinating to the 4 year old. The self-conscious teenager finds confidence in this truth. The college graduate who is looking for a job knows that even in the dead ends Jesus loves him. The new parents look forward to the day that their child responds to the offer of Jesus' love. The widow finds her comfort in this truth. The aging adult finds strength for the future. The Bible relates to every stage of our life. This is just one reason we need to provide Bible study groups for people of all ages.

## **An Unfolding Story**

His Story unfolds in the Bible from the beginning in the first chapter of Genesis through the new beginning in the last chapter of Revelation. His Story unfolds in the hearts of His people too. That's why Sunday School practices grading—organizing as many classes as possible and practical so that the Bible might be studied among a group of people with similar learning abilities and life issues.

## **All the Bible for All of Life**

One of the critical strategies of the Sunday School movement is this: all the Bible for all of life. In the organization where I serve as a Sunday School missionary, we call this strategy LifeSpan. It guides how we think about the development of Bible study plans and materials for use in the open, small, transformational communities called Sunday School classes. We publish materials for babies, students, retired adults, and everyone in between. We focus on ages and major life stages of a person's

development as well as specialized Bible studies for the important transition years between these stages—kindergarten, preteen, and college. We publish materials for adults and kids with special needs; for urban adults and students. And we publish materials in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese. All with the promise of helping people explore the “whole counsel of God” several times throughout the span of their lives.

### **Studying with a Plan**

We all have our favorite parts of Scripture, and we tend to visit and revisit them. That stands to reason since those passages are usually the parts that mean the most to us or we understand the best. Nothing wrong with studying those passages, but we need a plan for study that somehow helps lead learners to look at the whole counsel of God’s Word. That plan needs to be realistic and fair. Studying Romans in one 30-minute session would not be realistic. You need more than 30 minutes to examine the depths of Paul’s letter. However, stretching the study to two years wouldn’t be fair to the class members. As important as the truths contained in Romans are, the people sitting in our classes need more than just Romans during a two-year time period. You can create your own plan or use one of the plans created by an organization like LifeWay. But regardless of the plan you choose, be sure it takes into account the whole counsel of God’s Word in a realistic and fair time frame. Once you select the plan, stick with it.

### **The Open Group Dilemma**

Sunday School faces a dilemma when it comes to discipleship. It is remarkably effective at exposing people to all the Bible for all their lives. But a missionary Sunday School has limitations precisely because it’s a missionary Sunday School. A missionary Sunday School class operates as an open group: it expects new people every week. Because it expects new people every week, it selects a Bible study curriculum that supports an open group strategy. Therefore, every week’s lesson must be a

complete and satisfying Bible study experience, whether the person was there last week or will return next week. The Bible study is typically part of a larger unit of study, maybe even a whole book of the Bible. Nevertheless, each lesson must also stand on its own if a class is to remain open. That's why Sunday School is foundational discipleship.

## **Ongoing Bible Study**

The open group concept is a key distinction of Sunday School classes compared to other group expressions in a church. Another critically important distinction is that Sunday School classes are ongoing. They meet virtually every week. Because they are also open, it's almost always a slightly different group of people each time—plus new people are always expected and welcomed. Still another distinction is Bible study. Sunday School classes hear, discuss, and apply a passage, topic, character, story, poem, or principle found in the Bible. Because of its ongoing nature, the class can take a systematic approach to the study of His Story. That's where curriculum materials come in. Such materials are almost as old as the movement itself. They are not intended as a substitute for the Bible, but rather as a plan to study it, learn it, teach it—all of it—over the course of a lifetime, at a level appropriate for the age and stage of each learner's life. A group that is open, ongoing, and employs a systematic Bible study plan is functionally equivalent to a Sunday School class, whatever you call it. A group that lacks any of these three is not a Sunday School group! Shorter term, closed groups are good and necessary in the life of a healthy church. They're just not Sunday School! A missionary might consider them advanced training.

## **Advanced Training**

Following basic training, I was assigned to Technical School for advanced training in my specialty. Because of the sudden withdrawal from Vietnam just as I was completing basic, my orders to language school were canceled. Instead I went to Shepherd Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas. There I learned the skills of a Communications

Specialist, part of which were Top Secret. I'm glad my current work as a Sunday School missionary isn't classified information. Missionaries need advanced training. Sunday School leaders—and members—need advanced training too, especially if they want to be even more effective missionaries. So what do you do about advanced training?

### **D-Groups**

Advanced training for the purpose of going deeper into a biblical doctrine, dealing with a challenging topic, finding support for a difficult life issue, or equipping for effective ministry, is best accomplished in a D-group or discipleship group. D-groups are typically closed groups. Not only do they not expect new people every week, new people would feel lost once the group starts. Why? Because D-groups usually select a short-term course of study that's more intense in nature than an open group like a Sunday School class. Excellent D-groups usually establish a covenant as they start, documenting agreement about attendance, preparation, and confidentiality within the group. Missionaries need D-groups. So do Sunday School leaders and members. They just need to guard against turning their classes into D-groups. If they do, the class may lose its missionary purpose.

### **Nurture or Evangelism?**

This question has been debated since the beginning of the Sunday School movement. Is it the purpose of Sunday School to disciple those already in the church, especially children who are the future members? Or to assimilate new members by connecting them to a class where they can enjoy fellowship and ministry as well as systematic Bible study? Or is it the purpose of Sunday School to reach the unchurched, especially children, who might never otherwise hear His Story? The answer is yes! A missionary Sunday School attempts all three, distinguished by the third—outreach and evangelism. A missionary Sunday School believes there should be a Sunday School class for Every Person. One Mission: transformation. His Story: all the Bible for all of life. Every Person.

# Reflections on Chapter 2

Rate your class on these three elements using the scale below:

<b>Open</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Ongoing</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Short term</b>
<b>Systematic Plan</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Whatever</b>

What steps do you need to take to improve (move closer to the left) the ratings you gave your class? \_\_\_\_\_

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In the past six months, who has made a commitment to Christ as a result of the work being done by or through your class or class members?

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How would you describe the teaching that takes place in your class: for knowledge or for training missionaries? Give an example from the past two weeks to illustrate. \_\_\_\_\_

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Record an example of how the study of the Bible made a difference in the life of a person in your class, in your church, and in your community.

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What can be done to make these outcomes more consistent?

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## CHAPTER THREE

# Every Person: The Missionary Principle of the People Group



*The missionary Sunday School is satisfied only when everyone within its reach has access to a Bible study group appropriate for his/her age, stage of life, and ability to learn. Until that happens, there is always more work to do.*

It amazes me that some people reject the idea that Sunday School is for Every Person. Sometimes it's subtle (sometimes it isn't!), but the statements tend to sound like excuses: *Those kids will bring down our kids. God established parents to be responsible for training their children. They're just not interested in spiritual things. They have a tough time relating to us since they don't know much of the Bible.*

Let's be honest. Behind each of these righteous reasons is rationale for not engaging the lost in spiritual dialogue. You might be surprised to learn that some of these modern objections to Sunday School are as old as the movement itself. At their essence, they all challenge the idea that Sunday School is for Every Person.

### Our Kids and Those Kids

This objection has many corollaries but essentially it boils down to this: "We don't need *those* kids in our church, and certainly not around *our*

kids.” Sunday School had its start as a missionary ministry to “those” kids. Sunday School bus ministries, popular in the middle of the last century, were about “those” kids. Today’s Sidewalk Sunday Schools are about “those” kids. Vacation Bible School and summer camps were and are about “those” kids. This is not a new objection.

## **Religious Education is the Responsibility of Parents**

Ultimately all of a child’s education is the responsibility of parents. They are accountable for it whether they do it themselves or delegate some of it to others. A related objection is: “Sunday School divides families and supplants the parents’ (or more specifically the father’s) role as the chief discipler of children.”

In one of a series of lectures on Sunday School delivered at Yale Divinity School, Henry Clay Trumbull responded to this objection. “If the Sunday-school is in conflict, or even in rivalry, with the family in its sphere,” he said, “then the Sunday-school is not worthy of confidence or of approval.” He went on to argue the facts of the case in a lengthy lecture, demonstrating that “family education” was indeed stronger where Sunday-schools operated effectively. In response to the idea that Sunday School had somehow displaced a widespread cultural norm where fathers led their households in religious exercises, Trumbull said,

“It is a principle in human nature to glorify the past unreasonably and unreasoningly; and then to seek plausible reasons for the supposed degeneracy of the present, in its contrast with the ideal standard of the days of old. And this principle it is that has prompted so many, first to believe that there was a good old time when parents generally were faithful and efficient in the religious training of their children, and then to consider a possible cause of the present obvious lack of the imagined former perfectness.... There is no gain in searching for the cause of a state of things that exists only in fancy.”<sup>17</sup>



The year was 1888! Trumbull backed up his statements with facts derived from surveys (what we might call research today). He found that students entering university from upper-class families who did not “send their kids to Sunday School” were far less biblically literate—including divinity students—than students from less fortunate families who attended Sunday School. Why spend so much time on this objection? Because it's related to a larger issue concerning the work of a missionary.

### **Not “Little House on the Prairie”**

Most of us have a romantic view of life in pioneer America. The people in our history books were exceptional. People of vision became leaders, just like today. They just weren't the norm! Most of the people in frontier America as well as the growing cities in the original colonies were neither educated nor cultured. The Wild West really was wild. Life was extremely hard. The challenges of starting a Sunday School on the frontier in the 1800s were at least as difficult as the challenges of starting one in an urban apartment complex today. The good old days weren't. Life was hard. People were unfair. Immigrants were flooding in from all parts of the globe. Just like today. Into that epoch came a powerful force for transformation: the Sunday School. I believe it is still a powerful force today. And should be accessible to Every Person. But you don't have to reach Every Person all by yourself. You can focus on your people group.

### **What's Your Assigned People Group?**

If you were training as a modern missionary, you'd likely be assigned responsibility for reaching, teaching, ministering to, and planting churches among a people group. If that people group had no effective Christian witness or lacked access to the Bible in its language, you would be a missionary to what is known as a UPG—an Unreached People Group. While few Sunday School classes will have the responsibility for an entire unreached people group, every class in a missionary Sunday School has an assignment for an *under*-reached people group. The name of the group will even reflect who it is they are trying to reach. They want

to make sure that even those they are trying to reach know they exist for them. What people group is your class assigned to reach, teach, and minister to? How does the people group you are trying to reach know that you exist for them?

## **The Missionary Challenge**

That question is perhaps the basis of all missionary challenges. William Carey, celebrated as the first modern missionary, traveled from England to India in 1792 (about the same time the Sunday School movement was gaining steam). Carey and his colleagues Joshua Marshman and William Ward faced many obstacles and saw little initial fruit from their efforts. Not the least of their challenges was grasping the reality that India was a complex society with many people groups, constrained by a caste system, worshipping a variety of Hindu deities, in the midst of the colonial control of the British Empire. This legendary missions team finally made progress when they focused their efforts, including establishing a college in Serampore near urban Calcutta. The school served not only as a vehicle for conveying learning but also as a place to accomplish what is perhaps the second most important missionary challenge: learning about the people. The missionaries learned about their language, their culture—even the aspects they desperately desired to change (the caste system in India), their beliefs—the ones they needed to abandon in favor of devotion to Christ, and the consequences such as being cast out of their caste for professing faith in Jesus.

## **The Clearer the Better**

Robert Raikes knew exactly what people group he wanted to impact: poor illiterate kids. The fact that the movement spread beyond that group is undeniable. But without that initial focus, Raikes' Sunday School likely would not have been successful. Recently I asked a group of adult Sunday School leaders to describe the people group their class was assigned to reach. Most gave variations of this answer: "All the lost people in our county." That's a worthy goal and a possible eventual outcome.

But a clearer focus provides a more effective missionary strategy. One leader said, “Parents of teenagers, specifically parents of troubled teenagers.” Another said, “Young couples who have just had their first child.” I asked the group where a missionary might go to make contact with that people group. We laughed as we talked about imaginary encounters at the baby food or diaper aisles of the local grocery store! That’s how a missionary thinks! Where might a missionary go to learn about potential ministry opportunities for a class of widowers? College freshmen? Kids with special needs? A few days ago I asked a LifeWay colleague to describe the class he teaches. Without hesitation, he replied, “Couples from 45-55 who have at least one child in college.” Would his class welcome someone who did not fit that profile? Of course they would! But they also know what people group comprises their mission field; they’re clear about who they are assigned to reach and teach. Classes with that kind of clarity are well-positioned to be a missionary Sunday School!

## **My People Group**

My wife Vickie and I love teaching the pre-K people group. Not all 4- and 5-year-olds! Just those entering Kindergarten the following year. We have taught Kindergarten kids, which is our second-favorite people group. When we were stationed in the Azores in the Air Force, we taught all the 3- to 5-year-olds in our church. But our specialty is pre-K. That’s the people group we know and love best. I’m grateful for people God has called to teach older teenagers, single parents, elementary kids, senior adults, parents of preschoolers, empty nesters, DINKs (dual income no kids), preteens, and college students—you name the group. God has all kinds of groups for His people to reach and He usually gives each of us a heart for the group He wants us to reach. What people group has He assigned to you? Do you love them? Then get to know them!

## **Getting to Know Your People Group**

What’s one thing you know about a teacher who lectures for 30 minutes to her class of third and fourth graders? She doesn’t know her people

group! Missionary Sunday School teachers strive to learn all they can about how their people group learns. They want to know what the second graders are capable of grasping developmentally or how teen culture is impacting their students. They seek to understand the emotional challenges of the empty nest, how to help a widow navigate the grief process, and the best methods for teaching kids with special needs.<sup>18</sup> If you aspire to lead an effective missionary Sunday School class, learn everything you can about the context and culture of the people group to which your class is assigned.

### **The Geo-Social Context**

In addition to developmental and life-stage issues, a missionary will want to know about the geographical and socio-economic context of their assigned people group. I am writing this today while sitting in a Panera Bread Café® in a suburb of metropolitan Nashville, Tennessee. The mostly upper-middle-class crowd enjoying lunch here have different life issues than the folks just a few minutes away in urban Nashville or even those a few minutes further away in one of the more affluent suburbs in America or in the surrounding rural areas that do not fit the other profiles at all. What's the point? Churches—and classes—have cultural and natural boundaries that missionaries need to be aware of.

When we lived in Dallas County, Texas, the ministry reach of a church was significantly impacted by the boundaries of the independent school districts. The church I served was in the Garland Independent School District (ISD). It included the adjacent towns of Sachse to the north and half the town of Rowlett to the east. We could effectively reach and minister to people many miles away from our church as long as they were in the geographical bounds of the school system. But we almost never reached anyone who lived across Lake Ray Hubbard in eastern Rowlett; they were in the Rockwall ISD. More surprisingly, although it was just a short drive, we seldom reached people who lived within the southern city limits of Garland, but whose children attended Mesquite ISD schools or in the north part of the city and in Richardson ISD. Our friends in Richardson churches reported the same phenomenon,

effectively reaching the parts of north Dallas served by two Richardson high schools, but seldom assimilating people in adjacent Plano. There were some exceptions, of course, but there's a lesson for missionaries here. Know the boundaries of your assigned mission field. If possible, try to focus in on the areas where your people group is most likely to live.<sup>19</sup>

## **Knowing Who is Where**

A few years ago, a prominent church in Denver, Colorado, fanned out across the neighborhoods near the church to deliver door hangers and invite kids to Vacation Bible School. They didn't get many takers. They discovered most of the people who lived near the church were empty nesters! They later employed a demographic profile to determine where young families with kids were. A mailing effort into those areas proved to be much more fruitful. It was a good missionary tactic. Where does your people group live? Where do they congregate? Shopping centers? Soccer fields? Schools? Walking trails?

One year at First Baptist Church, Garland, Texas, I had responsibility for operating the bus routes for Vacation Bible School. We used the elementary schools in our area as the pick-up/drop-off points for children who rode our buses. This proved to be a wise approach from an administrative standpoint and as a missionary strategy. Why? Parents considered the schools to be a safe place that was familiar to them and their kids. Where are the safe places within your mission field where you might encounter your people group? Can you think of a time when you intentionally, or accidentally, employed a fruitful missionary strategy? What did you do? What did you learn about the people you engaged? How has that affected other efforts to address them?

## **The Babies—Twos People Group**

Please pardon a brief rant about a very important people group: babies, ones, and twos. Members of this people group may not be particularly adept at talking or walking. But they can and do learn—especially in those first important years. So it concerns me when a church decides

that all babies, ones, and twos need to experience when they're at church is babysitting in the nursery. These babies, crawlers, and toddlers need teachers! Teachers committed to sharing Bible concepts and singing spiritual songs. Teachers committed to helping babies learn important lessons beyond what is said. A great document called Levels of Biblical Learning guides curriculum development for LifeWay Kids and identifies some of the things teachers and parents can expect their children to learn around several biblical concepts (see page 38).

If you teach or parent preschoolers and children, part of learning about your people group may be mastering the biblical learning objectives of each age group. That's part of being an effective missionary to kids!<sup>20</sup>

## **Getting to Know the Individuals in Your Group**

As a missionary, you'll want to do more than simply learn about the general characteristics of your people group. You'll also want to discover specifics about the individual people within your group—their needs, backgrounds, aspirations, talents, and gifts. You'll want to know the important dates and events in their lives. In a word, you'll want to know their *story*. Everybody has a story. And for the missionary no one's story is complete until it has intersected with His Story. I am convinced that happens best in a community that is being enriched by each other's stories. A community like a Sunday School class!<sup>21</sup>

## **Sunday School's Missionary Stream**

Most of this chapter focused on ideas for reaching Every Person through an established, church-facility-based Sunday School. That would be part of the church school stream of the Sunday School movement. But what about the mission school stream? That's what I'd like to challenge you with in the final brief chapter of the book.

## Levels of Biblical Learning

Biblical Concept	Milestones for Babies-Twos
God	God is good. God made me. God loves me. God hears me. God cares for me. God loves people. God gives rules because He loves me. God wants people to love Him. God wants people to learn about Him.
Jesus	God chose a family for Jesus. Jesus was born. Jesus grew and had a family. Jesus went to church and learned about God. Jesus told people about God. Jesus helped people because He loved them. Jesus wants me to love Him. Jesus loves me.
Bible	The Bible is a special Book. The Bible tells about God and Jesus. People in the Bible told about God. The Bible has stories about Jesus. The Bible helps me know what to do.
Creation	God made day, night, plants, sky, sun, moon, stars, animals, water, birds, and fish. God made people. God made food for people and animals. God wants people to take care of the things He made. God wants me to enjoy the things He made. God wants me to thank Him for the things He made.
Family	God made my family. My family loves me. God gave me a mommy and a daddy. Family members help me. My family tells me about God. My family is kind to me. God loves my family. My family helps.
Self	God made me. I am special. I can make choices. I am learning. I can talk to God. I can grow like Jesus grew. I am learning to take turns. God loves me.
Church	People at church love God and Jesus. People at church love and teach me. People at church help me. People enjoy going to church. They sing, talk to God, listen to Bible stories, and talk about God and Jesus at church. God wants people to go to church.
Community and World	God made people. I can help. People tell about God and Jesus. I can talk to God. People work together. God cares about other people and me.

# Reflections on Chapter 3

What roadblocks does your church or class face when it comes to having a group for everyone in your community? What actions can you take to help remove that roadblock? \_\_\_\_\_

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What tools are currently in place for your class or church to utilize as a missionary? What tools do you need to help secure?

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Who in your community is not currently being reached by your church? Commit to pray that God will help your church start a Bible study group that will reach them for the sake of Christ.

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What would God need to do so your class could establish a new group for an UPG in your community?

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What would God need to do to make your class a center for sending missionaries to other groups (preschool, children, student, and other adult groups)?

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# Concluding Challenges



## New Sunday Schools

I have a dream.

It's a dream of missionary Sunday Schools being started in apartment buildings, housing projects, elementary schools, YMCAs, community centers—anywhere people could gather—all across North America.

Who would start them? Your class! Or several classes working together.

Who would these classes reach? “Those kids.” And maybe their parents.

When would they meet? Any day or night of the week, although Sunday afternoon or evening might be a good time.

Could you start a class for medical professionals who work at the hospital on Sundays, either before or after their shift? A coworker, Bruce Raley, actually did that after an emergency trip to the hospital on a Sunday morning.

How about a class at the county jail? A lady in Texas told me about her class at the juvenile facility—a group functionally equivalent to Sunday School that meets on Tuesday afternoons.

Where else might you start a class? Or even better, a whole Sunday School with at least four classes?

## Unreached People Groups

There are thousands of people groups around the world where less than two percent of the people are professing Christians. That's the definition the International Mission Board uses to describe a UPG. You may be surprised to know that Japan, even after years of missionary effort, qualifies as a UPG. You may be even more surprised to learn that New York City is not far from a similar designation. There are thousands of other people groups where the percentage of Christians is effectively zero. There is no Bible in the language of the people. They may have never heard of Jesus at all. These peoples are called unengaged people groups.

Would your class adopt a UPG?<sup>22</sup> Your first step would be simply to learn about them and pray for them. Perhaps all the classes would adopt the same group as a church-wide effort. Then you would wait to see what God does. Perhaps He might be pleased to open up opportunities for some from your class or church to engage the people group.

Can you imagine a Sunday School starting among your UPG? Can you imagine it thriving? Can you imagine it starting more and more classes? Reaching more and more people? Can you imagine a church springing forth from that Sunday School? Then other churches? If you can—if you can dare to imagine God doing such things—you may be on your way to becoming a missionary Sunday School!

Ignited for *One Mission*.

Fueled by *His Story*.

Concerned about *Every Person*.

# Appendix



## Tools for the Missionary Sunday School

### **TOOL 1—First Contact**

First Contact is a ministry for new and expectant parents. It provides support through prayer, encouragement, and ministry. If parents agree, a child may be enrolled in Sunday School. Some churches present a small New Testament to new parents. Another great resource for new parents is *BabyLife*, a magazine that may be ordered in bulk from Life-Way. Refreshed every few years, *BabyLife* is a special edition of the monthly magazine *ParentLife*. It's an inexpensive way to say “we care” to new and expectant parents. Some churches ask permission to provide the magazines with appropriate contact information in waiting rooms where expectant parents might be. What other resources might be helpful if you were a missionary to new or expectant parents?

### **TOOL 2—Printed Literature**

The modern missionary movement and the Sunday School movement both gained momentum in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. For over two centuries, one of the important tools for both enterprises has been literature: Bibles, books, tracts, devotional guides, magazines, and other Bible study materials. The American Sunday School Union even published Christian fiction as a part of its library program, just as Christian publishers do today. Christian education and publishing remain primary tactics in our missionary strategy to this day. Granted, the advent of the Internet,

digital publishing, and other advances are changing the way literature is delivered. But content is still being delivered. The written word has amazing power, not in the least because of its ability to multiply the impact of a gifted communicator. In the book *Shape of Faith to Come*,<sup>23</sup> Dr. Brad Waggoner reported research findings concerning what contributes to growth in spiritual maturity over time. Perhaps you will not find his conclusions all that surprising. People who demonstrated spiritual growth were more likely than those who did not grow (or regressed) to (a) attend church regularly, (b) be involved in a small group Bible study (like a Sunday School class), and (c) read the Bible and other Christian literature regularly. How have you been impacted by Christian literature? How can you use literature effectively as a Sunday School missionary?

### **TOOL 3—Visitation and Literature Distribution**

Two key practices marked the work of early Sunday School missionaries in America's pioneer West—visitation and literature distribution. Imagine an unfamiliar person riding or walking up to your farm house, into your village, or onto your ranch. After a brief introduction, she delights you by opening a satchel filled with rare commodities: papers, tracts, and books—or even a catalog you can use to order books. She then tells you about the Sunday School she is starting. Perhaps you offer your barn as a meeting place. Maybe even offer to help spread the word. After a few dozen such visits, a class (or classes) gets organized. You volunteer to help. You call yourself a Methodist, but are pleased to learn that a Presbyterian neighbor, a Baptist friend, an Episcopalian businessman, and a couple of Catholic families have also agreed to help. After a few weeks, the missionary departs for the next community, leaving you in charge. You are a little nervous but your confidence is bolstered by the missionary's provision of some Sunday School papers to get you by until your order for additional materials arrives.

The school grows. More children are reached. Some parents admit that they need help with writing. You help organize an adult school. People of various faith walks—or none at all—enjoy the sense of community the Sunday School provides. They decide to have a picnic next

Sunday. Eventually there is interest in providing a permanent building for the school. The building becomes a center of community and includes a growing lending library of books secured from the publishing operation of one of the Sunday School Unions.

The group decides to start a church and secures a minister who preaches once a month in each of the four communities that provide his support. The farms in the community become more established, freeing up children to attend school on weekdays, so the community decides to start a common school in the building. About that time, the Sunday School missionary comes back through, and you are recruited as the permanent “school marm.” Readers and spellers are purchased from the union. People learn. The community is strengthened. A sense of citizenship prevails. Regard for the law pervades. Many profess faith in Christ. Another church is started. And on it goes.

All this started by two classic missionary tactics: visitation and literature distribution. What came next was another important practice: gathering people together into groups for Bible study. Could these practices work today? How might they be used, adapted, and reworked to be effective tools for contemporary Sunday School missionaries?

## **TOOL 4—Starting New Groups**

We can appreciate stories about Sunday School missionaries and affirm the equipping of missionaries as one purpose of Bible study. We may even be inspired to consider leading our Sunday School to be a missionary Sunday School. Still a missionary Sunday School is known by its fruit. The greatest evidence of a fruitful Sunday School is that it expands.

### **The Irreducible Law**

The irreducible law of kingdom growth is start new units. On the mission field that means starting new preaching points, new missions, and new churches. In churches it means starting new ongoing classes, new short-term discipleship groups, new small groups, and new ministry teams. That law applies to the missionary Sunday School too. While a

Sunday School can grow through the expansion of existing classes, the key is the expansion of the organization by creating new classes.

### **The Law of 10**

Maybe the word *law* is too strong but it's remarkable how consistently this principle proves to be accurate. Simply put, for every new class your church establishes, the overall Sunday School attendance will increase by about 10 people within a year.<sup>24</sup> If you want to get more technical, the law could probably be expressed as a math equation: your current average attendance divided by the total number of classes equals 10. You may be surprised how accurate it is!

If your church averages 200 in Sunday School, you probably find 20 or so classes meeting somewhere this Sunday. If you wanted to know how many new classes you need to add for an increase in your average attendance, then divide that desired increase by 10. Remember this formula assumes that all existing classes continue. The inverse of this law is consistently true as well. Eliminating a class will likely decrease attendance by 10—surprisingly even if the class did not average 10 in attendance.

### **A Word Problem**

Consider a church with an average Sunday School attendance of 70 (that's close to average for North American churches). The church has a goal to become a triple-digit Sunday School by achieving an average attendance of 110. How many new classes will it need to create (and find spaces for)? How many new leaders will it need to enlist and train?<sup>25</sup>

### **Flake's Formula Still Works**

Arthur Flake was a Sunday School missionary. A department store salesman in Winona, Mississippi, he gained such notable success as Sunday School director at First Baptist Church Winona that he was asked to travel the state—and beyond—inspiring others to expand their ministries. In 1920, he was asked to join the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay) as the first national program leader of Sunday School for Southern Baptists. Flake conducted, and taught others to conduct,

enlargement clinics. Sometimes these took the form of a Sunday School revival. Flake's now famous five-step formula is:

- Know the possibilities.
- Enlarge the organization.
- Enlist and train the workers.
- Provide space and resources.
- GO** after the people!

The formula still works! Perhaps Flake's greatest contribution was the idea that the organization should be expanded in *anticipation* of growth (based on the possibilities), not just in *response* to growth.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Principle of Three**

As a general rule, you will need three leaders to start a new class. Three words often used to describe the purposes of Sunday School are teach, minister, and reach. One could also describe the purpose in terms of discover, connect, and invite.<sup>27</sup> There is a subtle difference between these sets of descriptors. Teach, minister, and reach are usually directed by the Sunday School organization or its leaders. Discover, connect, and invite are three things *every* class member can do. A group where members—not just leaders—embrace these three dimensions is more likely to be a missionary Sunday School class. The basic idea is that each class has at least three members/leaders that accept primary responsibility for one of the three dimensions, even as they share responsibility for them all.

### **3 x 5 = 18 Principle**

When starting a new class, the team of three can also do double-duty as care group leaders. In that secondary role, they will take responsibility for contacting five people every week. That would be 15 plus the three leaders, or 18 in all. Other persons can be enlisted to be care group leaders as the class expands. Obviously the formula is scalable too. A class could reach an enrollment of 21 if the care groups had six members or 24 with seven. The effectiveness of care group ministry will diminish if you exceed five to seven members in each. In student classes, a good way to introduce students to ministry is to let them be care group leaders.

With both adults and students, it will be more effective if care groups are single gender: males contacting males and females contacting females.<sup>28</sup>

### **Do You Need Three with Preschoolers and Children?**

One leader in every preschool or children's class should be the director or lead teacher. This leader will assume primary responsibility for the Discover dimension and will serve as the planner for the weekly classroom experience. The other teachers will be actively involved in the Bible study session as well. Perhaps the director will ask each of them to be responsible for a learning center or activity. Certainly they will be expected to arrive early to greet the kids and interact with them throughout the session.

There's another more important reason why it's best to have at least a three-person team in every child's room: for the safety and security of the children and the protection of the workers. Vickie and I enjoy teaching in pre-K Sunday School together. The background checks required of all who work with kids in our church are clear. But we always feel better when there is a third person, even a high school helper, in the room. On any Sunday that Vickie is out and I'm the lone leader for a short time at the beginning of a class, I always stand outside the door of the room until reinforcements arrive.

### **Another Baby Rant!**

I've ranted about babies once; pardon me as I do it again. If you don't have a class for babies, start one. "But David," you protest, "we don't have any babies." Your Sunday School will never have babies unless you provide for babies. If a couple attended your church and had no place for their newborn, it's highly unlikely they'd come back. You cannot wait to respond to opportunity. You must anticipate it. Plan for it. Find a room suitable for babies. Get it sparkling clean. Paint it. Enhance the lighting. Get some safe beds and a couple of rocking chairs. Install a sink if you can. Buy some disposable gloves. Invest in smocks and enlist folks to wear them. Provide Bible study resources designed for babies. Then ask God to send you some babies. Or act like a missionary and go to the baby food aisle at the grocery and interact with new moms and dads!



## An Expanding Organization

A minimum Sunday School organization has four classes, one each for preschoolers, children, students, and adults. That organization will seldom exceed 40 in attendance. What might the organization averaging 70 look like? A good guess would be a separate class for babies and ones, one for older preschoolers, one for children, one for students, a couples class, and classes for men and women—seven classes in all.

### Expanding Preschool

What might the preschool Sunday School organization look like as it expands? How many rooms will be required at each level? How many workers? Here is a chart that moves from left to right illustrating what an expanding preschool could become.

Preschoolers	Babies-Twos	Babies	Babies
		Ones & Twos	Ones
	Twos		
	Threes-Kindergarten	Threes & Pre-K	Threes
			Pre-K
		Kindergarten	Kindergarten

### Getting Them in the Right Room

However one of the challenges of an expanding preschool ministry is helping get kids to the right room for their developmental level and making sure there is a sensible plan for grouping them. The scheme above works well too on the first Sunday of a new Sunday School year, but it can become confusing later in the year. It's difficult to explain to newcomers in March that their child who celebrated his third birthday last week is supposed to go to the 2-year-old class. A helpful solution for explaining who goes where is to use a grid.<sup>29</sup>

Begin by creating a grid chart with the months of the year on the left hand side and the years across the top (begin with the next year and go backwards). Then mark the month kids will start school. In the box

that represents the first graders in your church, write *first grade*. Now work backwards, usually in 12-month blocks. Keep in mind when the schools in your area start and when your church actually promotes. The next group to mark would be the Kindergartners.

Put as much or as little information into each block as needed: room number, class designation, teacher's name, etc. The class designation and room number will likely be sufficient. Unless you have enough space for 60 preschool classes, the same room number will appear in multiple blocks on the grid.

You may need to make occasional exceptions due to a child's unique developmental needs, but this grid makes it less complicated to assign preschoolers, comfort parents, and calm the pre-K teacher who has to explain to a parent in July—a month before the kids start Kindergarten—that yours is probably not the best class for her really smart child who turned 3 yesterday. (Yes, that's a testimony!) You may want to consider naming classes using letter designations such as PA, PB, PC, PD, etc. Then you aren't taking a 3-year-old to a 2-year-old class but to Class PC.

The preschool check-in desk gets confusing in July too. A grid like this helps make sure preschoolers have a great experience in a developmentally appropriate class on their first visit to your church. If you are diligent about keeping it up to date, it will be easy to show a parent how you decided to place her child: just slide your finger down to the birth month, then across to the birth year, and that block should be the perfect room for her child! Now start thinking like a missionary. Can you see a growing number of different classes filling out the grid as you expand your ministry to every preschooler? (Refer to sample grids on page 60.)

## **Expanding Ministry to Children**

Note: Your church may include sixth graders in the children's or student area, depending on prevailing educational models in the community. Sixth grade is a crucial time in a child's development. Make every effort to provide what's best for them, not what's most convenient for you. Explore [www.theflyteblog.com](http://www.theflyteblog.com) for more insight.

This chart shows typical progression of expanding classes for children.

Children	Grades 1-3	Grades 1-2	Grade 1
			Grade 2
		Grades 4-6	Grades 3-4
	Grade 4		
	Grades 5-6		Grade 5
			Grade 6
	Kids with Special Needs		Special Buddies

This is the historical heart of Sunday School ministry and a tremendous mission field filled with an impressionable people group. With elementary children, kids simply go to the class that corresponds to their grade level without regard to how old they are or when their birthday is. That works well just about anywhere.

Some churches are using a single gender approach with children.<sup>30</sup> One of the key obstacles to doing this successfully is that boys need men to teach them in that environment. Will you join me in praying God would stir the hearts of thousands of men to teach kids in Sunday School? Boys and girls need to see men in these key leadership roles as well as women. Not instead of women! The advance of the missionary movement known as Sunday School would have never happened without women—in reality, mostly women! I’m confident that many women will resonate with the exhortation for men to step up as teachers too.

### Expanding Ministry to Students

This chart and the one on page 51 illustrates an expanding Sunday School organization for students in a typical church:

Students	Middle School	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	6 <sup>th</sup> grade
		7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade	7 <sup>th</sup> grade
			8 <sup>th</sup> grade
	High School	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> grade	Freshmen
			Sophomores
		11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Juniors
Seniors			

Another approach is one based on gender:

Students	Middle School	Middle School Girls	6 <sup>th</sup> grade girls
			7 <sup>th</sup> grade girls
			8 <sup>th</sup> grade girls
		Middle School Guys	6 <sup>th</sup> grade guys
			7 <sup>th</sup> grade guys
			8 <sup>th</sup> grade guys
	High School	High School Guys	Freshmen guys
			Sophomore guys
			Junior-Senior guys
		High School Girls	Freshmen girls
			Sophomore girls
			Junior-Senior girls

One of the delightful characteristics of students is that they don't mind noise. If needed, you could put the groups above—even all 12 classes in the right hand column of the gender-based chart—in one large room. The classes could be around tables or just circles of chairs. Dividers to block sound and provide the feel of a room would be great but not necessary. In such a set-up, all you need to start a new class of guys or girls is space for another table and a Bible study leader (and maybe some donuts). Students respond well to the “small group in the middle of a large group” learning environment.

### **Expanding Adult Ministry**

Well, here's where it gets harder! Kids and students will generally go to the room and the teacher they're assigned to. Not so much with adults. How could missionary mentality help us think some fresh thoughts about expanding our ministry with adults?

## The Two-Year Principle

You can find exceptions to all the laws and principles in this book. But you'll rarely find an exception to this one: an adult class is unlikely to ever grow past the attendance it achieves during its first two years. It may continue to add new people but just enough to make up for the people who leave. In a typical class (or a typical Sunday School or church) there will be a 20 percent churn every year. A coed class that averages 20 in attendance will have two new couples who were not in the class last year, but two couples who no longer attend will be missing.  $20 + 4 - 4 = 20$ . In its first two years, a class will attract its people group.

### Two Solutions

Actually there is only one foundational solution: create new classes! But there are two different ways to accomplish that goal: (1) classes plant or sponsor new classes out of their class, or (2) classes are created to supplement the current organization. I have long been a strong advocate for the first option—classes planting new classes from their own classes.<sup>30</sup>

Here's how the news of new classes might be communicated in a church newsletter or Sunday worship bulletin:

*New Young Adult Classes Begin Next Sunday: Three years ago, a class was started for nearlyweds and newlyweds. The class has seen remarkable growth and now averages over 30 in attendance. Next Sunday, this one class will become three! Those who have become parents in the last year will be the foundation of a new Young Parents class. A new Nearlywed/Newlywed class will also begin, specifically for engaged couples and those married less than a year. The current class will focus its missionary efforts on Young Couples without kids. Help us spread the word to young adults who fit into one of these three people groups!*

### Age Group Gaps

Do you have gaps in classes for a particular age group? Your welcome center chart won't be sufficient to answer this because you likely have the age group covered in your organization. But do you actually have people attending in that age group? If not, that might be the signal that a new class is in order. That is if you're serious about reaching Every Person.

## **Life Stage**

Could you start new classes around various life stages? How about an empty nester class? A class for adults who've just sent their first child off to college? A class for parents of preteens? By the way, one of the most common questions about life-stage classes is: What if I have a child in middle school, another in elementary school, and a preschooler? As a rule of thumb, people seem to feel most comfortable with people who are on the same parental frontier. That would usually be determined by the age of the oldest child.

## **Life Stage plus Average Age**

A good device for helping people find a class—and more importantly for helping a class understand its people group—is to combine a life stage designation with an average age for the class. Tell the truth! Actually calculate the average.

## **Gender**

Classes for men and women are making a comeback. Men and women look at life differently. They also have different needs. There are some things that will never be addressed as long as spouses are sitting in the same room (and the wise teacher will not bring them up either!). Single gender classes for students and elementary children are making a comeback too. Could you start a new class just for guys or just for girls?

## **Affinity Groups**

Recently I had the pleasure of witnessing the commissioning of several International Mission Board missionaries. After they all gave brief stories about their call to missions, they identified the affinity groups they had been assigned to reach. The IMB groups the thousands of people groups it has identified into nine affinity groups. Affinity groups are another important missionary principle. What about a class for golfers or quilters? Hunters and fishermen? Car enthusiasts? What other affinity groups might fit into a missionary strategy to reach, teach, and minister to Every Person?

## TOOL 5—Multiple Schedules

An effective method for expanding Sunday School in a church that is crunched for space is to start an additional Sunday School session. As a general rule, a church that starts a second Sunday School session can gain an additional 60 percent capacity. A third session will probably add another 20-30 percent.

Why doesn't each additional session provide a 100 percent jump in space capacity? One reason is inefficiency: all rooms don't end up being used twice. The less obvious reason is preschool: you gain zero additional capacity for preschoolers by adding a second or even a third Sunday School session. In fact, there are two capacity issues that multiple schedules cannot fix: parking and preschool. Why? Because most of those spaces are going to be filled by the same people at both the Sunday School and worship hours.

Let's take a look at multiple schedules, especially their impact on preschool. If you're not interested in multiple schedules, skip to page 59.

### Flip-Flop: The Most Efficient Dual Schedule

When I was making phone calls for a project called "Sunday School in a Simple Church,"<sup>32</sup> I asked a ministry assistant my standard question: "Would you tell me your Sunday morning schedule?" She responded, "We have a flip-flop schedule." After a pause, she clarified: "We don't wear flip flops! It's just that about half of our people attend worship first, then Sunday School, and the other half attend Sunday School first, then worship." Her explanation was right-on. A flip-flop schedule is the most efficient, especially when it comes to providing for preschoolers.

Here's an example of how it might look:

9:00	Worship	Sunday School
10:30	Sunday School	Worship

Consider these advantages to this schedule:

1. Preschoolers can usually be dropped off before the first session and picked up after the second session without changing rooms.

2. There will be about the same number of children in the room at both sessions. Most of the children will be there both hours but the number who attend only one hour will likely be about the same as the number who just attend the alternate hour.
3. Staffing is simplified. You only need to enlist staff for two hours, the same staff needed if you have one Sunday School and Extended Teaching Care (ETC)<sup>32</sup> during worship service. You can have permanent teams at both sessions, permanent teams in one hour and rotating ETC (also called extended session) volunteers at the other hour, or a combination with permanent teams in some rooms at both hours. Even if you use ETC volunteers, ideally you'd still have a permanent director in those rooms.

### **Sandwich Schedules Challenge Preschool Leaders**

One of the hardest tasks in any church is adequate staffing in preschool classes. Any triple or sandwich schedule multiplies that challenge.

There are two basic varieties of the sandwich schedule. First:

Worship	Sunday School	Worship
---------	---------------	---------

This schedule is used by churches with adequate space for Sunday School but need additional worship space. It is also used in churches that want to have an early option for worship, with the side benefit of freeing up space in the later service. It is being adopted increasingly in churches that employ a different style of worship for each of their services.

Here's how it looks in my church:

	Education Buildings	Worship Center with pastor	Fellowship Hall with video
8:30	Sunday School	(Future service)	
9:45	Sunday School	Traditional service	Contemporary service
11:00	Sunday School	Blended service	Contemporary service

One dynamic of this schedule with preschoolers is almost all preschoolers will be present in the second of the three sessions. Only 30 to 70



## ■ MISSIONARY SUNDAY SCHOOL

percent will be present in the first and third sessions. (In theory, it would be 50-50 but that theory seldom plays out.) Adequate space for preschoolers must be provided for the high capacity hour even if those rooms are half empty the other hours. (Note: Even in churches that only provide for adults in the early service, preschool challenges do not change.)

The second sandwich schedule is illustrated below:

Sunday School	Worship	Sunday School
---------------	---------	---------------

This schedule is most common in churches where the capacity for Sunday School is considerably less than the space for worship. This is often true in response to the growth that follows the construction of a new worship center. The challenges are almost the same as those above for preschoolers. In this schedule, many churches find it helpful to have a permanent team of Sunday School teachers at the first and third hours, using the prescribed curriculum materials. In the middle hour, when the rooms will be packed, extended care volunteers supervise the children in more relaxed activities: snacks, games, playground, art activities, and potty time. A simplified group time with a review of the Bible story strengthens the impact of that approach. That's what we tried to do in the Dallas-area church where I served as a minister of education using the following schedule:

8:30	Early Worship (chapel)	Sunday School
9:45	Classic Worship (sanctuary)	Sunday School/Preschool ETC
11:00	Contemporary Worship (Fellowship Hall)	Sunday School

This schedule was a bear to manage, especially for preschoolers. Multiple schedules also present challenges for other age groups and life stages. But challenges are always a part of a missionary's work.

### **Students in Multiple Schedules**

It goes without saying that a church with multiple Sunday School sessions should have an option for Every Person at every hour. Perhaps the

biggest pushback comes from the students—or more likely the student minister, teachers, or parents of students. Often the objections can be placed into two categories. Both are as fallacious as they are compelling.

### 1. All the Youth Want/Need to Be Together

I'd argue with that objection. They might ought to want to but they don't. Not any more than a 70-year-old widower and a 24-year-old never-married woman and a 49-year-old divorced man want—or need—to be together because they're all technically single adults. (They are quite distinct people groups whose current marital status is more a coincidence than a characteristic.) Seventh grade girls and eleventh grade boys do not need to be together and probably don't want to. But guess what? Not all the eleventh graders need or want to be together either. Given a choice, they will likely flock to whichever people group is most like them—and will be far more likely to invite others in their people group to Sunday School. Just sayin'! Who really wants all the students together? Why? Are those people thinking like missionaries?

### 2. Sunday School Sessions Need Balanced Attendance

Actually missionary mentality trumps balance when it comes to expanding Sunday School, especially with students. You need not have the same number of Middle School or High School students at each session. Yet you do probably need to use your available space wisely.

Here's how some churches successfully handle this challenge:

	9:00	10:30
High School	High School – all grades meet together in the same room	9 <sup>th</sup> grade
		10 <sup>th</sup> grade
		11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Middle School	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Middle School – all grades meet together in the same room
	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	
	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	

Four spaces are needed and utilized at both hours. There is a class available for every student either hour. But there is a subtle difference. The

combination classes might also be a better fit for a different people group of students than the age-graded classes—and vice versa. I’ve watched it happen. The early high school class was about a third the size of the later classes. The kids were different too. They came to church with their parents—often single parents whose class also met at 9:00—because they didn’t have their own car like most of the kids in the 10:30 classes. The conventional wisdom would have said that they weren’t as “cool” as the kids in the late Sunday School. Curiously, more of those students ended up in vocational ministry than from the much larger later group. One of the reasons is that some of our superstar student workers taught that early class. I don’t think they knew it but they were missionaries to those kids. Those kids were special to them. They were their people group. They accepted them. They were interested and involved in their lives. They loved them. They taught about Jesus—and modeled Him—among the “least of these.” Combining these groups to achieve balance would have been a big mistake and would have violated missionary mentality. By the way, the “cool” students needed missionaries too!

### **Multiple Schedules and Missionary Mentality**

The best motivation for enduring the challenges of multiple schedules is not to solve space issues (although that’s why most churches do it). The best reason is missionary mentality—a desire to provide for Every Person.

I’ve seen missionary mentality in the face of church leaders as they “got it” concerning the real reason behind multiple schedules. While speaking to leaders in a Tennessee church about the possibility of adopting a flip-flop schedule, I ventured the following: “What if you could start a new mission church, without buying any additional land, building any additional buildings, or calling any additional staff?” I still remember a prominent member of the church, a respected physician, responding, “I don’t think we’d thought of it like that. Almost all our objections about not seeing everybody every week would be equally true if we started a mission somewhere else. This just makes sense. I say we do it.”

Needless to say, he helped carry the day—once the leaders shifted their thinking from *us* to *them*! Thinking like missionaries.

# The Expanding Sunday School

Preschoolers	Babies-Twos	Babies	Babies
		Ones & Twos	Ones
			Twos
	Threes-Kindergarten	Threes & Pre-K	Threes
			Pre-K
		Kindergarten	Kindergarten
Children	Grades 1-3	Grades 1-2	Grade 1
			Grade 2
		Grades 3-4	Grade 3
	Grade 4		
	Grades 4-6	Grades 5-6	Grade 5
			Grade 6
		Kids with Special Needs	Special Buddies
Students	Middle School	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	6 <sup>th</sup> grade
		7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade	7 <sup>th</sup> grade
			8 <sup>th</sup> grade
	High School	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> grade	Freshmen
			Sophomores
		11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Juniors
		Seniors	
Students	Middle School	Middle School Girls	6 <sup>th</sup> grade girls
			7 <sup>th</sup> grade girls
			8 <sup>th</sup> grade girls
		Middle School Boys	6 <sup>th</sup> grade boys
			7 <sup>th</sup> grade boys
			8 <sup>th</sup> grade boys
	High School	High School Boys	Freshmen boys
			Sophomore boys
			Jr-Sr boys
		High School Girls	Freshmen girls
			Sophomore girls
			Jr-Sr girls

# Grouping Preschoolers

This is an example of what a chart might look like in a church the first Sunday of the Sunday School new year. For this example, the start date is June 3, 2012. The schools in the city in which this church exists use a September 30 birthday as the marker for when a child begins school.

## Preschool Chart—June 3, 2012

This church has four preschool classes at the beginning of the Sunday School year. The infants and creepers are in PA1, walkers are in PB1, children who will be 3 and 4 before September 30 are in 3-PreK, and children who will be 5 before September 30 are in Kndr (Kindergarten). a new family shows up on June 3, 2012 with a child born in June of 2011,

Birth Month	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
JAN		PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
FEB		PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
MAR		PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
APR		PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
MAY		PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
JUNE		PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
JUL			PA1*	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
AUG			PA1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
SEP			PA1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
OCT			PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr
NOV			PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr
DEC			PA1	PB1	PB1	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr

that child will be taken to the PB1 classroom. If they have a second child born in October of 2007, that child will be taken to the 3-PreK classroom.

\*There may be some preschoolers born in July 2011 who are walking well and need to be a part of PB1 class as opposed to the PA1 class.

### Adjusted Chart—Eight Months Later

Birth Month	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
JAN	PA1	PB1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
FEB	PA1	PB1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
MAR		PA1*	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
APR		PA1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
MAY		PA1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
JUNE		PA1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
JUL		PA1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
AUG		PA1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
SEP		PA1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr	1 <sup>st</sup> Gr
OCT		PA1	PB1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr
NOV		PA1	PB1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr
DEC		PA1	PB1	PB1	PB2	3-PreK	3-PreK	Kndr

This chart shows the same church with an added preschool class during the eighth month after the start of the Sunday School year. This new class is for younger preschoolers (PB2) who will turn two after September 30. In reality, the preschoolers who were in the PB1 class were recognized as the PB2 class so the preschoolers who are ready to move up (walkers) would have an appropriate class for them (the new PB1 class). There may be some preschoolers born in March 2012 who are walking well and may need to be a part of PB1 class as opposed to the PA1 class.

# Endnotes



<sup>1</sup>See *Transformational Class: Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School* by David Francis at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.

<sup>2</sup>See *Connect<sup>3</sup>: The Power of One Sunday School Class* by David Francis at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.

<sup>3</sup>Belle Paxson Drury, *A Fruitful Life: The Missionary Labors of Stephen Paxson* (Minneapolis: Curiosmith, 2010). Originally published in 1882 by the American Sunday School Union.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>6</sup>In *Transformational Class* (available at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>) you can read a summary of the story of how the Sunday School movement took root in England around 1780 (p. 10).

<sup>7</sup>The organization changed its name from the Sunday and Adult School Union (organized 1817) to ASSU in 1824, to the American Missionary Fellowship in 1974, and an additional change in 2011 to InFaith. Visit <http://infaith.org/about/history/> for a more complete history.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>For information on Motorcycle Sunday School Mission, visit <http://www.motorcycles-missions.org>.

<sup>10</sup>Belle Paxson Drury, *A Fruitful Life: The Missionary Labors of Stephen Paxson* for a complete telling of the influence of Stephen Paxson.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>12</sup>Keith Drury, "Short History of the Sunday School," [online], 30 March 2010. Available from the Internet: <http://www.drurywriting.com/keith/sunday.school.history.htm>.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, The Christian School movement being an exception—or perhaps a reaction—to that trend.

<sup>14</sup>InFaith, <http://infaith.org/about/history/>

<sup>15</sup>C. Sylvester Green, *B. W. Spilman: The Sunday School Man* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1980).

<sup>16</sup>See *Great Expectations: Planting Seeds for Sunday School Growth* by David Francis. Free download available at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Clay Trumball, *The Sunday-School: Its Origin, Mission, Methods, and Auxiliaries* (Philadelphia: John D. Wattles, Publisher, 1888. Reprinted by BiblioLife, LLC), 178-179.

<sup>18</sup>Levels of Biblical Learning. Free download available at <http://www.lifeway.com/n/Product-Family/Levels-of-Biblical-Learning>.

<sup>19</sup>One of the key tools offered by LifeWay Consulting Services is a geo-coded breakdown of the Mosaic clusters (people groups) in a church's Primary Ministry Area (PMA). Visit [www.lifeway.com/consulting](http://www.lifeway.com/consulting) for more information.

<sup>20</sup>Levels of Biblical Learning. Free download available at <http://www.lifeway.com/n/Product-Family/Levels-of-Biblical-Learning>.

<sup>21</sup>For more about stories, see chapter 2 of *The Discover Triad: Three Facets of a Dynamic Sunday School Class* by David Francis. Free download available at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.

<sup>22</sup>For information about adopting an Unreached People Group, visit <http://prayerthreads.imb.org>.

<sup>23</sup>Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008).

<sup>24</sup>A preschool class that meets twice with the same children should be counted only once, even if there are two sets of teachers. This is often true in a church that operates a flip-flop dual schedule. Likewise, each individual child will be counted only once. Sandwich schedules are more difficult. If it is Worship/Sunday School/Worship, count the preschoolers in the Sunday School and count it as one class. If it is Sunday School/Worship/Sunday School, the number of classes will be determined by how many times the lesson is taught by a regular set of teachers.

<sup>25</sup>If you said "four" and "twelve," congratulations! You are a Sunday School consultant! Or shall we say *missionary*?

<sup>26</sup>See *The 5-Step Formula for Sunday School Growth (Based on the Works of Arthur Flake)* by David Francis at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.



<sup>27</sup>In *The 3D Sunday School: A Three Dimensional Strategy to Help Members and Leaders Fulfill the Great Commission*, I proposed three basic “dimensions” of a vibrant class: Discover, Connect, and Invite. Available for download at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.

<sup>28</sup>My good friend David Apple, an adult ministry specialist at LifeWay, introduced me to this concept.

<sup>29</sup>See the Appendix on pages 42-61 for samples. Excel files and explanations also included on a CD-Rom by David Francis in the *How To Sunday School Manual* by Wayne Poling. See the Web site <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/how-to-sunday-school-manual-P005164710>.

<sup>30</sup>*Bible Express* is a monthly devotional magazine designed for preteens with separate devotional readings for boys and girls. See at the Web site <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/bible-express>.

<sup>31</sup>*Great Expectations: Planting Seeds for Sunday School Growth* includes an appeal to classes to do the missionary work of planting new classes from their own classes. Free download available at <http://www.lifeway.com/DavidFrancis>.

<sup>32</sup>Eric Geiger and David Francis, "Sunday School in a Simple Church." Available from the Internet: [http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwF\\_Sunday\\_School\\_in\\_a\\_Simple\\_Church.pdf](http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwF_Sunday_School_in_a_Simple_Church.pdf).

<sup>33</sup>For information on conducting an extended care teaching ministry, visit the Web site <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/conducting-an-extended-teaching-care-ministry>. The preschool *Bible Teaching for Kids* curriculum from LifeWay is a flexible resource that can be used in Sunday School and Extended Teaching Care (ETC) programs.

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