

# connect<sup>3</sup>

the power of one Sunday School class

David Francis

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**David Francis**

David Francis is the director of Sunday School, discipleship, and network partnerships at LifeWay Christian Resources. Before coming to LifeWay in 1997, he served as the minister of education at First Baptist Church in Garland, Texas. David and his wife, Vickie, teach Preschool Sunday School and adult discipleship groups at Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee. They have three sons.

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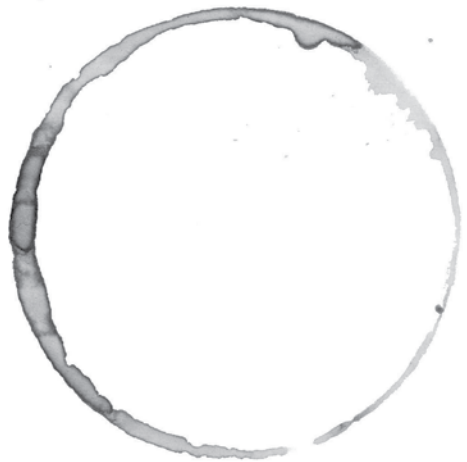
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# Introduction

I've joked that this is the fourth book in a trilogy! That's sort of true. It is the final installment in a series that began with my book *The 3D Sunday School*. That book identified three dimensions of a balanced Sunday School class: Invite, Discover, and Connect. The second book in the series, *I-6: A Six-Lane Strategy Toward an Inviting Sunday School*, dealt in greater detail with the Invite dimension, suggesting six dynamics that create a culture of invitation in a church or class: Invigorate, Incorporate, Intercede, Invest, Invite, and Involve. *The Discover Triad*, the third book in the 3D series, dove deeper into the Discover dimension, identifying three facets of every great Bible study experience: Scripture, Stories, and Shepherding.

This book challenges Bible study groups to higher levels related to the Connect dimension. Like the other books in the 3D Sunday School series, this book is intended for members as well as leaders. In fact, of all the books in the series, this may be the most important one to get into the hands—and hearts—of every member of your group or class. I am confident that many will resonate with the challenge; and if it does, your class or group may never be the same again.

So what is this book about? Essentially, it challenges small groups and Sunday School classes—whatever you call them in your church—to become intentional about connecting with other people on three levels. Any class or group can apply these principles, whether any of the other groups in your church do or not! After reading *Connect*<sup>3</sup>, you should be able to—

1. identify the level at which your group or class currently functions;
2. discover ideas for operating on each level with greater meaning;
3. decide whether you want to move to a higher level or stay where you are.

So is this book going to be a guilt trip to make you change the way you are doing Sunday School? Absolutely not! Let me be very clear: it's OK for your Bible study group or class to be on whatever level you find yourself. Every level has unique value that can't be achieved on any other level. If you choose to move to another level, it may take work. And time. Don't expect to jump from the first to the third level in one or two Sundays—or even one or two months!

So what are the three levels? Class, Community, and Commission. Even if you don't call your small group a class, it can still function on that level. In fact, that level is the foundational level. The primary purpose of the *Class* level is Bible

study. The goal is for each member to be—well—a participating *member!* On the second level a group becomes a *Community*, organized for caring and sharing 24/7. In a community, members have the opportunity to become *ministers*. On the third level a class gets intentional about helping one another obey a *Commission*—the Great Commission. In this kind of group, members and ministers are challenged to become *missionaries*—part of a missional team.

LEVEL	CLASS	COMMUNITY	COMMISSION
<b>Churched</b>	Member	Minister	Missionary
<b>Focus</b>	Me	Us	Them
<b>Unchurched</b>	Conversation	Community	Conversion
<b>Biblical Mandate</b>	Great Confession	Great Commandment	Great Commission
<b>Conversation</b>	What we learned	What they did for me	Where we went
<b>Prayer</b>	General requests	Needs of others	Lost people
<b>Records</b>	Class list	Ministry list	Prospect list
<b>Organization</b>	Teacher, secretary	Fellowship, ministry, prayer, and care-group leaders	Missions leader, outreach leader, apprentices, associates
<b>Biblical Concept</b>	<i>Kerygma</i>	<i>Koinonia</i>	<i>Kenosis</i>

All three levels are important. A group or class does not graduate from one level to the next. It just builds on the previous level. Each level is foundational to the next. They work together to help people progress from making the *Great Confession*, to experiencing the *Great Commandment*, to participating in the *Great Commission*.

Each chapter in this book will include a brief discussion of how each level of connection might influence the conversations we have with outsiders—people who are outside the kingdom of God but inside our spheres of influence. To maintain some level of consistency, each chapter will also attempt to address how each level relates to several other key topics: goals, member expectations, organizational structure, growth, evangelism, prayer—and nametags!

I believe your class can become more than you ever imagined as you progress through the three levels of connection we'll talk about in this book. Ready to get started?





## chapter 1

# Class: Connecting with God's Word

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *class*? Probably something like a place you go to learn, typically from a teacher. Maybe it makes you think of school. It might even make you think of Sunday School! Whatever else Sunday School is, it is usually at least a weekly occasion at which groups of people come together to learn from the Bible.

The foundation of the Sunday School movement is Bible teaching. The first Sunday Schools were established to help poor boys and girls learn how to read and write. The participants were called scholars, and the primary textbook was the Bible. So in addition to learning to read and write, Sunday School scholars were exposed to the life-changing message of God's Word. Although the Sunday School movement has evolved over the years, its primary purpose remains the same: helping boys and girls, men and women connect with God through His Word.

You may call it something different from Sunday School in your church. In my church we call classes Connect Groups. Regardless of what you call your groups, they still fulfill the function of a class—a place where people come to learn. It can be more than just a class, but at least it usually functions as a class. And it can function more effectively at that level.

### **Open Groups**

There is one key distinction about classes in the Sunday School movement. Classes are designed to be open groups. What's an open group? One of the best ways to describe an open group is to contrast it with a closed group. Closed groups typically meet for a predetermined number of sessions, using a set course of study materials. There is usually a higher degree of accountability in closed groups. Participants are expected to attend all or most of the sessions and to complete assignments at home. Because of the nature of a closed group, new participants are discouraged once the group begins. I am often asked, "Are closed groups bad?"

No, they are just closed! They serve an important purpose, especially when it comes to going deeper into a particular doctrine, training for a specific ministry, or intentionally creating a high-accountability group.

Open groups are ongoing groups that encourage newcomers every time the group meets. In fact, they expect new people to be there; so the study material should provide a complete Bible study experience at every session. The session is usually part of a unit of study, like a book of the Bible or a biblical topic, and participants benefit from frequent participation. Still, each session stands alone, ensuring that new people feel welcome even on their first visit to the group.

LEVEL	CLASS	COMMUNITY	COMMISSION
<b>Churched</b>	Member	Minister	Missionary
<b>Focus</b>	Me	Us	Them
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## Staying Open While Going Deeper

One big challenge for open groups is satisfying the desire of believers to go deeper into God's Word while still maintaining an openness in which not-yet-believers feel comfortable. There are a few keys to navigating that dilemma. The most important key is to make sure Bible study is the center of the group experience. Unchurched people overwhelmingly say if they decide to attend a church or small group, a primary motivator is to understand the Bible. So you don't have to dumb down Bible study to be open. Many teachers interpret the desire to go deeper as a call to prepare and deliver in-depth lectures about the Scripture passage or topic. In reality, most people want to go deeper through discussion. A proper balance of lecture and discussion—and even other teaching/learning methods—is critical to helping a group be both deep and open (check out “Discovering Scripture” in *The Discover Triad*, which can be downloaded free at [www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool)).

## **Biblical Illiteracy and Relevance**

Much lamented by church leaders today is the problem of biblical illiteracy. In normal English that term just means a lot of people attend church year after year who still don't know the Bible well enough to apply it practically to everyday life choices and decisions. That's why the primary purpose of the Class level is unapologetically Bible study and teaching. In fact, if a class or group never moves beyond this level, it is still fulfilling a very important function: conquering biblical illiteracy. But the purpose of a class is not to win a game of Bible Trivia. Rather, it is to help its members apply what they learn as they face the changes and challenges life brings. In other words, Bible study must be relevant.

## **Dropping Out and Coming Back**

In their excellent book *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, Thom and Sam Rainer explore the reasons 71 percent of churchgoing 18- to 22-year-olds drop out of church during these pioneer years of young adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Their research indicates that “almost every dropout (97%) leaves the church because of a life change.”<sup>2</sup> On the positive side are the 30 percent who remain active in church. Want to guess some of the important reasons they gave for staying connected? If you guessed things like “I knew what the Bible says about being connected to a group of believers” or “The preaching and teaching of the Bible were essential and relevant to my life,” you're right on target.<sup>3</sup> It probably won't surprise you, then, that one of the main reasons cited by dropouts who later return to the church is “I remembered what the Bible said about it!”

The research suggests a strong correlation between dropouts and a lack of biblical knowledge.<sup>4</sup> The Rainers summarize the research, “So what have we discovered about Christians who hear good sermons each week, who are involved in small-group Bible study, and who study the Bible on their own? We have found that such Christians rarely drop out, that they rarely become one of the dechurched. And if they do, they are the most likely to return.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Raising the Expectations of Class Members**

Notice in the previous research summary that those who stay connected to the church not only hear sermons and attend a class. They also “study the Bible on their own.” So what does a Sunday School class have to do with that? Plenty! In too many small groups and Sunday School classes today, there is virtually no expectation that members come prepared. In fact, they may not even know what the passage or topic will be until they show up. The teacher may be well prepared, but



class members are not. Everyone just shows up, hears the lesson, and goes home. If there is discussion, it is typically not informed discussion, the kind of vibrant, meaningful discussion that happens when members come to the class experience already prepared to explore the Bible passage or topic. So how do you create the expectation—or at least the opportunity—for members to prepare for the group session? You provide them Bible study material! And reward them for using it.

As the leader of Sunday School for our denomination, I have heard a lot of fun poked at quarterlies. Seems that a lot of churches have decided it's not cool to provide study materials to the members. Or that it's too expensive. Frankly, compared to the expense of biblical illiteracy and church dropouts, study guides are actually a pretty inexpensive investment. And you might even be surprised how many members would be willing to pay for their books. Of course, extra copies for guests, who should always be provided a copy, and for use in outreach should be paid for from the church budget.

You may have thought that last paragraph sounded like a commercial, but I hope you heard my heart. These principles apply whether you purchase Bible study and devotional resources from LifeWay or prepare them yourself. Members should have the opportunity to prepare for class ahead of time and should be encouraged to spend time reading the Bible each day. These are ways you can help members develop at the Class level. Creating the opportunity and expectation for members to come prepared will not only help them personally. It will also create a much more robust and dynamic group discussion centered on trying to understand what God is saying to them in His Word rather than just personal opinions uninformed by personal Bible study.

### **Connecting as a Member: Enrollment**

At the Class level the goal is for every participant to become a member of the group. That begins with enrollment. Enrolling in a class or group simply means what it implies: agreeing to be placed on the class or group roll. Classes and groups that are intentional about being open groups encourage newcomers to enroll as soon as possible. Why? Because it says to that person, "We'd like to get to know you; we'd like to invite you into our group; we welcome your contribution to our class." Does this person already need to be a believer or a church member? Absolutely not! In fact, during the years when my denomination experienced its greatest growth, Sunday School enrollment exceeded what Southern Baptists call resident church membership by as much as 10 percent. Some in the denomination are concerned that the number of church members is overstated. The solution, for some, is

to purge the rolls of nonattenders. In my opinion, that should be exercised with great care and should almost never apply to the Sunday School roll.

The alarm being expressed by some in our denomination is that a large number of unregenerate members may be on the rolls. That is, people are on a church-membership roll but seldom attend or give other evidence that they are Christ-followers. So what does the discussion about unregenerate members have to do with Sunday School enrollment? In a word, nothing! Why? Because we actually want members in Sunday School who are not yet believers—people who have not yet pledged their allegiance to Jesus. I'll address this more fully in the next chapter.

### **Belonging Before Believing**

The genius of open enrollment—of not only allowing but also encouraging people to enroll in our Sunday School class or open small group—is that it lets people belong before they believe. That is exactly what we do with kids! A baby can't make a decision to follow Christ, but a loving parent can enroll her in Sunday School. In fact, during a recent meeting with the Central New York Baptist Association, one pastor suggested to me that if we really believe life begins at conception, we should allow babies to be enrolled in Sunday School before they are born! I didn't tell him, but I have heard of churches who enrolled babies in their Cradle Roll departments before they were born, with the parent's permission, of course. This was never specifically encouraged by the promoters of Cradle Roll ministry, which actually had as its focus the enrollment of expectant parents. The emphasis is now called First Contact. These approaches amplify the passion behind the practice of open enrollment.

### **Church Membership Not Required**

What if, when asked about enrolling as a member of your group, someone says, "We're not sure we're ready to join the church"? I recommend that you memorize this response: "Enrolling as a member of our class does not make you a member of the church, nor does it obligate you to become one." Communicating both points is important. We want Sunday School members to understand that enrolling in the class, making a commitment to Christ, and requesting church membership are three distinct and separate decisions. And we also want them to know that a lot of people enroll as members of Sunday School while they are considering one or more of the other decisions. It's sort of like trial membership in the church.

And guess what? You will be amazed how many people will respond positively to such an invitation if presented in a clear, compelling way. Beyond the

mechanics of enrollment, however, what people are really listening for is “We like you; we want to get to know you better; would you honor us by being an official member of our group?” They want to know it’s OK with you if they belong before they believe—even if they never believe.

### **Connecting to Christ: The Great Confession**

So if we have not-yet-believers connected to our class, what is our desire for them? That they connect with Christ! We want them to come to the place where they can sincerely express the Great Confession, the response Peter made to the Lord’s question, “Who do you say that I am?” What did Peter say? “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16).

While there are many ways for people to come to such a point of decision, by far one of the most effective is involvement—over an extended period of time—with a small group of people who regularly study and share about the Word of God. The evidence is overwhelming: a person enrolled in Sunday School is about one hundred times more likely to receive Christ than a person who is not enrolled in a class or small group. I like those odds!

### **Enrollment and Assimilation**

*Assimilation* is a word used by church leaders to describe the process—and the problem—of connecting to a local church the people who accept Jesus’ offer of forgiveness and eternal life. The problem primarily arises from an approach to evangelism that suggests this process: conversation, conversion, community. This approach suggests that the normal way to reach people for Christ is to present the gospel to them, lead them to pray to receive Christ, then try to help them connect with a group or church where they can grow in Christ. Thus, the problem of assimilation is accomplishing the third step in that process. And it is a real problem because unfortunately, it is quite rare when this approach actually results in the person’s getting to the third step—being assimilated into a local church.

Dozens of schemes have been devised to solve this problem, but most have had disappointing results. So what if we changed the order of the process? What if our primary process were conversation, community, conversion? That is, the goal of conversations with our FRANS—friends, relatives, associates/acquaintances, and neighbors in your sphere of influence—would be to invite them to be part of our Bible study group; then to invite them to enroll in the class and become part of our community (next chapter!); and finally, in the context of fellowship around God’s Word, experience Christ’s love and their need for Him. When a person comes

to Christ this way, guess what happens to the problem of assimilation? There's not one! They are already assimilated! Enrollment and participation in a Sunday School class or small group is perhaps the grandest preassimilation tool ever!

### **Participation: The First Indicator of Connectedness**

At the Class level there are two progressive indicators that a member is connected to the class or group. The first is simply participation, or attendance. The member shows up for class with some level of regularity. That's why attendance is one vital sign we use to measure the effectiveness of a class in the macro and the individual member in the micro.

What is a healthy ratio of attendance to enrollment? Remarkably, for many decades the average ratio in Southern Baptist churches has remained virtually constant at around 50 percent. That is, with only a movement of about a point in either direction over many years, in the average church about half of Sunday School members attend any given week. So an attendance-enrollment ratio of between 40 and 60 percent is generally seen as healthy. If the ratio is below 40 percent, it usually indicates either that the class is unusually aggressive at enrolling new members or that the class may need to address how well it is ministering to its members (which we'll address in the next chapter). If the ratio is above 60 percent, it usually means the class is very passive about inviting new people and/or inviting them to enroll, or it has purged its roll of nonattenders. So David, are you suggesting that a high percentage is bad? Actually, that's exactly what I'm suggesting! People are more important than percentages.

### **Active Enrollment: You've Become More Connected than You Think!**

It's typical for a class to think something like this: we have 30 people on our roll, and our attendance averages 15; so we must have 15 people who don't attend. That's probably not accurate at all. In fact, if you counted how many different members come at least once during a given month, you'd probably discover that there are perhaps 22 to 24 members participating at least monthly. I call this active enrollment. Your class might be encouraged by this number. And it certainly reduces the scope of the challenge of your efforts to reconnect nonattenders. In chapter 3 I'll give you another number you might add to your active-enrollment figure that I think you'll find even more encouraging in terms of the size of your class.

## **Preparation: An Advance Indicator of Connectedness**

The second indicator that members are connecting more fully at the Class level is preparation. Members seldom come to class wondering what the lesson for the day might be. Using the materials or advance information provided, they have prepared for the class.

There are different steps of preparedness within this level. The first step may be simply making a commitment to read the Bible passage(s) before class. The next step would be reading the comments in the learner guide. Still another step might be to mark in the book, circling words you'd like to know more about, underlining key comments with which you agree or disagree and using exclamation points or question marks to mark issues you'd like to discuss further, and so forth.

Wise teachers reward such preparation. One way is by asking the class, "From your reading for class, what questions or ideas would you like to make sure we try to address today?" Another way is by actually using the learner guide during the class session: "Look at the [photo/question/comment/box] on page 22. Let's break into groups of four and discuss it for five minutes." Preparation should be expected—and rewarded!

## **Connection Is Affected by Room Set-up**

At the Class level the way the room is set up has a significant effect on members' participation and their ability to connect during the class.

- Rows of chairs with a lectern at the front communicates that the leader will do most of the talking and the learners will sit and listen. Some people prefer this arrangement because it is safe: nobody is looking at me, and I don't have to say anything! This is about the only way to set up a class where attendance exceeds 25 to 30. The use of smaller buzz groups during class is an effective way to stimulate participation in such a class.
- A semicircle with the leader sitting or standing in the open end communicates that there will be some level of participation, but the leader is still clearly in charge. (I confess that this is my favorite way to teach, but it may not be the best way!)
- A full circle communicates that the leader is a fellow learner, and there is going to be a lot of interaction in this class. It is also the most efficient use of space because you use every wall.

- What about tables? I hate it when people ask me about tables, because they seldom like my answer! Tables almost always communicate that this is a closed, academic sort of group. In addition, tables are an incredibly inefficient use of valuable space.

Whatever way you decide to set up your room, it's OK. Don't stop reading the book over the way your room is set up!

## **Organization at the Class Level**

What kind of organizational structure do you need at the Class level? On the most basic level you need just two positions: teacher(s) and secretary. The secretary checks and returns attendance records. If groups meet away from the church or at times other than Sunday, the secretary can report attendance via the Internet or another means. She completes and returns appropriate forms that capture information about guests and new members. There are many other duties the secretary might also perform. You can download a copy of sample job descriptions for Sunday School class leaders at [www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool).

Why the (s) after teacher? Two reasons. Preschool and children's classes need multiple teachers. Period. This is true for a number of reasons: safety, security, and—perhaps most important—sanity! Student and adult classes may have more than one teacher also. In a class for kids, one of the teachers typically serves as the lead teacher. Some churches call this person the director.

## **Director: A Position Worth Considering**

If your class is large, if your class has more than one teacher, or if two or more classes are part of a department, you might want to consider a position like a director. Similar titles I've heard are administrator or class coordinator. The titles pretty much describe the role: coordinating the organizational and administrative functions of the class, thus freeing the teacher to maximize his or her time to prepare the lesson and shepherd the class members. Several ministers of education I know have two key positions in their classes, which they call adult Bible fellowships—director and teacher. One tells the teachers they are the pastors of their classes and the directors that they are the ministers of education. To get ideas for a director's job description, visit [www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool).

## **The Goal: A Bible Study Experience Nobody Wants to Miss**

The goal at the Class level of group development is to provide a consistently satisfying Bible study experience that people hate to miss. It is outside the scope of this book to describe how to accomplish that. *The Discover Triad* suggests ideas and resources to equip teachers to plan and lead dynamic Bible study sessions. Southern Baptist state conventions and local associations also provide training and helps. Visit their Web sites for specific information. (Hint: You may find great ideas on the Web site of a state convention or association other than your own! You can find links to some of them at [www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool).) LifeWay offers national training opportunities ([www.lifeway.com/events](http://www.lifeway.com/events)). And always participate in training events offered by your church.

### **Conversational Impact at the Class Level**

How can actively connecting at the Class level season your conversations with lost people? You will become increasingly knowledgeable of the stories, characteristics, and principles of the Bible. Week after week you'll grow in your understanding of how it all fits together. As you apply Bible truths to your life, you'll become more and more confident that loving, trusting, and obeying God is the absolutely best way to live. More importantly, you'll become more and more comfortable sharing what you are learning—and living—in the course of everyday conversations. You won't sound preachy. It will just become the natural, unforced "salt" in your speech (see Col. 4:5). You'll find yourself sharing naturally about how your story is being impacted by God's story. It may sound something like this: "That reminds me of a story about a man named Joseph we discussed in our Bible study class last Sunday. May I share it with you?" Your testimony may sound something like this: "Being part of this class has made a huge, positive difference in the way I understand and navigate life's challenges." Your invitation may sound something like this: "I'd love for you to consider attending our class with me to check out whether you think it might be helpful for you too."

### **Growth and Evangelism at the Class Level**

At this level growth and evangelism are pretty much about being welcoming toward people God sends to your class. *That doesn't sound hard*, you might be thinking. *Doesn't everybody do that?* In a word, no, they don't. I visit churches all over the country. I have visited many classes with pretty good Bible teaching and discussion that were pretty lousy at welcoming people.

What kinds of things does a class do to create a welcome environment for newcomers? First and foremost, the teacher and some of the members—maybe a greeter—arrive at class at least 10 minutes early, and someone greets newcomers at the door. If any forms need to be filled out, someone does it for them while getting to know more about them than the contact information on the form. That person introduces the new friend to other people, especially if he discerns an interest match like a sport, hobby, or vocation. Members make an intentional effort to break away from conversations to show sincere interest in the guest. Perhaps someone invites the person to accompany them to worship. And if you want to make an A+, invite them to lunch. (They probably won't accept, but the gesture will make a big impression.) Finally, the teacher or, even better, several class members contact the newcomers the following week to invite them back. For a number of additional ideas about how to make positive first impressions with guests, see the chapter "Connect" in *The 3D Sunday School* (view or download it free at [www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool)).

So is this really evangelism? Maybe not. But it is important, because creating a welcoming class is the foundation for invitation, which is the foundation for evangelism. (See the chapter "Invigorate" in *I-6: A Six-Lane Strategy Toward an Inviting Sunday School* for a more thorough treatment of this idea.) Who knows? Perhaps if you get ready for guests, God may send some to you!

### **Nametags at the Class Level**

David, are you really going to talk about nametags in every chapter? Yep! I've been called an evangelist for nametags because I think they are so important! In each chapter I'll try to convince you why you should use nametags at that level of the class's development. So what about the Class level? The most apparent reason relates to the previous topic—making guests feel welcome. Absolutely nothing makes a newcomer's anxiety crash like nametags.

There are also other bonuses at the Class level, whether or not you expect any guests. Nametags enhance discussion and prayer. How? Because people can confidently call one another by name. Nametags—especially if you print first names larger than last names—prevent people from saying, "Following up on what she said ..." or from praying, "Lord please provide for our brother who lost his job." Think of your nametag as an act of faith. As you put it on each week, say a quick prayer like this one: "Lord Jesus, if You send someone our way today, make me worthy of that trust." No other single tool will help your group connect.



## **Prayer at the Class Level**

What a class prays for may be the best indicator of whether it is functioning at the Class, Community, or Commission level. At the Class level of development, prayer requests are typically general in nature. Not necessarily superficial, just general. Prayer for a friend's health. Prayer for elected leaders. Prayer about social concerns. Prayer for the victims of natural disasters. You get the idea.

Studying God's Word as a class is important. It is indeed foundational to every other level. Without this level the other levels have no center of gravity. But there is more, like different kinds of prayers in the context of a class that connects on a higher level—Community. We'll look at that level in the next chapter.



## chapter 2

# Community: Connecting with One Another

Your class has become a wonderful weekly Bible study experience. You have to miss sometimes, but you hate it when you do. The teacher almost always has a fresh word from the Lord. Most members come prepared, so the discussion is robust and meaningful. You gain new insights every week from your own study, from your teacher, and from the other members. Can it get any better than that? Well, believe it or not, yes, it can! It happens as your group moves from being a class to becoming a community. I use the word *becoming* intentionally. To some degree your class can become a community naturally, whether or not you decide to become one. Yet something significant happens in a class that is aware of the dynamics of community. That's especially true if you want to remain an open community.

### **What Is Community?**

There is a lot of buzz today in Christian-education circles about developing community in classes and groups. But what does that mean? Here's one key idea: community is a place where you feel safe. Safe to be yourself. Safe to share your thoughts. Safe to express your feelings. Safe to ask questions. Safe to challenge the ideas of others. Safe to laugh. Safe to cry. In *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, author M. Scott Peck devotes a chapter to the true meaning of community. One mark of safety, Peck says, is that members experience "the gift of tears." In a community members discover how much they share in common. To be in community is to feel accepted. To be appreciated. To be included. Peck argues that "the great enemy of community is exclusivity." But he recognizes how hard creating an inclusive environment can be:

Inclusiveness is not an absolute. Long-term communities must invariably struggle over the degree to which they are going to be inclusive. Even short-term communities must sometimes make that difficult decision. But for most groups it is easier to exclude than include. Clubs and corporations give little thought to being inclusive unless the law compels them to do so. True communities, on the other hand, if they want to remain such, are always reaching to extend themselves. The burden of proof falls upon exclusivity. Communities do not ask “How can we justify taking this person in?” Instead the question is “Is it at all justifiable to keep this person out?” In relation to other groupings of similar size or purpose, communities are always relatively inclusive.<sup>6</sup>

LEVEL	CLASS	COMMUNITY	COMMISSION
<b>Churched</b>	Member	Minister	Missionary
<b>Focus</b>	Me	Us	Them
<b>Unchurched</b>	Conversation	Community	Conversion
<b>Biblical Mandate</b>	Great Confession	Great Commandment	Great Commission
<b>Conversation</b>	What we learned	What they did for me	Where we went
<b>Prayer</b>	General requests	Needs of others	Lost people
<b>Records</b>	Class list	Ministry list	Prospect list
<b>Organization</b>	Teacher, secretary	Fellowship, ministry, prayer, and care-group leaders	Missions leader, outreach leader, apprentices, associates
<b>Biblical Concept</b>	<i>Kerygma</i>	<i>Koinonia</i>	<i>Kenosis</i>

## Community in an Open Group

Building community in an open group is not without its challenges. That’s where intentionality comes in. A class doesn’t have to work too hard to become a community, but it has to be very intentional about remaining open while it becomes a community. The natural inertia of a small group will lead it toward being a closed group. That’s not to say that every closed group achieves the level of Community. However, groups that achieve community are more likely to become closed. It’s just one of the predictable outcomes of small-group dynamics. The group does not necessarily become closed on purpose. It just happens. So a group that is designed to be open must be very intentional about remaining an open group. That being said, it is still worthwhile for a class to pursue the level of Community.

## **Connecting to Community: The Great Commandment**

If the Great Confession is the biblical basis for the Class level, the Great Commandment provides the biblical mandate for the Community level. The Bible reports that a Jewish teacher asked Jesus what the most important commandment was. Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31). Loving those around you in the context of your shared love for God is the basis of Christian community. Your class or group is a great place to practice the Great Commandment as you become a community. In reality, many not-yet-believers will not make the Great Confession at the Class level. They need to experience a Great Commandment community first.

## **Conversion in Community**

Remember the evangelistic process described in chapter 1—conversation, community, conversion? Notice that it’s not conversation, class, conversion. That, of course, can and does happen. It is clear that those who make the Great Confession in the context of a class are far more likely to stick than those who make that profession in isolation. In fact, in many ways the Class level is less threatening to someone seeking God than the Community level. But research and experience confirm that those who make the Great Confession in the context of community are even more likely to remain active.

## **A Key Transition: From Class Roll to Ministry List**

Perhaps the first step a group must take to signal that it wants to move from class to community is to change what it calls the roster of people who are members of the group. In a class the people who have enrolled are put on a class roll. In a community they are added to a ministry list. What’s the difference? A class roll connotes that the primary commitment is from member to class. That is, the member has made a commitment to attend the class. A ministry list, on the other hand, connotes that the primary commitment is from class or community to member. That is, the group has made a commitment to minister to and with the member. Perhaps the difference is subtle, but it is significant. Let’s pick the most obvious example to illustrate the difference.

## When Should We Drop Inactive Members?

I perhaps receive more questions—and hear more stories—about this issue than any other. The stories are often as tragic as they are hilarious. My friend Steve Sallis, who leads the work of Sunday School in the Baptist Convention of New York, loves to tell the story of a church in Louisiana that had a practice of dropping any member who missed three consecutive Sundays. (By the way, a person had to attend three consecutive times before he could be placed on the roll as well.) There were no exceptions. So when the church's retired pastor missed three straight Sundays because he was serving as the guest preacher in other churches, they dropped him from the roll!

So when should you drop someone? It depends on whether you are at the Class level and are dropping them from a roll or at the Community level and are dropping them from a ministry list. If the former, you'll ask, "Has this person honored his commitment to our class?" If the latter, you'll ask, "Has our class honored our commitment to this member?" You'll get a different answer, depending on the question you ask. Perhaps you've heard it said, "Don't drop anyone from the class list unless they have died, joined another church, moved too far from the church to receive our ministry [not that they've move too far away to attend!], or requested to be removed." But your motivation will determine whether you'll actually practice those wise principles. In fact, when your class becomes a community, you'll do your best to talk the person out of that last option! In *Essential Church?* Thom and Sam Rainer recall an interview with a man named Brian, who observed, "It should be harder to leave a church than join a church."<sup>7</sup> That should be doubly true when it comes to a Sunday School class.

## The Third Place

A popular chain of coffee shops has a strategic intent to become "the third place" for its customers. What is the third place? At least in American society two places dominate the time and experience of most people. The first is home. The second is either work or school. Most people have time for only one more significant place. When I am at the YMCA, I regularly see people for whom that is their third place. The lake, the golf course, or the mall is the third place for others. In *Essential Church?* the Rainers contend, "We believe the church must reclaim the status of the third place."<sup>8</sup> If we do, I believe it will be because many classes have become intentional about becoming communities.

## Nametags: Get to Know One Another

On a once popular television show, Boston’s “Cheers” was the third place for a curious assortment of characters, a place where “everybody knows your name.” One of the first steps a class can take to move to the level of Community is to make sure everybody can call everybody else by name. Why do I keep hammering this nametag thing? Because I still go to lots of classes in lots of churches that have not discovered—or have intentionally decided against—the power of the nametag. Since I’ve said so much about this topic before and in previous books, I’ll not repeat all that here. Just know that the connection between nametags and community—at least an open community—can be very strong.

Here’s one twist you can use at this level to help people connect to one another. Set a standard about how the class makes nametags, using three lines:

1. First name in large letters (maybe all caps) that can be seen across the room
2. Last name in smaller letters that can be seen when you’re talking with someone face-to-face
3. Another line that changes each week. Each week everyone is asked to print something different: favorite vacation spot, hometown, hobby, favorite sports team, favorite food, favorite musical group or song, book they’ve recently read, favorite movie or television show (or categorize: comedy, drama, reality, etc.), favorite Bible verse, year (you were born, were married, joined the church), a number (kids, grandkids), waist size (Just kidding! Don’t get too personal!), and so on. You can imagine the kinds of surprise connections people might make!

For more tips on nametags, such as the article “Seven Deadly Sins of Ineffective Nametags,” check out the Web site of Scott Ginsberg, the Nametag Guy (just Google “nametag guy”). Ginsberg’s article “Five Ways to WOW People Who Wear Nametags” even mentions nametags at church.

## The Nametag Project: Unity Through Community

You’ve probably noticed that I think nametags are an essential tool for building community. But I am like a pacifist about nametags when compared to Joseph Porcelli, the founder of the organization Neighbors for Neighbors and one of its outreach efforts, the Nametag Project. Porcelli noticed that most people where he lived in Jamaica Plain, in urban Boston, passed one another on the streets without speaking. Taking an idea from an episode of “Seinfeld,” Porcelli decided to start wearing a nametag every day and encouraged others to join him. The mission of the project, as described at [www.nametag.neighborsforneighbors.org](http://www.nametag.neighborsforneighbors.org), is simply

“to get people to talk to each other and get to know their neighbors! ... We believe every person is valuable and worth knowing, people who know each other, care for each other, and that actively participating and contributing to your community is satisfying. Neighbors for Neighbors brings neighbors together in person to satisfy the human need to connect and care for one another. We do this so neighbors may discover common interests and passions and organize around them, transforming their great ideas into actions that contribute to our community. We socialize. We organize. We make a difference.”

I wish that were the description of more Sunday School classes! Porcelli's vision for International Nametag Day has yet to be fulfilled, but in July 2007, in a cosponsorship with the Boston Police Department, 40,000 nametags were distributed at Fenway Park prior to a Red Sox game. Reports suggest that about 10,000 fans actually wore the nametags and probably made some new connections. Why was the police department involved? Porcelli, whose efforts led to a role with the BPD Neighborhood Crime-Watch Unit, convinced Commissioner Ed Davis of this simple reality: neighbors who know one another are more likely to care for and watch out for one another, reducing crime and strengthening community. The theme of the event, Boston's version of the National Night Out program, was “Unity Through Community.” All facilitated by one man's vision for nametags!

### **From Members to Ministers**

As a group transitions from the Class level to the Community level, the goal is for an increasing number of members to become ministers. The word *minister* essentially means *serve* or *one who serves*. Serving one another. Serving within the class. It's a mind-set. Or maybe better, a heart-set (if that's a word). This kind of group does the kinds of things you'd expect a community to do: arranging meals when someone experiences a birth or death, visiting hospitalized members, recognizing birthdays and anniversaries, and so forth. As it develops, it moves beyond just doing caring activities and really starts caring.

### **Parties: Have Fun with One Another**

A key indicator that a class has become community is that it likes to have fun together. One criticism aimed at Jesus during His earthly ministry was that He liked to party—often with nonreligious people. One champion of using parties to build community and to reach others, my friend Josh Hunt ([www.joshhunt.com](http://www.joshhunt.com)), advocates giving Friday nights to Jesus. Fellowship is a spiritual discipline that takes planning. Many groups set a goal of having a party or another social

activity once a month. You don't have to be legalistic about it. For example, you could skip November and have a Christmas party early in December. Or skip June, July, or September if your church has a big Vacation Bible School family night, an Independence Day celebration, or a Labor Day picnic.

### **Serve with One Another While You Have Fun!**

Parties help a community come together in fellowship. But if you really want to see your group bond in fellowship, do a ministry project together. It could be something as simple as raking the leaves of a homebound widow or cleaning the house of a hospitalized class member. Or it could be something more costly, like preparing and serving meals at a homeless shelter. At church events like those mentioned above, your class could volunteer as a group to staff one area, having fun together while you serve. Some churches that sponsor an alternative-to-Halloween event ask classes to sponsor a room, providing the activity and the treats.

Your group may want to start with baby-step projects like collecting school supplies, clothing, or food for your church's benevolence ministry. Those kinds of projects are meaningful; but in terms of developing real community, nothing beats actually doing something purposeful together. Let me tell you a true story. Jack and Mark came to my office at the church one day with a special appeal. Rob and Kim, members of their class, had fallen on difficult times and were in danger of losing their home. The leaders came to ask, "Is there anything the church can do?" I responded, "Who is the church?" We sat down and looked at a couple of passages from the Book of Acts: 2:41-45; 4:32-35. I asked, "What would your classes be willing to sell to help them?" Two Saturdays later their department, which was made up of three great classes, conducted a garage sale at Paul and Linda's house and raised thousands of dollars. The bond created between those who participated—not to mention the couple that benefited—was powerful. And they had a blast while they were doing it! It was the ultimate party with a purpose!

### **Organization at the Community Level**

A class that decides to move to the Community level will require more leaders. The first will be someone to coordinate the group's fellowship and ministry activities. This position can be called activities leader or something similar. It's the function, not the title, that is important. Or you could divide the role and have a fellowship leader whose job is to plan social activities and a ministry leader who plans ministry activities and coordinates the group's response to crises in members' lives. You may want to enlist a prayer leader, whose job is to capture and distribute prayer



requests. And if you really want to become community, you'll organize the class into care groups and enlist a care-group leader for each one.

### **Care Groups: Key to Community**

One of the most important things your class can do structurally to accelerate the development of community is to organize the class into care groups. A care group is a group of five to seven men or women who are shepherded by a care-group leader. I strongly advocate single-gender care groups, even in married coed classes, and especially in single-adult coed classes. Why? Because when care groups are made up of couples and the care-group leaders are couples, what typically happens is that the women contact the women, but the men never get contacted or make any contacts. Even in a so-called couples class, sometimes one of the spouses does not regularly attend. Perhaps one has a ministry responsibility on Sunday morning, and the spouse attends the class alone. That, by the way, is a good reason to avoid the term *couples* in favor of *coed* most of the time.

Here's a possible twist on the same-gender concept: you could enlist a couple to be care-group leaders and assign spouses to each of their groups. That way at times the two groups could fellowship or minister together as couples, even though they are in separate care groups.

### **The Care-Group Leader**

What's the job of a care-group leader? In most classes the job description is just one line long: contact every member of the care group every week. Do you mean every absent member every week? Nope. I mean every member every week. The contact can be face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. Or on a really special occasion, like a birthday or an anniversary, the care-group leader might make the special effort of sending a card via snail mail!

The responsibility of the care-group leader is not to get people to come to class. If it were, we'd have discussed it in the chapter 1. The role of the care-group leader is to help members connect in community. In fact, I encourage care-group leaders to seldom mention class attendance. Rather, the role is: "Just keeping in touch." "Just checking in to see how you're doing." "Anything going on you'd like the class to pray about?"

The contacts need not be long. Just a quick phone call during a daily commute will do. The goal is simply to stay connected with every person in the group and to report news and needs to the teacher and, in urgent cases, to the pastoral staff so that a timely and appropriate ministry response can be made. Many people,

properly enlisted, will be ready to accept this entry-level leadership position—one that's very important yet not overwhelming.

### **Care Groups on Steroids**

The previous paragraph describes a relatively passive care group. Nobody except the care-group leader might even know who is in the group. That's OK. It's a start. And it's certainly preferable to not having care groups at all. But care groups can be and do more, especially if your class is intentional about becoming a community. One step forward is to reserve 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning or end of every class session for the class to gather into care groups. Some large classes even check attendance in these groups.

During this time the group has two primary objectives:

1. Calling the names of all absent group members to identify ministry needs
2. Sharing and praying with one another

This is one of the primary reasons for having single-gender care groups. Women and men often have different kinds of prayer needs and are usually more likely to share them if the group includes only their gender.

Sometimes in large classes the care group also functions as a discussion group. The room can be set up so that care groups sit in chairs arranged in a horseshoe shape, with the open end facing the teacher. This allows for a small-group feel even within a large class.

How, you might be asking, does such a class remain open? Either by always having an empty chair in each care group to welcome newcomers and/or by regularly starting new care groups. A few care groups move beyond even these levels of development and actually tackle small ministry projects all by themselves!

Each of these activities adds to the responsibilities of the care-group leader in one or more of the following ways: lead the weekly share/prayer time, lead small-group discussion during the teaching session, and/or lead the group to conduct occasional ministry projects.

### **The Care-Group Leaders' Care-Group Leader**

Who is the care-group leader for the care-group leaders? Usually the teacher! The teacher calls each care-group leader each week, not just to receive the reports of their contacts but to care for each of them personally and to model the role. Some large classes may require one or more care-group coordinators (or connect leaders), who are responsible for five to seven care-group leaders. In this case the

teacher's care group is that person or persons and perhaps others on the class leadership team who may or may not be assigned to a care group.

### **Member Expectations at the Community Level**

At the Class level members are expected to be *members*. At the Community level the goal is for members to increasingly become *ministers*. This role may include baby steps like preparing part of a meal for a bereaved member. A next step might be agreeing to serve as a care-group leader or to participate in the group's ministry efforts. The class provides a great context for members to discover their spiritual gifts for ministry and to explore opportunities for utilizing the gifts with which God has entrusted them. The ultimate goal at the Community level is for every member to be a minister.

### **Conversational Implications at the Community Level**

As your class or group experiences the Community level, you'll add another kind of seasoning (see Col. 4:5) to your conversations. It might sound something like this:

- "I don't know what I would have done when Seth got sick if it hadn't been for my Sunday School class."
- "Someone in my Bible study group shared a similar experience a couple of weeks ago."
- "You won't believe what my small group did for us when we announced our engagement."

It won't be forced or premeditated. It will just be a part of the everyday stuff you talk about. Even better is when you can tell these kinds of stories when the topic is "What we did last weekend." You'll increasingly be able to share things like:

- "In our Sunday School class we have small groups called care groups. Last Saturday our care group spent the morning trimming the yard of a friend recovering from surgery."
- "We had a Bible study class party Friday night. We went bowling. Most of us had not bowled in a long time, some never. But we had a blast!"

### **Growth and Evangelism at the Community Level**

Evangelism starts at the Class level of a group's development, where members work hard to welcome newcomers. At the Community level the class steps it up

another notch. The key impact on the growth of the group at this level is directly related to how well members stay connected through concern and care. It's much easier to grow a church—and a class—if you don't always have to replace people who have dropped out. In *Essential Church?* research findings show that “a caring, welcoming, authentic, and inspirational church is much more likely to assimilate its students.”<sup>9</sup> The findings are clear: people of all ages stick around if they are truly connected. And others will come back if you stay connected with them: “60 percent of formerly churched eighteen to thirty-five year olds are willing to return to church if a friend or acquaintance invited them.”<sup>10</sup>

If your class truly practices open enrollment, you will also increasingly have people in your group who have not yet come to Christ. Some make that decision at the Class level, just from the impact of studying God's Word. Most people, however, need to experience the gospel as well as hear it. That's what happens in a community. Becoming a Christian is usually as much the result of sociology as soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). Most people need to hang around some Christians before they decide to become one. That's why it's important to move from class to community!

### **Prayer at the Community Level**

I have placed the section on prayer last in each chapter for a reason. Perhaps nothing else is a better indicator of what level your group is operating at than the nature of its prayer requests. At the Class level most prayers tend to be rather general or distant in nature. At the Community level prayer requests become more personal. Prayers are not just for someone else's health, someone else's kids, someone else's job situation. They are for *our* health, *our* kids, *our* job situation. It takes a different level of trust to ask for prayer for yourself rather than for a distant relative or the president of the United States. That kind of trust can best be developed at the Community level.

Because your class is an open group, there are probably some prayer requests too intimate to share in the presence of first-time guests. But you'll figure out the appropriate balance. It's important for newcomers—especially those who have not yet determined to be Christ-followers—to hear that believers struggle with the challenges of life like everyone else. And that God answers prayer! Make sure a generous part of the prayer time in your group celebrates what God has done in response to your prayers. So pray together in community.

Could it get any better than this? Actually, yes. If your class is willing to take the step of commission.

# Commission: Connecting to the World

The Class level is about helping people connect—continually—with the Great Confession. Each Bible study session reinforces the wise choice to receive the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life found only in Jesus Christ. The class becomes more and more intentional about enjoying fellowship around the Word of God. The Community level is about helping people connect with the Great Commandment. The group discovers that the class is not just a one-hour-a-week Bible study but also a 24/7 ministry network. The class becomes increasingly intentional about caring for everyone on the ministry list.

At the third level a class decides to become intentional about the Great Commission, saying yes to Jesus' final command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

## **From Member to Minister to Missionary**

The fruit of the Class level is active *members* who prepare for and regularly participate in the Bible study group. The fruit of the Community level is a growing number of *ministers* who develop meaningful relationships with others in the group. The fruit of the Commission level of class development is *missionaries* who enter a class covenant to do all the group can to fulfill the Great Commission. When I was talking about the idea for this book, a friend observed, "Class is about *me*. Community is about *us*. Commission is about *them*." That's exactly right!

## Class and Community Provide the Foundation

This is probably not the first time your class has been challenged to get busy about the Great Commission. You probably haven't said, "No, we're not going to do that." It's quite unlikely that your group has decided to deliberately disobey the Great Commission. But it may be that you've never figured out how to do it. One purpose of all you've read so far is to equip you to go on mission. But you can't skip the first two levels. They are foundational to becoming an on-mission group.

If you were appointed as an international missionary, one of the first steps in your training would be language school. There you would begin the process of learning to understand the words of the people with whom God has called you to live and work, as well as the concepts and ideas behind those words. The Class level is sort of like language school! It's where we future missionaries learn and understand God's Word. Just as we never fully learn a language, we never fully master it all. But we keep striving to understand every precious word and precept. But just learning the language will not be enough to be an effective missionary. You will also need to immerse yourself in the culture of your assigned people group. Your training will equip you to develop and draw people into community. All of that is foundational to your assignment: sharing the good news of Christ so that people are compelled to follow Jesus. Guess what might be one pretty effective way of accomplishing that? A Bible study class that is becoming a Great Commandment Community!

LEVEL	CLASS	COMMUNITY	COMMISSION
<b>Churched</b>	Member	Minister	Missionary
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<b>Unchurched</b>	Conversation	Community	Conversion
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<b>Biblical Concept</b>	<i>Kerygma</i>	<i>Koinonia</i>	<i>Kenosis</i>

## **Acts 1:8: A Glocal Mandate**

My friend Rich Smith, the minister of discipleship at First Baptist Church in Ellisville, Missouri, publishes a blog called “The Glocal Church.” Rich didn’t think up the word. *Glocal*, a combination of the words *global* and *local*, is generally understood to describe any enterprise or group that has determined to think globally and act locally, whether it is a Christian group or advocates of another cause. Just prior to His victorious ascension into heaven, Jesus gave these last instructions to His disciples as something of a strategic plan for fulfilling the Great Commission: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus was saying, “Start close to home; then venture out farther and farther as you witness about Me.” That’s a pretty good plan for a class that decides to venture beyond community and into commission.

## **Commission in Your Class and Church**

If your class practices open enrollment, welcoming both believers and nonbelievers, allowing people to belong before they believe, then you have a mission field right inside your own group. And it can be a growing mission field. All it takes is for each member to become intentional about inviting others. You’ve probably been exhorted many times before to invite other people. The primary reason you haven’t done it is probably because you’re not sure whether you can count on the people in your group to welcome your friends. That’s why you have to be intentional—and vigilant—about the stuff in the first two chapters. If you’d like more ideas about how to develop a culture of invitation in your class, see *I-6: A Six-Lane Strategy Toward an Inviting Sunday School*.

The next step for a class that wants to be intentional about becoming a missional team is to look beyond the class but within the ministry of the church. A good way to approach this is to focus on two concepts—release and reproduce.

## **Release: Sending Missionaries to Kids and Students**

A great step for a class that wants to become missional is to release members to serve in preschool, children’s, and student classes. Perhaps the primary advantage of an on-campus Bible study program like Sunday School over an off-campus small-group ministry is that there are classes for all ages meeting at the same time as, just before, or just after the primary weekly worship experience. Such

a ministry takes workers—a lot of them! And guess where all the adult leaders of preschool, children’s, and student classes come from? Adult classes!

Sadly, some classes bemoan the loss of an active member to a teaching assignment or another leadership role in a class with kids or students. But a missional class celebrates it! They make a special poster with the names of all the class missionaries who are teaching kids. Or they create a bulletin board or a special wall display with photos of these folks serving in their rooms. These members are typically called something like associate members or members-in-service. Whatever you call them, you should treat them like celebrities. Invite them to every party. Assign them to special care-group leaders whose sole assignment is staying in touch with associate members. Volunteer to substitute in their rooms. You get the idea. As you develop a release culture in your class, more members will answer the call to become missionaries to kids and students. You see, the number one reason people hesitate to leave a group, especially if it has become a community, is that they think they will be forgotten—will get disconnected, if you will. You know why people feel that way? Because it is usually—and unfortunately—true. As you celebrate and support associate members as missionaries from your class, more and more members will answer the call to work with kids and students.

## **Reproduce**

Another huge step for a missional class is to be intentional about reproducing itself. David, are you talking about splitting our class? Not at all. That’s something that gets done to you. I want to challenge you to become intentional about doing it to yourself! The primary indication that your class intends to reproduce itself is the enlistment of an apprentice teacher and, if applicable, an apprentice director/coordinator. Who is a candidate for enlistment as an apprentice teacher? A person who—

- demonstrates a commitment to Christ;
- has shown an ability—probably as a substitute—to facilitate interesting and meaningful Bible study;
- is committed to leading a new group when the class is ready to give birth.

How will you know when it is time for your class to birth a new group? One huge indicator is when the room is too full to provide empty chairs for guests. Another is the point when the teacher doesn’t know every member’s name. Still another indicator is that the apprentice leaders are ready. You’ll sense when your class is pregnant. Then it’s just a matter of how to give birth.



## Key Factors in Successfully Birthing a Class

The number one key for successfully birthing a new class is this: don't make anyone move with the new class who doesn't want to. Remember, we are not dividing a class; we are birthing one. We want it to be a joyous occasion, so we want to avoid complications at birth. In my experience here's the best way to approach the beginning of a new class. Several weeks prior to the launch date, announce to the class that—

- we (not they!) will start a new class;
- the new group will be composed only of volunteers—missionaries, if you will—from our class or perhaps more than one class;
- [name] will lead Bible study in the new group.

Guess what? People will volunteer! Some have a missionary spirit and are drawn to the challenge of starting something new and helping it grow. Others really like the new teacher's style. Still others have relationship problems with other members of the group (I know that's never happened in your church!) and need a fresh start. What if the classes end up different sizes? It doesn't matter as long as both have room to grow.

## Celebrate Being a Great Commission Group

As you send out associate members as missionaries and reproduce by starting new classes, celebrate the milestones in tangible and permanent ways. It's OK to take credit for releasing and reproducing! In every session remind the group what your class has done to release and reproduce. Each week pray for associate members who serve as missionaries to kids and students elsewhere in Sunday School. Plan occasional fellowships with the class your group birthed. In doing this, you give evidence to members and guests that yours is a Great Commission group!

## Add Associate Members to Your Active Enrollment

In chapter 1 I introduced the concept of active enrollment, which refers to the number of members who attend your class at least once during any given month. By the way, you may have wanted to ask, "What about guests? Do we count them too?" Only if you enroll them, inviting them to become members of your ministry list! But here's a number you can add to your active enrollment: all your associate members—those folks who would be in your class if they were not serving as missionaries to kids and students. I believe this metric—members who have attended at least once during the month, plus the number of associate

members—is a great way to evaluate the relative strength of an adult class. Which is the stronger class—the class that averages 30 members attending at least once a month but has just 2 associate members serving outside the class or the class that averages 22 members attending at least monthly with 12 associate members? It's not even a contest—if you use the right metric.

### **A Word About Associate and Team Teachers**

It's a popular concept today to have more than one person share the duties of teaching or facilitating Bible study. I understand the reasons. People are busy. Schedules are hectic. Preparation is demanding. Yet there are significant unintended consequences to this approach if a class wants to move beyond community to commission. The primary one is whenever the approach precludes the development of an apprentice Bible study leader. Now if the associate teacher, team teacher, or coteacher is committed to starting a new class in the future, there is no problem. Often, however, this is not the case. Rather, the team-teaching concept is a way—intentional or not—to keep the class together and avoid reproducing. If an associate teacher has no such commitment but rather sees the role as a “pinch hitter,” he or she effectively blocks reproducing the class. This one issue may be the difference between your class's being able to reproduce itself or not. Just think about it. If you decide to stick with your arrangement, nobody is mad at you. And there are other ways for your group to fulfill the Great Commission together. It will just be more difficult to reproduce yourself.

### **Team Teaching in Preschool and Children's Classes**

What about team teaching in preschool and children's classes? That depends on what you mean. By the very nature of the work, every preschool and children's class needs to have multiple teachers. One teacher, however, should be designated as the director, lead teacher, or a similar title. He or she is responsible for planning the learning activities for each session and often leads the large group Bible study time. Ideally, the other teachers in the room plan the session with the lead teacher or at least receive their assignments from them. If that's what you mean by team teaching, that's great.

Many churches, however, alternate teachers in preschool and children's classes, perhaps every other month or every other quarter. What's the main reason? Survival! The leaders of preschool and children's ministries—whether paid or volunteer—have perhaps the most challenging job in the church. They will take what they're given! The one positive side to this approach is that some

of those who team teach—and would not have taught at all otherwise—will eventually sense God’s call to make a 12-month commitment to teaching kids! But it’s not best for the kids. They need to see familiar faces each week. Being a Sunday School worker with kids is more than teaching. It is relationship building, getting to know the kids and their parents. That happens best when there is consistency.

One of the main reasons given by those who want to alternate is that they want to stay connected with their adult groups. That’s understandable, especially if the adult group does not do a particularly good job of staying connected with its associate members. The best way for your class to support this work is to take great care to stay connected with your associate members, whether they are full-time or part-time missionaries.

### **Growth and Evangelism at the Commission Level**

We have already dealt with this to a large degree, but I’ll add a few more comments. Most important is this truth: the irreducible law of Kingdom growth is starting new units. What’s a new unit? It is a new group, a new class, a new ministry team, a new preaching point, a new mission, or a new church. In general, new units grow faster and reach more new people than older units. Of course, all of us can point to exceptions—a church plant that did not reach its potential or a new class that failed. However, I have seldom heard of a class that failed if it was birthed following a careful, prayerful process like the one that has been described or if it was started to meet a clearly defined need or ministry gap.

### **Starting New Classes to Fill Ministry Gaps**

The birthing of a class from an existing group typically produces another group that’s pretty much made up of the same kinds of folks as the old class. That’s normal. Kids usually resemble their parents. Sometimes, however, you need to start a new group to fill in a gap in your existing ministry outreach. Here are some examples.

- College class
- Nearly-weds and newlyweds class
- Class for young singles (caution: they may not prefer to be labeled singles)
- Young-adult class (18 to 35, single or married, without kids; they don’t mind being together—at least until children come along)
- DINK class (dual income, no kids; you probably don’t want to call it that!)
- Class for new parents (DINKs who have had babies!)
- Parents-of-teens class
- Class for empty nesters

- Couples-without-kids class (for married adults 35 to 60 without children)
- Senior-adult class (believe it or not, this is a new area of ministry for many new young, contemporary churches)
- Pastor's class—usually for a limited duration, targeting adults who attend worship but are not connected with a class

Starting a gap class presents different challenges than birthing a class from an existing one. Leaders need to be chosen and trained. Then an announcement is made that the class is starting. The key thing existing classes can do to help is to add their blessing to the new group and let interested members know it's OK to go check it out. This is tricky! You don't want to make them feel that you're running them off. But you also don't want them to be afraid that they may hurt your feelings if they go. Perhaps the best approach is just to have that conversation. And if they go, celebrate them as missionaries who are leaving to help start a new Kingdom unit. It's almost always OK to send out missionaries!

### **A Key to Church Growth: Reaching Kids and Students**

The primary audience for this book is members and leaders of adult classes. In a healthy church 50 to 60 percent of the average Sunday School attendance is in adult classes. A general rule of health is 12 to 15 percent of the total attendance in preschool, children's, and student classes, including the adult leaders, or 40 to 50 percent of the total. Despite what I said in the previous section, let me be clear about something: starting new adult classes alone will not grow your church. Rather, the key is reaching kids and students. The engine to grow Sunday School—or whatever you call the Bible study ministry in your church—is a commitment to reaching kids and students. That means providing them the best space and releasing great people to teach them. It means placing a high priority on staffing classes for kids and students. Too many churches ignore one sad reality—or pretend not to know: regardless of how many people your worship center seats or how many other rooms you have, if you are out of preschool space, you are out of space. The name of the game in growing churches is the expansion of preschool space. That usually means taking over children's rooms, who in turn must find new space in rooms previously assigned to students and adults.

What's that got to do with your class? Simply that you may need not only to release people to serve but also to release your room! You may be getting tired of the *release* word. But if your class has decided to move to the Commission

level, that's one sacrifice you must be willing to make. Still not convinced? Then try out this fact: if a person doesn't make a commitment to Christ by his or her 18th birthday, it is incredibly unlikely that decision will ever be made. Is that to say we should give up on adults? Of course not. God saves adults. It's a glorious and wonderful thing when it happens, partly because it is so relatively rare. There is one group of adults, however, that is unusually open to an invitation to your church or class—parents.

### **Parents: Kids Don't Come by Themselves!**

Here's the cool side effect of becoming very intentional about reaching kids. In most cases parents will bring them. Of course, there are other ways to reach kids whose parents won't bring them but will let them come, such as riding to church on a bus or with a neighbor. But in an age with so much fear about the safety of children, most kids will come only if their parents bring them. So guess what? They are going to need to go someplace while their kids are in Sunday School. In some churches they may attend only the worship service, at least at first. But with the right encouragement you can connect them with your class or group. A surprising 80 percent of Gen X parents say that they intend to take their kids to Sunday School!<sup>11</sup> Of course, we know they're not doing it; and the main reason is that we're not inviting them. The main reason we're not inviting them is that we know we're not ready for them. Getting ready for them means providing space and teachers.

### **Kids: The Dilemma of the Small-Group Movement**

I have attempted to write this book in such a way that its principles apply to second-step groups, whether they're called small groups, Sunday School classes, or another name. What do I mean by a second-step group? That's just a designation for the next step you want people to take after they've taken the first step in group involvement—worship-service attendance. Some churches have no choice but to choose off-campus small groups as their second-step strategy because they don't have the space on campus—if they even have a campus—to support an extensive ministry like Sunday School. But a church that has the facilities and parking to support an on-campus Bible study ministry that meets before or after the primary worship experience of the week will see a much larger number of worship attenders moving from step 1 to step 2 in their discipleship process. Typically, at least twice as many.

Many churches have wonderful small-group ministries for adults. Small groups are all the rage among church leaders. That's why some have replaced the name *Sunday School* with *small-group Bible study*, whether or not the groups are actually small (12 or fewer, by definition). But back to the point. The number one dilemma for off-campus adult small groups is this: What do you do with the kids? If you ask what you do *meaningfully* with the kids, you face an even greater dilemma. Therein lies the number one advantage Sunday School has over off-campus small groups. A church that provides space for both worship and Sunday School—or its functional equivalent by another name—can accomplish the first two steps in its discipleship process with every member of the family on one trip to the church. Simple. Essential. Effective. Some contend that it's not cost-effective to build on-campus educational space. I would argue that, from a discipleship standpoint, it's not cost-effective not to! If you have the choice, choose wisely.

### **Students Need the Commission Level Too**

A surprising finding reported in *Essential Church?* is that students don't want to get stuck at the Class level: "Teens are best assimilated into the church through their service, giving, and missions."<sup>12</sup> Students who are provided opportunities to serve, participate in ministry projects, and go on mission trips are far less likely to drop out than those whose church experience is pretty much limited to sitting in class and participating in fun activities. This is consistent with LifeWay's research with young adults, who want to plug into a church where they can make a difference. This desire is expressed not only by Christian young adults but by non-Christians as well. They are attracted to a group or church that is making a positive impact in the lives of others. Thus the stories we hear of young adults being saved—making an initial commitment to Jesus while participating on a mission trip!

Parents, your kids are watching you too. They are 20 percent less likely to drop out of church if they hear you talk about spiritual things at home and see you serve.<sup>13</sup> Want to keep your kids from dropping out of church when they hit their late teens and early 20s? Then get active. Don't just do church. Do the Great Commission. Let them see it's real in your life. Connecting to a class operating at the Commission level would be a great advantage, don't you think?

### **Nametags at the Commission Level**

David, aren't you about out of gas on this nametag thing? Actually, I saved the best for last! All the reasons to wear nametags at the other two levels also apply to the Commission level:

- At the Class level nametags make newcomers feel a zillion times more welcome and dramatically increase interaction during the Bible study session.
- At the Community level nametags help people connect as they put together names, faces, and interests over time.
- At the Commission level nametags are a symbol of faith: that God will honor our interactions, invitations, and prayers this week by sending our group someone who needs to connect—with His Word, with us, with Jesus.

You may think I should be called the Nametag Guy. But that title belongs to Scott Ginsberg, who has worn a nametag every day for years, becoming the unquestioned world expert on nametags! You can see a total of how many consecutive days Scott has worn a nametag at [www.mynametag.com](http://www.mynametag.com) and go through the Internet's least intrusive sign-up process for access to hundreds of articles about nametags and approachability. In one video clip on his site, Ginsberg reports that the first company in America to require its employees to wear nametags was Wal-Mart. Sam Walton said, "I want my customers to get to know the people they buy from." That worked out pretty well! Scott says wearing his nametag has created "encounters that otherwise would not have existed." It's the same principle behind lapel pins and colored bracelets representing various causes, giving people the excuse—or invitation—to ask, "Hey, what's up with that?"

The subtitle of Ginsberg's book, *The Power of Approachability* is *How to Become an Effective, Engaging Communicator One Conversation at a Time*. Am I suggesting that we should all start wearing nametags all the time? Hardly, although I am doing some experimenting. (I had a fascinating conversation with an 82-year-old PhD I shared a plug with at the bakery café where I'm writing today, who simply asked, "Have you been to a meeting?") But couldn't we at least wear a nametag every time we're in our class or group, having a party, or making a follow-up visit to someone's home? I know I would have to be grouchy a lot less and smile a lot more! And when I ordered my salad today at Panera Bread, the cashier, Karen, didn't have to ask for my name!

### **Conversational Implications of the Commission Level**

Your stories get even better when your class reaches this level. The Monday conversation at work turns to "what we did this weekend." You share, "A group of us from my Sunday School class spent Saturday morning doing repair work at the house of one of our senior adults."

Someone responds, “I thought Sunday School was just for kids.”

You reply, “Oh, we have a fantastic Sunday School for kids at our church. Think they call it Discovery Zone. The kids love it. But we also have classes for adults. One of the things I really like about our class is that we don’t just have a great time studying the Bible, but we also do cool stuff together like what we did Saturday.”

Perhaps the conversation continues. Remember, you’re not forcing it. “Like what else?”

“Well, we have adopted a classroom at an elementary school in the city. We’ve done things like paint the room and provide supplies for some of the children. Last Thanksgiving a group from our class served dinner at the homeless shelter. At Christmas we collected toys. This summer I’m going to be part of a team that will go to Africa to lead a sports camp. My class is raising a lot of the money to pay my way. Stuff like that.”

“Wow! How do you get involved in a group like that?”

“Just show up! I’d love for you to be my guest sometime.”

## **Organization at the Commission Level**

The enlistment of an outreach/evangelism leader is the leading indicator that a class—or at least its teacher—has decided to move to the Commission level. I’ll deal in a little more detail with that position in the next section. Other possible positions might be something like a mobilization leader and a missions leader. The job of the mobilization leader is to help each member discover their spiritual gifts and find a ministry. The job of the missions leader is to help the class have a missions awareness and to lead the class to participate in one or more of the three ways an individual or group can support a missions cause or project: pray, give, and/or go. The class might adopt a particular missionary family to pray for and/or the people group with which it works. It may set a class goal to support a special missions offering or to financially support a person or group going on a mission trip, especially if the group is from your class. Another important position at the Commission level is the group leader(s) assigned to stay in touch with associate members serving outside the class. The names of the positions are less important than the function. Can you think of other functions/positions that might be needed at the Commission level?



## The Work of the Outreach/Evangelism Leader

The best person for this job is someone God has entrusted with the spiritual gift of evangelism. This leader's passion and practice is sharing the gospel. Studies show that God has given this gift to about 10 percent of the people in your church, so there is likely to be one in your class. The person may not even know it yet! Most people discover their spiritual gifts by doing ministries in which it would bear fruit, not by taking a 15-minute spiritual-gifts inventory. This is especially true of the gift of evangelism. (If you're interested in learning more about how to discover your gift, you might want to check out my six-week study *Spiritual Gifts: A Practical Guide to How God Works Through You*, available from LifeWay.)

How do you discover whether God has entrusted the gift of evangelism to you? Sign up for a witness-training program, such as LifeWay's *FAITH Evangelism*. If you find joy in doing it, if you are effective at it, if your witnessing efforts are fruitful, and if other people confirm that God has granted you the gift, He probably has. By the way, that's pretty much the way you discover any spiritual gift. It's just that so few people even try to discover whether evangelism might be their gift—or one of their gifts.

How does the outreach/evangelism leader help in this process of discovering folks with the gift of evangelism? He or she enlists two other persons to be part of the class evangelism team for, say, one quarter. If the church has a witness-training program like *FAITH Evangelism*, the term of service will coincide with the training semester. Because all of us are called to be witnesses, whether or not we have the gift of evangelism, it would be great if most of the class rotated through this team. Most members will serve and train for only one semester, and the outreach leader will enlist two more members. But some members will discover that this evangelism thing is really for them. They will want to continue in the training, perhaps leading a team themselves. Everyone else will eventually be trained to be a more effective witness too, without a long-term commitment to the team. The purpose of the outreach team is to visit almost exclusively on behalf of the class, working primarily from the group's own ministry list and prospect list.

## The Prospect List

This is the outreach/evangelism leader's primary tool. The prospect list (or file) is like the ministry list for people who have not yet connected as class members. It includes names, contact information, and perhaps other helpful data. The most typical sources for the prospect list are—

- people who have visited a worship service; attended a special church event; or enrolled their kids in a church ministry like Vacation Bible School, Mother's Day Out, or a day care or after-school program;
- church members who have not enrolled in any class and have been assigned to yours as a best fit;
- friends, relative, associates, and neighbors (FRANs) identified by class members.

The goals of a visit or contact with a prospective member are to present the gospel if God provides the opportunity and invite them to receive Christ and/or to invite them to enroll in the class and/or to invite them to attend the class. When visiting the FRAN of a class member, it is wise to ask the member if he or she thinks the timing is right. It might be better if the sponsoring FRAN arranged the meeting and better still if he or she were present. Use discretion and good judgment. But also be aware that most people, once they have responded to a clear presentation of the gospel, later express some measure of despair that it took someone so long to get around to it. While grateful that they have a home in heaven, they are also keenly aware of the destination their current path was taking them! People sometimes need a little spiritual nudge to help them cross over the line into the kingdom of heaven. Not a push, just a nudge.

### **Prayer at the Commission Level**

As I've said before, perhaps nothing indicates what level a class is operating on like its prayer list.

- At the Class level prayer requests are pretty safe expressions of concern for people and events unconnected to the immediate life of those in the group.
- At the Community level the requests become more personal as people feel comfortable asking for support for their own life challenges.
- At the Commission level prayers are for others but not for the same others we prayed for when we were at the Class level. We pray for missionaries—those courageous folks serving Christ in faraway places, as well as those serving in our own church as missionaries from our class to kids and students. We perhaps ask God to work among a people group we have adopted for prayer. But the mark of a class that has really achieved the Commission level is a class that is intentional about evangelistic prayer. Members have identified the names—or at least the first names—of their FRANs who need Christ. A program called “PowerUP Your Sunday School,”

developed by Bob Mayfield, who leads the work of Sunday School for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (visit [www.powerupyourworld.net](http://www.powerupyourworld.net)) places primary emphasis on evangelistic prayer. The plan encourages classes to make evangelistic prayer lists and post them on the wall. The stories resulting from this effort are amazing. I was moved to tears when Bob showed a photo of two beaming teenage boys standing beside two names they had circled on the prayer list on the wall of a student classroom. You know why they were so happy? They were their names! In preparation for a one-day evangelistic crusade, my church, Long Hollow Baptist in Hendersonville, Tennessee, asked members to use permanent markers to write the names of people they were praying for on the walls of the worship center. There are literally names on every paintable surface in that room. And I don't know if we'll ever be able to paint over them! Long Hollow seldom has a worship service at which someone is not baptized and is consistently among the leading churches in the Southern Baptist Convention in baptisms. Wonder if it has anything to do with prayer?

## conclusion

# The *K* Words

My prayer for your class is that it will connect on all three levels: Class, Community, and Commission. I have suggested several ways to distinguish the levels. Here's one more way, using three Greek words: *kerygma*, *koinonia*, *kenosis*. You may be familiar with the middle word, *koinonia*, a word used to describe Christian fellowship, but you're probably not as familiar with the others. So let's take a quick look at each one and relate it to the three levels of a group's development.

### ***Kerygma***

Grammatically, *kerygma* is a Greek word usually translated something like *proclamation*, *preaching*, or *announcement*. Theologically, the word has come to denote the essence of the gospel, especially as delivered verbally by the apostles. It is sometimes contrasted with the word *didache*, or *teaching*, which is used to denote a deeper exploration of Christian doctrine.

Here's how *kerygma* applies to class development. The primary purpose of Bible study is for believers to be able to understand, share, and defend the essence of the good news: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Christ, the incarnate Word of God, visited our planet and experienced human life as a real man. The Son of Man, having lived a sinless life, offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sin on Calvary's cross. God raised Him from the dead, and He appeared to many witnesses after His resurrection. Upon His ascension into heaven, He commanded His followers to spread the good news of salvation in Him throughout the earth and declared the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Helper and power source for this grandest of endeavors. He was exalted by God to the place of highest honor in heaven. He will return again in glory and power to execute final judgment over humankind.

This message demands a response. Inherent in its preaching is an appeal to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone through faith alone. The anticipated result of the message so proclaimed is that people will experience salvation, becoming citizens of the kingdom of God and receiving eternal life—a life worth living forever.

Several passages capture the essence of *kerygma*. First Corinthians 15:1-8 speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:14-40) proclaims the gospel message. Even more pointed and concise is Paul's appeal in 1 Corinthians 2:1-4, which captures the essence of *kerygma*: "When I came to you, brothers, announcing the testimony [or mystery] of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not be based on men's wisdom but on God's power."

Does that mean every lesson in your class should include an evangelistic message? No. It just means that that we never stray too far away from that stack-pole. The Old Testament points to Jesus. The Gospels and Acts tell of Him and the birth of His bride, the church. The Epistles (Letters) interpret and apply His teachings. Revelation describes His coming. The point is that Jesus is the center of the teaching ministry of Sunday School. And most people, whether or not they have a favorable opinion of evangelical Christians, are attracted to Jesus.

### ***Koinonia***

This word, usually translated *fellowship*, first appears in the New Testament in Acts 2:42-47, which describes the community enjoyed by the first Jerusalem church: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. ... Now all the believers were together and had everything in common. So they sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. And every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those being saved."

The word *fellowship*, which appears 20 times in the New Testament, can include the ideas of sharing in common and communion. This passage, together with Acts 4:32-35, provides the biblical benchmark for measuring community. Few classes ever achieve this kind of intimate fellowship, but every small step in that direction is a rewarding one. The key idea of *koinonia* is being in something together, being united in purpose, serving alongside one another, agreeing with one another. Philippians 2:1-4 describes this well: "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection

and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others.”

### ***Kenosis***

The most prominent use of this Greek word, which means *to empty*, is found in Philippians 2:5-11, the classic passage describing Christ’s humility:

*Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus,  
who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God  
as something to be used for His own advantage.  
Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave,  
taking on the likeness of men.  
And when He had come as a man in His external form,  
He humbled Himself by becoming obedient  
to the point of death—even to death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8).*

Is this the attitude of your class? That’s what the Commission level is about—emptying yourself. I’ve about had it with people telling me, “I’m just not being fed.” Being fed is important but not just for the purpose of ingestion. The purpose of food is fuel. In our bodies food is converted to energy. A calorie is a measurement of energy. When we exercise, we burn energy. When we consume more calories than we expend, we store the rest!

The same thing happens in the body of Christ. It’s good to partake of spiritual food by studying God’s Word in a class. It’s wonderful to experience the life-sustaining encouragement of a fellow believers, doing life together in a community of faith. But God wants us to empty ourselves in ministry and missions. That’s what the Commission level is all about—using the energy we get at the Class and Community levels to make a positive difference for the kingdom of God. The pinnacle of development for any class is when it learns to empty itself. Maybe that starts by emptying your class from the beloved room you paid to decorate so that your church can accommodate more preschoolers. Maybe it continues as you empty your class of folks who become missionaries to kids and students. Maybe it involves emptying some of your bank account to come to the aid of a hurting class member or to support a worthy missions cause. Maybe it means something else. Just know that when you become that kind of class, you’re in good company.

## Knametags

Just kidding! I hope you've enjoyed the book or have at least been challenged by it. I hope your Sunday School class or small group will set out to make a name for itself. In the name of Jesus. To the glory of God the Father. Empowered by the Holy Spirit. Too often, books like this can come across as mechanical: if you do this stuff in this order, this will be the result. Or mathematical: for every new unit you start in your Sunday School, you can anticipate a growth of about 10 in average attendance. You need about 3 workers, on average, for every new unit. So if you want to grow your average attendance by 50, you need to provide five new spaces for five new units staffed by 15 new workers. By the way, that equation has been proved to be remarkably accurate. But it can sound mathematical and mechanical. And it doesn't work without God's blessing and power.

The cool thing is that God has promised that power to all who will obey Him. The source of power is the Holy Spirit. He will provide energy. He will give you ideas. He will help you know what to say. He will nudge you when it's time to nudge someone to cross the line into the kingdom of God. You can count on the fact that He is nudging them too. That's His work. At the end of the day, it's all His work. In God's kingdom economy He chooses to use us as His partners to bring people to receive His gift of abundant and eternal life in Messiah Jesus. Just don't use the Holy Spirit as an excuse for inaction. Most of the time He chooses to do His work through us. So get intentional. Get busy. But don't fret. What if you're the only class that is doing this? That's OK. You don't have to wait for any other groups to get on board before you start. I believe one class in every church could literally start a connection revolution. Will yours be that class?

1. Thom S. Rainer and Sam Rainer III, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 154.
2. *Ibid.*, 185.
3. *Ibid.*, 195–96.
4. *Ibid.*, 193–95.
5. *Ibid.*, 199.
6. M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 61.
7. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?* 77.
8. *Ibid.*, 62.
9. *Ibid.*, 106.
10. *Ibid.*, 122.
11. Debra Rosenberg, "Raising a Moral Child," *Newsweek* [online], 1 March 1997 [cited 6 August 2008]. Available from the Internet: [www.newsweek.com/id/95392/page/1](http://www.newsweek.com/id/95392/page/1).
12. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?* 86.
13. *Ibid.*, 100.

## ADDITIONAL HELP

The following materials are available for free download at [www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool), as well as the entire text of *Connect<sup>3</sup>: The Power of One Sunday School Class*, which you have permission to reproduce for use in your class or church.

### **Sunday School Kickoff Event Resources**

Many churches conduct an annual training event to kick off the new Sunday School year. A training module for each age-group team (preschool, children, students, adults, and general leaders) is available for free download. Each module includes a teaching plan, handout masters, and a PowerPoint® presentation that support and supplement the concepts.

### **Online Training**

For a free online study of this resource led by the author, go to <http://lifeway.acrobat.com/discovertriadcourse>.

### **The 3D Sunday School**

The 48-page books and training materials for the 2007 and 2006 kickoff events remain available for download, as do the 2005 materials based on the 32-page book *The Five-Step Formula to Sunday School Growth*.

### **[www.lifeway.com/sundayschool](http://www.lifeway.com/sundayschool)**

Information about LifeWay curriculum resources, as well as lots of free articles and links to other information, is available. Add it to your favorites and visit often.

### **eSource Electronic Newsletter for Sunday School Leaders**

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