

Set Goals for Teaching Sunday School

If you were on a longboat rowing team, you would know that it's paramount for all crew members to row in the same direction in order to reach the finish line. In the same way, it's important that all the members of your Children's Ministry team "row" towards the same goals you want to achieve for each Sunday school class at your church.

That's why it's important for the Children's Ministry Director to develop goals for each Sunday school class to achieve. When you set your goals, think about the language ability, attention span and cognitive maturity of the students in each age range. Once you have your sights on the goal, then you can make plans to achieve that goal.

To help you set goals for your own Sunday school program, let me describe how we do things at our church.

The "Little Blessings" Class

We call our Nursery the "Little Blessings" class and it is for children 6 months to potty trained. In this class we feature a well-known Bible character each month. Each year we go through the same sequence of characters (*God, Adam & Eve, Noah, Joseph, David, Jonah*, and so forth) chronologically through the Bible, even though these little ones are unaware of that.

Goal: A child who consistently attends Sunday school at our church will have been exposed to this sequence of characters two or three times. By the time a child moves into the pre-school class s/he will at least be familiar with these people's names. More important, the child has learned that Sunday school is a good, safe, fun, loving place to be—a place they want to come to.

The "Movers and Shakers" Class

We call our pre-school class, the "Movers and Shakers" (from potty trained to 1st Grade). And, we follow the same idea of teaching chronologically, but we go a little deeper. The character studies are more complex. We have formal teaching schedules which take the children through the whole Bible in a year. I have modules starting with *Creation* and moving chronologically through the Bible to *The Patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, Judges, Kings, Prophets*, and, of course, *Jesus!*

Goal: A child who consistently attends Sunday school at our church will have been exposed to the Bible 2 or 3 times at a high level. They will have heard the main Bible stories and would be familiar with the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. More important, the child has discovered that God's word is exciting.

The Grade School Class

We call our 1st – 4th grade class, "Kid's World". For these classes, I use the same systematic approach to teaching chronologically through the Bible, but we go even deeper. Instead of going through the whole Bible in a year, like I do with the pre-school class, I take several years to teach a complete Bible survey of the Old and New Testaments.

Grade school children are generally more concrete thinkers. It's hard for them to grasp deep spiritual concepts; they have a difficult time thinking metaphorically.

Goal: A child who consistently attends Sunday school at our church will be able to navigate to any book in the Bible and locate specific chapters and verses. S/he would also understand God's plan of redemption and be able to share the Good News with others. More important, the child has learned that God's word is applicable to their lives.

The Tweens Classes

We call our 5th and 6th grade class, the "Soldiers of Christ".

This age is known as "tweens" because they are in between elementary and Jr. High-age students. They are children yet they are looking to break out and be more than just children. They think that they are too old to do the things done in children's ministry; yet, they feel inadequate to participate in the youth group activities.

5th and 6th graders are facing heightened peer pressure in school and out of school. It's a huge temptation to blend

in with the kids of the world. They want to fit in and not stand out as different. They might be receiving some persecution from the other kids at school because they are followers of Christ. So, my vision for this age group is to give them answers for what it means to be a Christian as opposed to being something else.

As this age group is developing spiritually, the question that seems to engage them is “Who am I?” My goal for this age group is to give them a fun, healthy environment where they can be challenged to have assurance and confidence in their walk with the Lord so that they can feel good about being a child of God. I want them to know that because they belong to God, their lives have purpose to live every day, in every moment, for every purpose in Him!

Young children are generally more concrete thinkers. It’s hard for them to grasp deep spiritual concepts; they have a difficult time thinking metaphorically. *Tweens* are more mature and ready for a deeper challenge.

By the time the kids are in 5th or 6th grade, they are ready to explore the types and symbols in the Word. For example, they are ready for the deeper concepts presented in Paul’s letters. My hope is that they will begin to think about what they believe and why they believe it and to be able to articulate why they have faith in God. Now we can start teaching the students how to study the Bible inductively. That is, to ask questions of the text and really think about the meaning of the words the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of God’s word to use, and how they can apply God’s word to their own lives.

Goal: A child who consistently attends Sunday school at our church should know how to navigate around in their Bibles and has a good solid foundation of Biblical principles which will enable them to make good decisions based on God’s Word. They should be motivated to make choices to live their life for the glory of God.

Middle School (7th and 8th)

Middle School students these days are dealing with things only adults dealt with when I went through this age. They are faced with: gangs, sex, drugs, violence, broken homes, dead-beat dads, awful school expectations, horrible living conditions and that’s just the beginning of the list. These issues can run deep and they cause the middle school students to grow up faster than ever before.

If we skirt issues with middle school students like sex, sin and fatherless-ness with pithy, easy to understand topical talks we can seriously miss our window of opportunity with these students. We can teach real, honest truth to these teens without watering it down like we so often do.

Middle school students are hungry for depth, hungry for knowledge, hungry for acceptance, hungry for discussion. We need to give them the strong food they need. I believe we need to be teaching them basic Bible doctrine and basic apologetics, as well as the basic principles of thinking Biblically. They need to know that the Bible has everything they need for life and godliness. I have written another article on *Teaching Doctrine to Children*. It addresses what doctrine is and why we should teach it to children and gives some tips on how to effectively teach it to children.

Goal: By the time kids are in Youth group they should know the first 11 chapters of Genesis very well since that is the foundation of the whole Bible. They should be able to articulate why they have faith in God and have answers for what it means to be a Christian.