

Transformational Class

Transformational Church
Goes To Sunday School

David Francis



Introduction

Churches across North America are being impacted by the research reported by Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer in *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations*. I was privileged to direct LifeWay's team of consultants and regional directors who fanned out across our country to conduct the interviews that were the core of the qualitative phase of this massive research project.

One of the highlights of my spiritual life was my trip across New England in April 2009 interviewing pastors whose churches emerged among the top ten percent from telephone surveys with over 5,000 pastors. I still pray regularly for Jason, Dick, Tim, Russell, and John, who pastor churches of five different denominational affiliations. Jason pastors two rural churches in Vermont, one affiliated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference and the other with the United Methodists. Dick pastors an American Baptist congregation in a northern suburb of Boston. Tim and Russell lead Evangelical Lutheran and Conservative Baptist churches just miles apart in central Connecticut. John (who shares my zeal for name tags!) shepherds an Assembly of God congregation in Rhode Island. These five men shared a common passion.

As the consultants met with Dr. Stetzer and the LifeWay Research team to debrief the interviews, it became apparent that most of the other pastors we talked with were all passionate about the same things. The greatest joy in their lives, evidenced by stories with themes we heard over and over again, is to see people becoming more like Christ, to observe their churches acting more like His body, and to celebrate the impact their churches are making in helping their communities reflect His Kingdom. Stories about those three things became the foundation for the subtitle of *Transformational Church*—creating a new scorecard for congregations.

Seven Elements under Three Categories

It is beyond the scope of this book to recap the research reported in *Transformational Church*. In fact, authors Stetzer and Rainer would testify that it was an incredibly challenging task to capture and comment on the findings of this project—the most expansive research ever on the American church—in 250 pages! I will only introduce the broad outline and use it as the organizing principle for this small volume.

As our team of consultants conducted the pastor interviews, we asked questions grouped into nine topics. As it turned out, however, only seven distinct elements emerged from the research, with labels different from our original nine. These seven seemed to fall into three larger categories. As the authors state:

We made the decision early on that the research would drive our conclusions. We both have ideas as to what makes a strong disciple-making ministry. But the point of the Transformational Church initiative was not to justify our opinions or past research. We intentionally came into this process without a logo, framework, or set of principles we were determined to put in front of you. In other words, we were not looking for a neat set of rules for you to follow so everything will be smooth in your church. From years in the field of research, we know that presuppositions are impossible to eliminate, but a model built from them is normally too tidy and most likely faulty.

As we pressed forward through the research, we discovered these seven elements that fell into three categories. Obviously, the math does not work out in a balanced formula. But again, we were not looking for a formula. We were looking for spiritual practices rooted in the Scriptures that God used to deliver

transformation. In TC we found the principles that transform people to look like Christ, congregations to act like the body of Christ, and communities to reflect the kingdom of God.1

These seven elements and three categories converged into what the researchers concluded was a “Transformational Loop” that could be found in the Transformational Churches. A graphic representation of the loop is illustrated below.

Transformational Class: TC Goes to Sunday School!

What might a Sunday School class look like if it demonstrated the seven elements found in Transformational Churches? That’s the purpose of this book and the question we will explore in this volume. Each chapter will deal with an element in the Transformational Loop. Consider this book commentary rather than an extension of the research findings. It’s the same “So what?” or “What if?” process any pastor, church leader, Sunday School teacher, or small group facilitator might engage in while digesting Transformational Church and attempting to apply its findings in his or her own situation.

Missional Small Communities

Transformational Church author Ed Stetzer is passionate in his exhortation for churches to get people out of rows, into circles, and from those circles, to engage them in missional activity in their communities and beyond.

What would it take for a Sunday School class or small group (or the functional equivalent in your church) to become a missional small community? A group or class that intentionally pursues the seven TC elements will likely become such a class: a Transformational Class!

The Power of One Class

If you know me, then you know I have an undying faith in the power of each and every Sunday School class or small group to choose to become a missional small community that intentionally reaches people for Christ, releases people to serve, and reproduces itself for Kingdom impact. Your class can decide what kind of group you want to be and choose what kind of impact you want to have on your community and world.² Can a single group or class be transformational even if it’s not part of a Transformational Church? The answer is yes! I believe a single Transformational Class could be the catalyst God would be pleased to use to spark a congregation toward being a Transformational Church—a church where the seven elements in the TC research are increasingly evident.

My best estimate is there are over 400,000 Sunday School classes in Southern Baptist churches. Assuming this is less than 20 percent of the total Sunday School classes in our country would mean there are well over two million Sunday School classes in North American churches. Maybe three million or more if you throw in small groups of various kinds. Denominational leaders like me enjoy speculating about what might happen if all—or even most—of these groups would determine to be Transformational Classes.

But for this book, I want to appeal to you about your class or group. Not the other classes in your church. Not the other churches in your community. Just your class. Your small group. Will you open yourself to the possibility of becoming a missional small community? To exploring the seven elements that might be evident in a Transformational Class? To imagining an exciting next chapter in the story of your group or class?

The Power of Story

One of the most challenging aspects of digesting and reporting the Transformational Church findings is that the qualitative research is a virtual mountain of stories! Edifying stories of cathartic events that moved a congregation toward a missionary mentality. Wonderful stories of lives impacted because churches embraced godly motives and biblical values. Moving stories of people changed as churches engaged their communities with the love of Jesus and His gospel.

You have a story.

Your class has a story.

That story is not complete.

If you're satisfied with that story, you can stop reading now. But if you're ready to be challenged (and you will be!) to consider Transformational Class as the next chapter of your story, then let's get started!

[David Francs (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Chapter 1: Missionary Mentality

Have you noticed that the first category in the Transformational Loop has only one element? The category and the element are similar but there is a subtle difference. A church or class can seek to understand its cultural and socioeconomic context using something as simple as an observation technique like a windshield survey or as sophisticated as demographic mapping tools. It takes another level of commitment to prayerfully and intentionally make it your mission to reach out to others within that context. Discernment is therefore a requirement throughout.

Sunday School: A Missionary Movement!

Recently I was leading a group of Sunday School leaders at Applewood Baptist Church near Denver through a presentation of "Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School," testing concepts I hoped to incorporate into this book. Minister of Education Dave Brown had provided each of his leaders with a copy of my book *Great Expectations: Planting Seeds for Sunday School Growth*.³ After reading the introduction, one lady remarked with great excitement, "I didn't know Sunday School really started as a school on Sundays!" Most Sunday School teachers and leaders in churches today do not realize they're part of a missionary movement that's still going strong in its third century.

Discerning the Context: Robert Raikes

Gloucester, England, is generally considered the birthplace of Sunday School. Robert Raikes, popularly regarded as the father of the Sunday School movement, observed the children of the working class poor—children who worked six long days each week before the enforcement of child labor laws—running wild in the streets on their only day off. He discerned that, at best, most of these children were destined for lives of poverty; at worst, they were destined for prison.

I'm convinced his solution idea came from God because, over the years and in many nations, numerous people have miraculously had the same idea! Raikes wanted to establish schools for these children where they could learn to read and write, thus equipping them to break the cycle of poverty and, in the process, preventing them from resorting to lives of crime. The first school, staffed by paid teachers, was started in 1780. Within five years, schools had sprouted across England, primarily staffed by volunteers and funded by donations from community leaders. Some churches embraced the movement and provided space for its practice.

William Fox, of London's Prescot Street Particular Baptist Church, had been convicted for years about the need to provide education for the poor, but he was discouraged by the expense of doing so. Fox read of Raikes' program. Encouraged by Raikes, Fox and some friends established the "Society for the Establishment and Support of Sunday Schools" in 1785, even though his own church did not embrace the idea until 1798.

Sunday School Comes to America

By the 1790s, the Sunday School movement had crossed the Atlantic and Sunday School Societies were established in Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania. These interdenominational organizations not only provided printed materials for Sunday Schools but appointed Sunday School missionaries to promote the movement.

The organization that employs me as a "Sunday School missionary," LifeWay Christian Resources, was established as The Baptist Sunday School Board in 1891 with a similar mission. Traveling across the prairies, Sunday School missionaries helped many pioneer towns establish community Sunday Schools and often constructed buildings which served as a center of community activity. If you've had the privilege of attending an event at LifeWay's Glorieta (New Mexico) or Ridgecrest (North Carolina) Conference Centers, you may have worshiped in Spilman or Holcomb Auditoriums. These buildings are named in honor of two legendary Sunday School missionaries, who literally wore out their boots to plant Sunday Schools across the South and beyond.

Sunday School: A Movement Unified by Mission

Historically Sunday School transcended minor doctrinal differences and found unity around the mission of changing lives—young and old—through the impact of God's Word being read, taught, discussed, learned, and applied. Even through the mid-1900s, it was not unusual for Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others to gather together for training at large Sunday School conventions or assemblies. Sunday School teachers and leaders would invest a weekend or a whole week away from distractions to concentrate on learning to do better Sunday School work. Somehow they sensed they

were part of something much bigger than themselves, their class, or their church. They were part of a movement.⁴ A movement planted in the minds and hearts of men and women by God Himself. A missionary movement—with a missionary mentality.

Missionary Mentality: Hope for Sunday School Revival

I support the Discipleship movement and am a leader in it. I appreciate the Small Group movement and am an advocate for it. But I love the Sunday School movement and have dedicated my life to its advance. I have concerns about the movement. But I also have great hope. Some say the movement is dead. I say they are dead wrong! Sunday School does need to experience a revival in many places. The key to the revival of the movement of Sunday School globally, the program of Sunday School congregationally, and the ministry of Sunday School in your class, is rediscovering the people group(s) we are seeking to reach.

Sunday School as People Groups

What is a people group? Foundational to an effective missionary strategy is the ability to identify—and identify with—the people group we are called to reach. Dr. Orville Boyd Jenkins says: “For gospel strategy purposes, a key principle [concerning people groups] is to define a strategy ... within which the gospel can spread through ‘natural’ social networks.”⁵

You don’t have to cross an ocean to find your people group. There are hundreds of people groups in places like Los Angeles, Atlanta, Dallas, or New York City. And at least dozens where you live, too!

The Principle Behind Graded Classes

The basic idea behind a missionary strategy is to establish—with as much clarity and specificity as possible—who it is you want to reach. That is also the principle behind the time-tested model of an age-graded Sunday School. The principle is simple: We will establish at least one open Bible study group for a person of any age. Some churches have one department for all preschoolers, for example. Other churches have multiple departments for bed babies, crawlers, and toddlers—based on the age and developmental stages of the preschoolers. (If you choose this approach, make sure the class structure is clear to parents and to the volunteers who help the parents find the right class for their children. Create a grid for preschool classes, listing birth years across the top and the 12 months down the left side. In each block, put the class designation and room. Greeters will know where to direct parents of preschoolers based on the year and month of birth of the child. Update the chart frequently; it’s well worth the effort.)

Most churches also age-grade children and students. Actually, they grade them by the school grade they are currently in (or in the summer, the one they just completed). Some churches have one department for all children; other churches have several departments for each grade.

Grouping Adults More Challenging

Children, students, and their parents typically don’t complain about “Promotion Sunday.” In fact, they look forward to experiencing a new room with a new teacher. However it’s often more challenging with adults!

Age-grading is a proven strategy for adults but it is not the only way of grouping them. Many churches combine the concept of life-stage with age-grading. One church we visited had adult classes identified by life-stage and average age to help guests and greeters discover the right class to try first. A perfect fit for us right now would be a class for Empty Nesters with an average age of 58. The benefits of such a

system are 1) providing multiple reference points, and 2) the ability to start new classes. The same principle would apply to a class targeted to a specific affinity group (medical professionals, law school students, motorcycle enthusiasts, or cowboys!). Or a small group for a specific neighborhood. Or a combination of all these. The key is being able to describe your class in a distinctive way so that you clearly know what people group you are responsible to reach. It defines your mission, if you decide to accept it. With a missionary mentality!

Remember your strategy will be different for a Newlyweds Class and a New Parents Class. If you want to meet your people group for the latter class, just go hang out in a baby food or diaper aisle!

Single Gender Classes on the Comeback

There's an emerging trend that merits consideration in the people- grouping conversation. After decades in which coed classes dominated the scene in Sunday morning classes and weekday small groups, single gender classes are making a comeback. And not just among adults! One of the most consistently effective student Sunday Schools I know of has organized all its classes—for both middle and high schoolers—for girls and boys. In fact, because of tremendous growth coupled with lack of space, this thriving student ministry now meets in a school building. Students who ride buses to and from the church campus for worship usually do not have a room for their class. Instead they gather around tables in an open area. The tables are labeled by grade and gender and facilitated by a teacher of the same gender. This trend is less prominent in classes for kids, although it would certainly be feasible to have separate tables for girls and boys within the same classroom if—and it's a big if—you actually have dedicated men to staff those tables. Come on, guys! Man up! Boys need to see men who love Jesus and are willing to teach them about Him! Get some missionary mentality!

Back to the Future: On Mission for Kids

I've become convicted that the Sunday School movement, through a church where it is properly understood and strategically implemented, can remain an effective missionary force. I also have a strengthened conviction that Sunday School needs to see a revival based on its missionary heritage. A heritage and history that continues to have kids at its center.

A disturbing trend among Sunday School and small group ministries over the past couple of decades is the emphasis placed on adult groups. The Sunday School movement started with an emphasis on kids, with adult classes coming later, partly in response to the question, "What do we do with the adults while the kids are learning?" Today that has—I believe unfortunately—switched. The question I hear pastors wrestling with now is "What do we do with the kids while the adults are enjoying their classes or small groups?" I think that's the wrong question. In North America, we have two generations left (maybe) before the near extinction of orthodox, church-centered Christianity in Europe sweeps our own continent. Will it make a difference if your church decides to build a Sunday School fueled by a missionary mentality, focused on kids and their families? I don't know. But I think it's worth a try! Whether you actually call it Sunday School or ascribe a different label in your church, will you consider engaging in this historic and effective missionary enterprise with fresh fervor? Do you need to lead the way? Or simply follow well?

Next we turn to the element of Vibrant Leadership as we continue to explore Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School! - [David Francis (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Chapter 2: Vibrant Leadership

A discerning missionary mindset must be built on proper motives and right values. That is exactly what we found to be true in a Transformational Church. Three values were present in TCs: vibrant leadership, relational intentionality, and prayerful dependence. When a Sunday School class or small group desires to be an agent of spiritual transformation, it starts with vibrant leadership.

It Starts at the Top

Luke 10 records the account of the sending out and return of “The Seventy” on a mission trip. In short, these missionaries departed with uncertainty and returned with joy. When our team of consultants returned to debrief their interviews with pastors of Transformational Churches, they returned with joy as well—and insight. As we compared our findings guided by Dr. Stetzer and his team, the element of vibrant leadership stood out clearly. The TC pastors did not display heavy-handed, autocratic leadership, but rather shared, multiplying, empowering leadership.

Or Maybe It’s the Bottom!

If you’ve read much on organizational leadership, you’ll recognize the idea of the “inverted pyramid.” The basic theory is that exceptional leaders see themselves as servants at the bottom of this pyramid, whose primary job is to exhort and support those charged with carrying out the organization’s vision and mission. That seemed to be true of TC pastors, at least from the stories they told. They delighted in sharing about others who had been captivated by a vision of introducing people to Jesus, or equipping disciples to become more like Him, or helping their church act more like His body, or ministering in their community as a reflection of His Kingdom, or going beyond their community to advance the gospel. I don’t think the word ambitious was ever used to describe these leaders. They were both humble and confident. Confident that God had placed them in that church, to shepherd that people. Confident that God would guide them in loving their community with Spirit-empowered words and works that would bring glory to the Father and bring people to the feet of His Son Jesus.

Staying Focused

One of the ongoing tasks of vibrant leaders is to keep organizational energy focused around a few key principles. Church Resources Vice President John Kramp, my boss at LifeWay, has urged me on several occasions to guard against letting an issue “spin out into complexity!” That’s a particularly good word for Sunday School leaders. Volumes have been written about administering and organizing effective Sunday Schools. I’ve written a few myself, and every idea has been helpful, I’m sure! But at its essence, effective Sunday Schools are led by vibrant leaders who may try different organizational schemes or experiment with new ideas, but who hold fast to two key principles and one irreducible law.

Two Key Principles: Open Groups Practicing Open Enrollment

Missional Sunday School classes are driven by two principles on which they refuse to compromise: open groups practicing open enrollment. Much has been written about open groups versus closed groups. I'm actually an advocate for both. In fact, I believe that both discipleship groups and small groups function best as closed groups.

D-Groups

Discipleship groups are typically short-term with high accountability for preparation and participation around a course of study that involves deeper biblical content than the typical Sunday School class. In "D-groups," disciples are challenged to grow in one or more of these areas: devoting themselves to being disciples, declaring their identity in Christ, developing spiritual disciplines, displaying Christlike character, defending the faith, discipling others—beginning with their own household, deploying their gifts in missional ministry, and/or depending desperately on the Holy Spirit. D-groups work best as closed groups—that is, once the group starts, it is no longer open to additional participants.

Small Groups

Sunday School classes and D-groups have one thing in common with gatherings typically called "small groups." They all tend to be more effective if they are actually small! But the term small groups usually implies more than just size. A common goal of small group ministry is developing deeper biblical community among a group of believers and some not-yet-believers who long to "do life together" in an environment of redemptive trust. Trust requires time. With the same people. That's why small groups tend to be closed, whether they're designed to be or not! North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia, answers a frequently-asked question about small groups on one of its Web sites:

Q: What makes North Point's groups model unique from others?

A: Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of our model is the closed group structure. We believe relationships take time to form and anything that gets in the way of the group building relational capital with one another works against this goal. Groups stay closed for a predetermined time of twelve to twenty-four months. At that time they multiply to form at least two new groups. (If a group loses members along the way, they are free to add new couples or individuals if everyone in the group agrees.) 6

I think closed groups are great. In fact, if I was practicing Christian Education in a local church today, I would strive for a merger of a small group and D-group ministry. That's exactly what Pastor Nelson Searcy and his team did at New York City's multi-campus Journey Church, as described in the book *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups*. Groups, which are closed once they start, start and stop three times each year. That's not so different from the discipleship trimester approach popular in many churches except that Journey's groups can meet anywhere on any day instead of on Sunday or Wednesday at the church campus.

Sunday School Classes Designed as Open Groups

What distinguishes Sunday School classes, including weekday off-campus small groups that are functionally equivalent to Sunday School, is an open group strategy. Sunday School classes study the Bible, and therefore help people discover the eight “Ds” identified with D-groups on a foundational level. Sunday School classes also help people connect and experience fellowship, ministry, and a sense of community, though probably more on a social level than on the intimate level that is the goal of many small groups.

So what makes it open? This short definition explains it best:

An Open Group Expects New People Every Week.

If you really expect new people every week, then the strategy changes. Leaders arrive early. The room is set up with newcomers in mind. Name tags are worn consistently. Every lesson is a complete and satisfying Bible study experience. And all this goes against the grain. The natural inertia of any group is to become closed. It takes vibrant leadership to continuously exhort a Sunday School class to remain vigilant about staying open. To be a welcoming place for newcomers every week. To be an easy next-step for someone when they decide to move beyond worship attendance alone. To be a safe place to get to know more about Christ—and Christians—before making a deeper commitment to Him.

Open Enrollment

Sunday School classes are designed to be open groups that practice open enrollment. Open enrollment means:

You Can Belong Before You Believe.

Enrolling as a member of a Sunday School class is a great first step for someone who has not yet decided about whether they want to join the church, pledge allegiance to Jesus as Savior and Lord, identify with Christ publicly through baptism, or while they explore Christianity and experience the powerful words of the Bible. They need to understand that enrolling in Sunday School does not make them a member of the church. Nor obligate them to become one. It’s just a safe place to belong before they believe. Whether they ever do or not, vibrant leaders know that open enrollment is one path to keeping a missionary mentality.

The Irreducible Law of Kingdom Growth

Vibrant Sunday School leaders also understand and emphasize the irreducible law of Kingdom growth:

Start New Units.

This law would probably also fit under the heading of Missionary Mentality because missionaries know that it’s absolutely true. On the mission field, it means starting new preaching points, new missions, and new churches. In established churches, it means starting new groups for discipleship, ministry, and evangelism. For Sunday School, it means starting new classes. It takes incredibly vibrant leadership to persuade and equip classes to reproduce themselves! We’ll come back to this important topic in Chapter 7. [David Francls (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Chapter 3: Relational Intentionality

Transformational Churches had a process in mind for making disciples. They also had it in their hearts that it is people who demonstrate the fruit of that process. As in most churches, there are many types of groups. In the TCs, the groups were all “on purpose.” And they were primarily focused on individual people. The researchers chose Relational Intentionality to describe this dynamic.

Intentionality: Consistent with Simple Church

The findings of the Transformational Church research were consistent with those reported by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger in *Simple Church*, a book that continues to impact churches (and a must-read for pastors and church leaders). Their research demonstrated that churches identified as “vibrant” were far more likely to have a discipleship process that was communicated with clarity, a process where members could understand where they were and what step they needed to take next to continue along the path of spiritual development. This movement could be measured by observing group involvement because there was a primary type of group aligned with each step in the process.

Five Typical Groups

The intentional disciple-making processes adopted by churches typically include five categories of groups. Some group them together as options for a single step in what they communicate to members. And the sequence has shifted over the years (a whole book could be dedicated to that discussion!). I’ll try to briefly capture what I’ve observed in Southern Baptist churches in the following table.

Typical Alignment of Groups to Process over the Decades			
Step	1920	1980	2010
1	Sunday School Class	Worship Service	Worship Service
2	Worship Service	Sunday School Class	Sunday School Class or Small Group
3	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group	Ministry Team
4	Ministry Team	Ministry Team	Discipleship Group or Small Group
5	Missions Group/ Evangelism Team	Missions Group/ Evangelism Team	Missions Group/ Evangelism Team

Sunday School: A Proven Step-Two Strategy

After *Simple Church* was published, I became curious about whether “simple churches” were actually employing Sunday School as their step-two strategy. With Dr. Rainer’s encouragement, I partnered with his coauthor Eric Geiger to conduct an analysis of the 400 Southern Baptist churches identified as “vibrant” in Phase 1 of Simple Church research. This sampling of churches was chosen because each had grown by at least five percent for three consecutive years, a hurdle that clearly separated these churches from the comparison group. With the list of these churches in hand, I was able to obtain information on the Sunday morning schedules of 376 of the 400 churches. The results: 87.5 percent operated Sunday School—or its functional equivalent—as their step-two strategy. (The other 12.5 percent utilized off-campus small groups or a mixture of off-campus and on-campus groups, at least for adults.) About half called it Sunday School, but whatever it was called, it operated as an on-campus Bible study experience adjacent in the schedule to the primary weekend worship experience (step-one in the disciple-making process of most churches).

Am I suggesting that all the TCs were also “simple churches” or that they all operated Sunday School as part of their process? Absolutely not. What I am suggesting is that the TC findings were not inconsistent with these earlier findings. So I’ll continue to proclaim that “Sunday School for Step Two” is a proven option in an intentional disciple-making process for most churches that aspire to be transformational and simple.

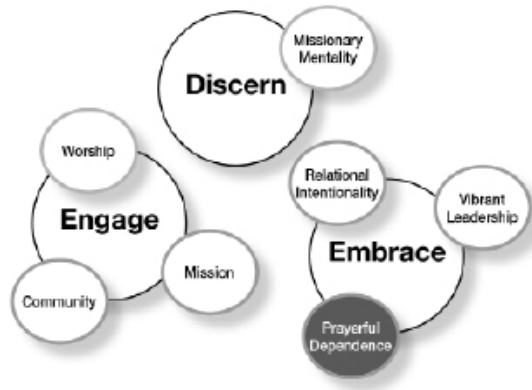
After all, what could be simpler? Accomplishing the first two steps of your disciple-making process with every member of the family on one trip to the church.

Safety in Social Space

In his book *The Search to Belong*, Joe Myers elaborates on four spaces where people belong: public, social, personal, and intimate. Public space is what you experience in a football stadium, with lots of other people you may or may not know unified by your support for the same team. One of my favorite social spaces is Panera Bread®, where I like to write. I recognize and exchange greetings with several other regulars there, although I would not describe them as friends. Personal space is for friends—people I enjoy being around, regardless of how long it’s been since I was last around them! Intimate space is reserved for those really close, accountable relationships, notably with a spouse or perhaps even what teens might call a “best friend forever!”

I found Myers’ book extremely helpful. In essence, his appeal to church leaders is to let people belong progressively and simultaneously in any of the spaces rather than equating “intimacy” with spiritual maturity and/or promising it as an expected outcome of small group experiences.⁷ For me his candid perspectives triggered one of the most liberating insights I’ve ever had: Sunday School is successful as a safe step- two strategy precisely because it operates in social space!

By trying to keep up with the promises of the small group movement, I had become defensive about Sunday School on this front. But not anymore! I’m comfortable with the reality that while a Sunday School class may provide an environment where a person might discover one or more close friendships, those relationships will be developed outside that environment. In fact, an attempt to use that environment to develop personal relationships may violate the open group principle on which Sunday School is built. Classes must remain open to be missionaries.



Chapter 4: Prayerful Dependence

Prayer is the fuel that drives the Transformational Churches. It will be the fuel that undergirds the work of a Transformational Class, too. What might that look like?

Before Class

The Sunday School teacher or leader who wants a Transformational Class will arrive early. But not just to get things ready because he expects new people every week. This leader will stand in the room, prepared for people who've yet to arrive, and ask God to give her a vision of the activities that will soon take place there. This teacher or leader "sees" faces that are not there yet and prays God's will for their lives, "on earth as it is in heaven." He wants to "hear" the sounds of preschoolers interacting in various learning centers as they begin to comprehend "Our Father Who is in heaven." He wants to imagine the conversations he may have with the third grade boys who always arrive early with "their daily bread"—in the form of a donut!—because their parents sing in the choir. She wants to imagine sitting at her table of giggling middle schoolers, gently drawing them into wrestling with a scriptural truth she's certain will help "deliver them from evil." He wants to call out to God for some struggling marriages among those in his empty nest couples class, pleading with Him to "lead them not into temptation." She wants to intercede for some of the most frail ladies in her senior adult class, that they can affirm, "Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." A pastor walks among the Sunday School rooms, asking God to honor their expectation for new people every week by blessing the classes with some!

Transformational Church, at its heart, is a message of hope. Paul writes about hope in Romans 8:24-25: "Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience."

The context of this verse is not about a Sunday School class; it is about the ultimate hope of a glorious eternity with God as His redeemed, adopted children. Too many Sunday School classes have lost hope. Prayer may be the key to rediscovering hope's power again!

During Class

Sometimes one of the most appropriate things to do—right in the middle of a lesson—is to stop and pray! How will you know? The Holy Spirit will tell you. Just obey Him. This is particularly true in classes for preschoolers and children. The prayers need not be long. Just a brief "Thank you, God, for birds" as Sam discovers the nest in the nature center or a simple "Thank you, God, for hands" as Julia puts together a

teaching puzzle. Preschool and children’s teachers know what I’m talking about. Student and adult teachers might learn a few lessons from spending a day in a preschool or children’s Sunday School class!

At the End of Class in Care Groups

A common way adult classes encourage prayer is to break into care groups for the last few minutes of class. The care group leader leads the prayer time, after doing a quick check-in to discover the status of absent members. (Some classes do this at the beginning of class, but it tends to work better at the end.) It involves a lot more people and takes about the same amount of time as a class-wide prayer time.

Prayer Requests: The Best Indicator of a Transformational Class

Prayer at the Class Level

Every group operates at one of three levels: class, community, or commission (see chart on page 35). At the class level, prayer requests tend to be general and safe. Prayer for folks experiencing the aftermath of natural disasters, political leaders, health issues of family members, and so forth. There’s nothing wrong with that just like there’s nothing wrong with a group that gets together each Sunday morning to hear a Bible lesson—even if that’s pretty much all they do.

Prayer at the Community Level

A good indicator that a group is functioning at the community level is when prayer requests become more personal—and a little less safe.

“They’re laying off at the plant again; pray that God will provide for our needs if I’m affected.”

“Our son and daughter-in-law are divorcing; pray that we’ll know how to love them and help the grandkids through it.”

“Our 16-year-old son is about to drive us crazy; pray that God will give us wisdom about dealing with him.”

You may hear these kinds of requests in a large group but you are more likely to hear them if the class breaks into same-gender care groups. (Teachers of all ages can adapt these principles to their classes.)

Prayer at the Commission Level

A class sticks its toes in the commission level when it begins to pray about missions in general. It starts wading in when it adopts a specific Unreached People Group (UPG) for understanding and prayer. A class gets into the deep end when it starts praying for people who are far from God right in the offices, schools, stores, teams, recreational centers, and neighborhoods where they do life every day.

“Pray for Bill who plays on our office softball team. I think God may be working in his life. Would you join me in asking the Lord to engineer a circumstance that allows me to share a word of witness?”

“Would you pray for Charles and Pat? They’re nice folks who live across the street from us, but I don’t think they are saved. Ask God to give us the opportunity—and courage—to invite them to church.”

“Sandy’s a cute new girl at school. I think she likes me but I don’t think she is a Christian. Pray she’d consider going out with me and that I’d be faithful to share with her about my commitment to Christ.”

“All the kids in our fourth grade class make fun of Wanda and Billy. But I feel sorry for them. I want to invite them to Vacation Bible School. Pray they’ll say yes. And that kids here will treat them kindly.”

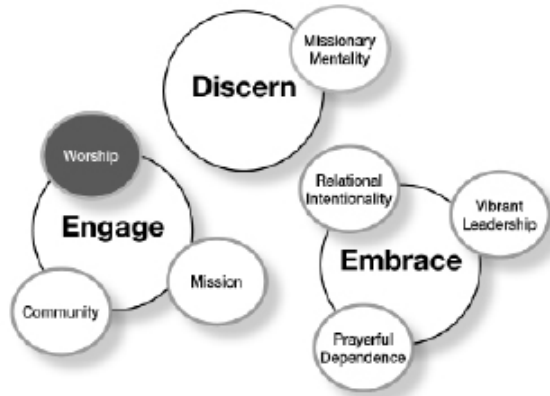
“My Me-Maw lives with us now, but she’s not a Christian. I’m going to start asking her to read the Bible story on our take-home pages to me every week. Pray God will help her learn about God.”

A visual sign of a class that is practicing evangelistic intercession is a poster with the names (or initials) of people the class is praying for. This should be a different list than one for Christians who have needs. It is a list of people who are far from God. The class or care group can celebrate each step those persons take that move them closer to Him. One senior adult ladies class in Oklahoma never takes anyone off their list. They just mark through the name with a pink highlighter, celebrating each name on their sheets that has also been written in the Lamb’s Book of Life! 8

Discern, Embrace, Engage

Transformational Church research found that TCs have a missionary mentality (**discern**). They **embrace** three core values: Vibrant Leadership, Relational Intentionality, and Prayerful Dependence. TCs also **engage** in three essential practices: Worship, Community, and Mission. In the final three chapters, we’ll explore how each of these practices might apply to a Sunday School class that is intentional about spiritual transformation and community impact.

[David Francs (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Chapter 5: Worship: Actively Embrace Jesus

When you consider the main purposes of the church, a Sunday School class can do a pretty good job at all of them—with the exception of worship. Perhaps you noticed on the chart on page 21 that in the early 20th century, it was not uncommon for Sunday School to be the primary entry point, especially in Southern Baptist churches. Years ago one of the “six tasks of Sunday School” I learned as a “special worker” for the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay) was “Lead People to Worship.” In days gone by, guests were more likely to attend a Sunday School class first and then move toward attending a worship service. That practice is beginning to change, but Sunday School and worship services have always been a powerful tandem in the local church.

The Tandem Turned Upside Down . . .

Or perhaps you’d argue the tandem was turned right side up when worship services started becoming “step-one” in the disciple-making process of churches. Arthur Flake, Southern Baptists’ first Director of Sunday School, introduced the “Standard of Excellence” in his 1922 book, *Building a Standard Sunday School*. Flake identified several criteria by which a church could achieve recognition as a Standard Sunday School. One of the criterion applied to the Sunday School’s responsibility for getting people to worship: “An average of at least 70 percent of [those] above eight years of age attending the school shall remain for the preaching services.”⁹ In most churches, that percentage has reversed. The average in Southern Baptist churches is about 70 percent of those in worship also attending Sunday School. The benchmark for a healthy church today is only 80 percent. But whichever comes first, the tandem of a Spirit-filled, Word-driven worship experience, coupled with Sunday School classes for all ages and stages gathering together right before or right after, remains a powerful tandem for getting people started on a path of discipleship.

The Assimilation Problem: Where Did All the Worshipers Go?

In any group of pastors who trust each other enough to share their challenges, someone will bring up the problem of assimilation. What’s that? Basically, it’s usually centered around two issues: (1) people praying to receive Christ away from the church who never make it to church for baptism—or often even to a worship service, and/or (2) people who have attended or even joined the church but who have never progressed beyond worship service attendance in the disciple-making process.

A Proven Assimilation Solution: Sunday School

In research findings reported by Thom S. Rainer in *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church*, new Christians who had joined a sample of churches were tracked for five years. Among those who only attended worship, fewer than 20 percent were still active five years later. However, among those who attended both worship and Sunday School, over 80 percent were still active after five years. (Having fielded questions about whether these findings apply to small groups, I asked Dr. Rainer. He says that the research did not include small groups, but that it is not unreasonable to assume that there is a similar if not exact correlation, at least directionally.)

Application: Obedience as Worship

So what? That's the question too few teachers ask their group to wrestle with during or after an encounter with God's Word. At LifeWay, our curriculum is constructed around "a promise backed up by a plan" we call **LifeSpan** (see chart on inside back cover) It's a process that reflects basic developmental and spiritual formation principles. Materials for preschoolers and children guide them to **Hear, Know, Do**. The process for students is built around the word **Known** encouraging students to **Know** the scriptures, **Own** their faith, and make it **Known** to others. The adult strategy is a non-linear approach that leads adults to make continuous progress in four areas: **Connect, Grow, Serve, Go**. Each step in each age-group has a matching logo that shows up in the curriculum materials, especially related to application questions and activities.¹⁰

In biblical terms, worship is less about a service than it is about acts of obedience. Obedience is worship. The Hebrew word *shema*, the first word in the Great Commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, is usually translated listen or hear. But according to the excellent word study tools at www.mystudybible.com, the word was translated obey over 80 times in the King James Version. The point? When it comes to Bible study, listening demands obedience. And obedience is worship.

Promoting Daily Worship

Although not as prevalent today, some churches use offering envelopes as an accountability mechanism. One version includes a place to check "Bible read daily." Sunday School classes provide a wonderful place for distributing devotional resources and encouraging their use. Accountability for daily worship might be more subtle today than checking a box on an envelope but it could still happen in a class that cares about the discipline of daily devotions. Something as simple as an occasional question like this might work: "What was something you read in your devotional magazine this week that encouraged or challenged you?"

LifeWay produces an entire line of devotional resources for kids, students, and adults.¹¹ One of my favorites is Bible Express, the devotional resource for preteens, because it has two front covers! Half the magazine is for girls, but turn it over and the other half is for boys (although I'm sure many of them read both halves!). A couple who taught 5th and 6th grade Sunday School at Trinity Baptist Church in Schenectady, New York, enthusiastically shared with me how they make accountability fun for their preteens so they'll spend time daily with the Lord using Bible Express. Whether your church uses devotional resources from LifeWay or sends out daily e-mail devotions, find a way to encourage daily worship through your Sunday School class.

Which Comes First: Conversion or Community?

I can hear some of you objecting: “You dealt with the second assimilation problem you identified but not the first one—the one about the difficulty in getting people who accept Christ apart from the church and never come to make that decision public or get involved in the church’s disciple-making process.” I didn’t forget; I just saved it until last! Why? Because it is a point of personal frustration to me as well as to most churches. I may get in trouble here, but I’m going to say it anyway: I don’t think leading a stranger you never plan on seeing again to pray a prayer is the best way to make disciples. It happens. I’m grateful it does. I just don’t think it’s the best way. Or even the most biblical way.

For years, I’ve been schooled that the process of evangelism looks like this:

Conversation > Conversion > Community

In other words, the goal of a conversation with a person who is far from God is to lead them to a point of conversion, after which I try, perhaps desperately or perhaps not, to encourage them to get involved in Christian community. Again, that process works...sometimes. But not as often as we would hope. In fact, if we are really honest, it rarely happens that way. Does that mean we don’t witness to people? Of course not!

The goal of our witness—unless the Holy Spirit is clearly convicting the other person to believe and you to share—is to nudge a person who is far from God just a little closer to Him. I borrowed that idea from English evangelist Dennis Pethers. His burden is for America not to become a “post-Christian” society like “mother England.” Pethers has partnered in the production of an American version of the More to Life materials God has used so effectively across Great Britain. The first step in the process is to give a friend an inexpensive DVD containing the stories of people who’ve overcome great challenges to come to Jesus. The second step is to get them into a group where they hear and discuss four stories from John’s gospel.

The process is more like this:

Conversation > Community > Conversion

That’s the way Sunday School classes are designed to work, too. That’s why we practice open enrollment, allowing people to belong before they believe. When people enroll in Sunday School before making a decision to follow the Lord Jesus, guess what happens to the problem of assimilation? There’s not one! They’re already “in the church” when they come “in the kingdom of heaven!”

An important part of discipleship involves connecting through community. That takes us to the next element in the loop.

[David Francs (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Chapter 6: Community: Connect People with People

Transformational Churches are intentional about engaging people through community. The authors of *Transformational Church* identified five elements of group life in TCs: Mission orientation, Word-driven, Multiplication Mindset, Stranger Welcoming, Kingdom Focused. Sounds like how you might describe a great Sunday School class!

An Effective Triad: Scripture, Stories, Shepherding

I believe there are three components present in a group where people can experience a sense of community: 1) *Scripture*, the Bible, is the textbook of the Sunday School. 2) *Stories* are the vehicle for effective learning and for building community. 3) *Shepherding* is the facet that pulls together the 24/7/365 ministry we call Sunday School.¹²

Revolves Around Stories

Everybody has a story. In *Transformational Church*, the authors state that people are a story. Here's the basic idea as it relates to community:

No one's story is complete...

until it has intersected with God's Story...

which happens best in a community

being enriched by the stories of others.

Questions, listening, silence, preparation, participation, and even name tags impact the development of a story-sharing community committed to shepherding one another and learning and applying the scriptures to daily life. A critical component of Christian community is sharing our second-chance stories. Those people we've invited to belong before they believe need to understand that we haven't always had it all together—and in reality don't have it all together now! But we move forward, confident in the hope that we know the end of the story.¹³

Connect3: Class, Community, Commission

I noted earlier that groups function on one of three levels: as a class, a community, or a commission. Dwayne McCrary, a friend and coworker at LifeWay, created a chart to help others get a better handle on each level.

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

Scan the Community column. Does it describe your class? Do members see themselves as ministers or do they expect to be ministered to? Are people content to have confessed Jesus as Lord or do they strive to love God and each other more sincerely? Is the class list viewed as a list of people who have made a commitment to attend the class or as a ministry list that records the names of people (some who have chosen to belong before they believe) to whom the class has made a commitment to minister? (*It's the same list; it's all about the class' mindset!*) What do the conversations—the stories—sound like? What about the prayer requests?

Multiplication Mindset: Start New Units

As a Christian educator, I've identified three expectations for every Sunday School class: 1) Expect new people—and a great Bible study experience—every week. 2) Expect people to say yes to all aspects of the ministry of the class and Sunday School. 3) Expect to plant new classes.¹⁴

Groups struggle most with the third expectation and the prospect of moving from Community to Commission. The Class level was fine. We got together once a week and listened to an interesting Bible lesson, perhaps just to have some place to go while the kids were in their classes. Then we discovered Community. It feels wonderful to be cared for and to care for others. We've grown to love each other and even invited others to be a part of our community. We intentionally keep our group open and practice open enrollment. *And now you want to divide our class?*

Multiply or Divide?

Let me be crystal clear: Dividing a class is irresponsible (best synonym for “stupid” I could think of). It is (pardon the pun) divisive! There may have been a day when a more trusting generation would let you do that. Not any more! If someone has to “do” it to a class, it’s dividing. The only way for a class to successfully develop a culture and legacy of new classes is to self-determine to multiply.

The seventh element discovered in TCs was the practice of Mission. Many classes that apply the other six will stumble over the next chapter. I hope yours doesn’t.

[David Francs (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Chapter 7: Mission

What's the difference between Missionary Mentality and Mission? For me, the former is about how you think and the latter is about how you act. Remember TCs discern the context, embrace values, and engage in actions. So in this case, mission is an action word.

Three Rs of a Class on Mission

An on-mission Sunday School class practices the three Rs: Release, Reproduce, and Reach. The biblical concept is *kenosis*, the Greek word in Philippians 2 used to describe how Jesus, though equal with God, *emptied* Himself, becoming a humble human, visiting the planet He had created, and obeying God's missionary plan for saving mankind. The three Rs are about a class with the same attitude as Christ Jesus: a class that's willing to empty itself in missional activity.¹⁵

Release: Sending Missionaries to Kids

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

Such a ministry takes a lot of workers! And guess where all the adult leaders of preschool, children, and student classes come from? Adult classes! Sadly, some classes bemoan the loss of an active member to a teaching or 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 wall display in their rooms with photos of these folks serving. These members are called 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. The number one reason people hesitate to leave a group, especially if it has become a Community, is they think they'll be forgotten or become disconnected. Why do they feel that way? Because unfortunately, it's usually true. As you celebrate and support associate members as missionaries from your class, more and more members will be more willing to take that next step.

Reproduce: Planting New Classes

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 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 an Apprentice Director/Coordinator if needed. A candidate for enlistment as an Apprentice Teacher is a person who 1) demonstrates an apparent commitment to Christ, 2) has shown an ability—probably as a substitute—to facilitate an interesting and meaningful Bible study, and 3) is committed to assuming leadership of 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 at the point where the teacher does not know every member's name. Still another is that the apprentice leaders are ready. You'll sense when your class is pregnant! Then it's just a matter of preparing for the arrival of that new class!¹⁶

Reach: The Power of a Holy Conversation

There is power in one class. There's also power in one conversation. Especially if it's a holy conversation. What are the ingredients of a holy conversation? Let God's Word help answer that question.

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah ... so that I might reveal it as I am required to speak. Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

Colossians 4:2-6

Honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect...

1 Peter 3:15-16

A conversation is holy when people agree to hear each other's stories. It is holy when you talk about destination. It is holy when it is gracious—and salty! Some translations of Colossians 4:6 even use the word winsome to describe this engaging and holy conversation. I don't think we typically associate witnessing with the word *winsome*!

Transformational Church authors @edstetzer and @thomrainer are avid devotees of Twitter. I laugh when Dr. Rainer talks about some of the opportunities he has to tweet about his faith with a skeptical follower on Twitter. He calls it being a "Twittness." To me, that captures the essence of the idea of being a witty and engaging witness!

So where can a person get "salt" for a holy conversation? In a Sunday School class! Especially one that's on mission. Do you recall the chart from the previous chapter about the group levels (page 35). Take a close look at the conversations row. Groups provide different kinds of "salt" for conversations depending on whether they are simply a Bible study group, have moved to experiencing community, or are involved in mission. The mission stories are some of the best ones! Allowing people to tell their mission stories will motivate others to get on mission as well. Inviting people to tell their story to illustrate

a lesson point, photo bulletin boards, ending the class with a share time, and prayer requests based upon mission stories are all ways these stories can be shared.

Asking the Wrong Question?

Perhaps we're asking the wrong question: "What can we do to get more people to join our church or class?" Perhaps a better question would be "What can our church or class do to make our community a better place to live?"¹⁷ A creative, missional response to that question will provide your class members with a lot of "salty" stories!

Stories from Cornerstone Church

Greg Brewer is the Christian Education Pastor at Cornerstone Church in Madison, Tennessee, an Assembly of God church operate an excellent Sunday School program. Last year, Brewer challenged every adult class to find a need in the community and plan a ministry project to address it. And the classes responded!

One adopted a fire hall. Three adopted different elementary schools, each with different needs. One furnished the room of a young immigrant who was sleeping on his floor. Another class adopted the maternity ward at Nashville's Metro General Hospital. Two gave away free gas, washing the windshields of the folks who took advantage of the offer. Another replaced the leaky bathroom of a senior saint. Two classes went together to tackle an external makeover of an old house. Still another cleaned and planted flowers at a neglected neighborhood park. My favorite was the class led by teachers Henry and Pat White. Their class adopted an assisted living facility, purchasing a flat screen TV and a Wii® console. Greg sent me photos of the senior adult residents enjoying a Wii® bowling tournament. As you can imagine, the ministry at the nursing home continues, with the gift of time and fun paving the way for holy conversations.

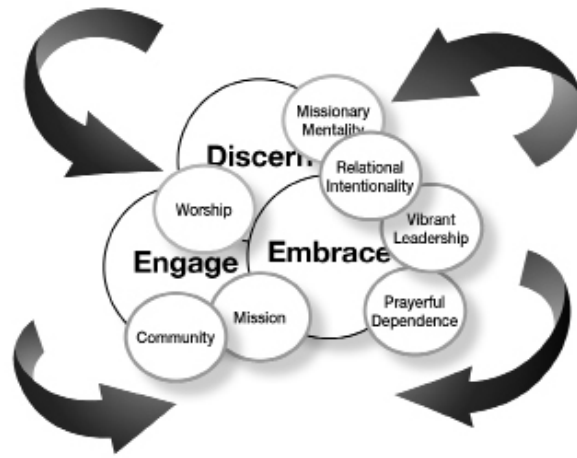
Beyond Judea...

In Acts 1:8, Jesus challenged His disciples to spread the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the world. A class can "go" to a remote part of the earth in their minds and hearts by adopting an Unreached People Group.¹⁸ A class might literally take a prayer walk in a local neighborhood or virtually take one in an international location. It might volunteer to serve Thanksgiving dinner at a rescue mission together. Or provide the support for a student mission trip to Chicago. Or send a group from the class on a construction trip to Brazil. Or a sports camp in Africa. Or....

What Stories do You Have?

I am starting a collection of stories of community service and missions through Sunday School classes like those illustrated above. If you have a story, send it to me at sundayschool@lifeway.com —preferably with a photo attached. I hope to be able to post them online as a source of encouragement and ideas for other Sunday School classes that want to become missional small communities!

[David Francs (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]



Conclusion: Connection, Catharsis, Convergence

Members of TCs “believe that Christ is busy in their midst, building a church for His glory, the good of the city, for calling the lost to salvation and the believer to a thriving relationship with the King.” 19

But where does our class start? Anywhere you want! That’s the unique principle of connection discovered in the TC research. The process is not linear. You can start at any point and move to any other.

The principle of catharsis is used to describe that event, insight, crisis, awakening, or some other dynamic that jolted a church toward a transformational path. Convergence is the term used to describe what the diagram above attempts to illustrate. The various elements are not discrete with clear boundaries between them. Stories of connection and community inevitably include accounts of mission activity in an environment of prayerful dependence prompted by the challenge of a vibrant leader that produces relational intentionality and causes people to worship!

So it doesn’t really matter where you start. Just start! My prayer is that your group will choose to be a Transformational Class, a class where Transformational Church really goes to Sunday School!

Sandy’s Story: Women with Purpose Class

Sandy Maddox is a speaker for women’s events. She’s married to Jim Maddox, LifeWay’s Florida consultant. And she’s a Sunday School teacher. A few months ago, I asked our consultants about stories of Sunday School classes that reflected the seven elements in TC. Jim told Sandy about my request. Her story is a fitting conclusion to this book. Thanks to Sandy for sharing it!

David,

I recently read Transformational Church. I was so pleased to learn that our scorecard had an actual name/method assigned to it (our approach was relational and intentional; who knew?). This should be suggested, if not required, reading for everyone who holds a position of leadership in the church. Especially anyone who teaches.

Three years ago, in May 2007, at First Baptist Church Orlando, I was asked to start a women’s Sunday School class. With a core of six ladies, Women with Purpose was begun. My challenge to them from day one: first and foremost, to be purpose-focused, to bring honor and glory to God, and to serve Him only (missional/worship and prayerful dependence).

Secondly, we would reach out to all women (relational/community) without regard to needs, baggage, or experiences. We want every woman who walks through our door to feel as though her presence is a gift to us and we are honored she came our way (embrace: to transform lives by transformed lives). Their stories and how WWP members have ministered and disciplined them is a book of its own!

In an effort to keep this concise, a few facts...

~Over the past three years we have averaged enrolling one a week. Many have matured in their faith and God has led them to various areas of service within the church and beyond.

~We are in the process of starting a second class for the women who attend the first worship service. We will have WWP at 9:15 and at 10:45.

~Some employees at McDonald's (not members of FBC Orlando) asked if we could offer a Bible study as their shift changed in the afternoon. This class, meeting in McDonald's, affectionately became known as McWomen with Purpose!

~A recent survey revealed that WWP members serve in over 30 ministries and volunteer opportunities in our church, community, and home as well as foreign missions (leadership with missionary mentality).

~ WWP members carry and distribute specially designed business cards and postcard invitations with pertinent information about Women with Purpose: when, where, and so on. This has been a very effective (intentional) outreach tool.

~Just over a year ago, God called one of our ladies with a passion for intercessory prayer to begin Women With Purpose Prayer Ministry. This ministry is now worldwide with satellite WWP prayer partners/groups in Italy, Australia, Spain, Jamaica, Africa, and Canada as well as points across the United States.

In a recent meeting with some leadership in this class, I shared excerpts from Transformational Church. They were moved and inspired. They identified and aligned themselves with one particular quote: "We pray because our vision exceeds our ability".

What God has done through these ladies is beyond my words. It is through God and God alone. Ephesians 3:20.

Sandy Maddox [David Francis (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]

Endnotes

1. Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 32-33.
2. For additional insight, see *Connect3: The Power of One Sunday School Class* by David Francis. Free download available at www.lifeway.com/sundayschool
3. Free download available at www.lifeway.com/sundayschool.
4. For additional insight about the beginning of the Sunday School movement, visit www.gracemagazine.org.uk/articles/historical/raikes.htm.

5. Dr. Orville Boyd Jenkins, "What Is a People Group?" People Groups [online] [cited 11 October 2010]. Available from the Internet: www.peoplegroups.org/WIAPGfaq.aspx. For more information, visit www.peoplegroups.org, a site maintained by the Global Research department of the International Mission Board.
6. *Inside North Point* [online], [cited 11 October 2010]. Available from the Internet: www.insidenorthpoint.org/groups/faqs.
7. Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialities, 2003), 39-59.
8. See *Connect3: The Power of One Sunday School Class* by David Francis.
9. Arthur Flake, *Building a Standard Sunday School* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1922), 3.
10. For more information about LifeSpan, visit www.lifeway.com/lifespan.
11. To order LifeWay devotional resources, visit www.lifeway.com/magazines.
12. See *The Discover Triad: Three Facets of a Dynamic Sunday School Class* by David Francis. Free download available at www.lifeway.com/sundayschool.
13. See *Connect3: The Power of One Sunday School Class* by David Francis.
14. See *Great Expectations: Planting Seeds for Sunday School Growth* by David Francis. Free download available at www.lifeway.com/sundayschool.
15. See *Connect3: The Power of One Sunday School Class* by David Francis.
16. See *Great Expectations: Planting Seeds for Sunday School Growth* by David Francis.
17. See *I-6: A Six-Lane Strategy Toward an Inviting Sunday School* by David Francis. Free download available at www.lifeway.com/sundayschool.
18. For information on adopting an Unreached People Group, visit www.imb.org.
19. Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 228. [David Francis (2012). *Transformational Class*. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]

Other LifeWay Resources by David Francis

- *Spiritual Gifts: A Practical Guide to How God Works Through You*
- *The 5-Step Formula for Sunday School Growth*
- *The 3D Sunday School: A Three Dimensional Strategy to Help Members and Leaders Fulfill the Great Commission*
- *I-6: A Six-Lane Strategy Toward an Inviting Sunday School*
- *The Discover Triad: Three Facets of a Dynamic Sunday School Class*
- *Connect3: The Power of One Sunday School Class*
- *Great Expectations: Planting Seeds for Sunday School Growth*

[David Francis (2012). *Transformational Class*. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]

Additional Help

In addition to the books by David Francis, check out these Sunday School resources for equipping Sunday School leaders.

- **Transformational Class: Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School, Sunday School Emphasis Kit 2011**

This Kit provides resources to help a church conduct an organized year-long emphasis built around *Transformational Class: Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School* and the seven elements from *Transformational Church*. Also included are leadership meeting ideas (by age-group) built around the 7 elements of Transformational Church, a promotional poster set, teaching plans and support for training Sunday School (or small group) leaders, an administrative guide, and sermon ideas provided by Dr. Thom Rainer, Dr. Ed Stetzer, and Philip Nation. The Kit is available at LifeWay Christian Stores or at www.lifeway.com.

- **Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations**

An in-depth analysis of what thriving congregations are doing to accomplish the goals of more people following Christ, more believers growing in their faith, and more churches making an impact on their communities.

- **www.lifeway.com/sundayschool**

Find resources, free articles, and links to other helpful information at this Web site. Add it to your list of favorites and visit often!

- **eSource Electronic Newsletters**

Receive the monthly newsletter for anyone interesting in growing a Sunday School/Bible study ministry. To subscribe, visit www.lifeway.com/newsletters and opt in to receive this and other newsletters.

- **Associations and State Conventions**

Your local association and state convention have trained leaders and other valuable resources available to help you grow your Sunday School ministry.

- **www.sundayschoolleader.com**

The State Sunday School Directors' Association maintains this blog to help Sunday School leaders sharpen their skills and network with others. [David Francis (2012). Transformational Class. LifeWay Christian Resources. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]