

# Faith Pulpit

## Implementing the New Testament Emphasis in Adult Teaching Ministries

The first article demonstrated that teachers and teaching are two essential components of a New Testament church at any age level. This second article focuses specifically on the Bible teaching ministries for adults.

### **ADULT TEACHING MINISTRIES TODAY**

Churches today utilize three main Bible teaching ministries for adults:

- Adult Sunday School classes (sometimes called adult Bible fellowships),
- Specialized Bible studies (such as men's and women's Bible studies), and
- Small groups (small groups of adults who meet at various times; sometimes called cell groups or life groups).

All of these ministries can serve a useful role in Bible teaching, but how do they compare when evaluated against the New Testament emphasis on teachers and teaching?

### **TEACHERS**

The leaders of specialized Bible studies and small groups can and should be involved in teaching, but often their role is largely leading discussions. I believe adult Sunday School teachers most closely represent the concept of teachers as described in the New Testament. In an adult Sunday School class a man or woman spends several days (ideally an entire week) studying a Bible passage, shapes the passage into a lesson format (often with the help of published curriculum), and presents an organized, coherent lesson to the class on Sunday. Such a teaching time is an essential part of the New

Testament's Bible education program.

Some may say that many adult Bible teachers are doing a poor job, and therefore we need to utilize other adult teaching ministries. Admittedly, some adult teachers do not teach well, but the problem is not with the traditional format of adult Sunday School classes. The problem is our training and preparation of adult Bible teachers. Pastors and church leaders should take a greater role in developing adult Bible teachers.

## TEACHING

As noted above, specialized Bible studies and small groups involve Bible teaching to a degree, but that is not usually their design or focus. On the other hand, adult Sunday School excels at Bible teaching because of its structure and because of its potential to provide systematic coverage of the entire Bible.

**Structure:** The very structure of adult Sunday School, with a teacher presenting a Bible lesson each Sunday, lends to a strong Bible teaching focus. Fellowship and caring are certainly part of a good adult Sunday School class, but the focus is on Bible teaching which reflects the New Testament emphasis.

**Systematic Coverage:** Adult Sunday School excels at Bible teaching also because it has the potential to cover the whole Bible systematically. I say "potential" here because admittedly a teacher of an adult class can choose to teach his favorite books or subjects and not cover the entire Bible. But the potential for covering the entire Bible exists in adult Sunday School whereas it does not exist in specialized Bible studies and small groups.<sup>1</sup>

Lest some might wonder, I believe that covering the entire Bible in a systematic way is essential for a New Testament church. Consider two relevant Scripture passages.

- **2 Timothy 3:16, 17** states that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." All the Scripture comes from God and is profitable; therefore, we need to study all the Scripture in our adult education program, not just the teacher's favorite books.
- **Acts 20:28** records Paul's farewell words to the Ephesians elders. "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." Paul instructed the elders in all the teachings of the Bible, and we should adopt this same "whole counsel of God" approach. That means we do not hesitate to teach all parts of the Bible and all the doctrines of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

In the statement above I used the phrase "in a systematic way." By that I mean our adult studies need to be part of a planned approach to covering the Bible.<sup>3</sup> If we take a "what shall we study next?" approach, we will likely not cover all the Scripture. I believe a systematic coverage of the whole Bible is essential for a New Testament church.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR CHURCHES TODAY**

From what we have stated, adult Sunday School teachers then are an important part of a church's Bible teaching program. Children and youth teachers are equally important, but those teachers do not lead their students through the entire Bible. That role falls to the adult Sunday School teachers. On that basis I believe adult Sunday School teachers are really the cornerstone of a church's Bible education program.<sup>4</sup> Pastors should see adult teachers as valuable allies to their ministry and take a major role in developing adult teachers and classes. I present here four suggestions for pastoral involvement in adult classes.

### ***1. Take an active role in identifying and training adult Sunday School teachers.***

Quality adult teachers do not just "happen" in a church. They need to be developed and trained. A pastor can begin by identifying men (and women if the church has a women's class) who have the potential for being an adult teacher. The pastor can then meet with these people for mentoring and development. This mentoring and developing process can take several forms, but usually it involves meeting with the men and women to train them how to be an effective teacher. This training can include the role of a teacher, caring for people, lesson preparation, and adult teaching methods.

Many churches, even larger churches, have difficulty finding adults teachers. If a pastor is developing and training adult teachers this way, someone will usually be ready to step into a class when a vacancy occurs.

### ***2. Promote adult Sunday School.***

If indeed adult Sunday School classes play such an important role in a church education program, then a pastor will want to promote it publicly. He can do so through such venues as announcements and adult teacher recognition times.

One of the primary goals of promoting adult Sunday School is to encourage more people to attend. Every church seems to have a growing number of adults who come only for the morning worship service and never attend a Bible class. These people need to be encouraged to attend Sunday School so they can be strengthened in their faith and handle life from a Biblical perspective.

### ***3. Control the curriculum in adult Sunday School classes.***

If an adult Sunday School class is to achieve its goal of providing systematic coverage of the entire Bible, then a pastor will want to determine the curriculum of the class to make sure it covers the entire Bible. I do not think it best to allow adult teachers to determine what they teach for that can lead to

coverage of certain books and topics and omission of others.

One of the best ways for a pastor to control what is taught in adult classes is to have the adult teachers use published materials that take people through the Bible over a number of years.<sup>5</sup>

#### ***4. Meet with adult teachers regularly.***

A pastor usually meets regularly with his deacons because they are such important allies to his ministry. In view of the important role adult Sunday School teachers play in a church, perhaps the pastor should meet with them as well to continue mentoring and training them. He could meet with them as a part of regular teachers' meetings or at a separate time.

These suggestions admittedly put more responsibility on the pastor of a church. If, however, adult Sunday School classes and their teachers are so vital to his ministry, such an investment of time and effort will be well worth it. This kind of approach will help the pastor fulfill the Biblical directive Paul gave to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2. "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

## **Works Cited**

1. We do not fault specialized Bible studies or small groups for not covering the entire Bible for that is not their nature or design. The point remains, however, that only adult Sunday School has the potential to cover the entire Bible.
2. This approach to Bible teaching determines what kind of curriculum a church uses. Interdenominational curriculum usually covers only what is acceptable to a large number of churches, which means it leaves out essential Biblical distinctives. We want curriculum that covers all the books and all the teachings of the Bible. Regular Baptist Press ([regularbaptistpress.org](http://regularbaptistpress.org)) adult Sunday School curriculum is my choice because it provides courses that cover all the books of the Bible along with studies of the major doctrines of the Scripture from a dispensational, historic Baptist perspective.
3. Curriculum publishers call this planned approach the "scope and sequence" of the Bible studies. See the Regular Baptist Press adult scope and sequence at [regularbaptistpress.org/sunday-school/adults/truth-for-living](http://regularbaptistpress.org/sunday-school/adults/truth-for-living). I believe adult teachers should use a published curriculum with a planned scope and sequence rather than selecting what they want to teach.
4. To say that adult Sunday School teachers are the cornerstone of the church's Bible education program does not in any way minimize the role of the pastor's teaching ministry. Pastors do not usually try to cover all the books of the Bible in a systematic fashion. That is not their purpose and would probably not be workable in a Sunday preaching schedule. Their purpose is to preach from selected passages of Scripture that minister to a broader audience than adult Sunday School classes do.
5. Regular Baptist Press provides such a curriculum. Visit [RegularBaptistPress.org/](http://RegularBaptistPress.org/) for its scope and sequence of adult studies.

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#### **[Other Articles](#)**

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