

The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white dots. On the left side, there are several circular elements: a large scale with tick marks and numbers from 140 to 260, and several smaller circles with dashed lines and arrows, suggesting a technical or scientific theme.

WHAT THEY DON'T TEACH
YOU IN *SUNDAY SCHOOL*

I LOVE SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

I love small group Bible study.

I have been in small groups for years and I have led small groups for years.

I think every Christian of any age should join a small group.

But please remember that the value of the group comes from what YOU put into it. If you are passive, you won't get the benefits that you were hoping for.

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO GET FROM A SMALL GROUP?

I am guessing that most people join a small group for these reasons:

- Bible study – to learn more about the Bible and God
- Friends – to get to know people at a deeper level
- A support group – be around people who will encourage me
- A place to serve – a place to get involved, not just attend

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO GIVE TO A SMALL GROUP?

As time goes by, some people report feeling that they receive less value from being in a group. Most Christians would be happier if they shift their motivation from “what do I get” to “what can I give”

- How can I help lead a group
- How can I help other people grow spiritually
- How can I be a friend to those who need a friend
- How can I help organize the class to serve others outside our group
- How can I help people come to faith in Christ

PASSIVE LEARNING ISN'T THE BEST WAY

We invite people to come attend our class (and we ought to) but I fear that many classes have a strategy of passive learning (come and listen)

Few other places in our society think that passive learning alone is enough:

- Doctors and veterinarians practice for years in order to learn
- The military practice their skills every day for years
- Athletes might actively practice 30 hours before a 1-hour game
- Students have to read, do homework, take tests and practice

PASSIVE LEARNING ISN'T THE BEST WAY

- We use lecture because the Bible study curriculum seems to encourage it. The book gives us some Bible verses and many pages of commentary about those verses.
- In order to get through all the material, I have seen teachers almost read it out loud to the class word for word for an hour
- This kind of passive learning (just listening) doesn't work, or at least it is not as effective as active learning

WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

Active Learning would look more like this in a S.S. class:

- Class members read the Bible verses at home before they come
- They interact with the verses (“Which three are my favorite verses?” “What can I learn about God?” “What can I learn about people?” “How could I apply this verse to my life?”
- When they get to the class meeting, the teacher lets class members share what they read and what stood out to them.
- The class leader has 5 to 10 discussion questions that the class discusses. Many of these questions involve application.

WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

Class time would involve *practice* (engagement & participation)

- Say a memory verse, or several, to someone else
- Tell your story of faith to someone else in class
- Two people share a prayer request and pray for one another
- Practice explaining the gospel to someone else in class
- A class member explaining a key point from the commentary to the whole class (“this is what this Greek word means” or “this is why the Samaritans didn’t get along with the Jews”)
- Class members take turns being a discussion group leader

WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

- A class member chooses to sit and talk to someone they don't know well, not just with their old friends
- A class member chooses to sit with a new guest and later walks with them and sits with them in the worship service
- A class member asks someone else how they can pray for them
- A class member takes a supper meal to another family or invites them to come eat at their house
- A class member asks someone if they have questions about spiritual things or how a person can receive Christ

WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

- Helping with yardwork for a widow
- Building a wheelchair ramp
- Arranging a fun event for single Moms and their children
- Taking meals to a family that had sickness or hospitalization
- Serving meals at the homeless shelter
- Inviting neighbors to a block party at your house
- Helping with your church's children's camp or being a chaperone on a student mission trip

GROUP TIME SHOULD FEEL LIKE FAMILY

- Some small groups are arranged like a classroom in rows. Good communication and relationships are easier when we sit in circles and look each other face-to-face
- Discussion and prayer requests are easier in a smaller informal group (4-6), not in a group of 10 to 30 people

SMALL GROUPS MUST TRAIN NEW LEADERS

- Someone being the only leader of a class for 20 years is admirable, but not ideal.
- A better approach would be for every leader to constantly be training new leaders and giving them a chance to lead almost every Sunday, or at least once or twice a month

WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

- How could our 6th grade class help the 1st graders?
- How could our older adult class help the newlywed class?
- How could our young married class help the single adults?
- How could our college class help the music ministry?
- How could our “wealthy” class provide children’s camp scholarships?
- How could our children’s class help the older adult class?

FRIENDSHIPS DON'T JUST HAPPEN

- It takes being intentional to form a new friendship.
- Just being in a classroom together doesn't make friendships.
- Many people are content to just attend. They don't reach out and neither do you. Everybody wishes it were better.
- Classes need to plan time outside of class – meals, service projects, sports, games, camping, and parties.
- Sit with your class members in the worship service

WE HAVE TO BE DILIGENT TO INVITE NEW PEOPLE

- Invite new people who came to the worship service to your class
- Build an email list – send it out every week
- Really get to know a new guest, spend time with them
- Have a fellowship time at least every month or more often
- Sit with a new guest in the worship service
- Invite a new guest to lunch or supper at your home
- Invite guests to come help with a community service project

SMALL GROUP LEADERS NEED ONGOING TRAINING

- Sometimes we recruit a new leader and give no training
- Sometime our training is a workshop for one hour a year
- Sometimes we think that the S.S. book gives a leader guidance – but it doesn't give strategy, it just gives scripture commentary about the lesson
- Sometimes we think being a good speaker is the same as being a good leader
- We train people how to work on teams, not be a loner

YOUR SMALL GROUP DOESN'T HAVE TO MEET ON SUNDAY MORNING OR IN A CLASSROOM

- It is okay to have a class that meets Sunday at lunch.
- Your class could meet Sunday night or Wednesday night.
- Your class could meet in a home during the week.
- Your class could meet in a home near the church on Sunday morning.

IF YOUR CLASS ISN'T SUCCEEDING ON SUNDAY MORNING, IT MIGHT WORK BETTER IN A HOME

- “We had three on Sunday morning. Now we have twelve meeting on Thursday night.”
- “They were timid about inviting friends to church, but we have a crowd when we meet in a home.”
- “It felt rushed for 45 minutes on Sunday, but now everybody hangs around for 2 hours in our home.”

IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW BIG YOUR CLASS GETS

- Some churches try to keep every class at 10-12 attendance
- It actually is okay for a student, college or married adult class to have hundred people attending. But don't lecture to 100 people sitting in rows. After you welcome all 100 people, make some announcements and introduce the lesson - then you can break out into smaller groups of 6 to 10 people for discussion.

IT'S OKAY TO HAVE VERY SMALL GROUPS

- In addition to S.S. classes and small groups in homes, one church also added groups of 3 people who met once a week for an hour. Three women or three men committed to meet together for one year and read one or two Bible study books and discuss what they read once a week.
- If you are hoping to have 15 people and you only have 3 it feels like a failure. But if you are only supposed to have 3 people and you have 3 – it works!