

**Nametags:** Make sufficient number for anticipated attendance, and cut out before session. Punch hole in top and provide lanyard or string to tie around neck; or provide tape to attach to garment.



# CONNECT<sup>3</sup>

Level	Class	Community	Commission
Churched	Member	Minister	Missionary
Focus	Me	Us	Them
Unchurched	Conversation	Community	Conversion
Biblical Mandate	Great Confession	Great Commandment	Great Commission
Conversation	What we learned	What they did for me	Where we went
Prayer	General requests	Needs of others	Lost people
Records	Class list	Ministry list	Prospect list
Organization	Teacher, secretary	Fellowship, ministry, prayer, care group leaders	Missions leader, outreach leader, apprentices, associate
Biblical Concepts	Kerygma	Koinonia	Kenosis

# READING #1 THE CLASS LEVEL:

## Connecting With God's Word

**Open Groups** are ongoing groups that encourage newcomers every time the group meets. Open groups provide a complete Bible study experience at every session. Each session stands alone though they may sometimes be related through a theme or topic. The most important key is to make sure Bible study is the center of the group experience. The primary purpose at the class level in open groups is unapologetically Bible study and teaching for the intended purpose of application in the lives of those participating. Bible study must be relevant! Successful open groups are fueled by the expectation that their class members are studying the Bible on their own throughout the week.

**Enrollment:** At the class level the goal is for every participant to become a member of the group. Enrollment says to guests, we'd like to get to know you; we'd like to invite you into our group; we welcome your contribution to our class. We actually want members in our Sunday School classes who are not-yet-believers – people who have not yet pledged their allegiance to Jesus, it let's them belong before they believe. Enrolling as a member of our class does not make you a member of the church, nor does it obligate you to become one. Communicating both points is important. We want Sunday School members to understand that enrolling in the class, making a commitment to Christ, and requesting church membership are three distinct and separate decisions.

**Connecting to Christ: The Great Confession:** If we have not-yet-believers connected to our class, what is our desire for them? That they connect with Jesus Christ personally! A person enrolled in Sunday School is about one hundred times more likely to receive Christ than a person who is not enrolled in a class or small group.

**Assimilation:** A word that is used by church leaders to describe the process - and the problem – of connecting to a local church the people who accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness and eternal life. The problem primarily arises from an approach to evangelism that suggests this process; conversation, conversion, community. This approach suggests that the normal way to reach people for Christ is to present the gospel to them, lead them to pray to receive Christ, and then try to help them connect with a group or church where they can grow in Christ. Thus, the problem of assimilation is accomplishing the third step in that process. And it is a real problem because unfortunately it is quite rare when this approach actually results in the person's getting to the third step – being assimilated into a local church. What if we changed the order of the process? What if our primary process were conversation, community, conversion? When a person comes to Christ this way, guess what happens to the problem of assimilation? There's not one, they are already assimilated!

**Indicators of Connectedness:** At the class level there are two progressive indicators that a member is connected to the class or group; 1) participation or attendance on a regular basis. 2) preparation, using the Bible study materials in advance to be prepared for the class time. At the class level the way the room is set up has a significant effect on members' participation and their ability to connect during the class. Rows of chairs with a lectern at the front communicates that the leader will do most of the talking and the learners will sit and listen. A semicircle with the leader sitting or standing in the open end communicates that there will be some level of participation, but the leader is still clearly in charge. A full circle communicates that the leader is a fellow learner, and there is going to be a lot of interaction in this class. It is also the most efficient use of space because you use every wall. What about tables? Tables almost always communicate that this is a closed, academic sort of group. In addition, tables are an incredibly inefficient use of valuable space.

**Organization at the Class Level:** On the most basic level you need just two positions: teacher(s) and secretary. Why the (s) after teacher? Two reasons. Preschool and children's classes need multiple teachers. Period! Student and adult classes may have more than one teacher also. The goal at the Class level is to provide a consistently satisfying Bible study experience that people hate to miss.

**Conversational Impact:** How can actively connecting at the Class level season your conversations with lost people? As you apply Bible truths to your life, you'll become more and more confident that loving, trusting, and obeying God is the absolutely best way to live. More importantly, you'll become more and more comfortable sharing what you are learning – and living – in the course of everyday conversations. You won't sound preachy. It will just become the natural, unforced "salt" in your speech (see Colossians 4:5).

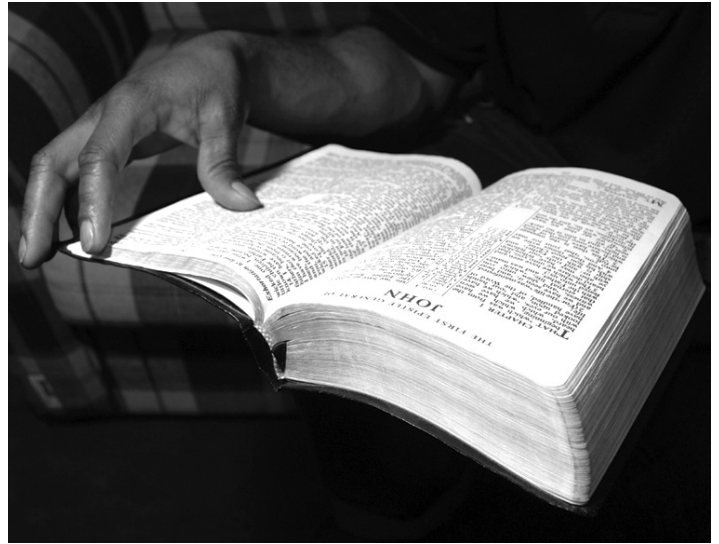
**Growth and Evangelism:** Growth and evangelism are pretty much about being welcoming toward people God sends to your class. What kinds of things does a class do to create a welcome environment for newcomers? Here are 5 ideas:

- 1) The teacher and some members should plan to arrive at least 10 minutes before the class start time to greet newcomers.
- 2) Someone is designated to complete any forms that need to be filled out while others are getting to know the newcomers.
- 3) Introduce the newcomer to two or three others in the class who may share similar interests, or vocational similarities.
- 4) Someone might invite the newcomer to join them in worship, and if you want to go the extra mile invite them and their family to join you for lunch following worship.
- 5) Someone should contact the newcomer in the following week to invite them back. Is this really evangelism? Probably not, but it is important, because creating a welcoming class is the foundation for invitation, which is the foundation for evangelism.

**Nametags:** The most obvious reason for nametags at the Class level is making guests feel welcome. Nothing makes a newcomer's anxiety crash like nametags. Nametags enhance discussion and prayer. How? Because people can confidently call one another by name. No other single tool will so effortlessly help your class to connect.

**Prayer:** What a class prays for may be the best indicator of whether it is functioning at the Class, Community, or Commission level. At the Class level of development prayer requests are typically general in nature. Prayer for a friend's health, elected leaders, social concerns, and victims of natural disasters seem to summarize the idea of general in nature.

Studying God's Word as a class is important. It is indeed foundational to every other level. Without this level the other levels have no center of gravity. This is the level at which everyone begins their spiritual journey.



# READING #2 THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

**What is Community?** Community is a place where you feel safe. Safe to be yourself, to share your thoughts, to express your feelings, to ask questions, to challenge the ideas of others, safe to laugh, and to cry. To be in community is to feel accepted, to be appreciated, and included. Author M. Scott Peck reminds us; “the great enemy of community is exclusivity.” For most groups it is easier to exclude than include. True communities are always reaching to extend themselves. Open groups must be very intentional about remaining open while it becomes a community. The natural inertia of a small group will lead it toward being a closed group. The group does not necessarily become closed on purpose it just happens. So a group that is designed to be open must be very intentional about remaining an open group.

**Connecting to Community: The Great Commandment:** The Great Commandment provides the biblical mandate for the Community level. Loving those around you in the context of your shared love for God is the basis of Christian community. Your class or group is a great place to practice the Great Commandment as you become a community. In reality many not-yet-believers will not make the Great Confession at the Class level. They need to experience the Great Commandment community first. Those who make the Great Confession in the context of community are even more likely to remain active.

**A Key Transition: From Class Roll to Ministry Roll:** In a class the people who have enrolled are put on a class roll. That is, the member has made a commitment to attend the class. A ministry list, on the other hand, connotes that the primary commitment is from class or community to the member. The group has made a commitment to minister to and with the member.

**The Third Place:** A popular chain of coffee shops has a strategic intent to become “the third place” for its customers. What is the third place? At least in American society two places dominate the time and experience of most people. The first is home. The second is either work or school. Most people have time for only one more significant place. In their book, *Essential Church?* authors Thom S. Rainer, and Sam Rainer contend; “We believe the church must reclaim the status of the third place.” If we do I believe it will be because many classes have become intentional about becoming communities.

**Nametags:** One of the first steps a class can take to move to the level of Community is to make sure everybody can call everybody else by name. Just know that the connection between nametags and community – at least an open community – can be very strong. Here’s one twist you can use to connect to one another. Set a standard about how the class makes nametags, using three lines. 1. First name in large letters that can be seen across the room. 2. Last name in

smaller letters that can be seen when you're talking with someone face-to-face. 3. Another line that changes each week. Each week everyone is asked to print something different [favorite vacation spot, hometown, hobby, favorite sports team, etc].

**From Members to Ministers:** The goal for the Community level is for an increasing number of members to become ministers who serve one another. Serving within the class is a mind-set, or maybe better a heart-set. This kind of group does the kinds of things you'd expect a community to do: arranging meals when someone experiences a birth or death, visiting hospitalized members, recognizing birthdays and anniversaries, and so forth. As it develops it moves beyond just doing caring activities and really starts caring. A key indicator that a class has become community is that it likes to have fun together. Fellowship is a spiritual discipline that takes planning. If you really want to see your group bond in fellowship, do a ministry project together. Your group may want to start with baby-step projects like collecting school supplies, clothing or food for your church's benevolence ministry. Nothing beats actually doing something purposeful together.

**Organization at the Community Level:** A class that decides to move to the Community level will require more leaders such as someone to coordinate fellowship activities. Another leader might be enlisted to coordinate the ministry activities and to respond to members in times of crisis. A prayer leader may be another helpful leader at the Community level.

**Care-Groups: Key to Community:** If you really want to become community you'll organize into care-groups which are lead by Care-Group Leaders. A care-group is a group of five to seven men or women who are shepherded by a care-group leader. I strongly advocate single-gender care-groups even in married co-ed classes, and especially in single-adult coed classes. Why? Because when care-groups are made up of couples and the care-group leaders are couples, what typically happens is that the women contact the women, but the men never get contacted or make any contacts. Here is a possible twist on the same-gender concept: you could enlist a couple to be care-group leaders and assign spouses to each of their groups. That way at times the two groups could fellowship or minister together as couples, even though they are in separate care-groups. What's the job of a care-group leader? Contact every member of the care-group every week. Do you mean every absent member every week? Nope. I mean every member every week. The contact can be face-to-face, by phone, or e-mail. The role of the care-group leader is to help members connect in community. The goal is simply to stay connected with every person in the group and to report news and needs to the teacher and in urgent cases to the pastoral staff.

**Member Expectations at the Community Level:** The ultimate goal at the Community level is for every member to be a minister.

**Conversational Implications:** As your class or group experiences the Community level, you'll add another kind of seasoning (see Col. 4:5) to your conversations. It won't be forced or premeditated. It will just be a part of the everyday stuff you talk about. You'll increasingly be able to share things like: "In our Sunday School class we have small groups called care groups. Last Saturday our care group spent the morning trimming the yard of a friend recovering from surgery." Or "We had a Bible study class party Friday night. We went bowling. Most of us had not bowled in a long time, some ever. But we had a blast!"

**Growth and Evangelism:**

In Essential Church? Research findings show that "a caring welcoming, authentic, and inspirational church is much more likely to assimilate its students." The findings are clear: people of all ages stick around if they are truly connected. And others will come back if you stay connected with them: "60 percent of formerly churched eighteen to thirty-five year olds are willing to return to church if a friend or acquaintance invited them." Most people need to experience the gospel as well as hear it. Many people need to hang around some Christians before they decide to become one. That's why it's important to move from class to community.



**Prayer:** At the Class level most prayers are rather general or distant in nature, while at the Community level they become more personal. We pray for our health, our job, and our children. It's important for newcomers to hear believers struggle with the challenges of life like everyone else. It is likewise important to celebrate answered prayers that demonstrate our God's faithfulness to all who will follow Him, so pray together in community!

# READING #3 THE COMMISSION LEVEL: CONNECTING TO THE WORLD

**From Member to Missionary:** The fruit of the Class level is active members who prepare for and regularly participate in the Bible study group. The fruit of the Community level is a growing number of ministers who develop meaningful relationships with others in the group. The fruit of the Commission level of class development is missionaries who enter a class covenant to do all the group can to fulfill the Great Commission. Class is about “me,” Community is about “us,” and Commission is about “them.” If you were appointed as an international missionary one of the first steps in your training would be language school. It’s where missionaries begin learning to understand the words of the people with whom God has called you to live and work, as well as the concepts and ideas behind those words. The Class level is sort of like language school! It’s where we future missionaries learn and understand God’s Word. Just learning the language will not be enough to be an effective missionary. You will also need to immerse yourself in the culture of your assigned people group. Your training will equip you to develop and draw people into community. All of that is foundational to your assignment: sharing the good news of Christ so that people are compelled to follow Jesus.

**Commission in Your Class and Church:** If your class practices open enrollment, welcoming both believers and nonbelievers, allowing people to belong before they believe, then you have a mission field right inside your own group. And it can be a growing mission field. All it takes is for each member to become intentional about inviting others. The next step for a class that wants to be intentional about becoming a missional team is to look beyond the class but within the ministry of the church. A good way to approach this is to focus on two concepts – release and reproduce.

**Release:** A great step for a class that wants to become missional is to release members to serve in preschool, children’s and student classes. Guess where all the adult leaders of preschool, children’s and student classes come from? Adult classes! Sadly, some classes bemoan the loss of an active member to a teaching assignment or another leadership role in a class with kids or students. But a missional class celebrates it! As you celebrate and support associate members as missionaries from your class, more and more members will answer the call to work with kids and students.

**Reproduce:** Another huge step for a missional class is to be intentional about reproducing itself. How will you know when it is time to birth a new group? One huge indicator is when the room is too full to provide empty chairs for guests. Another is the point when the teacher doesn’t know every member’s name. Still another indicator is that the apprentice leaders are ready. Key Factors in Successfully Birthing a Class: The number one key for successfully birthing a new class is this: don’t make anyone move with the new class who doesn’t want to. Remember, we

are not dividing a class; we are birthing one. We want it to be a joyous occasion, so we want to avoid complications at birth. In every session remind the group what your class has done to release and reproduce. Each week pray for associate members who serve as missionaries to kids and students elsewhere in Sunday School. Plan occasional fellowships with the class or group birthed. In doing this you give evidence to members and guests that yours is a Great Commission group!

**Growth and Evangelism:** Most important is this truth: the irreducible law of Kingdom growth is starting new units. What's a new unit? It is a new group, class, ministry team, preaching point, mission or a new church. In general new units grow faster and reach more new people than older units. Of course all of us can point to exceptions, but I have seldom heard of a class that failed if it was birthed following a careful, prayerful process like the one that has been described.

**Starting New Classes to Fill Ministry Gaps:** Sometimes you need to start a new group to fill in a gap in your existing ministry outreach. Here are some examples: College class; Nearly-weds and newlyweds class; Class for young singles; young adult class; DINK class (double income, no kids); class for empty nesters; couples without kids class; senior adult class; or a Pastor's class. Starting a gap class presents different challenges, however it's almost always OK to send out missionaries!

**Nametags:** All the reasons to wear nametags at the other two levels also apply to the Commission level:

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

**Conversational Implications:** Your stories get even better when your class reaches this level. When the Monday conversation at work turns to "what we did this weekend," you share "A group of us from my Sunday School class spent Saturday morning doing repair work at the house of one of our senior adults." One of the things I really like about our class is that we don't just have a great time studying the Bible, but we also do cool stuff together like what we did Saturday.

**Organization at the Commission Level:** The enlistment of an outreach /evangelism leader is the leading indicator that a class-or at least its teacher- has decided to move to the Commission level. The best person for this job is someone God has entrusted with the spiritual gift of evangelism. Studies show that God has given this gift to about 10 percent of the people in your church, so there is likely to be one in your class. Other possible leaders might be something like a mobilization leader, who helps each member discover their spiritual gifts and find a ministry, or a missions leader who helps the class have a missions awareness and to lead the class to participate in one or more of the three ways an individual or group can support a missions cause or project; pray, give, and/or go. Can you think of other functions/leaders that might be needed at the Commission level?

**Prayer:** Perhaps nothing indicates what level a class is operating on like its prayer list. At the Commission level prayers are for others but not for the same others we prayed for when we were at the Class level. The mark of a class that has really achieved the Commission level is a class that is intentional about evangelistic prayer. Members have identified the names-or at least the first names- of their friends, relatives, and neighbors who need to know our wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. My prayer for your class is that it will connect on all three levels; Class, Community, and Commission.





# MY DESIGN GUIDE SHEET

It is one year from today, and the members of your group are more connected to Christ and each other than ever before. The evidence of this is being felt throughout the community where you live. Your class members are more intentional than ever about living missional lives that carry out the work of the Great Commission, fueled by the Great Commandment. They are personally and intentionally inviting their friends to your class and many have made the Great Confession of Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and have begun the journey of their lives in Christ. Create your design for how this has happened using the questions below to guide your thinking:

- ❖ What intentional changes have you made personally as the leader/ teacher in your class?
- ❖ How has prayer impacted the growth of your class?
- ❖ What new leaders or initiatives have you enlisted or begun?
- ❖ What opportunities have provided increased fellowship or ministry?
- ❖ What major barriers did you face in implementing this new approach? How did you overcome them?
- ❖ Who had to be involved in order for this new approach to be effective?

You have 15 minutes for the completion of this exercise. You do not have to answer all of the questions above simply use them as a guide for your thinking as you develop your design. This design will help you in sharing your perspective, and arriving at helpful steps toward growth. When you've finished your design come back to the Focal Wall Report Area for further instructions.



# Our Next Steps...

# Kerygma

**Greek Word Meaning: Proclamation; Preaching; Announcement** The essence of the Gospel.

**Method:** Bible Study is for believers to be able to understand, share, and defend the essence of the good news: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. **Message:** Inherent in its preaching is an appeal to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone through faith alone. The anticipated result of the message so proclaimed is that people will experience salvation, becoming citizens of the kingdom of God and receiving eternal life – a life worth living forever. **Meaning:** Jesus is the center of the teaching ministry of Sunday School. Most people, whether or not they have a favorable opinion of evangelical Christians, are attracted to Jesus.

# Koinonia

**Greek Word Translated: Fellowship**

**Idea:** This word appears 20 times in the New Testament, and can include the ideas of sharing in common and communion. **Intent:** The key is being in something together, being united in purpose, serving alongside one another, agreeing with one another. **Instruct:** "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others."

**Philippians 2:1-4**

# Kenosis

**Greek Word Meaning: "to empty"**

**Personified:** "Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He *emptied* Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death – even to death on a cross." Philippians 2:5-8 **Pursuit:** God wants us to empty ourselves in ministry and missions. Kenosis is using the energy we get at the Class and Community levels to make a positive difference for the kingdom of God. **Pinnacle:** The pinnacle of development for any class is when it's participants empty themselves and pursue the co-mission with Jesus Christ daily!