

**PROSPECTING
FOR
GROWTH
IN THE BIBLE CLASS**

- * Growth comes from prospecting.**
- * Growth comes from discovering prospects.**
- * Growth comes from enrolling prospects.**
- * Growth comes from ministering to,
caring for, and enlisting
prospects.**
- * Growth comes from consistent
prospecting efforts.**

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PROSPECTING FOR GROWTH IN THE BIBLE CLASS

The purpose of this material is to aid the teacher, the outreach leader, and any other class member who is concerned and involved in helping to build the class. Growth occurs by actively and consistently prospecting with the aim of building the enrollment.

A pastor reminded his Sunday School staff that every decision they would make together would be a growth decision. He said, "To put it in different words, this means that every decision will relate to our reaching unreached people. They are our concern: the mission of the church is to reach them."

These were wise words. If any Bible School class (Sunday School) is going to become what God wants it to be, prospecting will be an integral part of the work. Only in this way can new people be enrolled and growth be engendered. If we are going to do the work of God as a Bible Study organization (Sunday School) then we must be prospecting for new people constantly. Not for numbers' sake, but for the sake of souls for whom Christ died.

The more people we enroll, the more we will minister to. The goal is to enroll many, even the unsaved, and even prior to their attendance, if possible. This may be the first step toward their salvation. This gives us an open door to begin to work with them. In the small class unit they can be made to feel at home, and feel that people truly care. Hopefully, they will begin to feel that "these people have something I do not have." Prospecting in order to find reachable people is imperative, for we cannot minister to people whose lives we have not touched.

In this material we will cover the following:

Why Go Prospecting?

Where are the Prospects?

How Do We Discover Prospects?

How and Where and When Do We Enroll Prospects?

Why Go Prospecting?

Concern is the key word in relating to prospects. We search for them because we care. We contact them and visit them because we care. We provide space for them because we care. We train workers to reach them because we care. We witness to them because we care. We have group-care leaders to minister to them in their burdens, concerns, and needs because we care. We train and encourage the outreach leaders because we care.

An acceptable teaching ministry is effective because we are concerned for those we desire to see saved, disciplined, and reproducing for the Lord. Reaching out to prospects is an act of concern. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts will move us to prospect for the souls of men.

We care because God cared enough to give His Son, His "unspeakable gift." We care because Jesus loves man with an everlasting love, and at immeasurable price provided salvation for all who accept it. Christ loved us enough to die for us. We ought to love enough to reach out to the reachable ones He gives to us as we labor. (See John 4:34-38; I Corinthians 3: 5-9.)

We care because the Holy Spirit cares. The labor of prospecting for souls to reach them for Bible Study is a ministry of cooperation with the Holy Spirit and His outreach through us. Through His power, leadership, and filling, we will naturally want to reach the unreached. Through Him the lost will hear the word of truth and believe. (See Ephesians 1:13.) Because God cares we will care. We are His people; our churches are His; the Bible study is His. Through us He wants to love the souls of men.

Where Are The Prospects?

Actually, they are everywhere. They are in the ever-widening corridors of population, extending between major metropolitan areas. They are in the burgeoning bedroom communities. They are near our church. They are in the quiet, secluded country places; in the villages, towns, and busy cities.

We will find them among the rich and the near rich, among the poor and financially distressed. Some may be in the grips of poverty, or in the midst of some crisis. Some will be in the throes of marital problems and need someone who cares. Still others will be among the "up and outers," who are highly educated and seem to have all the world has to offer, but lack Christ.

If we search for them we will hear different languages, and see many colors of faces. They come from far and near, but they are near the church. We will find them among our friends, our relatives, and our own family. If we look for them we will find them among fellow club members, business associates, fellow workers, and schoolmates. Yes, indeed, they are everywhere -- and it is up to us to find them.

How Do We Discover Prospects?

Discovering prospects can be an exciting labor. Prospects usually are not seeking churches today; caring people seek after the prospects.

While Christ spoke to the masses in public places, He also went out into the "highways and byways" of life to seek out the individual. He was always seeking the individual in order to minister to that one. So must the caring church do so. As Jesus did, so the church and worker today must locate and identify persons who are prospects. The search for prospects by the caring worker of a Bible Study class should never stop. Discovering them may not always be easy, but the search for them should be constant. Prospects can be found.

- * A person is a prospect only when a church has the person's name, address, age, phone number, and if possible their spiritual condition.
- * A person can only be a prospect when that name is assigned to a department and a class -- hence, to the teacher and outreach leader of that particular class.
- * The purpose is to enroll the prospect in the Bible Study Class (S.S.) as soon as they come, or even prior to their first attendance if they are at all willing to be enrolled.

1. Identify unenrolled church members. As the prospect file is being prepared for each class, a search of the church membership roll should be made. Every church member not enrolled in the Bible Study hour could become a prospect, and the class where they belong should seek them out to enroll them.

2. Seek out all old accumulated records of prospects that may be on hand. We may have cards representing visitors from past months, or even members from past years, who may be reenlisted to attend. Possible remnants of a visitation plan of the past may yield names of prospects.

Working through old Vacation Bible School enrollments of past summers may become a source of solid prospects. We need to glean from every potential source. Bus records would also give us potential contacts.

3. Check on parents of enrolled children. A search through the rolls of youth, children's, and preschool departments may give us names of potential prospects among the parents. Cards should be prepared and given to the corresponding teachers and outreach leaders of the classes to which these people might attend. *Information may be changed and cards reassigned when ages or birth dates are found to be wrong.*

4. Visitors in the church services are a major source of prospects. Cards will be made out promptly after the visit and assigned to the correct teacher and outreach leader for their contact work. The visitors should be followed up enthusiastically and quickly.

- * After the morning service (by the Monday evening after their visit) a phone call should be made to the visitor. Appreciation is expressed for their visit, and the call is made in order to pave the way for further contact at their residence. Additional information is asked for at this time if it is not complete. We need date of birth, address, phone number, etc.
- * Information should be transferred to a master file, and assignment cards should be made by Tuesday evening visitation time.

5. Names may come from a circle of influence or "referral system." We may at times take an "in-house survey" from our people. In a church service they will be encouraged to give names, addresses, etc., of people they would like for us to reach. Announcements of such a survey are made ahead of time so that our people can pray about and reflect upon names that could be given. This type of effort could be used from time to time in the Bible Study classes as well.

6. House-to-house surveys would give us contacts and prospects. This kind of effort is worth the work. Such a "people search" could be carried on by the whole church. If we were to enter into this kind survey, special training and planning would be shared with the whole church.

A prospect file contains cards on which the names and other information have been recorded. It is used to make assignments to departments and classes for caring, contacting, witnessing, and teaching. A prospect file, in reality, is a concern list. It represents people whom we desire to reach, enroll and see attend a Bible class.

How and Where and When Do We Enroll Prospects?

The first step after getting their names, etc., on a prospect list is to enroll them. This can take place prior to their attendance, as mentioned previously. This could be a step toward their attendance.

Every teacher, outreach leader, and care leader should be working toward enrolling people for their particular class. This is an ongoing labor that will net growth in the class as the needs of people are met.

So, when should a prospect be enrolled? This is an important question and should be understood by everyone. Many may feel that enrolling a lot of non-attenders is not wise. Studies and experience by many churches bring proof that the more people enrolled and worked with, the greater the attendance. With a growing enrollment there is a growing attendance. When non-attenders are on the rolls, it is usual for attendance on any given Sunday to be as low as 40-60% of class enrollment. As we endeavor to build enrollment this will be normal. But we will be reaching more people because of this very effort. (These people would not be counted in percentages for contests.)

1. Enroll the person the first time they attend. We must enroll the person in Sunday School at their very first visit if at all possible. (The exception would be the out of town visitor.) Don't wait until he visits a second or a third time, enroll him on the first visit if he is willing.

The greeting at the welcome desk of each department ought to be followed with a request for permission to enroll the visitor. This request may be made by the greeter, or secretary, or certainly by the department director or class outreach leader. (Someone should be designated to attend to this regularly so that the visitor is not overwhelmed by many making the same request of him.) *No person who visits a Bible class (Sunday School class) should leave without receiving an invitation to become a part of that class. Many churches have found that such a procedure done in love and in a caring manner will bring growth. This practice makes people want to be a part of the Bible Class.*

2. Enroll them when receiving new members. On the church membership slip used in the service, a line relating to Sunday School enrollment could be added. The counselor who deals with the new member(s) should be alert to this opportunity of selling the person on the Bible Study hour, and should enroll them at this time if feasible. *An immediate follow-up is extremely important for persons enrolled in this way.* Also, of course, the people attending the worship hour should be contacted by the appropriate class as effort is made to meet spiritual needs and to enroll them in the Bible Study hour.

3. Enroll them when completing the new member records. The church secretary may call each new member on Monday to make certain all items are complete as needed for membership records. *The accurate date of birth is essential.* If the records seem to be complete, the secretary could call to check for accuracy. At this time request could be made to enroll the person or to enroll all the family members if more than one family member has been received.

4. Enroll through bus outreach. Almost any bus team working each week can enroll from thirty to forty boys and girls. Sometimes adults can also be enrolled. A new bus route can find new enrollees quite easily. Most parents of bus children are not enrolled in a Bible Study class. *These are prospects and should be worked with toward enrollment and attendance.*

5. Enroll while on general visitation calls. Everyone going on visitation could carry enrollment cards with them when they make calls, and visit not just merely to invite, but also to enroll. Let a request for enrollment be a part of the visit. At least they are one step closer to attendance if they feel they are part of the group because of being enrolled.

The class teacher and outreach leaders, as well as others visiting for the class, should have some additional leverage to encourage attendance on this basis. *Prospects must be contacted soon and often until they become attenders.*

6. Enrollment possibilities come through special events. As a result of Vacation Bible School and other youth events, some will come who are not enrolled anywhere, or do not attend any gospel-preaching church. These are *immediate prospects* for enrollment.

Parents could be phoned upon the completion of a Bible School week and asked if their children could be enrolled in Sunday School. Enrollment could be completed by phone. If this is allowed, teachers and workers could immediately begin to work with the children to get them to attend class.

7. Enroll through the nursery department. Some churches have ladies who work with new mothers. Such contacts, made in love and with a gift for the new mother, often will lead to the salvation of souls and the potential of a number of the family being reached for Christ. We could have such an in-the-home ministry which could lead to reaching many for Christ.

8. Develop special enrollment emphases. The church could have special enrollment campaigns by means of thorough survey efforts in given areas. This is also something that could be used to build the Bible classes. If this is done, special training will be given to the whole church in preparation for this type of outreach.

Conclusions:

Reaching people is a concept originating in the heart of God. It is the purpose that brought Jesus into the world, and a heartthrob that characterizes Christianity. It is the mark of a spiritually vital church. It is the evidence of our commitment to Christ. It is our response to a spiritually needy and hungry world.

It is very clear from Scripture that we are to reach out into a world of unsaved people with the good news. We must cross geographic, cultural, and social lines. The gospel is indeed for all persons and all places.

One of the best ways to reach out and touch this vast unreached population is to get people involved in Bible study. We can do so by enrolling them in Sunday School, for Bible study is precisely what Sunday School is all about.

We need to reach out to the:

1. deaf and blind.
2. mentally retarded and physically handicapped.
3. shut-ins who are house bound through an in-home Bible study.
4. high-rise apartment dwellers.
5. ethnic and language groups.

We need a vision to begin many ministries among people in every walk of life, for all are prospects for the "kingdom" and for Bible study.