

How To Begin A Community Bible Class

You can increase your Sunday school attendance by 30% and more.

Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 9:22b**, *I have become* ⁽¹⁾*all things to all men so that by* ⁽²⁾*all possible means I might save some* (ESV). The Bible teaches we are to use every means possible to win everyone we can to Christ. I have learned some things during my 45+ years of pastoring I would like to share with you. As you listen, look for ⁽³⁾**principles**, not methods. Methods of reaching people vary from place to place, but principles remain the same.

Also, look for the ⁽⁴⁾**possibilities** first, not the problems. If you look at the problems first, you will get discouraged. Look at the possibilities first, and then you will be motivated to overcome the problems. Anything worthwhile will have a lot of problems. Don't be like the Israelites when they first came to the border of the Promised Land. After the spies returned, the vote was two million to two not to take the land. Why? The majority looked at the problems, not the possibilities. It doesn't take any ⁽⁵⁾**faith** to see the problems, but it takes great faith to see the possibilities in spite of many problems.

As someone has said, “**Only a** ⁽⁶⁾**fool does the same thing the same way and expects a different** ⁽⁷⁾**result.**” In this seminar, look for new ways to reach people through Bible study.

The CBC is a ⁽⁸⁾**bridge** class. It can meet in your church auditorium, fellowship hall, or even in an off-site location. The CBC is designed to reach people who do not attend a “traditional” Sunday school class. The material taught in this class is *Journey Of A Lifetime*. You should have already taught this material in your church on a Sunday night or Wednesday night to give your regular members an opportunity to take the course. Regular church members should ⁽⁹⁾**not** attend this class because they are intimidating to the non-churched. There are many people who will attend this kind of class but would never enter the doors of your church for Sunday school or worship services.

How many of you like to fish? In Oklahoma we have people who fish with trot lines, jugs, and throw lines. They know the way to catch the most fish is to have as many ⁽¹⁰⁾**hooks** in the water as possible. Jesus said, “*Follow me, and I will make you* ⁽¹¹⁾*fishers of men*” (Mt 4:19, ESV). To catch the most possible people, we must have as many “hooks” in the water as possible. The CBC is just another “hook.” It will attract some people to your church that nothing else will. Remember, if we are not fishing for men and women, we are not following Jesus.

The class should also be publicized as a “**no** ⁽¹²⁾**strings attached Bible study,**” indicating no one will be pressured to join a church or make any kind of decision. Also, people should be assured they will never be asked to read, pray, or speak in any manner.

The ⁽¹³⁾**pastor should teach this class.** There are several reasons for the class being taught by the pastor. The pastor is looked upon in the community as a knowledgeable, trained Bible teacher. Also, the pastor is probably the best large-group teacher in the church. By

his teaching the class, attendees will get to know the pastor and feel comfortable with him. Then, it will be much easier for them when they decide to make a decision for Christ.

When you are trying to attract the non-church, the CBC has at least **four** advantages over the traditional Sunday school class or small group Bible study:

First, a large class offers ⁽¹⁴⁾**anonymity** (the feeling of being anonymous), so the non-churched are not intimidated by feeling they will “stick out like a sore thumb.”

Second, the ⁽¹⁵⁾**fear** of being asked to pray, read, or speak is totally eliminated. The number one fear of every human being is being embarrassed in front of a group of people. So, for many people a traditional Sunday school says, “Come to our class and we will make your greatest fear come true.”

Third, the most appealing study to non-churched persons is one that will give them an ⁽¹⁶⁾**overview** of the entire Bible. Everyone wants to know about the #1 bestselling book of all time. So, they may come for knowledge sake, even though initially they may not be concerned about their spiritual condition. *Journey Of A Lifetime* has been designed specifically for this type of outreach and study. The CBC will not work nearly as well with traditional Sunday school literature or literature designed for small groups.

Fourth, the ⁽¹⁷⁾“**laid back**” atmosphere produced by casual dress and coffee is appealing—especially to those who often are turned off by traditional Bible study methods.

Be ⁽¹⁸⁾**patient** because decisions will result through the process of ⁽¹⁹⁾**osmosis**. This means a gradual or unconscious assimilation of ideas or knowledge. Over the course of the study, many in the class will make decisions for Christ, as a natural result of being exposed to the Word of God. However, you are dealing with people on the spiritual fringe, so don’t try to rush them. Remember . . . *faith comes by* ⁽²⁰⁾**hearing**, and ⁽²¹⁾**hearing by the word of God** (Rom. 10:17, NKJV). In some cases, four or five months may need to pass before you begin to reap the spiritual seeds sown in the class. I have seen a few people take two or three years before making a decision for Christ. Give God’s Word time to work (see Isaiah 55:10-11 & Hebrews 4:12).

CBC Countdown Sheet

Three Months Before:

_____ Explain the concept to church leaders, deacons, etc. Build a ⁽²²⁾**consensus**, beginning with church leaders. Perhaps the most important thing a pastor needs to remember when presenting a new program or idea is “**Most people are** ⁽²³⁾**down on whatever they are not** ⁽²⁴⁾**up on.**” So, get your church leaders “up” on how a CBC can reach people in a unique way.

Get your church ⁽²⁵⁾**excited** about the possibilities. You need to cast the vision and get people on board by promoting the possibilities. Also, other people in the church need to sense some ownership and feel like they are a part of the vision. Let them be a part by praying, submitting prospects, and contributing financially.

All true Christians want to be a part of ⁽²⁶⁾**reaching** people for Christ. When I was starting a CBC in downtown Marietta, we ran ads, put a banner on the building, and had a “sandwich” sign in front of the building. A local banker who attended the Methodist church called me. He said “Tommy, I know what you are doing. I just want to let you know if you need any money, call me and I will take care of whatever you need.” Also, a local business owner came to my office and told me to let him know, if I needed any money. All true Christians want to be part of something ⁽²⁷⁾**exciting** that has potential for reaching people.

_____ Lead the church to set up a special ⁽²⁸⁾**fund**, so church members can donate to the expenses of getting the class started. You will need money for advertising, study materials, etc. Some church members will give to something like this when they seldom give to anything else. Explain and promote this fund in the church newsletter and bulletin.

_____ Explain that the ⁽²⁹⁾**expenses** will take care of themselves. Even though church income is certainly not the reason for this class, by the end of the first year, the average adult who attends the CBC will give about \$10 per Sunday, or \$520 a year. For every ten people, you can expect around \$5,000 to be given annually after the first year. Even if it’s only \$5 each, every ten people will give \$2,500 annually. So, a CBC isn’t really an expense; it is a financial ⁽³⁰⁾**investment** and great resource for your church.

_____ Choose an attractive ⁽³¹⁾**name** for the class. You can call it the “Community Bible Class,” the “Pastor’s Class,” or whatever you think will draw people. For me, “Community Bible Class” has worked best.

Eight Weeks Before:

_____ Begin ⁽³²⁾**promoting** the class in the church newsletter, bulletin, and from the pulpit, as well as on Facebook and Twitter. Ask people to begin praying about whose names they will submit as ⁽³³⁾**prospects**. Explain that, as they pray, God will bring someone to their attention. Request they submit names of people they believe are reachable, not the most hardened, indifferent people in town. Do not hand out prospect cards until members have had at least one week to pray about the names they will suggest.

_____ Print an adequate number of ⁽³⁴⁾**prospect** cards. You can use a **Who Do Card** that begins “Who do you know who is a prospect?” This can be done on the church’s copy machine. Print the prospect cards on card stock and cut them into 3x5 cards. Twice your average Sunday school attendance is a good number with which to begin.

_____ Have a Sunday school officers' and teachers' meeting to ⁽³⁵⁾**explain** the CBC. Have prospect cards available for all adult teachers to distribute in the Sunday school classes on Sunday. They will need at least ⁽³⁶⁾**one** for each person enrolled in their class. Explain that each Sunday school teacher and deacon is asked to submit at least three prospects and other church members at least one. Make it fun by saying, "Teachers and deacons are asked to do ⁽³⁷⁾**more** because the Bible teaches that in heaven they will receive a stricter judgment. So, as a good pastor, I'm just trying to keep you out of trouble when you get to heaven." A prospect is a person who does not ⁽³⁸⁾**attend** Sunday school or church anywhere. **Inactive resident church members are great prospects for this class.**

_____ Explain in all meetings and in promotion that the ⁽³⁹⁾**correct** mailing address, email address, and phone number are critically important because you will be sending each prospect a personal letter before you call or visit them.

Seven Weeks Before:

_____ Teachers should distribute prospect cards in all ⁽⁴⁰⁾**adult** Sunday school classes. Cards should also be distributed in the worship services. Explain that the people whose names are on the cards will be invited to the Community Bible Class. Briefly explain the course, *Journey Of A Lifetime*. Stress it could make a difference in where someone they know will spend eternity, so they should turn in at least one name.

_____ Continue to ⁽⁴¹⁾**promote** and explain the class.

_____ Encourage people to begin submitting the ⁽⁴²⁾**prospect** cards.

Six, Five, & Four Weeks Before:

_____ Continue ⁽⁴³⁾**promoting** the new class in Sunday school, worship services, as well as on the church website, Facebook, and all church media.

_____ Begin ⁽⁴⁴⁾**collecting** prospects cards.

_____ Offer a free ⁽⁴⁵⁾**gift** for those who attend. The two most effective words in advertising are "New" and "Free." Take advantage of that fact.

Three Weeks Before:

_____ Run the first ⁽⁴⁶⁾**ad** in the local newspaper.

_____ Continue ⁽⁴⁷⁾**encouraging** members to submit prospects.

Two Weeks Before:

- _____ Order a ⁽⁴⁸⁾**book** for each person you anticipate enrolling and at least ten percent more for late enrollees. All orders are shipped within 36 hours of receipt of order. Using the toll free number or website is about two to four days faster than submitting the order by mail.
- _____ Continue to run an ⁽⁴⁹⁾**ad** in the local newspaper.
- _____ Enlist someone to be ⁽⁵⁰⁾**responsible** for the coffee. Make sure it is someone on whom you can depend. Have coffeepot, coffee, and cups provided by the church. This person is responsible to see all is ready for Sunday morning. Also, enlist at least three people to ⁽⁵¹⁾**greet** people as they arrive and to hand out the lessons. Involve as many people as possible, so they will feel it is their class.
- _____ Continue ⁽⁵²⁾**encouraging** people to submit prospects.
- _____ Send “Sample ⁽⁵³⁾[Letter 1](#)” to all prospects. Two things are critical in this letter, in all advertising, and in phone calls. **1. Emphasize no one will be ⁽⁵⁴⁾asked to pray, read, or speak in any way.** Remember the number one human fear is to be embarrassed in front of a group of people. The devil convinces many people that if they come to Bible study, their greatest fear will come true. **2. Explain if they come three times in a row and do not like the class for any reason, you will never ⁽⁵⁵⁾pester them about coming back.** You can’t overemphasize these two things.

One Week Before:

- _____ Make every effort to ⁽⁵⁶⁾**call** every prospect before Sunday. This is very difficult, but the Lord will bless your hard work. It takes an average of twelve contacts to get one person to come. If you want ten to come, you must make 120 contacts. If want 100 to come, you must make 1,200 contacts.
- _____ Continue encouraging people to submit ⁽⁵⁷⁾**prospects**. You should try to have as many prospects as your Sunday school enrollment.
- _____ Have registration ⁽⁵⁸⁾**cards** available to get the name, address, email address, and phone number of everyone who attends.
- _____ Secure letter-sized ⁽⁵⁹⁾**legal pads** to pass around at the beginning of the class for people to sign. This will give you a record of who attends, so you can do follow through.

The First Class:

- _____ Pass around a legal pad in each ⁽⁶⁰⁾**section** of chairs or pews in the class for people to sign for an attendance record.

- _____ Have name ⁽⁶¹⁾**name tags** available. They will be a real asset in developing fellowship within the class. They will also greatly aid the pastor in learning the names of class members. The pastor or teacher should also always wear a name tag.
- _____ Be sure to have all answers on ⁽⁶²⁾**PowerPoint** because many people are poor spellers and having to write the answer may be embarrassing for them. For a nominal cost, answers on PowerPoint and on paper are available for the study. Also, many people are visual learners, so this makes it much easier for them to learn. Anything visual will make the class more interesting and even exciting.
- _____ Be sure not to teach too long; ⁽⁶³⁾**45** minutes is adequate. This should include praise, announcements, etc. People should leave anxious to come back, not glad a long class is finally over.
- _____ Do not take up an ⁽⁶⁴⁾**offering** in the first class and don't have any offering envelopes in sight. Many people will already suspect you wanted them to come just to get their money. I usually don't take up an offering for four to six weeks after beginning a new class. By that time, people are already asking about when they can give.
- _____ Explain they are going to miss class ⁽⁶⁵⁾**occasionally**. Tell them you will also miss because of vacations, sickness, etc. Then say, "How many of you stop eating when you miss a meal? In the same way, don't quit coming to church when you miss a Sunday because this is spiritual food. Just come back the next Sunday."
- _____ Always end every class by telling them the ⁽⁶⁶⁾**title** of the next lesson and giving them some interesting topic or fact that will be discussed. Make sure your class always leaves anticipating the next lesson. This is critically important when dealing with new attendees, and with regulars as well.

The Week After the First Class:

- _____ Mail "Sample Letter Number ⁽⁶⁷⁾**Two**" to all new enrollees who attended the CBC.
- _____ This week and every week hereafter, go over the class ⁽⁶⁸⁾**roll** and check those present.
- _____ Make enough ⁽⁶⁹⁾**copies** of the CBC roll sheet ([see sample](#)) to list all the people who have enrolled (registered). When listing enrollees alphabetically, leave two blanks each time a name begins with a new letter, so you can add people who enroll later.

Follow Through:

Every week for the next three weeks, send a letter to every new person who ⁽⁷⁰⁾**attends** for the first time. In the letter, share your excitement about the class and the title of the next

lesson. This will keep people coming and let them know you are thinking about them. After the first six or seven weeks, call those who have missed two or more times in a row. Let them know you are not calling to pester or scold them but just to let them know you have missed them in the class.

The attendance will ⁽⁷¹⁾**drop off** some after the first three or four weeks, but the letters and phone calls will keep the dropouts to a minimum. In two to four months, people in the class will usually begin to make meaningful ⁽⁷²⁾**decisions** for Christ, as God's Word begins to produce fruit.

Teach God's Word, and He will bless your efforts—perhaps more than in your greatest dreams. This is because of His promise in **Isaiah 55:11** “*so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me ⁽⁷³⁾empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall ⁽⁷⁴⁾succeed in the thing for which I sent it*” (ESV).