

# Chapter 4

## DEVELOPING THE PLAY BOOK:

### Curriculum

The world of sports has athletes, organizations, games and plays. When rookies enter training camp, one of their first jobs is to learn the play book. These detailed strategies are developed by the coaches for use in specific game situations. Good teams have good play books. They must be clear, yet comprehensive. The success of the team depends on how well the athletes follow the design of the plays.

The game of discipleship will likewise excel when teachers do a good job of executing an intentional curriculum. Teachers who effectively utilize the lesson plans given a curriculum will succeed in helping their students grow deeper in Christ. The questions in this chapter will focus on curricula for the Christian education ministry.

#### **How can I locate good materials for discipleship?**

There are three good sources for finding discipleship materials. One good place is your local Christian bookstore. Many communities have excellent bookstores; however, some have stores that are less supplied in this area. The economy also affects bookstores, so the amount of materials they keep in stock varies from time to time.

Local bookstores usually have a sampling of Sunday School materials from several publishing houses. In addition, many have racks with Bible study materials from publishers like the Navigators, Serendipity or Inter-Varsity, and also resources from large churches like Willow Creek and Saddleback. A Christian bookstore may be able to supply books and study aids for just about any Christian education program. Materials from denominational presses, or specific programs such as AWANA Clubs, however, are usually only available directly from those organizations.

Information on Christian education materials can also be found in Christian periodicals. *Discipleship Journal*, *Group* and other magazines frequently review books

and study aids. Publishing houses also purchase advertising space in selected magazines to promote their books, videos, DVDs and even upcoming Vacation Bible School materials. Staying current with several Christian periodicals will keep leaders on the cutting edge of teaching resources.

A third source for discipleship materials is other churches. While each congregation has a unique DNA, much of what we do in discipleship is similar. Whether colleague connections are made through pastors' fellowships, Sunday School Conventions or simply phone calls, getting together with leaders in other churches promotes fellowship and also broadens our idea and resource base.

### **Who in the church should be responsible for curricular selection?**

The Christian Education Commission in coordination with program directors should be responsible for overall curricular selection. Individual teachers or workers within a program can review materials and make recommendations, but final selection decisions are reserved for the Education Committee (or program directors when authority is so delegated).

Coordination of teaching themes is important, yet many churches fail to give adequate supervision to the coordination and sequencing of their curriculum. Students need a balance of Old Testament and New Testament; a blend of the biographical, historical and didactical; and a variety between book studies and topical studies. Allowing individual departments or teachers to select their own curriculum hinders coordination.

While some churches prefer to use a different publisher for their various age divisions (early childhood, children, youth and adults), many congregations prefer to use the same publisher throughout a program (e.g., Awana Club materials for all children on Wednesday evenings).

The use of one publishing house for a whole program (e.g., Sunday School) trusts the publisher to provide a balanced diet for the learners. This practice minimizes the duplication of Bible passages that might happen from one grade to the next when different companies are used.

Most publishers produce a scope and sequence chart that describes the subject matter covered each quarter for every age. For example, one publishing house may cycle through the Bible in a conceptual form during the pre-school years, cycle through the Scriptures again from a story perspective in grades one through three, and then cycle through the Bible a third time from a historical perspective in grades four through six. A complete plan is likewise delineated and illustrated for the youth division. In a similar fashion the companies also offer a variety of book studies and topical studies for adults, some even stratifying their resources for young adults, middle adults and older adults.

To insure both balance and Bible coverage many churches have chosen to use the full curriculum from one publisher for each program. A thorough study should be made as to which curriculum is best for a program, and then only essential changes in curriculum should be considered. The change should still follow the approved scope and sequence for the overall program.

**How can we coordinate the teaching content presented in our various programs (i.e. Sunday School with club ministry)?**

The best way to coordinate the teaching content of the various programs is to first establish the curriculum of the predominant program (the program which is most attended), and then supplement those themes through the other educational ministries.

Since Sunday School is usually the church's largest educational program, other programs should supplement, not duplicate, what is being taught in the Sunday School. When the scope and sequence of the Sunday School is available to program leaders, they can develop their own plans without repetition. If they desire to teach the same Bible content, they can at least make the Sunday School staff aware of their objectives.

Here are two illustrations that occur frequently. When a youth workers seek input on what to teach on Wednesday evenings or on the winter retreat, they can be given suggestions based on what is not being taught that year in the Sunday School.

Another example might be a women's Bible study that consults the pastor for topics or materials for its group. Knowing what the adult Sunday School will be teaching during the next two years, the pastor can make suggestions that will steer the group into different or complementary areas of study.

A balanced curriculum over several years can be planned ahead of time, when thought is first given to the content of the major program, and then supplemental studies planned for other programs.

**Should teachers be allowed to develop their own materials, or is it best to use published curriculum?**

Very few teachers are capable of producing their own materials. Many can explain a Bible passage, but few are able to plan a balanced sequence of curriculum, and then take that sequence and develop methodology to make it age appropriate. Published materials provide a balance of themes, a variety of illustrative material, and presentations geared to the learner's conceptual level.

Occasionally a teacher will not like a particular lesson or learning activity suggested in the curriculum. In these cases, the teacher may have the freedom to substitute an alternate method for that particular lesson. In general, however, those who work full-time in the development of curriculum are more aware of learner needs and appropriate age level methods.

If a special program is begun, such as a children's church or a summer camp, the leaders may wish to develop their own materials. Even in this situation, however, careful attention should be given to what is taught in the other programs in the church, so that there is coordination for the students.

A creative Christian education ministry can have room for both a predetermined, balanced curriculum, and opportunities for the learners to make choices for study. A flexible curriculum can follow a planned scope and sequence, but allow for student choice within the teaching methodology of individual lessons. In order to assure comprehensive Bible coverage for the entire congregation, more freedom should be offered in the supplemental educational programs rather than in the primary endeavor.

Flexibility of study is more easily accomplished in mid-week studies, retreats, youth meetings, club programs and home studies.

In the childhood years, learner preferences are best accomplished by providing choices of learning activities within a predetermined lesson. With teens and adults, selection of whole topics of study can become their responsibility (again, if they follow an overall curricular plan).

If a church desires to respond to student selection during the Sunday School hour, the summer quarter is usually a good time to vary the format. A survey of students could reveal specific topics they are interested in studying, and if a change in curriculum is to be made, the summer may be the most flexible for implementation.

In general, student input and desire can be responded to without varying far from a planned curriculum. Special assignments, optional meetings and a few sessions usually deal with most questions. A balance between an intentional curricular plan, yet with sensitivity to learner needs and individual questions is our goal here.

### **What are the benefits and drawbacks of electives for adults or youth?**

Adults and youth should have opportunities for choice within their curriculum. A choice of electives can be provided either in the Sunday School or through mid-week studies. While curricular intentionality is important, some flexibility will let the learners know the church is conscious of their concerns, and make them aware that they are responsible for their own spiritual growth. A completely predetermined curriculum offers no individual freedom; a total elective system minimizes the ability to provide a comprehensive and balanced curriculum.

The advantages and disadvantages of using electives during the Sunday School hour are discussed further in Chapter 2, "Keeping the Team Going."

### **What are the pros and cons of dated versus non-dated Sunday School materials?**

In selecting a Church School curriculum, several issues worth considering to determine which one is best for your congregation. Bible coverage, specific themes, methodology, and attractiveness of art work are just a few of these issues. The issue of "dated versus non-dated" material is another one of these issues.

Non-dated materials have the advantage of being reusable, which in the long run saves money. When rotating the product on a two-year cycle, for example, it is possible to use the same resources two or three times before the publisher releases a rewrite. Since the materials are taught on a cyclical basis, teachers that stay in the department become familiar with the lesson material, save time in future preparation and have greater comfort in the classroom. A word of caution is in order, however. Teacher's manuals and other materials will only be cost effective if they are returned complete and stored properly.

Dated materials usually have the advantage of initially being less expensive. But since these products are used only once, their amortized cost can actually be higher. A second advantage of dated material is that each course is new (though it may not be totally new, since only a limited rewrite each year is a common practice).

Exercising care is wise when purchasing dated material, since these products are consumable. Churches that prefer not to waste dated resources may save the best

materials for supplemental teaching, or choose to pass them on to missionaries or others who are looking for Bible related curriculum.

### **What are some ways to keep curriculum costs down?**

The greatest way to keep curriculum costs down is to use what you choose. For example, if take-home papers are being read and appreciated by children and parents, then the cost of these supplemental papers is justifiable. If careful investigation reveals that half of the papers are turned into airplanes on Sunday morning, and the other half are filed away at home without being read, material costs can be cut by not purchasing these papers.

The same principle follows with all materials. If adults use student books when provided for them, then these are worth obtaining for them. In the adult division you have the option of letting adults that desire so, buy their own books, whereas in the children's division, the church must provide them. Nevertheless, if investigation reveals that adults are not preparing at home in advance, then again it might be wiser to make student books available in the church library, where they can be checked out by those who have real interest.

Teacher manuals and teacher aids are a must for every age group. Costs should not be cut in the resources provided for teachers. The in-class materials used by a student are also very important; they are actually part of the teaching session.

Careful filing of non-dated curriculum will also trim expenses. Finding a volunteer to coordinate the curriculum files will save the church significant amounts of money over time.

Some programs, such as children's church or club programs may also have materials that are reusable. The program leaders should check the cycle of those resources, since they will not want to repeat lessons until their students are promoted to another age group. These materials should be filed in a Christian education office, or in a central location, so that with staff turnover, there is still an awareness of materials that have been used, and where they are available for reuse.

The bottom line is, again, use what you choose. If you are using wisely the materials that are selected, curriculum costs are meaningful and justified.

### **Where in our program can we have an emphasis on Bible memorization?**

During a church business meeting one of our teachers conducted a children's program while parents were in the auditorium. The worker used an old edition of Bible Baseball as a learning activity for third through fifth graders. To her surprise she found that many of the children could not answer the "single" questions, let alone attempt a double, triple or home run. The amount of Bible knowledge and Scripture that our children have committed to memory is declining in many churches.

Over the last couple of decades there has been a movement away from rote and detailed instruction. The size of Bible passages studied each week has been reduced, with the emphasis on more learning activities to reinforce lesson objectives. While this trend enhances the learning of certain Bible truths, even regular participants cannot master of the Bible with only church school participation.

Many parents who are aware of their children's biblical illiteracy, and perhaps equally as important, are upset with their local public school's permissiveness, have placed their children in a Christian school or choose to home school. These children usually grow faster in their knowledge of the Scriptures. With this trend, however, there is a new problem for the local church. There is a growing disparity among its students. Some have a very primitive knowledge of the Bibles; others are bored when basics are presented.

Many congregations are giving stronger emphasis to Bible memorization. Some choose texts for church-wide learning, frequently paralleling preaching themes. Most congregations, however, use a more decentralized approach, encouraging memorization in their various programs. Every Bible lesson has a theme, and therefore should have a key verse underlying that theme. The teacher can stress this verse and expect a child to retain it over time. Ongoing review and carefully selected reward systems can make memorization very possible.

While memorization can be a part of every program, many churches make this practice a feature of only one of their programs. Some churches have moved to utilizing the club program as the primary vehicle for memorization. One of the main component parts of the AWANA program, for example, is the memorization of Scripture.

Wherever the memorization emphasis is placed, the understanding of the verses, their meaning and application, must be included in the practice. Our purpose is not to have children simply memorize 300 verses. No. Our desire is that they understand the Scriptures; and that their memorization will program their conscience to live in light of those verses.

Rote memorization apart from meaningful understanding has little significance. Worse yet, however, is no memorization at all. A balance of memorization, with a stress on meaning and application, is a good component of a balanced educational program.

### **Should homework be assigned to students?**

The purpose of homework is to expand each teaching session. The practice encourages students to develop self learning habits, and to apply lesson material. Just as homework is used in grade school, high school, college and other training seminars, carefully made assignments is a beneficial practice for some of our discipleship programs.

We recognize, however, that we can encounter some resistance when assigning homework in our Christian education programs. The first reason is that most people believe that church is a place where one passively listens to a preacher or teacher. After a hard week of work, many come to church to worship and hear a good sermon. The concept of being actively involved in learning, engaged even to the point of doing personal study or research, is foreign to the mindset of many.

A second difficulty with utilizing homework in a discipleship program is that meetings are usually seven days apart. Accountability and follow-up are hard to enforce. However, as teachers begin to assign homework occasionally, and then more consistently, students grow more accustomed to their responsibility in the teaching-learning process. Teachers, of course, must consistently follow up these assignments by

asking for student responses, and by giving positive reinforcement to those who complete the work.

In most Sunday Schools, homework is usually restricted to having a Bible verse memorized for the following Sunday. While good, this repetitive predictability stifles the natural creativity of children. Many are willing to take on assignments outside of the classroom. Many adults are also willing to bring back a report on a class question the following Sunday. It is certainly true that the class will benefit from the student research and reports, but the students will grow the most through their self discoveries.

Valuable instructional time can be extended beyond the classroom by asking students to make a map of the city of Jerusalem, interview friends on what they think God is like, or write a modern newspaper account of the exodus. Not only will learning be maximized through the extended time available for the homework, but the repetition of the study at home will deepen the student's understanding. In addition, individual involvement with the material will build personal study skills and enhance learning.

### **Should tests be used to measure learning?**

Evaluation is something seldom practiced in the church. Most programs run year after year without critique, most teachers are never assessed and most curricula are just ordered automatically. But assessment practices are valuable, and should be used in an appropriate manner.

One inappropriate application is for the grading of student learning mastery. Since ranking individual students has no practical value for a church, regular detailed testing of subject matter has little worth. For example, to know that three members of a class have mastered 80 percent of the content of the Gospel of John is not really that significant. However, it is important to discover that ten out of seventeen students surveyed indicated that they felt unprepared to share their faith. Through questions and answers, observation of discussion groups, and informal probing, a teacher can gain an understanding of how the students are doing. Occasional surveys and questionnaires can be used for student self-evaluation, as well as informing the teacher of learner concerns.

While tests can be used for measuring learning, they are best used as a teaching method. Questions at the end of a lesson in a student quarterly, or assigned as preparation for next week's passage, is usually nonthreatening and is a helpful learning method.

### **How important is it for parents to be aware of their children's curriculum?**

Unfortunately, if you were to ask parents what their children were studying this quarter in Sunday School, probably less than two percent would be aware of the main theme and/or Scripture portion, let alone what the child is expected to learn and apply. Some parents ask their children what they are studying in class, but the child's response is only as informative as the child's wiring for detail and/or sharing. For example, parents with energetic, random type learners usually are more frustrated trying to elicit information than parents that have reflective, analytical children. To level this playing field, teachers should initiate periodic contact with parents to apprise them of lesson themes.

The purpose of informing parents about the child's curriculum goes beyond mere information. Parents are accountable to God for the nurture of their children. The church's teaching ministry is really just supplemental to the modeling and teaching that parents should provide for their children.

Communication with parents is best established early and maintained regularly. At the beginning of each year, or at the start of a new program, an overview of themes and objectives should be presented. Periodic communication should then continue through open houses and home contacts. A simple phone call to a parent (even an unchurched parent) lets them know that we respect their role as parents, enjoy the learning times that we have with their children, and most of all, really love their kids.

### Summary

Very few athletes make it to the height of professional sports. Only the most talented and disciplined are sought by these teams. Most people will never know what it means to be part of that kind of team.

What a contrast for the Christian, however! It is not the most gifted, not the hardest workers, not the privileged few who are selected to be on God's team. No matter what background or talents, the invitation of our Lord goes out to "whosoever will." When an individual confesses his/her sin and receives Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, he/she instantly becomes a member of the greatest team in the world. The plan of salvation is complete when all followers are "presented mature in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).

In order to accomplish this purpose, discipleship programs are designed to provide believers with Christian instruction, and thus biblical values. God has given us one Training Manual, the Bible, which is the basis for developing the lessons that we use in our programs. Everyone in the body of Christ is a minister and player (I Corinthians 12; II Corinthians 5:14-21). God has given organization and leadership to His team.

Our play book (curriculum) is a compilation of Scriptural truths developed for the coaches so that they can train players, no matter what age or skill level. The play book is essential for a knowledgeable, organized team. The effective play book provides the coaches with the necessary strategies that their players need for winning in the game of Life.

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### SAMPLE CHART FOR CURRICULUM

			SUNDAY SCHOOL				
			AGE	A	B	C	
Closely Graded Courses	Preschool	Bible Beginnings	2	Courses for 2s	Rotate courses for 2s & 3s on a 2 year cycle	Use Kindergarten courses adapting for younger children	
			3	Courses for 3s			
	Kindergarten		4	Courses for 4s	Rotate courses for 4s & 5s on a 2 year cycle		
			5	Courses for 5s			
				GRADE	A	B	C
	Primary Department	Bible Theology	1	Courses for 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	Courses for 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	Rotate courses for 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , & 3 <sup>rd</sup> grades on a 3 year cycle	
			2	Courses for 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	Rotate Courses for 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> grades on a 2 year cycle		
			3	Courses for 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade			
Junior Department	Bible Survey	4	Courses for 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Rotate Courses for 4 <sup>th</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup> grades on a 2 year cycle	Rotate courses for 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> & 6 <sup>th</sup> grades on a 3 year cycle		
		5	Courses for 5 <sup>th</sup> grade				
		6	Courses for 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Courses for 6 <sup>th</sup> grade			
Departmentally Graded	Junior High	Bible Establishing	7	Three Year Course—Junior Highs can meet in one class or in 3 separate classes—all will study the same course			
			8				
			9				
	High School	Bible Equipping	10	Three Year Course—High Schoolers can meet in one class or in 3 separate classes—all will study the same topics			
			11				
			12				
Adults	Bible Exposition	Adult College Career	Ten year Course—Different courses every quarter for 10 years, then cycle is repeated				