

REACHING CHILDREN

By

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CHAPTER NINE

BUILDING ATTENDANCE

A LARGE attendance is not everything. Some of the most gracious and spiritual meetings have been small ones, and some have had the most far, reaching results. One gathering was so small because of the fierce weather that even the preacher did not arrive, but that morning saw born into the family of GOD a mere lad who was to shake the islands of Britain, and leave them closer to his Saviour. For that morning a stumbling lay preacher had said, "You on the back seat-you look miserable, why don't you look. Look to the Cross and live." And Charles Haddon Spurgeon had looked and lived.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

A purity of fellowship, a deeper insight into the individual's problems, and a more personal touch, are generally at their best in the small meeting, so let us see that we do not despise it. "Little is much if GOD is in it."

Little children who braved the elements and struggled through drifts of snow have been turned away, and told that there will be no meeting because more did not come. What a shame! Some of the Bible's best sermons had but an audience of one. And the One who preached to Nicodemus, the Pharisee, and the woman at the well was none other than JESUS CHRIST Himself. [166]

On the other hand, let us not excuse our lack of prayer and effort on these grounds. There are many without the Gospel, and we should do our utmost to see that they have an opportunity to hear. Building attendance is one way to get the Gospel out. It is that more may have the chance to hear, that this chapter has been written.

BY PRAYER

Prayer is the first and foremost answer to the problem of attendance.

Since **"it is not the will of your Father in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish,"** surely He will answer when He is called upon to bring them in. Often prayer is the only means

that will build attendance. Satan is on the warpath. Perhaps he has poisoned the mind of an influential member of the community against your group, and the children are conspicuous by their absence. Appeal to the Lord in prayer.

He who has stopped the mouths of lions can undertake in your case. **"He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think."** Spread out your case before Him, as Hezekiah spread out his letter, and He will still give peace and comfort, and results.

Later in this chapter different methods of increasing attendance will be given, but none are intended to replace prayer. Seek His face in regard to which methods should be employed, as some do not work in certain circumstances. He knows this before you ever begin, and can guide you in the use of the most effective weapons against inattendance. [167]

Classes which seemed to have as their permanent average four, five, or six, have suddenly skyrocketed to twenty-five or thirty when backed by consistent prayer. The teacher may pray by herself, or she may ask her friends to pray as a testimony to His power. Therefore we may make His answer a testimony by asking for prayer before the answer is seen, that more hearts may glorify GOD.

Of all the suggestions given in this chapter, the most sure method is by prayer.

BY PERSONAL INTEREST

"My Mommy doesn't love me. She wishes she'd never had me. She said if she didn't have so many children she could have an electric refrigerator."

So confided a wistful child with sad eyes to the teacher one day after Bible Club. This teacher's heart was touched, and although the girl was no longer small, the teacher took her on her lap and gave her a good "loving." Did this little girl come back? You don't even need to ask. She was a regular attendant from then on. She knew her teacher loved her, and that was what her heart was crying out for. Let us not be so concerned with numbers that we miss the needs of the individual.

There are many ways that the teacher can show that she loves her pupils.

- A friendly word when they come early,
- a hearty smile when she meets them on the street,
- a colorful card on their birthday, and
- a tactful call on their parents will do much to evidence her love,

and in the end will increase the attendance.

Children particularly like to have their teacher call. She should get in the habit of calling on all visitors, absentees, and sick ones. [168]

It has been suggested that a busy teacher with a large class might phone for first absence, send a card for the second, and call for the third. Calling on prospects for the class is another method of increasing attendance. A personal call in the home will give her an understanding of the child's

problems she will get in no other way. It is one way of showing her love. But this love must be sincere; it can't be pinned on just for their benefit.

There are two classes you can't fool - children and dogs. They detect insincerity every time.

Check up on yourself. Have you been as interested in all of your pupils as you might have been? Has a visit of measles come and gone with no word from you? What an excellent opportunity a sickness is for the teacher to inculcate in the other pupils the habit of praying for, and of being kind to those who are unfortunate. Show a personal interest in each one of your pupils and visitors, and you will find it a big help to building attendance.

BY PROGRAM

No one enjoys going week after week to some meeting where he is bored to death. And children are no exception.

In one Sunday school the Junior Department was noted for its lack of pupils. Some one suggested that a contest be held to secure more new pupils. But I am afraid that had a contest been held, the new pupils would have gone the way of the old ones, for on Sunday morning the superintendent of the department arrived anywhere from ten to twenty-five minutes late. When he finally arrived worship service could not be started until the adult class was petitioned for a pianist who was not a great deal of help since she didn't know the choruses familiar to the children, and they were strangers to the songs she knew. [169]

After the song service, if it could be called that, a few haphazard remarks were made on the spur of the moment, and the department was dismissed to its classes. Perhaps even then a substitute had to be sought out for one group. Such a lackadaisical organization calls not for a contest to build attendance, but for an improved program. There is no earthly use in conducting a contest and bringing in new children to such a sorry department.

The first procedure is to get a consecrated superintendent with an interesting Gospel-centered program that appeals to children, and they will not want to miss. If there is any contest, it should not be started until a good program has been well established.

To be interesting, a program should be varied.

One plan is to divide the month by Sundays and have one teacher responsible for a certain Sunday. It might be divided this way:

- 1st Sunday of month Object lesson
- 2nd Sunday of month Flannelgraph talk
- 3rd Sunday of month Missionary story or demonstration
- 4th Sunday of month Demonstration by pupils
- 5th Sunday of month Special speaker

Remember that children are interested in other children. Use them as much as possible.

One Sunday school solved the problem of the destruction of hymn books by placing the most

rambunctious class of boys in charge of keeping the books repaired and in order. Children may serve as ushers, may read the Scripture, may even lead the singing for their own department, if properly instructed. One child may serve as pianist and practice the songs and choruses during the week for the following Sunday. However, if after practice the songs are not played correctly, it is better to have an adult. [170]

Make the department as much the children's as possible, and the result will be renewed interest.

Of course, they must be impressed with the seriousness of their undertaking, and no foolishness permitted.

Other suggestions given elsewhere in this book may be employed to give further interest. Every minute of the program should be planned and packed with interest in order that the children will look forward eagerly to the service, and will not want to miss. A good program goes a long way in building a large attendance.

BY PROMOTION

Until the foregoing suggestions have been heard and heeded, the ones in this section should not be followed. A teacher who has not prayed for her class, who does not genuinely love her pupils, and has not painstakingly planned her program, will accomplish nothing by trying to build attendance by artificial methods. If, however, the foregoing suggestions have been heeded, these ideas, under the guidance of the Lord, may be used to a distinct advantage.

Posters

Even children can make attractive posters for use in advertising the class or Bible school. Collect old magazines, and clip attractive pictures from them. These may be mounted by the children on plain or colored cardboard, and a suitable caption printed below. Some time ago there appeared in color the picture of a freckled-faced girl calling "Mom's crying again, Dad." Why not mount that picture and caption, and put underneath, "Cause she's too big to go to Bible school." [171]

Then follow with the place, date, and time of the Bible school. Let the children think up titles. Of course, they should be approved before being made, as they may not be appropriate.

Use cardboard 11 x 14 inches. The pictures may be glued on. Make letters of harmonizing color of construction paper and glue on. Show card colors and lettering pen may be used by those you think qualified. Crayons are effective for the smaller ones.

Making the posters is only a small part. They must now be distributed. Grocery stores, bakery shops, beauty salons and what have you, make good places to post them. A pleasant smile and courteous word nearly always win permission to put the poster in the window. Ask the proprietor where to put it, or suggest a place, but in any event see that it is placed before you leave. A dozen or twenty such attractive posters (only use the most attractive - place the others in the church or meeting place) will be a constant reminder of the meetings to come.

Handbills

Posters, when coupled with novel handbills or folders broadcast about the community, bring the attention of the public repeatedly to your meetings. Blotters are sometimes the medium of the advertising. Mimeograph the bills on colored paper. Choose for the front a picture of a child or some drawing appealing to children. Do not just give facts, but mix in a little imagination. You are selling the idea of your Bible school, Tent Meeting, or special meetings to the child. [172]

What does a salesman first seek to secure? Attention!

Your work is wasted if you don't get that far.

Interest is next.

Seek by that folder or bit of advertising to get him interested. This leads to desire. Make him not only know that there is to be such a meeting, but want to come to it. Ask yourself this question: "If a red-haired, kite-flying champ read this folder would he want to come to these meetings?" If not, then you need to revamp your material. Perhaps you are going to introduce the song "*The Gospel Train*," and you have purchased a regular train whistle and bell. Why not incorporate the appeal of that somewhere in your ad? Any regular fellow is interested in trains. Seek to secure in your advertisement the attention, interest, desire, and decision of your reader.

Fish Contest

Several ideas may be worked out in connection with the verse, "**Follow me and I will make you ushers of men.**"

Give each child who brings one visitor a colored paper, or metal fish. (A pattern for a paper fish may be secured from a can of salmon).

Make a poster with a picture of children fishing. Record each child's name below, and attach a string through a hole punched in the bottom of the poster. For each new one brought tie a fish to the string below the proper child's name. See who is the best fisherman. Awards may be given for first, second and third best fishermen.

For awards on attendance contest announce the following:

- 1st prize - large goldfish in large bowl
- 2nd prize - medium goldfish in medium sized bowl
- 3rd prize - small goldfish in small bowl [173]

The fish may be purchased at the beginning of the contest, fed after each meeting, named, and speculated upon as to who will be their future owners.

To get a live goldfish, bring five visitors (not necessarily the same day). If each one of the five visitors comes for three meetings, the contestant receives a fishbowl.

Train Contest

From a child's color book get patterns of an engine, coal car, passenger car, freight car.

Cut patterns out of construction paper of various colors.

Make a poster with places along the left hand side for the engines which represent those entered in the contest. If desired, a child could be present three times before an engine with his name on it was put on the poster. For each child he brought he would be allowed to choose another car to put on behind his engine. The contest, of course, would be to see who could get the longest train. A small award could be given for the one who did.

After the award time at each meeting, when an assistant pastes on the new cars deserved, "*The Gospel Train*" song could be sung. Let the engine of the longest train blow the whistle, the next longest ring the bell. On each car should be printed the name of the child which it represents.

In all contests scrupulous care must be taken to preserve accurate records. There must be no remembering, but it must be down in black and white. Older girls sometimes make excellent secretaries, but in a contest have been known to "fudge" for their friends.

Be sure that nothing like this happens. [174]

Creating a Continuing Interest

When a child is brought to a class or Sunday school as a visitor, he helps to swell the ranks for that particular day.

The child who brought him has done his part, it is now up to the teacher to see that the child comes back. He feels strange - everything is new to him.

Some little picture, pin, or very small remembrance may be given to all those present for the first time.

If nothing else, a song may be sung in their honor while the new ones stand. That child has come once. But statistics from certain meetings show that those who came for three times consecutively almost always became regular members, while those who came only once or twice just as frequently dropped out. The goal, then, is to get each visitor to come for three days.

A very inexpensive award may be offered to those who come for "three days in a row." If one day is missed, the child must start over again.

If a choice must be made between giving an award on the first day and the third, choose the third day, and it will be of more benefit to your class. But be sure to let the children know that this award is theirs if they come for two more times. By the time the three days have gone, very likely they have started learning the memory verses, and may be bringing others.

In other words, they will have one-third earned, or one-half earned other awards, and will want to complete the work. This helps to insure their regular attendance, which is what you are after.

It is a great value to sustain their interest.

Long before one contest has closed, another has begun, and the child is so interested that he would not think of dropping out. Perhaps it has nothing to do with attendance. [175]

It might be a memory work contest, a poster project, a picnic coming up for faithful scholars, or a program to be given for the parents.

In other words, to sustain interest and consequently attendance, do not completely finish one project or contest before the child is already engrossed in another. It is like reading a serial story in a magazine, you would not think of missing the next issue. Overlap contests, projects and awards, for sustained interest.

This chapter has contained the principles of securing and holding attendance. Different contests, schemes, and plans may be worked out with a little imagination and understanding of what children like. Plans are a great help, but above all do not neglect to pray, to be personally interested in each child, and to provide an appealing program. [176]

~ end of book ~