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Book Review: Sunday School that Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities by Steve R. Parr

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chapter 8, he offers a helpful suggestion that the church must measure the right things, but he only offers six questions that would help to measure the right things. This left me wanting more meaningful reflection on how to make the change.

Last, Wilson was probably focusing on the main problematic areas of the attractional model; however, his indirect mention of evangelism and his neglect of addressing global missions left a significant gap that needs to be addressed.

Even though I would consider myself within the same tribe as Wilson, I still learned a lot from him and consider the book valuable as he clearly articulates some of my concerns with the attractional model. Wilson's efforts may be directed at those within the attractional church model, but I believe it is still a necessary corrective for those within the "gospel-centered" tribe because many churches still practice and rely on the attractional model. The ideologies are not limited to those already in the attractional church, and it would have been helpful for Wilson to unpack how his tribe struggles with them as well.

The Prodigal Church makes a persuasive call for attractional church leaders to realign their churches with the gospel. Wilson convincingly addresses the weaknesses of the attractional model and offers a call to something bigger than just numbers and growth—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I would strongly recommend this book to leaders within the attractional church that need pastoring through the difficult task of self-evaluation. Even if one is outside of the attractional church, it is still worth reading as a clear manifesto and a helpful reminder to all who wish to center their churches on Jesus Christ. Wilson's gentle call for the church to realign with the gospel and repent of its obsession with numbers is a needed one for the church to maintain its mission of making disciples and have the kind of success that matters for eternity.

Parr, Steve R. *Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2010. 218 pp. \$12.12.

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First developed in 1780 by Robert Raikes, Sunday School is often considered as an antiquated model of ministry. Steve Parr, Vice President for Sunday School and Evangelism with the Georgia Baptist Convention and adjunct professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, issues a clarion call to churches not to ignore the impact a strategic, purposeful, and organized

Sunday School can have, not only in a church, but also in an entire community. Parr addresses one of the most glaring questions with the Sunday School model of ministry today. Does Sunday School still work? According to Parr, no matter the name of the method of ministry (small groups, connections groups, or life groups), Sunday School still works. However, Parr clearly delineates that success does not hinge on name or place where Sunday School happens, but rather its success is in proportion to whether “it is done well and correctly focused” (27).

Relying upon the 2005 and 2008 statistical data of churches with the fastest growing Sunday Schools within the Georgia Baptist Convention, Parr observes that churches that prioritized Sunday School had a significant increase in baptisms. Not only did baptisms increase, but also assimilation rates significantly increased. Parr states, “Of those who immediately became active in Sunday School, 83% were still active five years later. By contrast, only 16% were still active if they did not become active in Sunday school immediately after becoming a believer” (18). In light of these findings, Parr wonders why others would even question the validity of a Sunday School ministry. Yet, he knows they do criticize it.

Observing the life and ministry of Jesus, Parr argues that the principles gleaned from Jesus’ teaching and discipling in small groups affirm the need for a Sunday School ministry. As seen throughout Jesus’ ministry, “relationships are the source of ministry, fellowship, and accountability” (40). In addition, Parr correctly understands that Jesus’ ministry and ultimately the Great Commission emphasize that the end result of these relationships and fellowships are to impact others. In other words, the ministry of Jesus was both purposeful and influential in people being discipled and sent out to reproduce what they had learned from him. For Parr, to question the value of Sunday School and its ability to impact the lives of others is also to question Jesus’ method of discipleship.

While the reasons people question Sunday School are plenty, the primary reason Sunday School is approached with skepticism can be summed up in that far too often, Sunday School is implemented unintentionally and without purpose. As a result, people not only believe that Sunday School is ineffective, but they also do not want anything to do with it because they have personally experienced its ineffectiveness. Because of this unfortunate reality, Parr’s work focuses on providing a simple strategy that can make Sunday School work again. Using the word WORKS as an acronym, Parr contends that Sunday School will work when it Wants to grow, when it Organizes to grow, when it Reaches out to the lost, when it Keeps all members connected, and when it consistently seeks to Sharpener the skills of its leaders.

The reader may be surprised to see the evangelistic thrust Parr emphasizes with an intentional Sunday School. The evangelistic thrust emphasized by Parr correctly challenges churches that they are not only to be evangelistic (if they desire to be biblical), but also that Sunday School is one of

the greatest, if not the greatest, evangelistic strategies waiting to be implemented in the local church. Parr states that Sunday School is to be an “intentional evangelistic tool” (16).

To be an intentional evangelistic tool, Sunday School requires effort and hard work. However, Parr states, “I fear that some leaders have abandoned Sunday School not because it does not work, but because of the work involved in making it work” (79). Unfortunately, Parr’s discernment is precise. Within the context of parachuting out of a plane, Parr intimates, “Too many classes meet in the plane to enjoy the flight, but never make the leap.” (72). Why? Because “there is a discomfort” (72). As long as churches and classes are unwilling to address the discomfort, Sunday School will continue to be a significant strategy with both an untapped potential and negative reputation.

Parr states that not only is hard work important, but also “working at the right things is more important” (93). In order to work at the right things, organization is paramount. Parr’s emphasis on organization is refreshing, specifically as it relates to the biblical model of ministry found in Ephesians 4:11–14. According to Parr, the pastor should be the “key leader” if Sunday School is going to be effective (95). For Sunday School to be important and organized, it must be important to the pastor. As its importance grows with the pastor, he then is able to equip and enlist others for the ministry of Sunday School. Parr is to be lauded for his emphasis on both a Sunday School that wants to grow and organizes to grow.

As with any ministry, wanting the best and implementing the right resources can be challenging. However, Parr does not leave the reader wanting. Parr provides practical guidelines and steps to take as a church moves forward to implement an effective Sunday School that not only transitions Sunday School teachers to Sunday School leaders, but also shifts the focus from those who attend to those the class seeks to reach. In addition, following these guidelines enables the church not to settle for counting heads, but rather it allows the church to evaluate qualitatively the discipleship and growth of new believers.

Parr’s primary emphasis in *Sunday School that Really Works* is to provide a model and platform for churches to experience significant evangelistic growth. If the advice, wisdom, and practical steps are implemented, three results are certain: the lost will be reached, lives will be changed, and leaders will be sent out (23). Every pastor and church desiring to see renewal and a reignited evangelistic fervor within its family of faith cannot afford to overlook Parr’s strategy. While the main thrust of the work is about Sunday School, the foundation of the work serves to call the church to effectively and intentionally fulfill the Great Commission through one of the most often overlooked and relegated-to-the-past ministries. Do not question whether Sunday School works. Question whether you are ready to work!