

SUNDAY SCHOOL HAS LEFT THE BUILDING!

Raleigh Baptist Association Training Extravaganza – 2020

Welcome: I welcome you to this conference today that is part of our associational Training Extravaganza 2020. I trust that our time together will be helpful to you and pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

I have not been able to stand before my Sunday School class since some time back in March. However, I have been able to teach my class and enjoy fellowship over the internet. I am embarrassed to admit that my attendance has been better over the internet than it was when we were meeting as a class in the church building.

Those of you who are doing some of the same things may have had that same experience.

It may be my age, but I sure do miss being with my class members and doing mission projects together. I really feel like I have lost some of my family.

I am preparing this conference in early June, and at this time I do not see any relief in sight, as far as getting the class back together.

I was reading and studying my Bible the other day and reread Matthew 28:19-20. To me this is the marching orders for our Sunday Schools and small Bible study groups. Let me read this for you.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

It spoke to me as I was reminded that God did not say do this if you feel like it, if you have nothing else to do, or if the church building is available. It is not a request, it is a commandment for us as his followers. So our question for this conference is this: **What are you doing as an individual, and what is your class doing to follow this command?**

Scott McConnell in Facts & Trends reports that LifeWay Research conducted a study among Protestants who attend church once or more a month to understand more about their participation in groups and their views on small classes and groups. The study revealed that the driving force behind their participation in groups is that churchgoers enjoy the group and expect to learn something.

Almost half of churchgoers who participate in a small group or class joined that group because the leader or a member of the group invited them. This fact alone reinforces the value of relationships in encouraging behavior change. Relationships are the most effective way to get others to join. Multiple recent research studies conducted by LifeWay Research point to an important pattern: a Christian’s discipleship journey is empowered by BEING TOGETHER IN A SMALL GROUP of believers that meets regularly around the Word of God. These transformed actions, attitudes, and beliefs reflect

the journey God desires for each of us. In the Bible, we see that God's plan has always been for us to follow him in community with other believers.

This raises a big question for us today! During this time of the Covid- 19 virus what are we doing to minister to our members, and to reach new people for the Lord Jesus Christ?

Are we, as individuals, and as classes or small groups still at work taking the good news of Jesus Christ to the mission field that God has placed us in? What are we doing to minister to the needs of our class members and to our lost neighbors?

Let me make a few suggestions as ways to keep our members faithful to all that God wants us to be doing.

If we were meeting together today I would ask the question: What are you and your class doing to encourage each other and keep us faithful in our Bible study, faithful in our family devotions, and faithful in our inviting people to study with us?

Let me share with you some of the things that many classes are doing, so some of these things are things that I have been doing, and others are what I have heard about what other classes are doing.

I remind you that there are many people who are hurting emotionally during these days. You may have some of them as members of your class. What are you doing to help them during this time of isolation?

My class meets every Sunday morning at 10:00 over zoom. We fellowship at the beginning as our people get signed on. One of our members is in charge of getting us on, every Friday he emails us the link and all we have to do is sign on, on Sunday morning when he feels that we are all on he turns it over to me and asks the members to mute their electronics. Now I usually have about 25 - 30 minutes to teach the lesson. I personally prefer to have discussion, but at this point that is not possible. I take a moment to welcome everyone and proceed to a time of prayer, praying for the needs of our members and family members that have been turned in. (Let me explain that!)

We have a member that is excellent in keeping us up to date with the prayer concerns of our members. We ask our members to let Mary know if they have a prayer concern. When a concern is called in to Mary she immediately informs the class by email.

This is a blessing as all the class members are informed about the members and their families and the needs that they want us to pray about. It is normal to receive prayer requests 4 or 5 times each week. That also keeps me, as teacher, up to date, and allows me to do follow up ministry. I usually do this over the phone as I am pretty much confined to my house.

You may not know that my wife is battling cancer, so we have been very careful about getting out. If she were to catch this virus it would very probably be the end of our marriage. Thus, I encourage you to pray for my wife, Gracie, and for me as the care giver. Thanks for your prayers.

If you cannot meet as a class, I encourage you to consider using the zoom program and use the internet to get your Bible study done.

I have a friend who teaches a class but has been unable to get his class together in any way. Each week he prepares his lesson and sends it to the members by way of email. I ask him what he was doing to find out how many of the members were reading the lessons. He said that he did not know.

On Wednesday evenings at 7:00 there are classes that meet together by way of zoom. A member will set this meeting up. He or she sends out the link on Tuesday, and it is easy to sign on using that link.

During this time the class will do a lot of fellowshiping, laughing and talking to each other. They also share good news and maybe some bad news of things that are going on in their lives. Then they have a time of prayer requests, sharing the desires of their hearts.

(For my class, Mary is busy with her pen taking all these requests down, and within just a few minutes after the program is over, we receive an email restating each request. These requests are then prayed for as we end the day with our family devotions.)

For a long time we were not allowed into our church buildings. However, We were allowed to meet as groups on the church grounds. We have a place that is relatively shady and our members could use that as a place to meet. Classes had to schedule the meeting time so that they would not interfere with another groups. The fellowship committees set up a time when the members of the class could meet together for fellowship. Blankets were set up on the ground and those who came set their chair up on a corner.

Each member was asked about their temperature and if they were well, and each had to have a mask on. The Lord blessed and it was not too hot that day, and the members had a great time together.

The membership of adult classes should be divided up into small care groups. The care group leaders are asked to contact their members every week if possible, if not at least every 2 weeks.

On the weekend of June 12 & 13 one of our members (a single lady) moved to a townhouse that she had just bought. Several of our members felt like she needed some help so several helped her to get moved.

This was a ministry of helping one of our members that we could do and enjoy doing without taking any chances.

We used to do what we called WHERE AND WHEN, but we cannot do that anymore. So, On Saturday, June 27, the class met for a class fellowship. As I stated a few moments ago, our church set up places on the church grounds for classes to use and fellowship. There are three places, so our fellowship committee reserved all three places.

Our class has 6 small care groups, so we assigned 2 care groups to each spot. We were required to use masks unless we were eating. We took our own food and chairs and enjoyed great fellowship with the other group that was assigned to our spot. Not all of our class attended because some preferred to stay at home where they were safe and not afraid of getting sick. Those who attended really enjoyed the fellowship.

Every time you meet you should have prayer and ask for prayer requests and concerns from your members.

Your class secretary or someone then sends the requests out to the members. Again this is another way you have of keeping up with your members and helping when there is a need.

I heard of a class that had two of their members who had birthdays during this time when the class could not meet. So the class organized a drive by parade for each of them. One of the ladies was in her early 90's and they surprised her. She is living with one of her sons who is also a member of the class. She was thrilled and excited that they would do that.

Be sure to encourage your small care groups to stay in touch with each other. It is easy for them to meet somewhere in somebodys yard, or some place and share fellowship together, just as long as they practice distancing, masks, and whatever it takes to be safe from the virus.

One Sunday morning a member that was in the hospital recovering from surgery tuned in and was a part of the lesson. His wife could not be with him while he was there. However, he felt good enough to tune in and be a part of the Bible study. His class was excited that he could join them.

I have a friend that attends another church and he was telling me that his church had a place on the church grounds that had several picnic tables. His class got together and sat on the corners of the tables. Just another way to enjoy the fellowship that we are missing during these days.

On several occasions we have had people to tune in who were not members but were invited to attend over zoom.

For some time now we have had a couple from the Knoxville, Tenn. area to tune in. They had relatives in our class and they invited them to join us, and they did. Can you imagine having guests visit your Bible study during this time?

A very important lesson that I hope you will get from our time together today is that even though we are not meeting together on Sunday mornings, our members can still witness to their neighbors and friends and invite them to join in on our **Bible study times**.

I heard of a young adult class that did a baby shower for one of the members. It was a drive by shower where the members brought their gifts by, handed the gifts through the car window and kept going. Anything is possible if you put your mind to it.

I live on a cul-de-sac and every now and again the families meet down on the pavement, and practice social distancing, but we enjoy the fellowship and watch the children play. It is an enjoyable time to share together. Is this something you class or small care groups can do and share fellowship together.

If you decide to do this it is a great time to invite prospects to join you. You want to be careful, practice all the rules to protect yourselves.

I come back to the place that I began with. What are you and your class doing with the Great Commission?

We may not be able to do a lot of the things that we used to, but there are many ways that we can still reach out to lost people and share with them the love of the Lord Jesus. He is still in the saving business and he has instructed us to be busy sharing His love, His forgiveness, and His salvation.

My closing question:

What are you leading your class to do during these days when we cannot meet as we always have? I remind you of the words coming from the book of James: "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only." There is still ministry and evangelism to be done. Yes, we all still need to be involved in the ministry and work that God has equipped each of us to do.

My prayer for you today is that you will be faithful in delivering God's message, faithful in your witness each day, and faithful in inviting the lost to come join you in **Bible study** and church membership.

Thank you for tuning into this conference today. I trust that you have been given something that you can use, and that you have been challenged and encouraged. I ask that you share with me some of the things that you are doing during these days when we cannot meet together. I would love to hear from and maybe do something new with my class.

If you have any questions about anything that you have heard me say, you can call the association office, 919-231-3995, and they will get you in touch with me. I am here to help you in any way that I can.

Let us pray:

O God, our Heavenly Father, I thank you for this day and for this time when I am able to share how we as Sunday School workers can be faithful to your instructions on what we as your children need to be doing even in this day of Covid-19.

I pray for the one who viewing this film, bless him or her in a very special way today. Please inspire and encourage this one to even better service to you. Bless in a special way the Bible study class or small group of which they are a member. I pray that you will bless each of the members of their class and challenge them during these days to be faithful in sharing your message of love and forgiveness.

Father, we pray for the churches that we serve. May our churches continue to be faithful in ministering to our communities and faithful in witness and evangelism.

For it is in your lovely name, and in accordance with your holy will, that we pray this prayer.

Amen.