

Reclaiming Your Chronic Absentees

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you have a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he call his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." Luke 15:3-7

God's Word makes it very clear that we are to seek out those who have drifted away from our fellowship. The task of reclaiming our absentees is a difficult one, however, statistics show that when a concentrated effort is made, 4 out of 10 absentees will return.

How important is the Friendship Factor?

7 friends made in 6 months	90% stay
5-6 friends made in 6 months	75% stay
3-4 friends made in 6 months	50% stay
1-2 friends made in 6 months	25% stay
0 friends made in 6 months	10% or less stay

A Sunday School class should plan NOT to have chronic absentees. A class that is organized for growth and ministry will help prevent people from walking out the door.

Assign every class member a group leader that maintains contact on a weekly basis.
Provide Bible study that is alive and exciting.
Provide regular fellowship activities and seek to involve members.
Do whatever it takes to build and nurture relationships!

What Causes Members to Become Inactive?

1. Do not feel welcome in the group
2. Boredom
3. Needs are not being met
4. Talents are not being used
5. Hurt feelings
6. Not being contacted
7. Priorities
8. Health Reasons
9. Job Responsibilities
10. No true experience with Christ
11. Unfulfilled expectations
12. Under Conviction
13. Feel they do not measure up to others in the class

Ideas For Reclaiming A Chronic Absentee

When trying to reclaim a chronic absentee, you must be consistent with you efforts. It often takes a lot of time. Absentees who have been out for several months often feel guilty or embarrassed. You must:

1. Pray. Prayer is essential! Assign an active class member the name(s) of chronic absentees to pray for during the week. Take time on Sunday morning to pray as a class for your absentees.
2. Assign to a group leader for a contact and ministry. Chronic absentees often feel intimidated by a weekly contact. Making sure contact is made on a monthly basis until a relationship is established is a better approach. Don't preach to them! Simply enquire of any needs and ask how you may pray for them. Follow up on the prayer requests later.
3. Have a class member write a personal letter or post card inviting them to Sunday School. Encourage the class members to keep the contact personal by signing their name, not just the name of the class.
4. Keep them informed of class activities. Sometimes they will come to a fellowship before they will to come to Sunday School.
5. Remember them with a card or phone call on birthdays, anniversaries, special occasions, etc.
6. Visit in their home. Take literature for the next quarter, a plate of brownies, or some other small treat.
7. Adopt – An – Absentee. Assign class members an absentee to pray for, send cards to, and provide ministry to. People in our classes expect to be contacted by the teacher, outreach leader, or group leader. Recruiting a contact from an unexpected source shows that you really care. The class members should be encouraged to build a relationship with the absentee.
8. Have a contest by groups for reclaiming. Class members are often fearful of contacting someone they may not know even if they are a member of the class. A challenge will sometimes give them the little extra push they need to get involved in reaching absentees.
9. Always keep your absentees before the class.
 - a. Take one Sunday a quarter to display on your wall the names of all class members. Write the names of class members on index cards (bright colors work best) and put them on the wall. When class members come in, have them take their name down. When the class begins, share with the class the names left on the wall are names of class members who are absent. This is usually quite a shock, especially if there are more people absent than are present, which is often the case. Have prayer as a class for the absentees. When class is over encourage class members to take a card from the wall for contact purposes.
 - b. You can also use holidays to your advantage. Make a tree decorated with hearts, ornaments, Easter eggs, etc. with the names, addresses and phone numbers of absentees written on the decorations. Encourage class members to take a decoration from the tree and contact the person listed.
 - c. Give out postcards (pre-addressed is nice) on Sunday morning as people come in. Have them write a personal note to the absentee inviting them to Sunday School. Tell them to sign their name.