

WHY WON'T MY MEMBERS COME TO BIBLE CLASS?
A STUDY OF THE POSSIBLE FACTORS LEADING TO LOW ADULT BIBLE CLASS
ATTENDANCE AMONG WELS CONGREGATIONS

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ABSTRACT

What is it that makes a Bible class desirable? This is a question that has been asked many times by many WELS pastors. What makes this question so popular? It is the numbers; they don't lie. WELS congregations, historically, have not had much success in getting their members to attend an adult Bible class. So, what's the solution? This is, perhaps, not the first question that needs to be addressed. Maybe the question to start with should be, "What are the barriers and obstacles that turn people away from Bible class?"

One reason why many congregations have low Bible class attendance is obviously sin. And to go along with sin are some other possible reasons like teaching methodology, relationships, and promotion. This paper will start by laying out the importance of adult Bible study. Afterwards, it will walk through some of the significant numbers found in the survey conducted for this thesis and the 2017 WELS Statistical Report that highlight the low attendance. And then, finally, it will spend time explaining each of these possible factors which contribute to low adult Bible class attendance within the WELS.

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INTRODUCTION

Fifty percent? What an incredible statistic! If a major league baseball player (one who had many at-bats in his career) were to maintain a .500 batting average, his name would be praised for a long time as the greatest. If someone found a letter on their desk at work telling them that they just received a fifty percent raise, they would be absolutely floored with excitement. If a gas station were to lower its gas prices fifty percent one day, there would be a continuous line throughout the entire day. There are many scenarios when fifty percent would be a great stat to have. But what about Bible class attendance? Would fifty percent still be a good stat to have? Unfortunately, speaking specifically about the WELS, yes. For a WELS congregation to have fifty percent of its adult worshippers also in attendance for Sunday morning adult Bible class would seem to be a great statistic to have.

Fifty percent? What an unfortunate statistic. This is the reality. A majority of WELS churches' attendance fall somewhere between ten and forty percent. Now, there is certainly reason to give thanks to God and rejoice over those who do come to Bible class, no matter how many that may be. But this still begs the question: Why aren't the others coming? Even if fifty percent of a congregation's adult members come to Bible class, they are still left with the other fifty percent who aren't coming to receive further nourishment, encouragement, and strengthening from God's Word. Why aren't the others coming?

This is the question this thesis will wrestle with. Many of the churches within the WELS are currently experiencing low Bible class attendance because of sin (an obvious but important reason), as well as other possibilities such as teaching methodology, relationships, and class promotion.

ANSWERING THE “SO WHAT?” QUESTION

So what? Why spend time looking at adult Bible class? This is time well spent because it deals with the studying of God’s Word. And while there is nothing in Scripture that says adult Bible class is essential, there is plenty of pleas from our Lord to dive into and study his Word. Now, this is by no means a new discovery. More than likely, those who are reading this paper already have a good grip on this truth. It is important, nonetheless, to still begin by laying out some of the Biblical principles supporting this truth. Spending time looking at Bible class is important because there is value in knowing God’s Word, God tells us to use his Word to educate, and pastors are called to teach.

The value of knowing God’s Word

“Take the world but give me Jesus.”¹ It’s a hymn that many Lutherans know, and know well. To place Christ, salvation, and God’s Word above anything that this world can provide is a principle that Christians, through faith, strive to live by. And where can this gift of salvation be found? Where must somewhere go to hear about their Savior? It is only in the Word.

Moses certainly understood and took to heart the value of God’s Word. And he wanted the Israelites to do the same thing. “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deut 32:46-47) Can’t you hear the passion and urgency

¹ Christian Worship, Hymn 355: *Take the World, but Give Me Jesus*, (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, WI, 1993).

in his voice? This is a speech made by man with genuine concern for his people, a concern that they hold fast to the truths and values of God's Word.

Now, for an unbeliever, holding fast to and seeing the great value of God's Word is impossible. They are dead in their sins and are unable to and lack a desire to hear and keep God's Word. But even for the Christian, who lives by faith, this is a difficult principle to consistently abide by. The new man loves to dive into and search the depths of God's boundless love found in the Scriptures. The old man, however, would love nothing more than to ignore it. The sinful flesh frequently and boastfully blurts out, "take Jesus, but give me the world." This struggle between the love and appreciation of God's Word against the hatred and apathy towards God's Word is constantly waging war inside the Christian.

Thanks be to God for faith that enables his Word to be seen as what it truly is. Christians don't see it as junk or as foolishness, but as something more valuable than gold and silver. Kent L. Johnson wrote, "Knowing that God loves us so much that he gave his only Son to die for us and that through Jesus we have been made the children of God is to have knowledge of the greatest worth."² Yes, we see God's Word as a powerful and loving gift from our God. We exclaim along with Paul, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes..." (Rom 1:16)

² Kent L. Johnson, *Called to Teach: Ideas and Encouragement for Teachers in the Church*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, 32.

God's Word is to be used to educate

How important it is that Christians continue to grow in knowledge of what their Savior has done for them. Sadly, it can so easily happen that many adult members (pastors included) can at times forget this. Mark Zarling wrote, "What about the flock? Does the thought of continuing Bible education turn adults off, especially adults who have grown up in the Lutheran tradition and don't remember mom and dad carrying a Bible to church? For some adults, education is a word associated only with children and youth."³

There is undoubtedly some logic behind the thought that education is only for children. After all, kids are the ones who spend most of their time in school. Does graduation, however, mean that learning is completed? Does it mean that no more learning will take place for the rest of the adult's life? Of course not! Adults continue to learn through continued education, and through life experiences. Without a doubt, the fact that adults continue learning in matters outside of Scripture stands as an important concept. But if this is the case, how much more important it is that adults continue learning in matters of Scripture.

This encouragement to grow in knowledge is a common truth seen throughout Scripture. For instance, in Peter's second letter he wrote, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." (2 Pet 3:18) Johnson holds a high view of this passage in view of adult education.

"Growth is a fundamental educational concept... Basically, growth is a concept that recognizes the reality of change. Teaching is an attempt to give direction to change in order that its consequences be positive. In 2 Peter that direction is very clear; it is growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That, according to the author of the letter, is the purpose for Christian education."⁴

³ Mark G. Zarling, *Increasing the Motivational Level of Adult Bible Hour Participants Through Teaching Styles*, (A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Education at Concordia University Wisconsin: Mequon, WI, 1998), 10.

⁴ Kent L. Johnson, *Called to Teach: Ideas and Encouragement for Teachers in the Church*, 14.

How does a Christian live a life of growing in knowledge of our Lord? The only place he/she can do so is in his Word. In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.” (Rom 15:4) Again, Paul answers the question as to how to grow in knowledge in his second letter to Timothy. He wrote, “and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” (2 Tim 3:15-16).

The place where Christian parents turn to train and raise their children to know their heavenly Father is in his Word. This is true for adults too. The only place adults turn to continue growing in understanding of their heavenly Father is also in his Word. The encouragement to grow in his Word is a lifelong encouragement from our heavenly Father, a Father who wants us both to grow and neither to fall away from him.

God has called pastors to teach

Pastors are called to teach. God lays this out for us, plain and simple. Paul wrote the following to Timothy, “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...” (1 Tim 3:1-2) In this list of qualifications for pastors, Paul includes “the ability to teach.” This doesn’t point us to how a pastor should teach,

nor does it indicate what level of ability to teach a pastor must have. It simply tells us that pastors are to be διδακτικόν, which is translated to mean “skillful in teaching.”⁵

So what?

Despite all of this, some people may still have the question in the back of their mind: “So what?” What makes Bible class so important? Don’t the people hear God’s Word in the church service? Don’t they learn about him in their own personal time spent in the Word? Why do they need Bible class? Certainly, these questions do hold some weight. Without a doubt, it is possible that people can and do feed, nourish, and strengthen their faith in worship and in their own Bible study at home. However, listen to this portion of 2 Timothy as we hear God hint at a possible reason that Bible class is important for the believer:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Tim 4:1-4)

There will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. They will call it foolish, abrasive, unloving, and judgmental. There will come a time when people will create their own doctrine. They will surround themselves with false doctrine that makes them feel good and satisfies their desires. They will surround themselves with those who are willing to teach this false doctrine to them.

This is happening right now. Christians are constantly being bombarded with this way of thinking. There are more interpretations and teachings about God’s Word than can possibly be

⁵ Note that most translations translate διδακτικόν to mean “ability to teach.” (NIV, ESV, CSB, EHV, NKJV, NASB)

counted. This is the answer to the “So what?” question. With all of this false doctrine flying around, how important it truly is to hear, preach, and teach the Word in its purity and entirety. God’s people need to be equipped with the truth and encouraged to continue equipping themselves on their own time as well.

While there is not a command in Scripture stating the necessity of adult Bible class, there is one to value God’s Word. There is a command to use God’s Word to teach God’s people. So, yes, adult Bible class is important. Yes, pastors should want all their members to have their faith fed, nourished, and strengthened. And yes, there should be concern as to why many adult members are not attending adult Bible class.

LOOKING AT THE NUMBERS

A major portion of the research for this thesis paper was in the form of a survey.⁶

Therefore, it is necessary to take a moment to lay out some of the key preliminary thoughts on the numbers found in the survey. (Results from both the survey and numbers found in the WELS statistical report from 2017 will be used throughout the paper.)

Background Information for Survey

A survey was sent to all WELS pastors. This means that roughly 1,500 surveys were sent out. Of these 1,500 pastors, 516 of them filled out this survey. Each of the twelve districts of the WELS were well represented among the respondents. The district with the most respondents was the Minnesota District with seventy-four responses. The two districts with the least respondents were the North Atlantic and Pacific Northwest District with seventeen responses each. Figure One (page nine) shows the number of respondents per district.

There also was a good sampling of numbers for church size in terms of worship attendance. There were plenty of churches from ten to fifty members per Sunday all the way up to churches with more than 500 members per Sunday. All of these numbers mentioned above indicate that the information provided through this survey was a good sampling. This provided an accurate foundation of information to draw logical conclusions from.

⁶ Entire survey can be found in Appendix 1

Figure 1 - Which District Is Your Church Located In?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
North Atlantic	3.35%	17
Pacific Northwest	3.35%	17
South Central	3.94%	20
Dakota-Montana	4.53%	23
Nebraska	5.71%	29
South Atlantic	6.50%	33
Arizona-California	8.66%	44
Northern Wisconsin	11.22%	57
Southeastern Wisconsin	11.61%	59
Michigan	12.99%	66
Western Wisconsin	13.58%	69
Minnesota	14.57%	74
TOTAL		508

A Look at the Low Attendance Numbers

Figure 2 (page 10) lays out the core issue that this paper looks to dive into. It shows results for Question Eight of the survey which asks, “What percentage of your members who attend Sunday morning worship also attend your Sunday morning adult Bible class (on average)?” Of the 516 total respondents to the survey, 474 answered this question. Just shy of fifty-five percent of the respondents are serving congregations that have attendances that fall between ten and thirty percent of their regular, adult worshippers. Seventy-nine percent of respondents have attendances that fall between zero and forty percent.

Figure 2 - Bible Class Attendance

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10 percent	11.18%	53
10-20 percent	27.43%	130
20-30 percent	27.22%	129
30-40 percent	13.08%	62
40-50 percent	11.60%	55
50-60 percent	5.27%	25
60-70 percent	1.05%	5
70-80 percent	0.84%	4
80-90 percent	0.42%	2
90-100 percent	1.90%	9
TOTAL		474

These numbers are supported in the 2017 WELS Statistical Report. The Statistical Report is a more accurate source of numbers for matters concerning the synod as a whole simply because it has the statistics for every WELS congregation.⁷ For the year 2017, just over thirty-three percent of WELS members across the Synod who attend worship also attend Bible class. Viewing this with a broader scope, it can be seen that only fourteen percent of communicant members, synod-wide, regularly attended adult Bible class. This, unfortunately, is not much better compared to attendance in previous years.⁸ In 1996 it was 12.2 percent of communicant

⁷ Adult Bible class attendance numbers on the Statistical Reports are using attendance numbers for all adult Bible classes, not just Sunday morning adult Bible class. This will change the numbers slightly, but not by much. With that being said, the numbers on Bible class attendance from the WELS Statistical Report, while useful, will be slightly less accurate than the numbers found in the survey conducted for this thesis.

⁸ Numbers from 1996 and 1986 are used here because those were the years used by Mark Zarling in his study on adult Bible class.

members attending adult Bible class regularly. And in 1986, the synod was at 8.8 percent of communicant members (Zarling found these numbers in the WELS Statistical Report).⁹ So yes, while there has been an upswing of almost six percent in the last twenty-two years, these numbers are still, sad to say, atrocious.

We certainly rejoice over the members who do come to Bible class. But the question still remains: Why are these numbers so low?

Initial Conclusions

One of the first hypotheses given at the beginning of this study was that the low attendance numbers correlate with congregation size or location of the church (district). This seemed to be a logical conclusion to make. The difference between the culture and dynamics of a small congregation/town compared to that of a large congregation/town can often be significant. The different geographical locations also bring different cultures and dynamics to the table. As logical of a hypothesis this seemed to be, it did not prove itself to be true according to the results found in the survey.

As far as congregation size is concerned, there was at least one noteworthy discovery from the survey. The congregations that could be labeled as small congregations,¹⁰ had more occurrences of fifty percent (or higher) attendances for adult Bible class. From the survey, there were 301 respondents serving at churches that fit under the label as small congregations. Of those 301 congregations, 297 of them answered the question asking for Bible class attendance

⁹ Mark G. Zarling, *Increasing the Motivational Level of Adult Bible Hour Participants Through Teaching Styles*, 1.

¹⁰ Smaller congregations are congregations with an average worship attendance between ten and one hundred

numbers.¹¹ Thirty-six of those 297 churches had fifty percent or higher Bible class attendance. (See Figure 3 on page 12 for a complete listing of larger churches' Bible class attendance.)

Figure 3 - Bible Class Attendance for Small Congregations

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10 percent	11.45%	34
10-20 percent	23.23%	69
20-30 percent	24.24%	72
30-40 percent	13.80%	41
40-50 percent	15.15%	45
50-60 percent	6.06%	18
60-70 percent	1.35%	4
70-80 percent	1.01%	3
80-90 percent	0.67%	2
90-100 percent	3.03%	9
TOTAL		297

These thirty-six smaller congregations do draw attention, especially when compared to the Bible class attendance in the larger congregations.¹² There were eighty-six respondents serving at churches that fit into the label of large congregations. And of those eighty-six, eighty-five responded to the question asking for Bible class attendance numbers. There were only four churches that had a Bible class attendance above fifty percent.¹³ (See Figure 4 on page 13 for a complete listing of larger churches' Bible class attendance.)

¹¹ Question 8 - What percentage of your members who attend Sunday morning worship also attend your Sunday morning adult Bible class (on average)?

¹² Larger congregations are the congregations with an average worship attendance of 200 or higher.

Figure 4 - Bible Class Attendance for Large Congregations

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10 percent	8.24%	7
10-20 percent	43.53%	37
20-30 percent	27.06%	23
30-40 percent	11.76%	10
40-50 percent	4.71%	4
50-60 percent	3.53%	3
60-70 percent	0.00%	0
70-80 percent	1.18%	1
80-90 percent	0.00%	0
90-100 percent	0.00%	0
TOTAL		85

There also seemed to be an even spread among the twelve districts as far as Bible class attendance goes. There wasn't one district that towered above the rest or that was far beneath the rest. Each of these districts had churches with average attendances in the ten to fifty percent range. There were, though, still some noteworthy findings.

The two districts with numbers that stuck out the most were the Minnesota District and the Northern Wisconsin District. According to the survey, the Minnesota District had the greatest number of churches with a Bible class attendance fifty percent (or higher). Of the sixty-six Minnesota District respondents that answered the question concerning Bible class attendance, eight of them had an average fifty percent (or higher). To see some possible reasons as to why the Minnesota District had higher Bible class attendance numbers, see Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure

¹³ Remember that the Bible class attendance survey question asked for the percentage of the average worship attendance that also goes to Bible class.

7, Figure 8, and Figure 9. Each of those tables (along with some conclusions after those tables) give details that could lead to some possible reasons as to why these congregations have a higher Bible class attendance.

The Northern Wisconsin District had the greatest number of churches in the zero to twenty percent range for Bible class attendance. According to the survey, just over sixty-two percent of respondents from the Northern Wisconsin District were serving congregations within this Bible class attendance range. However, just as for the highlight from the Minnesota District, this highlight, which pointed to the low Bible class attendance numbers, doesn't separate the Northern Wisconsin District from the rest. Ultimately, each district had Bible class attendances that were overall quite low.

There is one more general observation of the numbers from the survey to take note of here. What about the churches that are doing really well in respect to Bible class attendance? Are there any striking similarities between them that tie them together? When a closer look was given to the congregations with an eighty percent (or higher) Bible class attendance, there were a few discoveries made. Take a look at the following tables that represent the churches with an eighty percent (or higher) Bible class attendance.¹⁴

¹⁴ There were fifteen respondents with a seventy percent (or higher) Bible class attendance but only fourteen of them responded to the question represented in Figure 5.

*Figure 5 - What District is Your Church In?
Respondents with Seventy Percent (or Higher) Bible Class Attendance*

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Dakota-Montana	0.00%	0
Nebraska	0.00%	0
Northern Wisconsin	0.00%	0
Southeastern Wisconsin	0.00%	0
Arizona-California	7.14%	1
Michigan	7.14%	1
Pacific Northwest	7.14%	1
South Central	7.14%	1
Western Wisconsin	7.14%	1
North Atlantic	14.29%	2
South Atlantic	14.29%	2
Minnesota	35.71%	5
TOTAL		14

*Figure 6 - Average Worship Attendance
Respondents with Seventy Percent (or Higher) Bible Class Attendance*

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
10-50	66.67%	10
50-100	26.67%	4
100-150	0.00%	0
150-200	0.00%	0
200-275	0.00%	0
275-350	0.00%	0
350-425	0.00%	0
425-500	0.00%	0
500 and above	6.67%	1
TOTAL		15

*Figure 7 - How Far in Advance Do You Plan?
 Respondents with Seventy Percent (or Higher) Bible Class Attendance*

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Select topics/series 4-5 years in advance	0.00%	0
Select topics/series 2-3 years in advance	0.00%	0
Select topics/series 1 year in advance	33.33%	5
Select topics/series 6 months in advance	33.33%	5
Select the next topic/series towards the end your current topic/series	40.00%	6
Total Respondents: 15		

*Figure 8 - How Often Do You Write Your Own Bible Studies?
 Respondents with Seventy Percent (or Higher) Bible Class Attendance*

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-20 percent	20.00%	3
20-40 percent	13.33%	2
40-60 percent	0.00%	0
60-80 percent	13.33%	2
80-100 percent	53.33%	8
TOTAL		15

*Figure 9 - What Percentage of Your Congregation's Leaders Attend Bible Class?
Respondents with Seventy Percent (or Higher) Bible Class Attendance*

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10 percent	7.69%	1
10-20 percent	15.38%	2
20-30 percent	7.69%	1
30-40 percent	7.69%	1
40-50 percent	0.00%	0
50-60 percent	0.00%	0
60-70 percent	7.69%	1
70-80 percent	7.69%	1
80-90 percent	23.08%	3
90-100 percent	23.08%	3
TOTAL		13

There is certainly some correlation that can be drawn between these congregations with the higher (seventy percent or higher) Bible class attendance, which could lead to different conclusions. For example, all but one of these fifteen congregations were small congregations (average worship between ten and one hundred). So, a plausible conclusion may be that the smaller the congregation, the easier it is to encourage members to attend adult Bible class.

The numbers for how often Bible studies were being written as opposed to ordered from Northwestern (or other locations) or what percentage of leadership was attending class there wasn't much of an impact also gave some interesting plausible conclusions. In congregations with the higher Bible class attendance, sixty-six percent of them wrote their own Bible class sixty percent of the time (or more). This could possibly indicate that Bible classes were being

very closely tailored to the needs and wants of that congregation. And in these congregations, sixty-one percent of them said that they have sixty percent (or more) of their leaders attending adult Bible class. This could possibly indicate that having congregational leadership present in class helps encourage other members to attend as well (more on this later in the paper).

Transition

These numbers create a curiosity to dive deeper into the possible reasons why attendance numbers are so low. We'll now walk through some of these possible reasons for the low Bible class attendance throughout the WELS.

SINFUL NATURE'S EFFECT

Perhaps it goes without saying, but the number one reason for low adult Bible class attendance is sin. Every single human who has walked this earth (except for Christ) was a sinner. David writes, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Ps 51:5) There is not one person who can escape this sinful nature; everyone has it by nature. This has been true since Adam and Eve ate the fruit and will continue to be true until God decides to place his judgement upon the world, bringing an end to the world.

This sinful nature that resides in every human wreaks havoc on their life day and night. This is also true in a Christian's life. The Christian has a new man who wants to please God with their thoughts, words, and actions. But the sinful nature is always on the other end tugging as hard as it can to steer the Christian away from God pleasing actions. Paul speaks of this constant battle inside the Christian in Romans 7.

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! (Rom 7:14-15, 21-24)

Now, the simple conclusion that many may draw here is that the sinful nature being talked about is the sinful nature of the congregation members. While part of the reason for low attendance in adult Bible class is the sinful nature of members that constantly pulls and tugs on them, telling them not to go, this is not the only sinful nature that takes blame. The sinful nature of the pastor also shares the responsibility for low numbers in adult Bible class.

With the final question of the survey¹⁵, there was an anticipated result that the word “lazy/laziness” would be a common occurrence. Christians are by nature, sinful. This sinfulness manifests itself in a number of different ways, one of which is laziness. This laziness shows itself in work ethics, whether at work or at home. This laziness shows itself in how they carry out their given roles (parents, children, employee, friend, etc.). This laziness also shows itself in how God’s Word is treated.

Surprisingly, of the 438 respondents that answered the final question of the survey, “lazy/laziness” only came up eighteen times.¹⁶ However, with a closer look, it can be seen that this idea and theme of “lazy/laziness” appeared over and over again through other words and phrases that express that same idea. This laziness towards God’s Word can appear in both the pastor and congregation member.

A Disclaimer

Before looking at how sinful nature may impact Bible class attendance, two disclaimers are in order. First, God’s Word works both psychologically and supernaturally. God’s Word works psychologically; he has put it into words, syllables, and sounds so that it would be understood by his people. And because it is in a language that can be understood, pastors can use the words, syllables, and sounds to tell people about the Word. Pastors can use this written word, just like any other communication, to touch people’s intellect, will, and emotion when preaching and teaching. So, what pastors say and how they say it does play a role in teaching.

¹⁵ Question 37 - I think that some of the key reasons (aside from sin, that is a given) a number of my members don’t regularly attend Sunday morning Bible class are...

¹⁶ Cf. Figure 1 in Appendix 2.

God's Word also works supernaturally. The Word is powerful in and of itself. Man has no power whatsoever to make the Word of God any more effective or powerful. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14)

So, despite his efforts to make his Bible study as effective as possible (in terms of God's Word working psychologically), a pastor cannot make any changes to his Bible study to make God's Word more effective. God's Word is powerful simply because it is God's Word. Johnson wrote, "Because grace is God's gift to give, teachers have no control over it. They can, however, be instruments of God's grace as they teach God's Word..."¹⁷ Or, to put it negatively, a pastor can create barriers to God's Word. If a pastor is sloppy and careless in his teaching, an obstacle may be placed between his members and the Word.

The Sinful Nature of the Pastor

"This class is boring." For the pastor, complaints of a boring class are dreadful to hear and certainly the last thing that he wants to hear. Hearing something like this may be an indicator that the pastor is growing lazy in his preparation and delivery of Bible class (but not always, of course). Many of the respondents of the final question of the survey (asking for other thoughts they had about low Bible class attendance) included the point that some of their members will not come because they feel the classes are boring. The word "boring" comes up fifteen times throughout the respondents' answers to this question.¹⁸ This is an issue that applies to both pastor

¹⁷ Kent L. Johnson, *Called to Teach: Ideas and Encouragement for Teachers in the Church*, 21.

¹⁸ Cf. Figure 2 in Appendix 2

and congregation member (the portion concerning the congregation member's sinful nature will be covered later).

This portion of the thesis does not aim to burden any consciences. The aim is, though, to demonstrate the different ways that the sinful nature of the pastor might serve as a barrier between the Bible study and members. One area where this sinful nature might be more apparent is in laziness. What are some ways that sinful laziness shows itself in the pastor in respect to God's Word? Does he ever think that he has all the knowledge he needs? Does he ever forget that his role as teacher of the Word means that he must be a student of the Word as well? This is not to say that a pastor battling against laziness no longer loves God's Word. However, this does recommend that there may be some sort of disconnect between his head and his heart. It is possible that the pastor, from time to time, recognizes the importance of God's Word but fails to act in a way that reflects this truth.

Is it possible that as a pastor gets further along in his ministry, there could be a temptation to be content in where he is in his knowledge of God and his Word? Could a feeling that he can coast in his preparation for Bible classes creep into his regular routine, which in turn leaves him and his members stuck in the same rut, week after week, class after class?

How about in the young pastor? Is it possible that laziness may work its way into the life of a young pastor in respect to adult Bible class? Could he possibly grow weary of producing a Bible study week after week and begin looking for shortcuts? Is it possible for him to be a little over-confident in his knowledge of the Word that he received in his training, forgetting that he can and must continue to learn from the Word and from his members?

Laziness of the pastor towards Bible class can show up in two different areas: preparation and delivery. In respect to preparation, there were a number of pastors who commented in the

survey on the amount of time a pastor puts into adult Bible class preparation. One of these comments was “pastors consistently work very hard at producing excellent sermons; that same excellence isn't evident in the Bible classes.”

The impact that laziness can have on a Bible class attendance is significant. If a pastor starts cutting back on time and energy to pour into a class, there will be noticeable setbacks in the quality of the class. If a pastor grows careless and sloppy in his preparation for a Bible class, his members may notice. If a pastor uses the supernatural working of the Word to excuse his laziness, attendance may reflect that. The laziness of a pastor can easily serve as a barrier between God's Word and the members of his congregation. If they (the members) know or feel that the pastor typically doesn't put in much time to prepare his Bible studies, they may be driven away.

What can be done? It is vital that a pastor looks to constantly combat this sinful tendency to become lazy in preparation and delivery. A way he can do so is simply remembering who he is. He is not just a teacher, but also a student at the same time. Howard Hendricks writes to this point,

“The Law of the Teacher, simply stated, is this: If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow... This law embraces the philosophy that I, as a teacher, am primarily a learner, a student among students... I must keep growing and changing. The Word of God, of course does not change; but my understanding of it of it does change, because I am a developing individual. This is why Peter could tell us at the end of his second epistle, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”¹⁹

A pastor striving to grow more and more in his role as teacher is always learning. He is learning in his preparation. He learns by pouring time in the Word. He learns through his members in and out of Bible class. He learns in his time spent learning/researching more about teaching adults.

¹⁹ Hendricks, Howard G. *Teaching to Change Lives*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987, 27.

And when he does these things, he may continue to grow as a teacher and will certainly continue to grow in his own faith.

The Sinful Nature of the Congregation Member

How does sin, as a factor for Bible class attendance, appear on the congregation members' end? It may appear in a similar way that it does for the pastor. There can be a disconnect between head and heart. The head knows and loves God's Word, but the heart doesn't always reflect that same love.

“Oh, how I love *my pastor's teaching!* I meditate on it all day long.” “For I am not ashamed of *Pastor's teaching*, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.” “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of *my mouth*. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.”²⁰

These familiar passages from Scripture certainly don't sound quite right when the italicized and underlined words are substituted in. It is not the pastor's word or teaching that matters. It is the Word that matters. Many people in the world today are engrossed in a consumer mindset (the “What's in it for me?” way of thinking). Whether it is buying a car, deciding which grocery store to use, or selecting a school for kids to attend, the best, in every aspect, is demanded. Not only should the car run well, but it needs to also be at a fair price, it needs to be appealing to the eye, and the salesman has to be likeable. Not only should the grocery store have good deals, it should also be clean and organized, and close to home.

²⁰ These three passages (Psalm 119:97, Romans 1:16, Deuteronomy 32:46-47) are all slightly misquoted intentionally, indicated by the italicized and underlined words.

Now, for a lot of things, this is a reasonable and wise mindset to develop. But how often does this attitude creep in with our members concerning church, and more specifically, Bible class? Bible class needs to be the best in every aspect. The pastor (or whoever is teaching) needs to put in the diligent hours to be well prepared, the class needs to be taught with “my” favorite method of teaching, it needs to be challenging (but not too challenging), and the subject matter must be interesting and directly/immediately applicable. That list can go on and on. The sinful old man residing in each member is constantly tugging their focus away from the message and turning them towards their own self-centered preferences and desires.

As mentioned earlier, the word “boring” came up quite often in the respondents’ answers to question thirty-seven of the survey. It has already been explained how a portion of the blame could be given to the pastor. But the other portion of the blame belongs to the members. What is happening when a class is labeled as “boring?” Certainly, someone could make a general statement that a class was boring without being in the wrong. However, what could happen is that this statement turns into a slippery slope that does lead to being in the wrong. What may have started as a simple and rather innocent statement that a class was boring could lead to using that as the main or only excuse for not going to class. This is simply not a valid reason not to come to Bible class. As mentioned earlier in this section, it is not about the pastor’s words that matters, it’s God’s Word that matters.

Sin does play a major role in Bible class attendance, but it does not stand as the only barrier for members coming to Bible class. No, there are many other causes that must be addressed and thought through. So now, we shift our attention towards the issues of teaching methodology, relationships, and promotion.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Which teaching methodology is best when teaching a class full of adults? This is a study that has been approached from a number of different angles by many different people. Richard Patterson wrote, “Christian educators tend to “boil down” theory to more manageable, simple guidelines. It is the nature of human beings to do so...Most of us do not naturally seek complexity. Yet, complexity weaves the fabric of how adults learn.”²¹ Teaching adults is not easy. There is not one agreed way to do it.

There is not a definitive, one-size-fits-all method or style of teaching that is the clear best choice for teaching adult Bible class for all situations. There are a number of different factors that come in to play that will make each teaching opportunity different. Not every pastor has the same skillset and gifts to teach the same way as everyone else. Some churches have more older people than younger and vice versa. And, each individual adult is different. “When twelve people walk into your class for the first time, each one will come already equipped with various experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and ideas.”²² Attempting to come up with a universal teaching methodology for every situation will result in more harm than good. So, instead of trying to determine which method and style is best, this section will spend time on some of the key foundational principles that come into play with teaching the adults in a congregation.

Mark Zarling wrote his thesis concerning the same aspect of adult Bible class that this thesis is covering, except with a more specific focus. Zarling’s study looked to see if there was a

²¹ Kenneth O Gangel, James C. Wilhoit, Richard Patterson, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Adult Education*, (Victor Books/SP Publications Inc, 1993), 121.

²² Kenneth O Gangel, James C. Wilhoit, Richard Patterson, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Adult Education*, (Victor Books/SP Publications Inc, 1993), 121.

certain teaching style that adults preferred or learned more effectively with. He essentially broke it down into two options: dialogical (student-centered) and monological (teacher-centered).²³

Zarling found through his research that dialogical seemed to be preferred and more effective than monological. “Although no specific breakdown of data was attempted to correlate age of respondent with specific preference to a particular teaching style, yet the consistently large numbers in items five, six, and seven²⁴ seem to indicate a preference for the question and answer format that cross over generational lines”²⁵

Figure 10 - Zarling's Research

5. How would you best describe the teaching styles most frequently used in congregationally sponsored adult Bible hours? (please check one)

14% Lecture format

68% Question/answer format

7% Small group discussion/workshop format

0% Self-directed learning format

7% Variety of these formats used on a consistent basis

4% Don't know

6. In which format are you personally most comfortable participating? Comfortable = willing to speak up/ask questions/share ideas & answers (please check one)

1% Lecture format

67% Question/answer format

24% Small group discussion/workshop format

0% Self-directed learning format

8% Variety of these formats used on a consistent basis

0% Don't know

²³ Monological teaching style is a teaching that focuses more on the teacher walking the class through each step of the class (probably primarily lecture) Dialogical teaching style focuses more on the student. Students tend to be much more involved in class and even have a level of control over the class.

²⁴ See Figure 3

²⁵ Mark G. Zarling, *Increasing the Motivational Level of Adult Bible Hour Participants Through Teaching Styles*, 43.

7. Which format do you personally think matches your learning style and helps you learn/retain new information? (please check one)

 6% Lecture format

 61% Question/answer format

 25% Small group discussion/workshop format

 1% Self-directed learning format

 7% Variety of these formats used on a consistent basis

 0% Don't know

Zarling's research²⁶ shows that having a dialogical teaching approach is important. "It is safe to conclude from such data that the vast majority of respondents not only are exposed to a question and answer format for Bible hour but are comfortable in such a setting and are most likely to attend a class knowing that the teaching style will incorporate such a format."²⁷

Patterson, however, gives a warning to this point. He writes about the difference between andragogy and pedagogy. "Some andragogical devotees allowed their belief regarding how adults learn to degenerate into the 'blind leading the blind,' by fostering extensive sharing sessions with non-authoritative source for truth."²⁸ This quote from Patterson communicates the fact that the dialogical, despite its benefits, is not a foolproof teaching method. The fact is, each style/method has its blessings and advantages as well as its shortcomings and flaws.

²⁶ Mark G. Zarling, *Increasing the Motivational Level of Adult Bible Hour Participants Through Teaching Styles*, 40-41

²⁷ Mark G. Zarling, *Increasing the Motivational Level of Adult Bible Hour Participants Through Teaching Styles*, 44.

²⁸ Kenneth O Gangel, James C. Wilhoit, Richard Patterson, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*. (Victor Books/SP Publications Inc, 1993), 125.

Question thirty-six of the survey for this thesis asked respondents this: “The style/methods of teaching that describe how I teach are...” (they were to select all that applied to them as a teacher). Three of the options they had were lecture, going back and forth with questions, and breakout groups. Of these three, the question/answer style of teaching was most popular. And so, if Zarling is accurate, that a dialogical method of teaching is, humanly speaking, more effective, then we can rejoice that many of our pastors are using methodology which is more effective for teaching adults. Of the 475 that answered this question, 460 (almost ninety-seven percent) said that they incorporate this specific teaching style. 259 said that they use some lecture in their teaching. (almost fifty-five percent). And 223 said that they make use of breakout groups (almost forty-seven percent).

Figure 11 - When Teaching I... (select all that apply)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Lecture	54.53%	259
Going back and forth with questions and answers with the class	96.84%	460
Break out groups	46.95%	223
I usually don't use handouts	1.47%	7
I sometimes use handouts	8.63%	41
I often use handouts	88.84%	422
I usually don't use technology	16.21%	77
I sometimes use technology	53.89%	256
I often use technology	25.89%	123
Other (please specify)	9.05%	43
Total Respondents: 475		

Looking at these numbers alone, there seems to be variety in teaching style among the WELS pastors. This is healthy. It is good to incorporate more than one kind of teaching into

Bible class for the very reason that has been mentioned a couple of times already: there doesn't exist a "perfect way to teach."

Finally, when it comes to the teaching style used in adult education, there will be variance from pastor to pastor and congregation to congregation. It can be easy at times to get fixated on the idea that there is one teaching method that works, period. This is not true. So, a way he can stay focused is to remember what the overall goal of adult education is to feed his flock with God's Word and to encourage them, through that Word, to continue in their growth "in the grace and knowledge of Christ." (2 Pet 3:18). David Kuske suggests following these principles that echo this goal of adult education:

1. That believers are preserved in faith until God takes them to himself in heaven.
2. That to this end believers continue to grow in faith as they grow in their knowledge of God's Word.
3. That the Holy Spirit uses this growth in knowledge and faith also to lead believers to grow in living dedicated lives of praise and thanks to God for his mercy and grace to them in Christ.
4. That in order to grow in faith and knowledge and holy living believers also grow in their ability to do personal study of God's Word.
5. That along with this ability (#4) believers also grow in their ability to apply God's Word to what they encounter daily or on occasion in contemporary life.
6. That along with growth in faith and knowledge (#2) and these two abilities (#4,5) believers also grow in their ability to teach, strengthen, encourage, comfort and admonish one another.
7. That through growth in these various ways (#2,4,5,6) believers also grow in their ability to share God's Word with non-Christians of all kinds.²⁹

²⁹ David P. Kuske, "Issues in Adult Education," (WLS Essay File – <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2849/KuskeEducation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> 1993), pgs. 2-3.

RELATIONSHIPS

Another factor that can contribute to the low Bible class attendance is the relationships found between pastor and members. It is crucial that a pastor knows his members. If he doesn't then potential for miscommunications to be made is exponential and his teaching very well may consistently miss the mark. For instance, if this thesis assumed an audience of current WELS pastors, when in reality it was meant for teens in high school, it wouldn't come near to accomplishing/communicating what it wanted to. Donald Deffner and Arnold Schmidt give another reason why getting to know your audience is important: "The more you know about each other's needs and interests, the better you will be able to speak the Gospel to one another in a useful way."³⁰

Having the opportunity to build relationships with members is something many pastors love. This section will place the reminder and reemphasis on the importance of establishing relationships with members. And by doing so, it will allow the reader to evaluate how he is doing and what he could change or improve.

One way, as Deffner points out, for a pastor to get to know his members better is by understanding what stage of life they are in and what changes they are experiencing. Young adults (eighteen to thirty-nine)³¹ tends to be the group that has the lowest in attendance at Bible class according to the survey conducted for this thesis. These young adults are making the big transition/change from childhood to adulthood. Sometime during this age range they will be more likely to take on more responsibilities. They may be more responsible for their own

³⁰ Donald L. Deffner, and Arnold E. Schmidt. *How to Teach Adults: For Adult Bible Class Leaders*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1992, 6-7.

³¹ The age ranges and categories are the same that Deffner used.

schedule, their own jobs, their own house, their own bills, and maybe even their own family.

That's a lot of change, as well as a lot of weight placed on their shoulders.

What does this mean for the pastor? Deffner said that with this age comes “new questions about God, faith, prayer, and the purpose of their lives—matters they may have neglected during their high school and college days.”³² A pastor getting to know his young adult³³ members allows him to be there to answer the questions that come with the dramatic life changes going on for that member. The more he knows them, the more easily he can make applications in Bible class that apply to this age group.

Adults who are in their mid-life stage (forty to fifty-nine) “seem to stagnate. They appear to have become comfortable with their lives and are somewhat unwilling to change.”³⁴ And on the other end, some of them may feel like their life hasn't been what they wanted it to be. This is why it is called the “mid-life crisis.”

What value is there in a pastor knowing the people of this age group? Deffner answers this question writing, “If people in this stage can be stimulated into creative thought and activity, they will continue to grow. If they let themselves become bored and sluggish, they will shrivel mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.”³⁵ The more pastors get to know the people of this age group, the more they figure out how to specifically challenge them through the activities and questions used in class.

The third group is the older adults (sixty and over). This is the group that tends to have the highest amount in attendance at Bible class according to the survey conducted for this thesis.

³² Donald L. Deffner, and Arnold E. Schmidt. *How to Teach Adults: For Adult Bible Class Leaders*, 7.

³³ Still using Deffner's classification of young adults – ages 18-39

³⁴ Donald L. Deffner, and Arnold E. Schmidt. *How to Teach Adults: For Adult Bible Class Leaders*, 7-8.

³⁵ Donald L. Deffner, and Arnold E. Schmidt. *How to Teach Adults: For Adult Bible Class Leaders*, 8.

Like the young adults, this group is also undergoing significant changes in their lives. They are transitioning from the busy everyday jobs into retirement. Some will find another job to fill some of their time and some won't, but either way, there will be a natural tension and challenge of filling the extra time.

Deffner adds this about the older adults, "At a time when they would appreciate more contact with other Christians, many older persons find themselves eased out of social organizations. At the same time their physical vigor may decline, and they may lose part of their hearing and eyesight." So, the time when they want more social interaction and have more time for it is also a time when it is exceedingly difficult because of physical and/or mental health.

So what benefit does the pastor receive by knowing this about the older adults? This group of people brings a lot of experience and knowledge to the class. They have stories of things they have learned that can stimulate good discussion. So, the pastor is wise to get to know these members in order that he can get them involved in class often. There are many different things that a pastor can try to get to know more about his members (know their hobbies, their interests, the facts of their life, their family, etc.). The advantage of the pastor is that getting to know the people is part of his work.

The pastor strives to know his members. By doing so, he can strengthen his teaching of those adult members. The pastor also learns in class from his members. The more a pastor knows about the lives of his members, knowing that they have a lot to bring to the table as far as experiences go, the more personal and effective he will be able to make his teaching. Adults, having so much life experience, can shape the class in many different ways. And the better the pastor knows his members, the more effective his teaching may become.

PROMOTION

Another cause that can contribute to low Bible class attendance is how the class is promoted. Promotion (or a lack of promotion) can place barriers between your members and your Bible class (keeping both the psychological and supernatural working of the Word in mind, of course). We will look at promotion in the narrow and broad sense. I've chosen to define promotion in the narrow sense as how you advertise for and speak of the class you are about to teach. I've chosen to define promotion in the broad sense as how you inform your members of what Bible class as a whole is and isn't.

Narrow Sense

Whenever Bible class promotion in the narrow sense is brought up in this paper, it is the actual act of telling/informing members of what is being covered in Bible class that is being spoken of. There are many different ways that a pastor can promote his current or upcoming Bible classes. He can tell them in person after the service or in a general announcement after worship. He can tell them with a poster or a bulletin announcement. And with today's technology, he can tell them through email, social media, church website, etc.

Promotion in the narrow sense is important to do on two different levels. One, it tells the people what they can learn about and what they have to look forward to. This can serve as another incentive for the people to come hear God's Word. As mentioned earlier in the introductory paragraph to this concept of promotion, we must remain sensitive to and uphold the Scriptural truth of the psychological and supernatural working of God's Word, avoiding the ditches on either side. We must not abandon promotion all together. We should not view God's supernatural Word as an excuse for not promoting Bible class. We shouldn't be content in saying

that God’s Word is powerful enough to draw the people into class. (which is true, but God has called us to go to work with his Word) “We don’t want to slip into the mindset that says that we don’t need to do any encouraging/promoting. And on the other side, we must not view promotion inappropriately by elevating it too high. We should not say that if we don’t find a way to attract God’s people to Bible class they will never come, as if it depended all on us.

Figure 12 shows a handful of different ways that promoting can be done. Respondents were asked to select all the methods of advertising their Bible class to their members. As Figure 12 clearly shows, there is a healthy variety of promotion techniques being implemented by WELS pastors. There were even other ways that respondents gave in the “other” option of question nineteen.³⁶ Some of “other” promotion techniques that respondents added were mailing out brochures/postcards, filming a promotional video to highlight the upcoming classes, creating a regularly produced flyer, mentioning class in a sermon, and inviting people in person.

Figure 12 - Promotion Techniques

Announcements in the bulletin	95.61%	457
Announcements spoken after church	93.72%	448
Announcements put on a screen	35.36%	169
Email	53.14%	254
Website	47.49%	227
Social media sites	38.28%	183
Posters giving details to the class are put up around different parts of church	27.82%	133
An invitation with details concerning the class is placed in the member's box	9.41%	45
Church/school newsletter	57.53%	275
Other (please specify)	7.95%	38
Total Respondents: 478		

³⁶ Question Nineteen - How do you/have you promoted the topics for class? (select all that apply)

While there is clearly a healthy dosage of promotion techniques being implemented, this truth must remain in the forefront: there is nothing that pastors can do to make God's Word more powerful or effective. No matter how many announcements are made or how many different styles of promotions are used, it is ultimately God through his Word who draws people in to learn more. This doesn't, however, rule out the usefulness of these announcements. God has given his Word to work psychologically as well. People are naturally, though not all the time, drawn into things that are promoted well.

For instance, if someone is trying to make a decision as to where to eat between two local restaurants that they have never eaten at before, it may come down to how each restaurant promoted themselves. Restaurant one has a clear, catchy, and professional sign out front. It also has an eye-catching website that can be navigated with ease. And, it has commercials that are short, simple, and appealing. Restaurant two also has a sign out front, but it looks dirty, old, and is incredibly hard to read. Their website has glitch after glitch. And the commercials are overplayed, hokey, and unprofessional. Which restaurant will be picked? It is probably going to be restaurant one. The promotion alone can have a significant impact and can sway someone from one decision to another.

This concept of promotions applies in a similar way to adult Bible class. Let's look at pastor one. He serves at a congregation that has a website but it rarely is updated and he doesn't make use of it to tell his members about Bible class. He never uses other visuals like a poster or bulletin to advertise class. And even his post-worship announcements are lacking. After the worship service, he stands up and says, "Today we will cover Psalm 23 in class." And that's it; that is all that he says.

Now let's look at pastor two. He makes sure to have information about that is coming up in Bible class in a visible location on the website. He will often place posters around church to build both awareness and excitement about what is being taught in Bible class. And when he stands up after the worship service, he says something like this: "Shepherds were often viewed as the low-lives in Old Testament time. Not many people aspired to become a shepherd for a career. But yet, we call our God a shepherd. Come see why."

This was, of course, an extreme example. This illustration doesn't intend to accuse any pastor of doing the things that "pastor one" was doing. This illustration was, however, meant to demonstrate the impact that having well thought out and high-quality promotions for Bible classes can have.

Promotion in the narrow sense is important and should not be ignored. But just as the rest of the various causes/factors towards low Bible class attendance, promotion in the narrow sense is not the one thing that needs to be corrected or improved upon to bring about a change. Each of the different causes need to be evaluated and dealt with.

Broad Sense

Whenever Bible class promotion in the broad sense is brought up in this paper, it is the telling/informing of members of what Bible class is all about that is being spoken of. This is the process of stepping back and making sure that members understand what Bible class is and what it isn't. Looking at question thirty-seven of the survey³⁷ in light of promotion in the broad sense, there were two ditches that respondents often said their members fell into. One ditch was that

³⁷ Question thirty-seven - I think that some of the key reasons (aside from sin, that is a given) a number of my members don't regularly attend Sunday morning Bible class are...

some (members) thought that Bible class was too basic and was designed only for those new to the faith. The other ditch was that others viewed Bible class as being too complicated for them and was only for those who were more mature in their faith.

The first ditch (that Bible class is too basic) came up often and was supported by many of the respondents. Below are a handful of quotations from some of these respondents.

-- *“We seem to have a graduation mentality (know everything I need to know from confirmation), which seems to be taught by example from previous generations at our congregation.”*

-- *“The old confirmation idea that once I've been confirmed, I know everything there is to know about the Bible and Lutheranism, and no pastor is going to be able to teach me anything new”*

-- *“Many of the elderly perhaps think they've learned it all already.”*

-- *“Are satisfied with the level of Bible knowledge they have”*

Sometimes members can slide into this ditch of contentment. They honestly feel comfortable with what they know, and even think that they know all there is to know. The “graduation mentality” and “confirmation idea” is often applied which is the thought that you can complete your training/learning of God’s Word. People may view their Bible Information Course as adults or their Catechism/confirmation instruction as a child as being enough. They may see Bible class as an opportunity for those who don’t know as much to learn more, but not for them.

This mentality can ultimately appear in anyone. The sinful human nature can cling to this way of thinking quite naturally. However, this mindset may attack the members of long-standing who have familial roots in the WELS (or just Christianity as a whole) more often. “I already know this stuff.” they may say, “I don’t need to keep hearing this again and again, do I?”

The second ditch (that Bible class is too advanced for them or intimidating) was also supported by the responses of question thirty-seven. Written below are some of the quotations from the respondents.

-- *“Feeling of inadequacy - they don't know the Bible so think they will be embarrassed”*

-- *“Afraid of being exposed as not knowing much”*

-- *“Are afraid to find out how much they don't know of Scripture”*

-- *“Afraid that they will put on the spot to answer questions like they had to for confirmation and fear they will look unlearned”*

Pastors seemed to think that fear is the common denominator with members who fell into this second ditch. People are afraid that they will be put on the hot seat to answer a difficult question. People are afraid that if they go to Bible class they will be embarrassed by their lack of knowledge. People are afraid that they will be judged for their lack of understanding of God's Word.

This wrong view of Bible class may very well be prevalent among all kinds of members (new to the church or long-time WELS members). They feel they just don't know enough as others, which may be true. This becomes problematic when they translate this lesser knowledge to mean Bible class is not an option for them.

These two ditches are factors that a pastor has some control over. In either of the two ditches, a pastor needs to inform, inform, inform. With the first ditch, the pastor needs to inform his members that Bible class is not just a “beginners' course” that is meant only for those new to the faith. Rather, that it is an opportunity to feed and strengthen faith. The pastor can encourage them to see the benefit they have in having God's Word at their fingertips in many different ways, including Bible study. And finally, there can be encouragement given based on these words found in Peter's second Epistle, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (2 Pet 3:18) Christians are never done growing and learning about God’s Word.

With those who fall into the second ditch, the pastor should inform his members that Bible class is not an advanced Bible study designed only for those who are at a certain level of maturity of faith. These members fear that if they attend, they will look foolish. The pastor can ease the fears of these members, assuring them that Bible class is not a place of judgement or comparison of knowledge. The foundation of faith is Christ. It’s that very foundation that everyone’s faith rests. Bible class is not only for the “wise and learned” but for all so that all can continue to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (portion of 2 Pet 3:18)

OTHER CAUSES

Leading by Example

Question thirty-three of the survey asked what percentage of the leaders of the church regularly attend adult Bible class (complete results are below in Figure 13). 476 respondents answered this question. There were 120 respondents who serve at congregations with a zero to thirty percent Bible class attendance among the leaders of the congregation (about twenty-five percent of respondents). 208 respondents had fifty percent attendance from their leaders (about forty-three percent of respondents).

Figure 13 - Percentage of Congregational Leaders Who Attend Bible Class

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10 percent	9.87%	47
10-20 percent	8.40%	40
20-30 percent	6.93%	33
30-40 percent	8.61%	41
40-50 percent	9.87%	47
50-60 percent	12.18%	58
60-70 percent	10.50%	50
70-80 percent	13.03%	62
80-90 percent	12.18%	58
90-100 percent	8.40%	40
TOTAL		476

These low numbers (attendance among congregational leadership) can play a role for Bible class attendance as a whole. It is the simple principle of following the example of a leader. There are instances when some of these leaders can't come for legitimate reasons, but just think

about what an impression this makes. If the leaders of the congregation aren't attending, what message does this send to the rest of the church body? It could perhaps convey the message that Bible class is not that important.

With this being said, it is imperative that a pastor takes the time to instruct his leaders in the importance of feeding their faith with God's Word. And with that, a pastor should instruct his leaders to lead by example. In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote this, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Tim 4:12) In this portion of Paul's letter, he spends time giving instruction, advice, and encouragement to Timothy, a young pastor and leader. He emphasizes the importance of leading by example in every aspect of life: in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

This makes a clear application to the leaders of congregations today. Their leadership needs to be one that is carried out by example. Their life serves as a showcase of how to live out their faith. One practical way of doing so is simply taking time to go study God's Word in Bible class. If the rest of the congregation sees the leaders taking the feeding of their faith seriously by taking advantage of Bible class, they will be naturally encouraged to follow suit, or at least consider it.

Practical Issues (how many, how long, childcare, summer)

Finally, there are a few other causes/factors that don't quite fit into the categories listed above but are still worth discussing. Some of these practical issues could be: 1) How many options should a church offer for their Sunday morning adult Bible class? 2) Should there still be classes held during the busy summer months? 3) How long should each class be? And there are

many other possible scenarios that could be added to this list. If anyone were to search every page of Scripture, no matter how hard they looked, no specific answer to these questions would be found (this is true with most of the areas covered in this paper). Many of the applications are similar for many different practical issues, so we will only look at a couple issues.

The issues stated above all have a practical characteristic to them. Their practical nature, however, should not create a conclusion that they are not worth thinking about. Each of these issues deserve some thought and they will be resolved differently from congregation to congregation. For instance, some churches don't have Sunday morning Bible class. Question five asks respondents if they offer a Sunday morning Bible class. Of the 477 that answered this question, thirty-four said that they don't offer a Sunday morning class (about seven percent).

While it may not be wise to suddenly cut Sunday morning Bible class out of the normal routine of the congregation, there is nothing saying that it is necessary. Some congregations may replace Sunday morning Bible class with a mid-week Bible class as their "main" Bible class. Others will rely on small group Bible studies led in the homes of members in place of Sunday morning Bible class. Some of these other options may be wise in a larger congregation, a multi-site, or dual parishes for practicality sake. Or, some of these options may be wise for a congregation that, for one reason or another, can't make Sunday morning Bible class work. Ultimately, the pastor needs to evaluate the needs of a congregation as well as the people. People lead exceedingly busy lives. They have so many different things to manage, such as work, school, family, and social life. It all adds up quickly. So, maybe Sunday morning isn't the best time. Busyness, as mentioned earlier, is something that can easily move from being a legitimate excuse and instead turn into a sinful excuse. Nonetheless, the busy schedules of people today are something that should be considered.

In respect to class duration, what is the typical amount of time spent in Sunday morning Bible class? This is what question sixteen of the survey looked to answer. 408 of the 469 respondents to this question had Bible classes with durations that fall in the forty minutes to one-hour long range (almost eighty-seven percent). This range of Bible class duration is the most common. However, just because something is common, doesn't necessarily mean it is the best.

Figure 14 - Bible Class Duration

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 30 minutes	2.77%	13
30-40 minutes	8.74%	41
40-50 minutes	36.03%	169
50 minutes – 1 hour	50.96%	239
More than an hour	1.49%	7
TOTAL		469

The pastor needs to again evaluate the needs of both the congregation as a whole as well as the individual members. Perhaps a longer Bible class is a better fit for a congregation. Maybe a shorter Bible class is better. In support of this idea of evaluating the congregation, read what this pastor had to say about his adult Bible class:

When I first got out in the parish, I worked hard on producing 45-minute Bible studies. I liked them, but my attendance was terrible. I tried before worship - after worship. It was BAD. During the summer months I switched to the 19-minute Bible studies. I would offer a brief Bible study normally 10 minutes long IMMEDIATELY after worship... This was good almost EVERYONE stayed - I'm talking 80-90%. Come fall, I went back to the usual abysmally attended 45-minute class. This sucked. The kicked (sic) was after Christmas the attendance went into the toilet - so much so that some Sunday's my Sunday school teacher had no kids to teach! This was discouraging, and I was in danger of losing my teachers. So... I talked to my brothers. One guy did kids church. I am looking into it - he had one brave soul who was willing to miss every Sunday to teach all year - um that's not necessarily good... So, I suggested a rotation of eight people for the two classes and we offered kids church (I had push back - "kids need to be in the church"). The kids were in church through the children's message offered after the song of praise (following the C&A). Then they would leave. They would have a SS lesson (Christ light - nothing

crazy) during the lessons and sermon. They returned during creed/offering. Observe every LS. The kids are key because they need to be fed before the parents care about themselves. THEN what to do about the now obsolete Bible class hour - there's no SS so will any adults attend? Probs not. At least not more than the ten~ old faithfuls (sic). We went through the old parrish (sic) assistance 13-14 years ago...our consultant...looked at our numbers and asked why we would ever go from 80% Bible class attendance to 20% or less attendance just to have a "normal" Bible class. He said break it down. Christianity is a marathon and not a sprint. I agreed. Changed, never looked back. Some say what can you accomplish in 10 minutes? Um, more than you can in 45 if no one comes³⁸

The pastor who wrote this response brought up a few important things that need to be considered. The pastor tried and evaluated. He tried the “traditional” forty-five-minute Bible study and then evaluated to see if it was profitable to keep it that way or change it up. The pastor made conclusions and changes. He drew the conclusion that the forty-five-minute Bible study was simply not beneficial for his congregation. He then made the change from a forty-five-minute Bible class to a ten to twenty-minute Bible study.

A pastor needs to always be evaluating and acting on his evaluations. It can be easy to get stuck in a rut doing the same things over and over because, “that’s what always was done.” Just because something is tradition or common doesn’t always mean that it is better. In fact, traditional could at times mean worse. “Change can move persons to give and do their very best. People become stale and rusty when they are seldom called on to give their best.”³⁹

³⁸ Many of the written responses to the survey were written in a shorthand and an informal style of writing, which is why this block quote is in an informal form. While this informal style would not be fitting for an academic paper, it was fitting for the survey. Notice that (sic) is inserted a few times to emphasize that there wasn’t a copying error, but that it is how it should be.

³⁹ Jones, R. Wayne, *Overcoming Barriers to Sunday School Growth*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987, 77.

CONCLUSION

This is not, by any means, an exhaustive list of the different factors/causes involved in the issue of low Bible class attendance. There can't be an exhaustive and complete list made because each congregation is different. Each congregation has its own dynamics and culture, its own blessings and joy, its own challenges and troubles.

The causes/factors for low attendance given in this paper are not to serve as an exact guide to fix the issue and then increase the visible results of Bible class attendance. These causes/factors are, however, to serve as a foundation and starting point for pastors to evaluate the low attendance issue of their own congregation.

If a pastor decides to make some changes to address the problem of low Bible class attendance and sees results, thanks be to God! If a pastor decides to make some changes to address the problem of low Bible class attendance and doesn't see results, thanks be to God! It is easy to get caught up in the numbers and dwell too long on the visible results (whether positive or negative). While numbers are important, they aren't the only or most important responsibility in our calls as pastors. We are called to use God's powerful Word to nourish our flock over which God has placed us as overseers. We are called to do as Paul instructed the leaders of the church of Ephesus to do when he gave his farewell speech to them in Miletus:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32)

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APPENDIX 1

Below is the survey which was sent to all WELS pastors on October 15th, 2018

1. What district is your church in?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Arizona-California <input type="radio"/> Dakota-Montana <input type="radio"/> Michigan <input type="radio"/> Minnesota <input type="radio"/> Nebraska <input type="radio"/> North Atlantic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Northern Wisconsin <input type="radio"/> Pacific Northwest <input type="radio"/> South Atlantic <input type="radio"/> South Central <input type="radio"/> Southeastern Wisconsin <input type="radio"/> Western Wisconsin
---	---

2. How would you describe the location your church is in?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Rural <input type="radio"/> Small Town <input type="radio"/> Suburban 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Large City <input type="radio"/> Urban
---	---

3. What is the population of the town your church is in?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Under 10,000 <input type="radio"/> 10,000-50,000 <input type="radio"/> 50,000-100,000 <input type="radio"/> 100,000-250,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 250,000-500,000 <input type="radio"/> 500,000-1,000,000 <input type="radio"/> 1,000,000 and above
--	---

4. The population of the town my church is in is...
 - Growing
 - Declining
 - Staying the same

5. Do you offer a Sunday morning Bible class?
 - Yes
 - No

6. If you answered "no" to the previous question, what day of the week is your best attended Bible class?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Monday <input type="radio"/> Tuesday <input type="radio"/> Wednesday <input type="radio"/> I answered "yes" to the previous question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Thursday <input type="radio"/> Friday <input type="radio"/> Saturday
---	--

7. What is your average attendance for only your Sunday morning worship?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 10-50 <input type="radio"/> 50-100 <input type="radio"/> 100-150 <input type="radio"/> 150-200 <input type="radio"/> 200-275 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 275-350 <input type="radio"/> 350-425 <input type="radio"/> 425-500 <input type="radio"/> 500 and above
--	--

8. What percentage of your members who attend Sunday morning worship also attend your Sunday morning adult Bible class (on average)?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent
9. How many different Sunday morning classes do you offer?
- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4 or more
10. How many members on average attend a worship service other than Sunday morning?
- 0 (don't have one)
 - 1-20
 - 20-40
 - 40-60
 - 60-80
 - 80-100
 - More than 100
11. How many other adult Bible classes do you offer outside Sunday morning Bible class(es)?
- None
 - 1-2
 - 3-5
 - 6-10
 - 11 and up
12. Do you have members who will regularly attend weekday Bible classes but not attend Sunday morning class?
- Yes
 - No
13. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, how many?
- 1-5
 - 5-10
 - 10-25
 - 25-50
 - 50 and above
 - I answered "no" to the previous question
14. What percentage of your members who regularly attend worship on a day other than Sunday, attend your Sunday morning Bible class?
- 0-20 percent
 - 20-40 percent
 - 40-60 percent
 - 60-80 percent
 - 80-100 percent

15. Who leads your Sunday morning classes? (Select all that apply)
- Pastor(s)
 - Staff Minister
 - Teacher(s)
 - Elder(s) or other lay member(s)
 - Other (please specify)
16. How long is your typical Sunday morning Bible class?
- Less than 30 minutes
 - 30-40 minutes
 - 40-50 minutes
 - 50 minutes – 1 hour
 - More than an hour
17. When planning your Bible classes, you...
- Select topics/series 4-5 years in advance
 - Select topics/series 2-3 years in advance
 - Select topics/series 1 year in advance
 - Select topics/series 6 months in advance
 - Select the next topic/series towards the end your current topic/series
18. When planning your Bible class topics, you...
- Frequently ask members for input
 - Sometimes ask members for input
 - Seldomly ask members for input
 - Explain your answer and/or explain how you ask your members for input
19. How do you/have you promoted the topics for class? (select all that apply)
- Announcements in the bulletin
 - Announcements spoken after church
 - Announcements put on a screen
 - Email
 - Website
 - Social media sites
 - Posters giving details to the class are put up around different parts of church
 - An invitation with details concerning the class is placed in the member's box
 - Church/school newsletter
 - Other (please specify)
20. How often do you have a stand-alone (one class period) Bible class as opposed to a Bible class series that expands over multiple weeks?
- Almost never
 - Once or twice a year
 - 3-9 times a year
 - 10 or more times a year

21. How often do you write your own Bible studies (as opposed to getting a pre-written Bible study)?
- 0-20 percent
 - 20-40 percent
 - 40-60 percent
 - 60-80 percent
 - 80-100 percent
22. For pre-written Bible studies, where do you get your materials?
- NPH
 - Concordia
 - Kremer
 - I don't use pre-written Bible studies
 - Other (please specify)
23. How long does an average Bible class series last?
- 2-4 weeks
 - 5-7 weeks
 - More than 7 weeks
24. Do you offer a Sunday morning Bible class in the summer months?
- Yes
 - No
 - Explain why or why not
25. Do you offer Sunday school for children during the summer?
- Yes
 - No
 - Explain why or why not
26. Do you offer child-care for parents with young children during Bible class?
- Yes
 - No
27. What percentage of your regular Sunday morning Bible class attendees currently have children living at home?
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 0-10 percent | <input type="radio"/> 50-60 percent |
| <input type="radio"/> 10-20 percent | <input type="radio"/> 60-70 percent |
| <input type="radio"/> 20-30 percent | <input type="radio"/> 70-80 percent |
| <input type="radio"/> 30-40 percent | <input type="radio"/> 80-90 percent |
| <input type="radio"/> 40-50 percent | <input type="radio"/> 90-100 percent |

28. What percentage of your regular Sunday morning Bible class attendees are 18-30?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent
29. What percentage of your regular Sunday morning Bible class attendees are 31-40?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent
30. What percentage of your regular Sunday morning Bible class attendees are 41-50?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent
31. What percentage of your regular Sunday morning Bible class attendees are 51-60?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent
32. What percentage of your regular Sunday morning Bible class attendees are 61 and above?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent
33. On average, about what percentage of your school teachers, staff, elders, and council members attend Bible class (or are teaching Sunday school)?
- 0-10 percent
 - 10-20 percent
 - 20-30 percent
 - 30-40 percent
 - 40-50 percent
 - 50-60 percent
 - 60-70 percent
 - 70-80 percent
 - 80-90 percent
 - 90-100 percent

34. How equipped did you feel to teach adults after graduation from WLS? (on a scale of 1-10... 10 being the highest)

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 6 |
| <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 7 |
| <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 8 |
| <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 9 |
| <input type="radio"/> 5 | <input type="radio"/> 10 |

Explain your answer

35. In order to improve my ability to teach adults I have... (select all that apply)

- Read secular books on adult education
- Read books specifically focused on adult education in the church
- Taken classes/seminars
- Turned to a brother in the ministry for advice
- Other (please specify)

36. The style/methods of teaching that describe how I teach are... (select all that apply)

- Lecture
- Going back and forth with questions and answers with the class
- Break out groups

- I usually don't use handouts
- I sometimes use handouts
- I often use handouts

- I usually don't use technology
- I sometimes use technology
- I often use technology

- Other (please specify)

37. I think that some of the key reasons (aside from sin, that is a given) a number of my members don't regularly attend Sunday morning Bible class are...

Many of the charts/tables for the results of these questions are included in the body of the paper, but not all of them. If there is a question (or a combination of questions) that you would like to see results for, email me at platzeraj@gmail.com

APPENDIX 2

Figure 1 – All Occurrences of the Word Lazy/Laziness from the Following Question:⁴⁰

I think that some of the key reasons (aside from sin, that is a given) a number of my members don't regularly attend Sunday morning Bible class are...

- Time, *laziness* , not convinced how important it is
- pre sunday school aged kids, husbands don't come to church, *lazy* ..
- Busy and lithargic *lazy* too much church
- *Lazy* , they don't see a need for God's Word in their everyday life.
- The saints often think that coming to church is good enough. We all have a tendency to be on the *lazy* side - told what/why we believe (worship) rather than explore what/why we believe (Bible class).God's people don't fully appreciate how Bible class not only builds them up in faith, but also equips them to share the faith with others (although I do try to emphasize this).
- *Lazy* or 2. busy lives or 3. overcommitted or 4. already attend a different study or 5. don't click well with that particular group of people/leader
- Too *lazy* to come early before late service or too preoccupied to stay late after early service.
- *Laziness* , don't want to, one hour is good enough
- *Lazy*
- *Lazy* ; not a habit; "busy;" confirmation = graduation syndrome
- Men are afraid of being exposed for how little they know. Over-scheduled families. *Laziness* . Low-quality Sunday School program that kids and parents don't want to use, and therefore, have no "kid coverage" to attend. People are content with the status quo of their faith and feel little urgency (dangers without and blessings thereof) to grow in faith.
- inconvenient to their schedules/plans for Sunday (we meet after worship 11-noon); don't like large group study....prefer smaller groups (that's why we offer 3 additional study opportunities during the week); *lazy*

⁴⁰ Note that both Figure 1 and Figure 2 are direct quotes from the final question of the survey. Most respondents used more of a shorthand kind of style and did not write their response in complete English.

- *Laziness* . Also it is not their habit. They weren't trained by their parents to make Bible Study a regular part of their lives. They didn't make it an important habit with their own children. They easily don't always see the importance of it. They are usually not trying to be rebellious.
- Some have hearing problems / age issues / health issues that prevent them. Some are too *lazy* . Some distracted by the thorns of life
- *laziness* or embarrassment at what they don't know
- People are *lazy* . It's that simple. I have been a pastor for 16 years. When I first got out in the parish, I worked hard on producing 45 minute Bible studies. I liked them but my attendance was terrible. I tried before worship - after worship. It was BAD. There were two things I noticed. Bible class attendance and Sunday school attendance (for kids - it's called Sunday school for kids and adults commonly in the south) went together. If the kids came early - the parents wouldn't just ditch them, they would attend too. During the summer months I switched to the 19-minute Bible studies. I would offer a brief Bible study normally 10 minutes long IMMEDIATELY after worship - lock the doors. (I jest...) This was good almost EVERYONE stayed - I'm talking 80-90%. Come fall, I went back to the usual abysmally attended 45 minute class. This sucked. The kicked was after Christmas the attendance went into the toilet - so much so that some Sunday's my Sunday school teacher had no kids to teach! This was discouraging and I was in danger of losing my teachers. So... I talked to my brothers. One guy did kids church. I looking into it - he had one brave soul who was willing to miss every Sunday to teach all year - um that's not necessarily good... So I suggested a rotation of eight people for the two classes and we offered kids church (I had push back - "kids need to be in the church"). The kids were in church through the children's message offered after the song of praise (following the C&A). Then they would leave. They would have a SS lesson (christ light - nothing crazy) during the lessons and sermon. They returned during creed/offering. Observe every LS. The kids are key because they need to be fed before the parents care about themselves. THEN what to do about the now obsolete Bible class hour - there's no SS so will any adults attend? Probs not. At least not more than the ten~ old faithfuls. We went through the old parrish assistance 13-14 years ago. Jim Heubner from Grace was our consultant. He looked at our numbers and asked why we would ever go from 80% Bible class attendance to 20% or less attendance just to have a "normal" Bible class. He said break it down. Christianity is a marathon and not a sprint. I agreed. Changed, never looked back. Some say what can you accomplish in 10 minutes? Um, more than you can in 45 if no one comes ;)
- Most WELS Pastors couldn't teach themselves out of a wet paper bag! Plus, the pre-written materials are boring, condescending, and very light in doctrine and the Confessions. We ARE Lutherans after all! Many of my dear brother pastors are simply too *lazy* and uninterested to do a good job at teaching Bible class. I hear this over and over from members coming in our church!
- *laziness* and lack of appreciation for the gospel
- *Laziness* , not in the habit, fear of the unknown

Figure 2 – All Occurrences of the Word “Boring” From the Following Question

I think that some of the key reasons (aside from sin, that is a given) a number of my members don't regularly attend Sunday morning Bible class are...

- Habit. Not interested. Fear of being called on. Think it's boring . Think it's too complicated/deep.
- they perceive the classes as boring ; they think they know enough; they are too busy
- think they don't have time think they know it all already think it's boring
- "busy" but also a need for a better understanding of priorities. A number of people have been turned off by my predecessor's " boring " lecture style studies. I am working to shake things up and shorted lecture series.
- Here are some things I have heard - (not all at my current call) - "It's my time to have coffee with my spouse while my kids are in Sunday School." - "We've never had that habit." - "Topic doesn't interest me." (But no topic really ever did :) I think some things that might circulate: - Has never been a habit - i.e. the culture or expectation of coming never has been encouraged before. - People say stupid things and have silently hurt others - who then choose to stay away. - Setting of study is sometimes challenging for people to hear others, discuss, interact. - Boring teaching
- boring , lecture by those not gifted for lecturing, not enough fellowship
- Sin. Most or all who choose not to attend lack an appreciation for the importance of the Word in their growth in the faith. Some seem to think Bible class is necessarily boring . A few feel that the class time is too early in the morning.
- They don't find it meaningful, and often it's hard to blame them. Most pastor-led adult Bible classes are incredibly boring and woefully lack practical application. They're poorly researched, poorly devised, and poorly executed. People respect the pastor's office, so they don't usually ask challenging questions, but those questions are often the most valuable part of the class because they've seen more life than the pastor. It takes a lot of effort on the part of the pastor to develop excellent teaching skills, but it's totally worth the investment. God bless your efforts to that end.
- They feel a class would be boring . They also don't see it as practical to their lives.
- The perception that class is boring . Prioritizing other activities for a day off of work.
- Pastors lecture - boring . They don't spend time on coming up with thoughtful questions to stimulate discussion. They don't challenge their members. To me it's more of a pastor problem than a member problem.

- Never been in the habit of attending. Some are too afraid that they don't know enough to attend. Some past classes may have been boring . Or, they're under the impression that it's just like catechism class all over again.
- Most WELS Pastors couldn't teach themselves out of a wet paper bag! Plus, the pre-written materials are boring , condescending, and very light in doctrine and the Confessions. We ARE Lutherans after all! Many of my dear brother pastors are simply too lazy and uninterested to do a good job at teaching Bible class. I hear this over and over from members coming in our church!
- Don't see a need for it. Don't want to take the time for it. Too much like school (they anticipate it being boring).
- I realize these involve sin: sports activities for kids, Member does not think it is important enough I had a member say they don't attend because they know enough already immature faith Are satisfied with the level of Bible knowledge they have Are afraid to find out how much they don't know of Scripture They don't attend because it is simply habitual to not attend...They never have attended and learned the habit from their parents Travel over 30 minutes to church and don't want to get home well after noon when our Bible study ends Don't really apply the Bible to their lives on regular basis so why bother with Bible study Bible study is too boring Have too many secular activities such as maintaining their home and property they don't read and study the Bible at home so why would they on Sunday