

## 1.7 How can we avoid getting hung up on the size of our classes?

Teacher, do you identify with any of these scenarios?

- “Janie needs special help,” her Sunday school teacher admitted, “but I don’t have time to waste on just one student.”
- “Robby hasn’t been to class in several weeks,” his teacher said, “but he lives so far away. I can’t take time just to visit one absentee.”
- “We really should have special education classes for Sally,” superintendent Jones admitted, “but we have only one mentally handicapped child in our Sunday school. “We can’t prepare a lesson for just one child.”
- “Only one of my students was here today,” Mrs. Miller told her pastor, “So I just sent her over to the next class. I’ll save my lesson for when I have a larger group.”

What is the common problem in each of these scenarios? What do you think?

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 These teachers all downplay in one way or another the importance of the individual student. They are holding back on something that could be beneficial because it would affect only a few students. They are overly concerned with the number of students or the size of their classes.

*Think about this:* Sunday school specialist Elmer Towns has said that **though the church should be as large as all, it should also be as small as one.** What do you think he meant?

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 He meant that while we want to attract large groups of people, we should never lose sight of the importance of each individual student. Can you think of some Scriptures in the New Testament that show God’s concern for the one?

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 There are many possibilities. Here are a few: Jesus said that a shepherd would leave ninety-nine sheep to search for one lost one. He taught that a woman who loses one coin searches diligently until she finds it. Twice He told us that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:4-10). Jesus said that it is a serious thing to offend even one little child (Luke 17:2) and that anyone who receives one child in His name is really receiving Him (Matt. 18:5).

The one is so crucial in God’s economy that the word one appears well over 1,800 times in the Bible. God does not see people as a collective group. He sees us as individuals, and His love extends to each of us. If we intend to reach the masses in our children’s programs, we will do it only by reaching individuals.

Jesus preached to multitudes, but He also spoke often to audiences of one. Can you think of some examples?

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 Again, there are many possible answers. Here are a few:

- When He said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” only Nicodemus heard Him (John 3:3). Billions since have heard the words of John 3:6, but originally they were spoken to one man (Nicodemus).
- When Jesus said, “I am the resurrection, and the life,” He spoke these words only to Martha (11:24-25).
- When He gave His teaching on living water, only a Samaritan woman was there (4:7-14).



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- When He revealed for the first time that He was the Messiah, only she heard Him speak.
- Jesus did not heal the multitudes “en masse,” that is, as a big group. He healed individuals until at last they formed a multitude in number.
- In His death, He died for each one. Hebrews 2:9 tells us that He tasted death for every person.

What about the Apostles? Did they also give part of their ministry to individuals? Can you think of some examples?

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Here are a few possible answers:

- The Holy Spirit prompted Philip to go to the desert to talk with one man of another race (Acts 8:26-27).
- Part of Paul’s ministry was proclaiming the gospel privately (Gal. 2:2).

Concern for the one doesn’t mean we limit our ministry to “we four and no more.” Though the concept of the one may be misused to justify lack of growth, when understood aright it should promote growth. I have taught as many as three hundred in a class and as few as one. The large churches with which I am acquainted are churches that in the midst of the multitude see the one. The great commission commands us to take the gospel to the whole of humanity by taking it to every individual.

**How can Sunday school teachers minister to the individual?** Here are some ideas:

- We can visit each home.
- We can spend some time talking with each student.
- We can pray for each student daily.
- We can consider individual needs in preparing the lesson.
- We can serve as faithfully when God assigns us to a small church as when we do when He assigns us to a large, prominent church.
- We can be willing to serve faithfully in the hard and resistant places even though our teaching may not reach multitudes.
- Most importantly, we can keep watch on our attitude. Do we resent the times we are called to teach the one?

Remember, in God’s sight the one is what the gospel is all about!

**LET’S REVIEW**

Name some ways the Bible shows the importance of the individual.

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**LET’S PUT IT INTO PRACTICE**

Suppose the teachers of your church are complaining that their ministry is not important because their classes are not big like some other church in town. What would you say to them?

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Name one way this teaching will affect your own teaching.

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