

LEADERSHIP LESSON # 80: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPEN AND CLOSED SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES

OUTLINE BY JOHN P. JOHNSTON

Small group Bible studies such as Sunday School may be classified as either open or closed, depending on their approach. An open group allows people to join (enroll) at any time and typically continues to meet over a long period of time. Closed groups are more difficult to join and usually are limited in size and scope of study.

Sunday School serves as the outreach arm of the church, thus an open approach is more desirable. Here are a few reasons why:

1. Open groups use **curricula** that allows a guest to participate without previously attending. A guest would not need to worry about missing previous lessons and being behind.
2. Open groups **invite people** to attend. If a class grows too large, a new class can be created.
3. Open groups practice **open enrollment** whereby a person may join the class at any time without any pre-conditions on attendance or church membership.
4. Open groups maintain an **outward** focus by maintaining a prospect file and actively seeking to reach those not involved in Sunday School.
5. Open groups do not quickly **drop people** from their rolls; instead they seek to pray for and minister to those who may not attend regularly.
6. Open groups meet on an **on-going basis** so that people may participate year-round.

There is certainly a place for closed groups within a church. For example, short-term discipleship classes that last only a few weeks work better as closed groups. Characteristics of closed groups are:

1. Closed groups generally utilize curricula that require weekly attendance for **maximum benefit**.
2. Closed groups may need to **limit** the number of people involved in a class to allow for appropriate participation.
3. **Affinity groups** such as Women's Ministry, Men's Ministry, Divorce Recovery, Grief Recovery, etc. would be examples of closed groups.
4. Closed groups may only last for **short periods** of time – a few weeks to a few months, depending on the type of group.
5. Closed groups tend to be more **specialized** than open groups, providing for targeted instruction/training/support.
6. While closed groups **have their place** in the overall ministry of a church, Sunday School classes **suffer** when they function as a closed group. When a Sunday School class embraces a closed group approach, it ceases to become an effective outreach/ministry arm of the church.

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There is certainly a place for closed groups within a church. For example, short-term discipleship classes that last only a few weeks work better as closed groups. Characteristics of closed groups are:

1. Closed groups generally utilize curricula that require weekly attendance for _____.
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4. Closed groups may only last for _____ of time – a few weeks to a few months, depending on the type of group.
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