



Part 1 of 2—

21 Ways to Shape the 21st Century

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In the first century Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples and “teach them to obey everything I have told you” (Matthew 28:20). At the beginning of the 21st century, we continue to obey Jesus’ commission on Sunday School. Here are 21 thoughts for using Sunday School to shape the 21st century.

1 Help your students view Sunday School as a worldwide movement to disciple people of all ages, teaching them to love, trust, and obey God every day. Look for ways to introduce students to the language, foods, and customs of Christians all over the world.

2 Recognize that many religions and worldviews will compete for the hearts and lives of our children in the 21st century. Christian children will need help to hold firmly to the absolute truth of God. We can begin to help children love people of other religions while also believing steadfastly in one God. A good way to accomplish this is to encourage children to pray over pictures of children throughout the world, thanking God for the ones who know Jesus and earnestly praying that every child will have a chance to love Jesus.

3 Emphasize what is important. To emphasize the Bible, place visuals and other teaching helps in its pages and take them out as you teach. To emphasize the importance of children, let class members watch you ministering to them and their friends. They will learn how to treat one another in biblical ways. Emphasize that the purpose of Bible facts is to help us trust the Bible. In Psalm 78, God commands adults to tell children the stories of God’s mighty deeds. Why? “So [children] would all trust God. They would not forget what God has done. Instead, they would obey his commands” (verse 7).

4 Carry a vision for the lifelong impact of early Bible learning. In the 21st century, the emphasis on early childhood ministries will expand dramatically because new technology has allowed us to understand the lifelong impact of the first 6 years of life. The relationships and experiences of early childhood affect our intelligence by as much as 30 percent, influence our relationships by as much as 50 percent, and shape the spiritual basics of love, trust, and obedience.

5 Understand God’s design for early childhood. It is by God’s design that early childhood relationships and experiences affect lifelong attitudes and choices. He is raising up people to influence their world. He has lifelong plans for the little ones you teach. Dedicated early childhood teachers invest themselves in the prayer and study needed to understand and follow God’s plan for early discipleship.

6 Learn to teach the way young children learn. Young children are global learners who learn more when they are on the go using all their senses. At first, the on-the-go learning style of young children may unsettle those of us who were told to sit still and listen at church. Fortunately, there are many resources to help us match our Bible-teaching styles with children’s learning styles.

7 Present the Bible as the Book of the future as well as the past. Children need help to understand that God knows spaceships as well as camels. Your teaching style can help. Choose a Bible translation that uses the language children hear every day. Learn what interests the children you teach. Plan

ways to incorporate their interests into modern parables that illustrate spiritual truths.



8 Get to know Millennial kids. Tailor Bible lessons for the generation born after 1980. They like to work in teams. Begin to teach with at least one other person so children will see how a team can work at church. They like to work with adults. Participate with them. They want to change their world. So begin to add age-appropriate ministry projects to your Bible lessons. Even 3-year-olds can help collect money on World Hunger Day.



9 Share personal stories of spiritual growth. Millennial kids identify with grown-ups. You can identify with them by telling events that shaped your faith. When did God answer your first prayer? What childhood choices shaped your life? What would you change? What would you repeat? Of course, your stories will be tailored to fit the understanding of young children. As children learn about your childhood experiences, they will begin to understand that what they do as children can continue to help them love God as adults.



10 Support Gen X parents. These young parents need help to understand the eternal significance of Sunday School lessons. Generally speaking, today's young parents desire relationships that will help them successfully manage the challenges of everyday living. The more you can share Bible-related resources, ideas, and wholesome family events with them, the more they will catch the vision for your ministry to their little ones.

(Points 11 through 21 can be found in Part 2.)

Questions For Further Study—

1. What different religions are represented in your community? What can you and your children do to reach the people of those religions?
2. List four things you can do to emphasize the importance of the Bible.
3. List four things you can do to emphasize the importance of children.
4. How can you help children understand that the Bible is the book of the future?