

**SUNDAY SCHOOL**  
**IN CHURCH HEALTH**  
**& GROWTH**

**ADULT TEACHER TRAINING**

Path to Leadership Series

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL IS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND MINISTRY

## **Why Sunday School (or Whatever Your Church calls it) is Still a Good Idea!**

You want to get together for Bible study and fellowship in a small group with people with whom you have things in common. So, the thing to do is start a home Bible study, right? Because clearly, there is nowhere that is happening in church... that is, unless you have an organized Sunday School. You have rooms that are the right size. No one has to clean house before the meeting. You not only have child care available, you have a *Bible study group* for your children! You have the time. When people are attending the worship services already, adding one more hour is easy to work in. After all, it is still part of the same bite of time. Why not Sunday School?!

**What is Sunday School, Exactly?** Sunday School is not our deepest Bible study. It's not a multi-generational gathering. It's not next-level discipleship. It neither purely evangelistic nor purely leadership training. So, what is a Sunday School class supposed to be, exactly?

**Sunday School Classes are Family Meetings:** Only, not like a family reunion where you see grandparents and grandchildren together. It's more like the cousins are together, the uncles and aunts are together, etc.. Sunday School classes are not multi-generational; they are the layers of the family meeting together. Sometimes, the cousins just want to be together.

**Sunday School Classes are Instruments of Evangelism:** New people are able to relate immediately with the group since they have life-stage parts of life in common. They instantly have things to talk about before class. There is great power in the witness of the group as a group.

If you could get all of your cousins to agree to attend a Bible study, would you be willing for it to be less deep than you would prefer? Would you be willing to have it at a time or place less convenient for you? Of course you would. Because some of your cousins need the Lord, you would be willing to make sacrifices to see what God would do in their lives!

**Sunday School Classes are Open Groups:** You can join them at any time. They are open to people who are not in our circle of friends, even though they are organized in a way we could easily become friends. Regardless of where you are spiritually at this point, Sunday School is for you.

**Sunday School Classes are Entry-Level Discipleship:** Through the influence of the class, some will begin the Christian life as a new disciple. Some begin growing in discipleship. Some experience their first opportunities for Christian service in the class. Sunday School classes interpret the work of the church; so, they serve as an entry-way into all its opportunities for growth and for service. Classes are the introducers in the church, the general practitioners who refer their members to the various specialists. In fact, that is what Sunday School is...

*The General Practitioner Ministry of the Church.*

# SUNDAY SCHOOL

## Teaching the Bible in Sunday School

The text book of the Sunday School is the Bible, not the quarterly. Teachers should never, ever ask their students to read the passage out of the quarterly. For some, this will be their only contact with a Bible all week. So, have some extra Bibles and give them the page number of the passage and allow them to handle the Word of God and read it with their own eyes.

### The Three Questions essential to understanding a passage:

#### 1. What does it say?

Don't draw any general conclusions yet. Simply read the words. What do the words say?

#### 2. What does it mean?

What did it mean to the original readers in their time in history and life circumstances?

#### 3. What does it mean for us?

What principles for living can we learn from the passage for us in our day and in our life circumstances?

It can be helpful to write the passage out, one phrase per line — “stacking the phrases” — looking for the key connecting words (and, therefore, etc.) and parallel phrases. This is especially helpful in the New Testament epistles.

## Preparing to Teach the Bible: Study Tools

### The Number One Most Helpful Bible Study Tool is a Good Bible Dictionary

There are a lot of really helpful Bible study tools. Teachers need commentaries, an atlas, topical study tools, and tools to help with the meaning of Bible words. But the single most helpful tool is a Bible Dictionary. It can help in more different ways than any other tool. Here are some ways how:

- To read introductory material about a book of the Bible.
- To look up information about a city or nation
- To learn more about a Bible character
- For information about historic people & events that are in the background of a passage.
- Maps
- To read up on a doctrine or belief.
- Timelines and charts
- Pictures of items mentioned in the Bible-tools of the day, for example.
- Renderings of the Tabernacle, Temple, etc. and their furnishings.

Because it is all arranged in alphabetical order, it is an easy tool to use. So, be sure to keep a good Bible dictionary handy where you prepare to teach!

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### **To Study the Bible by Topic: *Thompson Chain Reference Bible***

The best help in understanding a Bible passage you will ever get is by looking at other relevant passages of the Bible. Scripture interprets Scripture. It's important to study a particular passage in the context of the overall teaching of the Bible. But how do find all of those passages?

Cross references are helpful. However, there isn't room in the margins to list more than 2 or 3 other verses.

A Concordance lists every time each word in the Bible appears. But what if a similar idea is expressed with a different word?

So you need a topical study tool. And the best one made is the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

Understanding the Margins, Indexes, and the Other Bible Helps - page xiii, (toward the front)

### **Key Page Numbers in the Thompson Chain Reference Bible:**

*How to Use the Thompson Chain Reference Bible* - page xvi (toward the front)

*Alphabetical Index* - page 1,323

(if you know a topic you want to study, start here, with the Alphabetical Index)

*Numerical Index of Chain Topics* - starts on page 1,423

(The numbers correspond to those in the margins of the Bible text and address specific topics)

### **Study the Words in the Word**

**Compare Several Good Translations** (not paraphrases).

Solid, accurate, modern translations include: CSB, NASB, ESV, NIV, KJV, NKJV

You can purchase Bibles or New Testaments with 4 translations side by side. However, the print is usually very small.

The NASB is the most literal word for word translation. The NIV is more phrase by phrase. The CSB & ESV are in between those two translations, and are also very accurate.

The *Amplified Bible* uses brackets and parentheses within the text to define words and explain meanings. Very helpful.

### **Look Up the Meaning of Individual Words:**

God is a good communicator and uses words to convey ideas. Before going to "What does it mean?," first deal with "What does it say?" Read. the. words... and define the words.

The first study tool for word studies may surprise you, but it is an English Dictionary. Bible translators choose the words in English that most nearly communicate the meaning of the words in the original

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Hebrew or Greek. Sometimes, those are not commonly used words, so we should look those up.

But having seen the words in translation, we can begin to look them up in the original languages. There are several language tools for this which are user-friendly:

*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

You look up the word in English and it lists the different words in Hebrew & Greek and explains their meanings.

The *Strong's Concordance* has an index with word definitions in the back, each assigned a number. However, it is much easier to use digital tools to take advantage of this resource. These include:

Software for Smart Phones & Other Devices: *Olive Tree*, [www.olivetree.com](http://www.olivetree.com)

Purchase a translation with Strong's numbers. Then just click on the word for which you want a definition.

*Bible Study Web Site: Blue Letter Bible* (free), [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

1. Choose your translation
2. Click on the TOOLS button, then on the Strong's number by the word for the definition.

Spiros Zodhiates has a set of book resources that are similar, but more thorough, called Key Word Study.

### **Bible Commentaries**

Sometimes, you are reading a passage of Scripture and you run across a phrase and you wonder, "What does that mean?" How do you know? First, compare several translations. Then, if the meaning is still unclear, consult a commentary.

Commentaries are books that help us understand a passage of Scripture in light of word meanings, historical setting, and its point for application. They come in individual volumes on single books of the Bible and in sets.

Commentaries represent a Bible student's best understanding of what a passage means. Sometimes, the various writers may disagree on a point of meaning. So, avoid following one particular commentator and simply parroting what he says. One old saint was given a Bible commentary as a gift. Later, her pastor asked her what she thought of it. She replied that she was enjoying it and added "You know pastor, the Bible sure sheds a lot of light on that book!" The Bible is infallible; they are not. Compare multiple resources.

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You may already have commentary resources you may not have thought of in that way:

- Your Sunday School book and teacher materials are a form of commentary.
- The explanatory study notes at the bottom of your study Bible are really a kind of commentary.
- Paraphrases like *The Message* (and some will remember the *Living Bible*) are where someone put the Bible into their own words to explain what they thought it means. These can be used like a commentary.
- Bible handbooks offer introductions to the books of the Bible and to the major sections and themes of each book.

### **Ways a Good Bible Atlas Can Help You Study & Teach the Bible:**

Sometimes, we think that all a Bible Atlas can do is show us that one dot, representing a city, is a little higher and slightly to the right of another dot, representing another city. But a Bible Atlas offers more than that.

- Great color maps - More than maps in the back of your Bible and larger.
- Color photographs of Bible places
- Insights into various periods of Bible History, which you can find in the Table of Contents.
- Information about the other nations & empires that come into biblical history.
- Archeological discoveries
- Usually, there is a Scripture index and a topic index in the back. Sometimes, a Map Citation Index. So, you don't have to remember which period of Bible history it was in. Just use the indices in the back!

### **Manners and Customs of the Bible**

These books tell about tools, agriculture practices, manners of the culture, and stage of life customs, as practiced in Bible times. For example, the wedding customs of Jesus' day help us better understand his teachings about his second coming and the situation of Joseph in Matthew 1. They are illustrated and often have a topical index and a Scripture index in the back.

To use this tool, you have to take the initiative to think as you study a passage, "Is there a custom here that could shed some light on this passage?" Then, you will have to hunt it in the book, using the table of contents and the indices in the back. However, the effort will often pay off. These are like commentaries in the sense that you will want to own more than one and compare what they say.

Examples:

- *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, James Gower
- *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, James Freeman

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### **Bible Software**

The big advantages of Bible software include:

- All the Bible study tools are available for Bible software.
- Instead of having a stack of books, you can easily click through tabs for various translations, commentaries, and resources.
- It's faster... lots faster... to get from one resource to the other. No having to find the right book and find the bookmark and find it on the page.
- Copy & Paste: Easily include quotes, maps, & charts into your notes.

**Not a Great Way to Read a Book Cover to Cover:** Bible software helps most with reference works, commentaries, word meanings, cross references, Bible dictionaries, etc. Many will fee the experience of reading a book on parenting or on prayer can be best read best in hard copy or on your Kindle.

### **Bible Software:**

**Olive Tree:** [www.olivetree.com](http://www.olivetree.com)— The choice for your phone or tablet. Good prices. Also has a desktop edition. Use it on all your devices.

**LOGOS:** [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com) — The most offerings by far. Expensive to get started in. The industry standard for seminary students.

There are other Bible software applications which are free to download. However, they are generally based on old, public domain resources, and don't offer near the number of modern study resources. The most famous of these is the Online Bible (though it's software, not just a web site you access online).

### **Bible Study Portals:**

Here are a couple of links to online Bible portals. They offer multiple translations to compare, definitions of words in the original language, some commentary help, and other tools, such as Bible dictionaries. They don't offer as much as Bible software, but they have some good helps and are free!

- *Blue Letter Bible:* [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)
- *Bible Gateway:* [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)



## Sunday School

### Teaching the Bible in Class

**There are three things we need to do when teaching the Bible:** *Explain the passage, Illustrate the passage, and Apply the passage.*

#### 1. Explain the passage.

Here are some ways you can explain the passage:

- Explain the context: When the book was written, to whom it was written, why it was written, the culture and current events at the time it was written.
- Outline the passage—that is, simply list the things the passage talks about.
- Explain word meanings.
- Explain customs of the day which are mentioned in the passage.

#### 2. Illustrate the Passage

- Show a photograph of the site or an artist's rendering from one of your study tools
- Show them the location on a map. Explain the location, if relevant: is it in the Holy Land or outside the Holy Land? To make distances easier to understand, compare it to places around here (e.g. "It would be like walking from here to such and such town in our state.")
- Have someone read a cross reference from another passage that helps in understanding.
- Have a class member read a definition from a Bible Dictionary.

#### 3. Apply the Passage.

How do we apply the timeless principles of Scripture to our lives today? This is where class discussion is appropriate.

### Use the Bible to Teach the Bible

#### Why Don't My Class Members Bring Their Bibles to Class?

Sometimes, a teacher could be excused for marveling that their class members do not bring their Bibles to class. After all, Sunday school is our Sunday morning *Bible study*. Class members need to hold the Bible in their hands. They need to mark passages in their own copy of God's Word. So, what's up with not bringing a Bible to a *Bible study*? What is implied by people not bringing their Bibles to church?

Sometimes it is because the class member does not own a good Bible. When you notice this, please contact the church office and you will receive help in securing a copy for your class member.

Sometimes, it is because the teacher teaches out of the quarterly instead of his or her Bible. What would they need Bibles for? "We're just going to read the passage out of the book." However, we teach the Bible, not the quarterly. Quarterlies are like commentaries to help us understand the passage.

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Sometimes it is because the teacher is trying to avoid embarrassing class members who don't know their books of the Bible. This is where using a particular Bible in class can be very helpful. Just tell the class to turn to the page number.

And, sometimes, it is because the teacher fails to *encourage* class members to bring their Bibles to Sunday school and to worship.

### How to Teach Bible Stories

Around 70% of the Bible consists of narrative passages—that is, *stories*. Some stories are historical record. We can relate to the struggles, the disappointments, and the sins of real-life people. Some stories are parables—earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Jesus told lots of parables. Because the Bible uses stories, telling Bible stories, and telling them well, is important.

One advantage of telling Bible stories, as stories, is that most folks don't know their Bible stories. Some will be hearing them for the first time.

Another advantage is that stories engage one's imagination and emotions in ways outlines, snappy points, and lists of principles do not. They are relatable, connecting our personal experiences to the big truths of life.

Stories can give us a mental picture of how biblical principles play out in real life.

For these reasons and more, missionaries often use "storying" to reach people in non-literate cultures. They are better able to teach those who are not naturally linear thinkers, but rather are "oral learners." In fact, many members of our Sunday School classes actually have an oral learning style.

Here are some principles for telling Bible stories most effectively:

1. Simply tell the story as a story.
2. Avoid inter-lacing principles and applications as you tell the story. Sometimes, people tell only part of the story, apply it, and then tell more of the story and apply that. At first, just tell the story all the way through. That's how God inspired it.
3. Stick as close as possible to the biblical text.
4. Don't add additional stories or sayings to the Bible story.
5. Avoid unduly modernizing the story.
6. As you prepare, review the story until you see it like a video in your mind. Then, tell the story as you see it.
7. When you have finished telling the story, then lead the class in discussion about the events, persons, motives, and outcomes in the story.

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### How to Use Discussion Questions

Discussion questions help class members think about the passage and how it applies to their lives.

#### What's a Good Discussion Question?

A good question is one where the class member knows the answer. Where they're the expert. It considers the passage from the point of view of human relationship, emotions, and motives. It moves biblical principles into our own life context.

- "Which character in this story do you most relate to?" (Or "least relate to?" or even "dislike?")
- "Has anyone been in a situation like this in your personal experience?"
- "How do you think most people today would have handled that situation?"
- "How did you feel?"
- "What did you like best about the story? Or find most encouraging in the story?"
- "Is there something in the story you find hard to understand or troubling?"

#### Good discussion questions do not:

- Have right and wrong answers. This is a discussion, not a test. Giving a wrong answer is embarrassing to class members.
- Concern the meaning of the text. That's your job as teacher to explain.
- Ask people to answer questions off the top of their heads that require prior study. Don't ask the class to pool their ignorance.

Good discussion involves you first explaining the passage and the principles in it. Then, asking prepared questions to help your class relate the passage to their every day lives.

### How the Curriculum Helps

Teaching the Bible passage in the curriculum helps us in a couple of ways: First, it keeps us off of "pet subjects." We have all heard the teacher who wants to teach through the book of Daniel, then Revelation, and then the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians — and then start with Daniel again. Others want advocate for or against a particular teaching. They're up to speed on their favorite subject, but they fail to teach "the whole council of God" (Acts 20:27). Secondly, it helps us learn about new passages which we may have never taught. Finally, if the church had decided to use the curriculum, then it is our responsibility to follow the leadership. Remember, you don't teach the lesson in the book, you teach the Bible. The curriculum is there to help us prepare.

### The Teacher's Packet

Our curriculum includes a teacher's packet. From quarter to quarter the exact contents may change, but it will include such things as posters with outlines of the book of the Bible, color maps, charts, etc.

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These are useful in engaging more of your class members' senses. Some people are visual learners. You don't have to use everything in the packet. Some items may not connect with your class members. However, it is worth the time to review the contents and to consider which ones you could use with good results.

### How to Teach Passages Which Might Offend Class Members

As we teach the Bible, we will occasionally come across an ethical issue that might be offensive to some members of our class. It is no secret that one or more class members (or someone they love) is living in open violation of the principle taught in the passage. What do we do?

#### Two Things Not to Do:

1. **Teach around it and skip that part.**
2. **Lead a discussion as to whether the passage is really teaching that principle.** This is why I encourage teachers to teach the passage and lead the class in discussing APPLICATION.

#### Seven Things to Do:

1. **Set the right tone.** Humility, not self-righteousness. Gentle, not harsh. Calm, not defensive.
2. **Set the right pace.** As you are going through a passage, don't get stuck on one command out of five, for example. Cover all five evenly, unless there is a question. This removes the impression you are trying to single someone out.
3. **Use plural language** ("Jesus teaches us..."), instead of singular language ("You need to...").
4. **If you have one, and if appropriate, tell your own testimony about adjusting your life to the biblical principle.** Or tell someone else's story from your reading of aligning their life with the principle.
5. **Humor can be defusing** (as long as it doesn't belittle people, but gives insight into the human condition).
6. **Be prepared for someone to object and say you are taking the command out of context.** "That's a good question; let's look at the context..."
7. **Say Often:** We don't interpret Scripture in light of our own lives or personal preferences; we get our values from Scripture. The Bible is the objective standard of truth. When you come to an issue like this, the stage is set.

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### Take Care of Each Other!

The phrase “one another” appears in the HCSB translation of the Bible 116 times. Examples include:

- ◇ “Show family affection to one another with brotherly love”— Romans 12:10
- ◇ “Accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted you”— Romans 15:7
- ◇ “Encourage one another and build each other up.”— 1Thessalonians 5:11
- ◇ “Be hospitable to one another without complaining.” — 1 Peter 4:9
- ◇ “Love one another, because love is from God” — 1John 4:7

### Ways to Minister:

Ministering to class members includes checking on the missing (absentees), comforting the grieving, and encouraging those who are going through a hard time.

- When a class member has a surgery, take the family some meals.
- When there is a death, take meals and attend the service.
- When there is a crisis, communicate the news and pray.

### Organizing to Minister...

#### You Have to Do it *On Purpose*

If we don’t have a clear plan to reach people and minister to them, then people end up being neglected. People fall between the cracks. “We just let the Spirit lead,” people often say. But in practice, it seems the Spirit leads them to minister to only their friends.

A class needs a Core Group to assist in ministry and outreach. Core Group members should include:

- **Teacher:** Teaches the Bible and leads the class in ministry.
- **Outreach Leader:** Keeps a list of people the class is trying to reach for the Lord and for Bible study.
- **Fellowship Leader:** Plans a class fellowship *at least* once per quarter.
- **Prayer Leader:** Communicates prayer concerns to members in a crisis.
- **Care Group Leader(s):** Text or call absent members to check on them. Lets teacher and prayer leader know if there is a family crisis or a health issue.
- **Secretary:** Gets an *accurate* count in attendance and notifies the teacher when someone has been absent multiple Sundays in a row.

⇒ As a new class is just getting started, the secretary may double as a care group leader or the secretary as the fellowship leader.

⇒ The more disconnected the class members, the more important it is to have a core group.

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- ⇒ To secure people for these roles, don't ask for volunteers. Enlist them!
- ⇒ If class members refuse to serve in these roles, go back to your Sunday School leadership for help. They may need to be brought in from the outside.
- ⇒ The Core Group isn't a class within a class or a clique. They are the pacesetters in including others into the class and helping them become involved.

### **Have Regular Class Social Get-Togethers**

Social events are powerful tools for building class fellowship and reaching prospects, some of whom will be lost. Don't forget to invite your in-service members – that is, people who teach, for example, in the preschool division, and who need the opportunity to fellowship with people their own age.

### **Why Group People Together with the Most in Common?**

We used to call this age-grading, though sometimes people have been grouped by the ages of their children or grouped by affinity (things which the members held in common such as hobbies or profession, etc.) Sometimes, people reject this idea as being exclusionary. However, there are good reasons for doing this. In short: To teach better and to reach better.

A giraffe walks up to the church's main entrance and is politely greeted by First Impression Team member, Tim Timmerman. The giraffe is new in town and is looking for a Sunday School class. He asks, "Where are the other giraffes like me?" What is Tim going to say? We have some giraffes in this cage, along with some wildebeests and some zebras. We have some giraffes in this other cage, along with some gazelles and some elephants; the teacher is a lion. "Can you recommend a class for me?", the giraffe asks. Tim scratches his head and, in exasperation, says "Just try these three cages and decide for yourself."

### **We Want Each Member in Each Class to Feel Two Things:**

- ⇒ **These are My Kind of People:** I feel at home here. When there is a cookout, these are people I want to be with. I feel like I belong and am included.
- ⇒ **This is My kind of Teaching:** I learn something from God's Word every week with this style of teaching. I relate to the examples. I relate to the class discussion; their families face the same kinds of things ours does.

**But won't love cross all barriers?** Yes, for Christians, but what about those who don't yet know the Lord? They don't yet have the love or comfort level to cross those barriers. A Sunday School class is God's instrument of evangelism.

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### Interpret the Work of the Church

In the old Sunday School training materials, they used to list the Roles of the Sunday School Class. It included: "Interpret and Undergird the Work of the Church." I used to think that was a silly word to use, *interpret*. It's not like the church's work is in another language. "What are they talking about?" I wondered. But now I see why they phrased it that way. How often do we hear remarks such as:

- "I didn't know about..."
- "I didn't understand what that event was..."
- "I didn't know it was going to be that good, so I missed it."

People are busy and just don't think about every announcement of upcoming events. So, yes, church events and ministries have to be interpreted.

### Ask: Does Anyone Have an Offering Envelope Today?

Traditionally, Southern churches everywhere have received offerings through the Sunday School. Many churches have received far more through the Sunday School than the worship services. This makes good sense; here's why:

- People learn more about how to "do church" in Sunday School than in the worship services. Of course they would! It is the class that provides the learning environment.
- Some people have to leave church after Sunday School. That means they will not be in the worship service to give. This happens every. single. Sunday.
- Some people simply forget about the offering envelope they have in their pocket or purse—which they have prepared and are ready to give.
- The church needs the money and they need to learn to give. Stewardship is a part of Christian growth.

So, it is reasonable for the class secretary to ask: "Does anyone have an offering envelope today?" And it sets the example for you to say "I do!" Give at least part of your offering through the Sunday School.

### Evangelism through the Sunday School

*When you expose people to the Word of God and to the people of God,  
over time, the Spirit of God does a work of God to bring them into the family of God.*

There is the *corporate witness* of the class. If a co-worker speaks to them about Christ at work, they can dismiss him or her as an odd duck. But when an entire class models the love of Christ and walk in his ways, they cannot dismiss their message quite so easily. They see how Christians love one another and they find themselves being attracted to it. This is one reason regular class fellowships are very important — it gives unbelievers an opportunity to see this dynamic in action.

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Because the gospel is so counter-intuitive, it takes time to come to understand the Christian message. While we have seen people come to Christ quickly it is, almost always, due to the person having a background where he or she already has some knowledge of the Bible. Our role is to clearly explain the claims of Christ and his demands until people have a clear understanding of the gospel. They then decide *for* or *against* Jesus Christ. Week-in and week-out, you will have many opportunities to teach these very truths in class. There will be times when the passage discusses salvation or faith or repentance or the cross; and all you will have to do is teach the passage clearly.

You may ask a class member to share his or her testimony of conversion. That story will be just what your pre-Christian class member needs to hear. There will be times in class discussion when a principle of the gospel will be made very clear as a natural part of the discussion.

In the end, there generally has to be a conversation. You, as teacher, will need to take the initiative. Here are some questions you may want to ask to get the conversation started:

- Bob, you have been coming to our class for nine months now; would you say your questions about what it means to become a Christian have all been asked and answered?
- Betty, I have noticed how you have seemed particularly interested as we talked in class about what it means to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Would you say you have come to the place where you have such a relationship or would you say you still have some questions about it?
- Bert, we have very much enjoyed having you in class these past few months. Some of your questions have really made our discussion much better. What are your thoughts so far in regard to trusting Christ as your Lord and Savior?
- Brenda, if your questions have all been answered and the gospel seems clear, is there anything keeping you from committing your life to Jesus Christ right now?

You may need to lead your class member in a prayer of commitment. However, it is not the prayer that saves a person, it is Jesus. They are trusting Jesus to save them. They are turning to him and away from a self-centered life, in repentance.

### **Build Your Class by Reaching New People**

#### **Not by Stealing Members from Other Classes.**

It is understood you will need a small core group of transfers to start a new class. There may be people in another class who will feel your class is a better fit for them; if they transfer into your class that's fine. However, the goal is to reach new people for the Lord and for the church, not to rotate members around or to develop personal followings within the church.



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### **Be Team Players.**

Recognize that your class is under the authority of the Sunday School Leaders and, ultimately, the church.

### **Maintaining Vitality in a Mature Class**

Most Sunday School Classes stop growing between 18 and 24 months. Over time, groups become locked. The key to maintaining momentum in a class is like maintaining romance in a marriage. You have to keep doing those things you did in the early days. That means you keep having fellowships, you maintain your class organization, and you keep talking about reaching and including new people.

#### **Signs of a Healthy Mature Class:**

- The class has secured additional Care Group Leaders to care for new class members
- Continuing to have at least one fellowship per quarter, inviting prospects & in-service members.
- Follow-up with people who have attended class or who are interested in coming to Christ.
- Focus on solid Bible teaching & discussion.
- Promote & explaining the work of the church to their attenders.
- Constantly looking for ways to get more unbelievers into class's sphere of influence.

### **Discipleship in the Sunday School**

The way the current terminology works, one may get the idea that discipleship happens only in groups called a “Discipleship Group.” We often think of these groups as having much deeper content and a more thorough accountability time. However, a disciple is a follower of Christ. And anything that helps a person follow Jesus more closely and know him better relationally *is discipleship*.

As one thinks about the *Disciple’s Cross* from *MasterLife* or the *Wheel* used by the Navigators to illustrate the life of a disciple, we see the components are not limited to a group that is officially named a “Discipleship Group.” The elements, which you can help people in your class develop, are:

- **Christ at the Center:** Enthroned in the human heart.
- **Bible Study:** How God speaks to us and feeds our souls.
- **Prayer:** How we speak to God and commune with him.
- **Fellowship:** How we relate to fellow-believers to encourage and nurture each other in the faith.
- **Witnessing:** How we communicate the good news of the gospel to unbelievers.
- **Obedience:** This is symbolized by the rim on the Nav Wheel and is “where the rubber meets the road.”
- **Service:** On the Disciple’s Cross, this is represented by the arrows at the end of each beam of the cross. Bible study in service is teaching, prayer in service is intercession, etc..

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Sometimes, people need to dig a little deeper in their Bible study. Certainly, small accountability groups may be more effective in pushing spiritual growth. However, Sunday School *is* an opportunity for developing disciples. And it is terrific at *entry-level discipleship*. So, don't think of your class as some kind of mere shallow Bible study; think of yourself as a disciple-maker!

### **Teacher, Pray for Your Class Members**

You are there, not just to *teach lessons* but, to *teach people*. Prayer is very powerful in helping class members come to Christ and to grow spiritually. So pray for your members' spiritual growth and don't restrict your prayers for them to times of crisis.

### **When a Class Regularly “Goes In” with Another Class**

#### **Sometimes a Class Does this Because the Teacher is Absent:**

- Do they have a assistant teacher in training?
- Is it because the teacher isn't committed to reaching & teaching this class's target group?
- Was the teacher enlisted properly and understand the expectations of teachers?

#### **Sometimes a Classes Does This Because It is Low in Attendance:**

- Does the class have enough core group members? A good core group constitutes enough people to sustain a class by themselves.
- Are the class Care Group leaders functioning?
- Do committed Core Group members need to be enlisted from outside the class?
- Does the class have enough fellowships to feel a connection to each other so they want to be together?
- Or has the fellowship become so ingrown that if one member is out, they all lay out?
- Is Bible study not an important reason the members belong to this class?

#### **What it tells the members when they go in with another class:**

- Our class isn't really necessary as a distinct group.
- Our class isn't worthy of a big commitment. “This Christianity thing... just ‘round the corners’ and ‘phone it in.’”
- Sometimes, it is necessary to “go in” with another class. However, when it happens frequently, we are “teaching” alright — just the wrong the thing.

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### **Gear Your Class Toward Reproduction**

Great teachers train new teachers and send them out to serve. Great classes sponsor new classes. They don't try to protect their little fellowship group; instead, they focus on being fruitful in service.

Our goal should be to start new Sunday School classes the same way they start new churches. The process works as follows:

1. The Sunday School Leaders studies the community in the falls of the year, following the start of the new Sunday School year. They think like missionaries and look for pockets of unreached people. These unreached people may represent anything from a language or ethnic group to a secular extended family, from people with the same occupation to people with the same hobby, to a socio-economic group. Whatever the case, they are unreached or under-reached in our community.
2. The Team then enlists a Teacher to start a class to reach people in this unreached pocket of people. They assign him a coach to help him along as he gets the new class on its feet.
3. With the Team's help, the Teacher enlists a Core Group to work like a team in reaching the unreached group of people. We try to enlist these workers from multiple existing classes, rather than "splitting" a class or running a class out of business. Each Core Group member has a role in the class: Teacher, Outreach Leader, Prayer Leader, Care Group Leader, Fellowship Leader, Secretary. In the beginning, someone may have to cover two roles until new people come into the class.
4. The Teacher and Core Group gets together to strategize how they, as a class, can develop relationships with people in this unreached pocket and be effective at reaching them. They make a list of people to invite.
5. Before having their first class, the Core Group has informal get-togethers at times other than Sundays, inviting people in the group they are trying to reach . These gatherings are social in nature and may be a cook-out or something like that.
6. The Core Group has a practice class or two before they launch the new class. They may have a "Preview Sunday" as one of the practice classes in which they invite possible members to visit.
7. Other classes are enlisted to assist in promoting the new class in the community.
8. After all these preparations are made, then the class has "Launch Sunday" and holds its first public Sunday School class.
9. As people join the class, the Core Group gives leadership roles to new members who are able and willing to fill them. Core Group members are willing to relinquish their own roles, if necessary, to enable the new members to feel ownership in the class.
10. The new class works hard at making new members feel like they are truly part of the group and remains alert to evangelistic opportunities.

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### **Differences Between Preschool, Children, Youth, and Adults**

Children learn by playing and by doing. That's why preschool and children's classes require more room—35 square feet per person in a preschool room and 25 square feet per person for children in grades 1-6, compared to 12 to 15 square feet for adults. One might think that since the children are smaller, they need less space. But adults remain seated. Children need to move around the room.

**Sitting Around Tables versus Learning Centers:** Some children's teachers arrange their class this way: The students come into the room and are given a page to color. Then they hear a Bible story. There may be a craft after that. This class is identified by the big table in the middle of the room. Parents think it is really great that they come home with a craft — even though it will be in the garbage by Tuesday.

Other teachers have realized that the curriculum is designed to use *learning centers*. Some may see the learning centers in a room and think they are only about playtime. However, children *learn by playing*. In fact, Hazel Owens, who taught Christian education at Southwestern Seminary for many years said, "The work of a preschooler is play." The wise teacher uses this insight to better teach her class. This approach takes at least two teachers in the room, but it works well when done right.

A preschool or children's class isn't there to color or make crafts but, rather, to learn about Jesus. Even though the methods vary greatly from adults, this is one area in which they are alike.

One would think that teaching preschoolers and children is much easier than teaching adults. In terms of teaching simple Bible truths from the Bible passage that may be true. However, after that, it gets much more difficult. The younger the class, the more planning is needed. With younger children, you have to plan every minute.

Adults can help you teach the lesson by joining in discussion. Preschoolers are not yet capable of making valuable contributions in that sense.

Preschoolers and children have short attention spans; so, you have to plan multiple short segments.

There is a lot of "cutting out" and gathering of art supplies required in teaching preschoolers and younger children.

To teach young ones, the teacher must read the lesson plan earlier in the week. That way, if supplies are needed, there is time to procure them. Additionally, there is art work and activity resources in the kit for each week. It takes a little time to see what is in the kit for the particular Sunday and see how each part works. However, it is not possible to simply open one's Bible and teach young children.

One has to be in the room early, ready to receive children. They arrive at different times. Some parents are choir members and that impacts their arrival times. Some families are naturally later arrivers. The teacher needs to arrive early, be in the room, and not roaming the halls visiting friends or grazing

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the breakfast food. Parents expect to find a teacher in the room.

One has to have a plan for the varying arrival times of class members. Prepared hand work gives the class something interesting to do as they arrive and prevents the class from “starting off wild.” Once the stampede has begun, it is difficult to get it stopped.

Teachers of non-adult classes, preschool through youth, have to be very alert to issues of security and propriety. We cannot allow any situation where a false accusation could be raised and there be any doubt that it was false. That is why we have two unrelated teachers in preschool classes, for example.

The approach in leading a class in the Youth Division is a little different. The students can offer more in the way of discussing the passage. However, while a teacher can often mentor a student in learning the skills of inviting their friends to church or touching base with an absentee, the teacher is ultimately responsible to ensure the ministry roles of Care Group Leader, Fellowship Leader, Outreach Leader, Prayer Leader, etc. are all fulfilled.

A word to adult teachers and class fellowship leaders: Consider how isolated these teachers might feel. These are the people we refer to as “in-service members.” One can easily see why it would be important to them that they be included in adult class fellowships.

