




# SADDLE UP



LEADING WITH  
PURPOSE, POSTURE, & PREPAREDNESS



KEN BRADY • MICHAEL KELLEY • DWAYNE MCCRARY

Introduction by Allan Taylor



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# Introduction: Saddle Up and Ride

Allan Taylor

Perspective determines how we see things. A proper perspective gives us the capacity to view the relative importance (or lack thereof) of something or someone. A proper perspective is indispensable in determining the true value.

The “Sunday School horse” has been around for some time and carries a proven track record. Few can dispute the impact of Sunday School over the years. But you don’t saddle, and eventually mount, a horse that you don’t trust. You only saddle and ride a horse in which you have confidence. You see, your perspective of the horse determines your use of the horse.

For some, Sunday School brings up images of a bygone era, of an organization best suited for children, or of large classes dominated by an information-rich lecture. Let me offer a different perspective of Sunday School that is filled with purpose and hope. To me, Sunday School is about making disciples. This discipling takes place as a group of people seek to reach people, teach people, and minister to people.

Let me pause and explain what I mean by Sunday School. I’m talking about Bible study groups that meet every week mostly on Sunday either before or after a worship service. Your church may call these Bible study groups by some other name, so just substitute that name every time you see the term “Sunday School.”

In Matthew 4:23 and 9:35, we find Jesus reaching, teaching and ministering to people. When we are busy reaching people, teaching people, and ministering to people, we are in the same business as Jesus. It just doesn’t get any better than that! This type of work will never be outdated or irrelevant in this world.

The writer of Proverbs declared that “a horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory comes from the LORD” (Prov. 21:31). This proverb points to two different ways we fail. First of all, we fail to prepare the horse. We expect God to do all the work while we sit, watch, and wait.

God offers us the opportunity to be involved in the battle with Him leading us to victory, but that means we need to saddle the horse. The second way we fail is by depending solely on our horse to carry us to victory. The victory is not ours. We are involved in God's work and must be careful to always follow His lead and point to Him as Victor.

Keeping these two things in mind also gives us perspective when it comes to Sunday School. We are responsible for putting ourselves in a position to be used by God. We also must keep our focus on God and His work in the process. His work is about making disciples and that should be our work as well.

## Reaching

Numerous Sunday School leaders have led the way in reaching people. These leaders kept reaching the lost at the forefront of the Sunday School. They understood that God's heart for lost people and His calling on His church made this reaching of significant importance. Therefore, they would not excuse the Sunday School of this God-given priority, nor should we. They understood tactically the value of the Sunday School shouldering the responsibility of reaching people.

God calls every believer to be a missionary. Sunday School gives us a means for treating them like missionaries. Every Bible study group functions as a mission team as they reach lost, unchurched, and spiritually detached persons in their community.

Historically, baptisms increase when Sunday School focuses on reaching people. History shows that it takes less of us to reach more people with the gospel when the Sunday School focuses on reaching people.

Strategically, Sunday School is the best reaching approach we have. Why? People are placed in a group that matches their stage in life. The Bible is taught on an age-appropriate level. In Sunday School, disciple-making (reaching and teaching) is seen as one action. Sunday School creates a means for getting everyone personally involved in reaching and discipling others. Each of these factors contribute to the strategic nature of the Sunday School.

## Teaching

Sunday School is all about the Book—the B-I-B-L-E! Standing front and center of the Sunday School ministry is the Word of God.

Sunday School is easily recognized for its contributions in getting Bible truth into the lives of her attendees. If Sunday School was appreciated for no other reason, the faithful teaching of the Word of God would be plenty reason enough! Through the Word, we come to faith (Romans 10:17). Through the Word, we are sanctified (John 17:17). Through the Word, we are kept from sin (Psalm 119:11). Through the Word, we receive God's direction (Psalm 119:105). When all else fails, the Word of God remains reliable (Psalm 119:89). Teaching takes place best when God's powerful Word comes together with a prepared teacher and participating class that seeks to live out what they discover in practical application.

## Ministry

Ministry best takes place in the context of relationships. No one can minister to you better than those with whom you are connected relationally. Each of us just came out of a storm, are in a storm, or are headed into a storm. Our sin-cursed world leaves none of us exempt. In these stormy times we come to know and appreciate the ministry of dear friends who love us.

If God sends us His children, then He expects us to take care of them. No other ministry is structured to care, minister, and restore people like Sunday School. Therefore, every Sunday School class should minister to the whole person—physically, emotionally, spiritually, & financially.

## Requirements for Making Disciples

Sunday School is the greatest venue the church has for laying a foundation for people to be discipled. Three realities impact why this is true.



First of all, discipleship best takes place in a small group. Jesus was the greatest discipler of all time. How did Jesus go about discipling others? He chose a small group of twelve men to pour Himself into. He preached to the multitudes, but He committed Himself to His disciples. Sunday School places people in a small group where they can be known, taught, mentored, and ministered to.

Second, discipleship best takes place in the presence of a discipler. The twelve were with Jesus, doing life together. Jesus' disciples learned from Him as He taught, but they also learned as they watched Him. Sunday School places believers with other believers in an "iron sharpening iron" setting. We learn from each other as we glean spiritual truth from one another.

Third, discipleship best takes place when disciples are sent. The goal of discipling others is to produce more disciples who will disciple others. The twelve were sent to reach more disciples. They matured their way to ministry, but they also ministered their way to maturity as the Master Discipler gave them assignments. Sunday School is a place where everyone can get involved in ministry.

As you can see, I believe the Sunday School horse is worth mounting!

My prayer is that this book will open our eyes to see afresh the purpose, posture, and preparation required for an effective Sunday School. We need to re-embrace the value of Sunday School, even in an ever-changing, contemporary church so we can gain the maximum benefit from our ride.

My friends, Ken Braddy, Michael Kelley, and Dwayne McCrary have ridden this horse before. They know and understand how to use Sunday School. Collectively, they have many years with this horse and have taught thousands of others how to ride this horse. Take the time to reflect on what you read and glean from the wisdom of these men.

Saddle up and enjoy the ride!

# Chapter 1: Our Purpose

Ken Braddy

*Why do we do what we do?*

Knowing why we do something is important. You might even say that it is critical and foundational. Without a clear understanding of our purpose for doing a certain thing, we can easily experience mission drift, or worse, apathy.

The legendary Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi, was famous for focusing his players on the fundamentals of football. Lombardi believed that the game of football could be boiled down to blocking and tackling. That's it. No need to complicate things. He gathered his players at the beginning of each season and told veterans and new players alike, "Gentlemen, this is a football" as he held one for them to see. He explained that ten yard gains led to first downs and with enough successive first downs, they would score points. Points would win games. The purpose of the team was to work together to block and tackle, advance the football, and score points. He never let his players forget the mission. Their purpose was clear.

Lombardi's focus on purpose became the stuff of legends. It worked out pretty well for him; the pro football trophy bears his name. Perhaps we could learn some things from his example.

## Start with "Why?"

Why does your Sunday School exist? What is its purpose? Why does your church take the time and trouble to have such a ministry to members and guests? Think about this for a moment, and then record your response.

The purpose of our Sunday School is:

In his book, *Start With Why*, Simon Sinek makes a compelling argument that organizations must think about their “Why.” He emphasizes that organizations need to be able to articulate why they do what they do and start a conversation about their why to reach new customers and like-minded people. He states:

*“Very few people or companies can clearly articulate WHY they do WHAT they do. When I say WHY, I don’t mean to make money—that’s a result. By WHY I mean what is your purpose, cause or belief? WHY does your company exist? WHY do you get out of bed every morning? And WHY should anyone care?”*<sup>1</sup>

My church recently established a new members’ class. At first we told guests and potential members about the “what” of Sunday School. We talked about class options, curriculum, and a host of other things. Then we changed the conversation and started with the “why” of Sunday School. Why does it matter? Why do we do it each week? Why do we set aside significant portions of our annual budget to make it excellent? Why do we want men, women, boys, and girls to be members of a group? Starting with the “why” of the purpose of Sunday School has resonated with both our staff and our potential members. The “why” has helped us connect people to the “what.”

## The “Why” of Sunday School: Make Disciples

Jesus began His public ministry with a dip in the Jordan River. He heard His Heavenly Father’s voice, witnessed the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, and felt His Father’s affirmation and joy as He began His salvation-bringing mission. His final words to His disciples just prior to His post-resurrection ascension are known by Christians all over the world. He told us to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Our Sunday Schools are tasked with many assignments: teach people, reach people, and care for people, to name a few. But at the center of it all is the command and the mission of making disciples. Hopefully you wrote something like that earlier as you thought about why your church has Sunday School.

*Review the purpose you recorded earlier. How does your purpose statement reflect the making of disciples?*

If you think of the command to make disciples as an “umbrella” command, contained within and underneath that umbrella is the task of evangelism. We make disciples as we share the gospel. Sunday School teachers share the gospel as they teach. They also share the gospel as they go. Every teacher should be an evangelist. Notice that I didn’t say every teacher should have the spiritual gift of evangelism! We are all charged with the responsibility of sharing the gospel. We are all evangelists even if we do not have the gift of evangelism (2 Tim. 4:5). Some of us have a supernatural spiritual gifting that makes it easier to share the good news or to share it more clearly and creatively. But we must all respond to the Lord’s command to go and make disciples by sharing with those who have not heard the gospel.

Why do we have Sunday School? If we start with the “why,” the answer must be “to make disciples by sharing the gospel.” We’ll put people in groups with others of a similar age or life stage. We’ll teach them to understand and obey God’s Word. We’ll fellowship with them. We’ll pray for them and they’ll pray for us. We’ll serve alongside them as we engage in serving others. But we do these many Sunday School tasks as a response to and an expression of the command to go and make disciples. Sunday School is the strategic tool our churches use to share Jesus with the spiritually lost. It’s the largest organization in practically every church. It has a place for every member and guest to belong. It makes sense that we should focus on making disciples, which starts with evangelizing them. There’s the heart of disciple-making—evangelism. This was why Jesus came: to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Robby Gallaty, pastor and author of *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Make Disciples*, says,

*When the church becomes an end in itself, it ends. When Sunday school, as great as it is, becomes an end in itself, it ends. When small groups ministry becomes an end in itself, it ends. When the worship service becomes an end in itself, it ends. What we need is for discipleship to become the goal, and then the process never ends. The process is fluid. It is moving. It is active. It is a living thing. It must continue to go on. Every disciple must make disciples.*<sup>2</sup>

There again is the “why” of Sunday School! It’s not just something we do on a Sunday morning because we’re already at the church. It’s not something we do to meet our needs. Sunday School exists to make disciples. It should be our expression of obedience to The Great Commission. Period.

## **Inherent in Making Disciples is Change**

Just what makes a disciple? How would you define that term to someone who asked you, “What is a disciple?” To begin with, all Christians are disciples. That’s the way the New Testament presents them. But I will agree that some disciples are not growing disciples. They should be maturing, but they are not. That doesn’t mean they are not disciples. They are simply disciples who are not advancing in their faith like some of their

fellow disciples. So what does a growing disciple look like? What kind of changes might you see?

Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington point to Jesus' calling of His first disciples to demonstrate three changes that take place in disciples:

**1. “Follow Me” is the head.** God changes the way disciples think. Before becoming a disciple, the person is in charge of his or her actions and decisions. Becoming a disciple requires a different way of thinking. This change happens because disciples realize that they must radically commit themselves to Jesus. A disciple's thinking changes as a result.

**2. “I will make you” is about the heart.** Jesus takes His new disciples and begins to change their affections. We learn to love what He loves; we learn to hate what He hates. Jesus remakes us from the inside out. Things we once clung to lose their appeal as we focus on pleasing the One who saved us from our sin.

**3. “Fishers of men” involves the hands.** When Jesus told His first disciples that He would make them fish for men, He was talking about changing their day-to-day vocation. He, as their rabbi, would give them new things to do. No longer would they carry on as fishermen in the traditional sense. Now they would become evangelists and disciple makers as they fished for the souls of people. Jesus changed their day-to-day activities, as He continues to do with us today.<sup>3</sup>

Using the images of head, heart, and hands helps us remember these three big areas of change that should be evident in our lives, and the lives of other disciples. We should be able to see change in the people we lead in our Bible study group, too. We can use the head-heart-hands illustration to help gauge our growth as disciples.

*How might the three images of head, heart, and hands be used to evaluate the growth of a disciple?*

## **Sunday School is Foundational Discipleship**

I watched my home being built several years ago. My wife and I selected the lot, the brick color, carpet, cabinetry, appliances, and other things important to us. The one thing I didn't have a say in? The foundation of the house.

Someone deep within the company from which I purchased my home made the decision about my house's foundation. They decided the appropriate engineering procedures to drill down into rock. They decided on the depth of the foundation, the mixture of concrete and water, and the time it needed to cure. Unless the foundation was laid properly, everything built upon it would be for naught. Without a proper foundation, my house would have eventually shifted and possibly collapsed. Thankfully, my house was built on a strong foundation laid with great intentionality and care. I am grateful that someone much smarter than me knew how to lay a solid foundation. It is so important.

When it comes to Sunday School, we must understand that it is foundational discipleship. Sunday School is designed to intentionally be a place where we teach the basics of the Bible. There is a difference between simple and simplistic. We must tell the gospel story and help people understand what God's Word says. We shouldn't over communicate, but we should communicate in the simplest terms possible, not leaving anyone behind, and not assuming everyone in our group has our level of biblical knowledge. Jesus should find us "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded" (Matt. 28:20). So we approach Sunday School and the study of God's Word with a degree of fear and trembling. It is a holy task to teach God's Word to His people. We stand with our pastor as co-teachers of God's Word. The Holy Spirit leads and guides His people into all truth through teachers like you and I (John 16:13).

## **Implications of Foundational Discipleship**

If Sunday School is foundational discipleship, what are the implications for us? How might we go about making sure that Sunday School is doing its job of laying a good, solid foundation in disciples' hearts and lives?

To begin with, foundational discipleship means we resist the urge to always “go deeper.” If you ever hear people saying something like, “Sunday School isn’t deep enough,” then you have a problem on your hands. This is an indicator that the people in your church don’t understand the mission of Sunday School: making disciples. As we said earlier, making disciples requires evangelism. Sunday Schools that are evangelistic will have new believers in groups. Those new believers will sit next to more mature (and maturing) believers. The new disciples will listen, watch, and study alongside more mature Christians. These newer believers need foundational studies. If you feel that your group “just isn’t deep enough,” may I suggest you leave that group and start a new one? Most adults who sit in Sunday School groups are educated well beyond their level of obedience. It’s time for tens of thousands of group members to step up and step out to start new groups and disciple new believers.

Secondly, foundational discipleship means we choose trustworthy ongoing curriculum. Bible study series produced by Christian publishers like LifeWay craft studies with great intentionality. The studies are designed to be balanced and to be based on a study plan that helps disciples mature in their understanding and obedience to God’s Word.

Lastly, foundational discipleship means we keep the attention of our groups focused outwardly. In a conference setting, I once asked a group of teachers to form circles of about eight to ten people. I instructed them to hold hands, which they did. And they did so just as you might expect; they circled up, joined hands, and faced the inside of their circles. I asked them, “Is there another way that you might form a circle and hold hands?” In time, each of the groups shifted position and turned around to face outward, still holding hands. As they stood there in each other’s grasps, I said, “This is what you must do as teacher-leaders, keep your group members’ attention focused outwardly.” I explained that in time, most groups tend to turn inward. I saw this happen with the group I recently led. It takes very strong leadership to constantly remind our group members that we exist as Sunday School groups, in part, for the people who are not yet here. The tendency is to turn inward and believe that Sunday School exists solely to take care of our needs and to take us to incredible depths of study. May it never be so! Sunday School exists to make disciples, and that requires that groups focus their attention outwardly on the lost.



*How do you see the three implications for foundational discipleship playing out in your class?*

## **Making Disciples Means Openly Enrolling Them**

In order to make disciples, it helps to enroll people in our Bible study groups. Dr. Harry Piland, former director of Sunday School at LifeWay, was a proponent of enrolling lost people in Sunday School groups. Dr. Piland made the following observation.

*One of the best ways to reach out and touch this vast unreached population is to get people involved in Bible study. We can do so by enrolling them in Sunday school...To reach means to enlist and involve persons in Bible study. It means enlisting and involving unsaved persons, unchurched Christians, members of a church who are not part of the Bible teaching program, and children of these groups.*<sup>4</sup>

Enrolling people in Bible study means we must change the conversation when a guest comes to our Bible study session. In a typical adult group, the secretary for the group might ask the guest to fill out an information card of some kind. Rather than simply asking for information, what if the conversation went something like this: “We’re so glad you chose to come to our group today! We’d love to have your permission to place you on our group’s ministry list. You are not making a commitment to the church, nor are you joining the church. You’re giving us permission to pray for you and your family and to keep you in the loop about our group’s activities. Would you allow us to do that for you?” We communicate that we want them to be a part of the group. They are potential members first, and guests second.

## Open Enrollment and Open Groups

Sunday School groups function best as open groups. In fact, Sunday School groups are designed to be open groups. I once heard a teacher say, “Our group is an open group; it’s a friendly group.” Being an open group requires that, of course, and much more. Being an open group means:

- *They are open to new people attending each time the group comes together for Bible study.*
- *They pray for and expect new people to attend the group.*
- *They intentionally choose ongoing curriculum where each Bible study session stands alone as a complete Bible study experience.*
- *They wear name tags to make it easier for guests to relate to group members and vice versa.*
- *They have extra chairs and room for guests.*
- *They have extra curriculum for guests.*

Open enrollment goes together with open groups because we do not require a guest to visit several times before they can join a group. In fact, we might enroll someone at a time and place away from the church campus! If we discover a friend, neighbor, coworker, or acquaintance who is not in an ongoing Bible study group, we could invite them to belong to our group wherever they are – at a restaurant having lunch with us, sitting in the bleachers as our kids play a sport, or even in the office break room. Open means open to enrolling people any time and any place with the purpose of getting them connected to a Bible study group where they can learn what it means to be a disciple.

*What is the relationship between open groups  
and open enrollment? How do they support each other?  
Can you have one without the other?*

# Principles for Making Disciples

Since our goal in Sunday School is to make disciples, there are a few principles that we should acknowledge. These principles are just that—principles—and they transcend ministry context, church size, and other factors. In this sense, they are universal principles that we all must recognize as we go about Sunday School’s primary task of disciple making.

## 1. Disciples are made in smaller groups.

I am completely convinced that smaller groups are best for making disciples. That conviction comes from years of observing groups, and from years of leading my own Sunday School group. Larger groups become places for people to hide out. While a guest may prefer to be incognito, it is actually best for them if they build relationships with fellow disciples. The formation of friendships happens best in smaller groups. In addition to this, smaller groups encourage “conversational community.” We’ve all been in larger groups dominated by one or two outspoken individuals. The rest of the people simply sit and listen and participate minimally.

Perhaps the most important thing I could say about the need for people to be in smaller groups is that it appears to be Jesus’ model for making disciples. Jesus primarily related to a group of twelve disciples and then to a smaller group of three disciples. If preaching to the masses was the way to make disciples, wouldn’t Jesus have asked His own band of disciples to rent the local amphitheater and invite hundreds or thousands to hear Him preach? Sure He would have. But He didn’t. He spent His days relating to a small group of disciples and only occasionally spoke to very large crowds.

## 2. Making disciples requires proximity.

You can’t make disciples from a distance. Robby Gallaty, pastor at Long Hollow Baptist Church, says,

*Preaching to make disciples is like going to the nursery and spraying crying babies with milk and saying you just fed the kids...discipleship involves more than preaching and listening.<sup>5</sup>*

If we want to feed a baby, we must hold them close. Making disciples requires that same kind of proximity. It is about relationships.

### **3. Growing disciples read God's Word daily.**

Through a massive research project done for the book, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Brad Waggoner discovered that growing disciples place themselves in a posture to grow spiritually year-over-year by several key habits. Regularly attending a Bible study group and the church's weekend worship services were the second and third most common factors in growing disciples. The most prevalent factor was daily Bible engagement! <sup>6</sup> Disciples who immerse themselves in God's Word daily are in a strong position to grow spiritually. We could have possibly guessed this was an important factor, but now the research has proven it. Self-feeding on God's Word is a significant growth tool for disciples.

### **4. Disciples replicate themselves.**

In 2 Timothy 2:1-2, we see three generations of Christians. Paul instructed Timothy to take the gospel he'd heard Paul preach and teach it to others. These men would in turn teach the gospel to another successive generation of believers. The implication being that those believers would pass it along to yet another generation of Christians.

Disciples replicate individually as they relate to other disciples and help them mature. We also replicate ourselves corporately. A group of disciples (take your Bible study group, for instance) replicates itself by starting a new group. Hopefully in time that new group will start its own fledgling group. It is a joy to see a "mother" group with many "daughter" groups. Replication and multiplication are keys to reaching more and more people with the gospel.

### **5. Disciples have preferences for Bible study.**

Going to a steak restaurant is a difficult thing for my family. We cannot agree on the right way to have our steaks prepared. My college son, Ryan, likes his medium rare. His usually come in a pool of blood on his plate. My wife likes hers medium, while I tend to enjoy a steak left on the grill a little longer. I've realized that none of us are wrong; we simply have preferences for the way we like our steaks prepared. In a similar way, disciples often have preferences for the way they go about studying God's Word. Some disciples prefer to study a topic and see how God's Word addresses it. Others prefer to study book-by-book, while another group

may prefer to study theologically, seeing how Jesus is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments. None of these preferences are wrong; but one may feel “more right” to some disciples versus others.

#### **6. Disciples benefit from greater accountability.**

Engaging in a church’s weekend worship service is a must for growing disciples. So is participation in a Bible study group. But what about beyond the group? Growing disciples benefit from what some have called “accountability groups” or “D-groups” (discipleship groups). In these smaller groups, two to four same-sex people come together weekly for further study, reflection, and accountability. This cannot be forced upon people in groups, but it can be encouraged by the group leader. In a perfect world, every adult in my Bible study group would be partnering with others from that group for a deeper level of study, relationship, and accountability.

*How are these six principles tied to the three implications of foundational discipleship (see pp. 14-15)?*

*What barriers might get in the way of these principles being carried out and how can you combat those barriers?*

## Making Disciples is Fueled by Silence

Disciple-making teachers know that the people they teach need to be allowed to talk and encouraged to talk at least as much as they do. For some teachers, this is almost heretical. Somewhere along the way, the average teacher has adopted a mindset that says, “I’m the expert, and you’re not so listen to what I have to say.” It’s true that teachers often study for many hours in preparation to teach their groups which is highly commendable. But what is most effective in a learning setting is when teachers become guides, leading their people to discuss insights gained, wrestle with Scripture, and challenge assumptions and actions. Ed Stetzer characterizes Bible study groups as “groupalogue.”<sup>7</sup> By that he means that each person in a Bible study group should be allowed to talk and encouraged to talk. Without that, the class ends up being a place where a limited dialogue takes place. (The teacher and one student tend to dominate, or even worse, it becomes a setting in which a monologue takes place weekly. The teacher simply becomes the only one who talks.) Group leaders who learn to be silent and allow their group members to talk at least as much as they do are well on their way to producing disciples.

*How does group silence work against the six principles for disciple making?*

## Disciples or Degrees?

Having led a weekly Bible study group for the past six years, I have asked myself on more than one occasion, “What are you doing?” I’ve wondered if the kinds of Bible study experiences I created for my group members actually helped produce maturing disciples or if they produced people with knowledge and “degrees.”

If I had to lean toward producing disciples or degrees, I'd choose disciples any day. Here are three diagnostic questions that may help us be more conscious of our effort to produce disciples:

### **1. Are my Bible studies knowledge-focused or application-focused?**

In my experience, I've seen many well-intentioned teachers focus almost exclusively on the biblical text, with little attention given to connecting the Scripture to present-day life. Have we accepted a teaching model that says, "You're mature if you know a lot of facts"? Jesus said that we must "teach them to obey," not "teach them all kinds of interesting, little-known factoids." Do the people in our Bible studies have an idea of how to bridge a Bible truth to life in the real world? Have we led them to apply the Scripture to their context today? Group leaders must find the balance and not just teach history lessons; they must teach lessons grounded in the Word of God, connected to life today.

### **2. Is the goal to "get through" a lesson or to allow for Spirit-led meandering?**

Many teachers believe that success equals getting through the lesson. We may feel like we've failed if we don't cover all the points in our teaching outlines. We need to get comfortable with allowing the Holy Spirit to lead our "meandering," knowing that He is at work in each of the people in our groups, and they are all at different places in their growth as disciples. Sometimes what we planned to teach has to be set aside as we chase a connected topic that is important to them. Does it make me feel uncomfortable when I don't have control over the discussion? Sure it does. But it allows for the Spirit to spontaneously deal with issues, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs that are held by me and my group members. The Spirit helps bring all of those into alignment with Scripture. Rivers always meander. They flow downhill and have a point at which they connect to another body of water. Rivers never make a straight line for their final destination, but they ultimately get there. That's how we should approach teaching our groups! We know the destination where we hope to take them in Scripture; we know the main idea we want them to wrestle with. But if it takes some meandering to get there, we need to be OK with that. The goal isn't to get through all the points in our outlines. The goal is to make disciples.

### 3. Are there visible signs of people becoming more mature followers of Christ?

Can we see the fruit of the Spirit present in us and our group members in an increasing way? Do we see our group members making sacrifices to serve, give, and relate to others? Do we have a sense of Spirit-inspired peace? Would we say that we are acting more like Christ each day?

If we are leading our group members to understand and apply the Bible, they should look more like the Savior each day. The last thing we want is for our group members to know the Scripture but fail to live it. We want them to see spiritual progress that can take place as they yield to Christ and the leading of His Holy Spirit.

*How might these three questions be used to evaluate a Sunday School Class? How might the response differ based on who does the evaluation (the leader, the group, a guest, etc.)?*

## In Summary

Sunday School exists for the purpose of making disciples. Disciples are created and grow as they encounter God's Word on a regular basis as individuals and with a group. The group encourages each person enrolled (and those yet to be enrolled) to study God's Word and live it out as a community. Everything done by the group should reflect the purpose of making disciples.

So what do we do as teachers to put ourselves in a position to carry out this purpose? Our posture matters when it comes to making disciples. In the next chapter, Michael Kelley looks at the posture we must assume if we are going to fulfill our God-given purpose of making disciples.





## Chapter 2: Our Posture

Michael Kelley

*How do we set the standard for others to follow?*

If we are to lead our group well, then we must be confident in and committed to the purpose for the ministry. But we must also actively seek to bring ourselves into the right posture of leadership. A “posture” is the way someone holds their body when standing or sitting. It can also mean a particular way of dealing with or considering something. Our posture, then, is our approach; it’s our overall attitude. Just as our physical posture is important for us to have a healthy lifestyle, so also is our spiritual posture imperative if we are to lead a group well. Just as we can take an active role in forming our physical posture, we can also be active in forming our spiritual posture.

Imagine a home improvement project we have our eyes on. After examining the work and making a basic plan, we go to our toolbox to take inventory of what we have at our disposal. What we find there are some basic tools, but not the exact tools we need to do the work. But we decide that what we have is good enough, so we start the job.

Maybe we end up using a hand saw rather than a circular saw to cut a thick piece of wood. Or we might use the bottom of a screw driver to hammer in a nail. Perhaps we get the job done, but chances are the work took twice as long, and it wasn’t nearly as precise as it would have been if we had the right tools.

It’s a simple illustration, but it makes an important point: Tools are designed for specific purposes. The same thing is true in leading our groups. We are the primary tool the Lord uses to accomplish His purposes. If we know our purpose is to join Jesus in His mission of

making disciples, then we ought to care deeply about being rightly shaped for the task at hand. This is our spiritual posture, and we must be actively engaged in our own spiritual growth and leader development if we hope to pass on spiritual truth, insight, and transformation to our group members.

Furthermore, if we are joining Jesus in His great mission, we must also recognize that discipleship begins with us. This is how discipleship works. As we are formed into the image of Jesus, God uses those of us in the right posture for His good purposes. We must be in the right posture to receive God's work in us and then consequently to be used for God's work through us. This is what Paul articulated in Philippians 2:12-13:

*Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.*

In these two verses, we see God and us working. God works out His will and purposes. We work out our salvation with fear and trembling. This is the work of posture—willingly and actively positioning our lives to receive the power and work of God within us and eventually through us.

Think of it like water skiing. The power for water skiing doesn't come from the skier; it comes from the boat. But the skier must put himself or herself in the right posture in the water in order to be the recipient of the power. The same thing is true spiritually for us. We are recipients of life-transforming power that comes from outside of us. But we must position ourselves in the right posture to receive this power on an ongoing basis.

So how do we as leaders assume the correct posture so that we can best be used by God to disciple the people in our groups? We must assume at least three specific postures to make disciples.

## **The Abiding Posture of a Leader**

The most basic and comprehensive description of the posture that a Christian leader must take is the same posture that ought to characterize any Christian life. This posture can be summed up in a single word: “abide” or “remains.”

*I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me (John 15:5).*

Abiding in Christ is the basic work of the Christian life. Some translations call it remaining. The image Jesus used was of a branch connected to a vine. Apart from that connection, a branch is a stick; it's useless except for kindling. But when that branch is locked into the vine, it finds life and nutrients flowing into it so that it eventually bears much fruit.

*What are the dangers of trying to carry out the mission of Jesus on our own?*

When we remain or abide in Jesus, we will find our very lives. What's more, those who abide in Jesus will bear much fruit. This is a promise from the Son of God, backed by His authority and power. As leaders, we want our lives to bear fruit as we seek to lead others to be disciples of Jesus, making it imperative that we understand this basic posture of abiding. Unfortunately, "abide" is not a word we use often in our current culture.

How do we pursue a posture of abiding? Though the Book of John doesn't contain a checklist of how to abide in Jesus, it does give us a picture of abiding in chapter 1. The Book of John opens with Jesus being a relatively new figure on the religious landscape. There were rumors surrounding Him about His birth, His teaching, and His power. But by far, the big religious draw of the day was still John the Baptist. John, with his wild beard and locust-popping diet. John, the fearless man who called the Pharisees to task. John, the eccentric.

John the Baptist made a mysterious but powerful declaration. One day while preaching, he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared: “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:19) Such a statement no doubt left John’s own disciples wondering about the identity of this Person.

Then, when the same thing happened the next day, two of those disciples wanted to inquire further:

*The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and noticed them following him, he asked them, ‘What are you looking for?’ (John 1:35–38a).*

Valid question. Here were two men who were followers of John. Jesus comes walking up, and suddenly these men stopped following John and started following Jesus. So what were they looking for?

Their response seems to say, “We don’t know.” Instead of answering the question, they ask Jesus a question back: “Rabbi...where are you staying?”

Another good question. It’s not because it redirected the question asked by Jesus, buying them some time to think of a better answer. It’s a good question because of the word “staying.”

The word is the same word we find translated as “remain” in John 15:4-5, this time spoken by Jesus:

*Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me.*

The men asked, “Where are you staying?” Where are You remaining? Where are You dwelling? Where are You going to be, because that’s where we want to go. To be with You. To remain with You. To abide with You.

This simple account gives us at least three insights into what abiding means and how we can pursue a posture of abiding in Christ

### **Abiding begins with a glimpse of Jesus.**

These early disciples didn’t know the ins and outs of who Jesus is; they had an inkling, but they were a long way from being able to articulate Jesus’

true identity and the gospel. Maybe that's why they answered Jesus with a question when He asked them what they were looking for. The two guys looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and asked another question as if to say, "truth is Jesus, we don't exactly know. But we know that You're different. You're unique. And wherever You're going, we want to go there, too." This is how it begins for all of us.

We catch a glimpse of Jesus. Maybe we've got some theological background. Maybe we know better answers than these two future disciples. Regardless, abiding in Jesus begins not when we learn about Him, but when we actually encounter Him, and we find ourselves so arrested by that vision that we know we need more. Abiding starts with a glimpse of Jesus, but it doesn't end there. We must put ourselves in positions to get regular glimpses of Jesus if we want to abide in Him.

We do that through the very ordinary means of the spiritual disciplines. We read the written Word that gives testimony to the Living Word. We regularly worship alongside other believers as we serve one another and sing alongside each other in the name of Jesus. We make a habit of prayer so that we can spend time with Jesus. Each of these things puts us in a position to regularly glimpse Jesus.

*Tell about the first time you truly encountered Jesus.*

*How did that encounter change your life?*

## **Abiding is an intentional choice.**

Nobody accidentally abides in Jesus. These men didn't. Even though they didn't know what they were looking for precisely, they made the intentional choice to stop following John and start following Jesus. In fact, they became so invested in the time they were spending with Jesus that much of the day just slipped away from them.

Like them, we will have to bring some intentionality to our Christian walk if we want to abide in Christ. We aren't going to stumble into abiding. We've got to make the intentional choice to meet Jesus where He is. We must do things like intentionally battling sinful patterns in our lives. We must surround ourselves with people who move us forward in our faith. Even things like our entertainment choices must be filtered through the lens of whether or not it brings us closer to Jesus. We must make intentional choices if we are to abide in Him.

*What intentional choices have you made that put you in a better position to encounter Jesus more regularly?*

## **Abiding is driven by faith.**

Sometimes our faith is small, but in each case, we catch a glimpse of Jesus. We make an intentional choice to be with Him. And then we find ourselves choosing to do it again and again out of faith.

Let's not make the mistake of thinking that abiding in Jesus is purely an act of the will; it's not. It's driven forward by faith. There will be times when we don't feel like abiding. We're too tired. We have too much to do. Something else seems more important. What we must do in those times is more than act; we must believe. We must believe that Jesus will meet with us. We must believe that the Bible is the Word of God. We must believe in Him and His Word, and then let our actions follow.

## The Kneeling Posture of a Leader

The second posture a leader must take is kneeling. This is the posture of prayer. Beyond any leadership strategy, preparation method, or teaching technique, a leader must daily and repeatedly find himself or herself kneeling. Consider, for a moment, what this posture indicates.

When we kneel in prayer, we are saying something about our own weakness. When we pray, regardless of what we pray for, we are implicitly recognizing that we are incapable of creating real change in our lives or in the lives of others. The very act of prayer, in and of itself, communicates that we recognize our own weakness and dependence on God.

Prayer not only is a recognition of our weakness; it's a recognition of God's strength. Why else would we pray to Him unless we believe He is strong when we are weak? That He is sufficient when we fall short? That He is rich when we are poor? When we pray, we give testimony that we believe God to be all powerful and willing to help us, for we are needy.

Prayer, like any other discipline, does not come naturally to us. That's why we must put forth a concerted and strenuous effort in order to assume this posture. In other words, we must practice at prayer. Here are three simple ways that we can develop this particular discipline as leaders:

### **Pray regularly.**

Prayer is one of those things most of us intend to do. But despite our best intentions, very few of us actually have a long-lasting, sustainable prayer life. No shortcuts exist for getting there; we must commit ourselves to regular and habitual prayer. Prayer, for us, ought to be treated like any other imperative in life. Much the same way we might put a notice on our calendars to help us set aside time for an important meeting or task, so also should we care enough about prayer to set aside the time to practice it. Just like we do with other important meetings, we need to set a time to meet with God and do all we can to keep that appointment.

### **Pray specifically.**

Jesus rightfully picked apart the prayers of the Pharisees, noting they were long, rambling, and formulaic while lacking any real zeal, emotion,



or authenticity. We should not pray this way. Our prayers should not be general in nature, but specific, because we need specific help in specific situations. To pray specifically, we must be in regular and intimate contact with our groups. If we are to pray specifically, then we must also be pursuing an ever-deepening sense of community with those under our care. We must know our people specifically so that we can then pray specifically.

### **Pray collectively.**

As we pray regularly and as we pray specifically, we must also pray collectively. Jesus also railed against the Pharisees because they prayed on street corners to be seen by and impress other people. Jesus did not mean that we should never pray in public, far from it. In fact, when you look at the Lord's Prayer—Jesus' model for how His disciples should approach the Father—you will find the notable absence of one word: "I." There are no first person singular pronouns in this model. (See Matt. 6:9-13.)

Jesus told us to pray to "our Father." We are to ask for "our daily bread." We are to ask Him to "Deliver us from the evil one." Implicit in the Lord's Prayer is the fact that we should be praying together. Collective prayer ought to be an indispensable part of not only our preparation, but for our meeting together. In as much as we are pursuing the posture of prayer as leaders, we should be bringing our groups along with us to the same posture.

*Which of these three prayer actions is easiest to maintain?  
Explain. Which requires the most work?*

When we begin to assume a kneeling posture, remarkable things begin to happen. Some of those things will no doubt be visible in our groups as God faithfully answers our supplications on behalf of others. But our kneeling posture will also have a profound impact within us. As we pray more, we will find that through prayer, God bends our heart to His. He aligns our wills to His. He slowly, but surely, shapes our thoughts and desires to conform to the thoughts and desires of Jesus.

We will find ourselves seeing others not with partiality, not with prejudice, and not with preconceived notions, but instead through the eyes of Christ. Our compassion will be deeper, our love will be purer, and our conviction will be stronger. All of these things happen as a result of pursuing a kneeling posture.

## **The Servant Posture of a Leader**

The leader must have a posture of abiding. The leader should also have a posture of kneeling in prayer. We must also pursue a posture of service. Service is, in fact, the leadership way of Jesus. Once, during Jesus' earthly ministry, two brothers jockeyed for authority and acclaim in the future kingdom. Their mom stepped in to ask for a special favor. Jesus took this as an opportunity to remind all His disciples that the principles of the kingdom are not like the principles of the world. In Jesus' kingdom, many things are counterintuitive to the world's way of thinking, including leadership:

*Jesus called them over and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:25-28).*

When we assume a posture of service, we communicate that we value people in a way that mirrors God's love for people. Consider again the example of Jesus. He had every right to demand service from others. Further, He had the power to force it to happen. And yet we see Jesus wrapping a towel around His waist, bending low, and washing the dirty

feet of a bunch of rag-tag followers (John 13:1-17). Why would He do something that seems so beneath Him?

Sometimes the simple answer is the best. Jesus served because He loved people as the Father loved them. His service set the standard for this kind of demonstrated love.

Jesus' posture of leadership is one of service. The posture of the world when it comes to leadership is the complete opposite. Instead of loving and serving people, the world uses people. Uses them to advance itself. Uses them to meet its desires. Uses them to prop up its egos. But the gospel frees us from the compulsion to use other people because we are fully accepted in Christ. We are free, then, to actually and genuinely love and serve others without seeking anything in return.

The simple answer as to why we must assume the posture of service is because God passionately loves the people in our groups. Therefore, we ought to love them and demonstrate that love through service.

Here are three characteristics of Christian service we should emulate as we assume the posture of serving others.

### **Our service must be humble.**

It is possible that in our sinful hearts we can be proud of our level of service. If we choose that road, then we are self-destructing the posture of service we need to assume. That is because humility is a prerequisite not only for Christian leadership, but for Christianity as a whole.

Think, for a minute, about the most basic message of Christianity as it applies to humanity. At its core, Christianity is the most insulting of religions. Emil Brunner, the Swiss theologian, said it like this:

*All other religions spare us the ultimate humiliation of being stripped naked and declared bankrupt before God.*<sup>8</sup>

That's pretty strong language, yet it points to the humiliating nature of Christianity. No other world religion treats humanity with such pessimism. In all other schools of thought, we have something to bring to the table. They teach that we can strive toward God and meet Him, and in a sense, be congratulated when we do.

Not Christianity.

In Christianity, we bring nothing to the table. In fact, the only thing we bring to the equation of salvation is the sin from which we need to be rescued. Perhaps that's why, if we look back into history, Christianity has been called the religion of women and slaves. In cultures of the past, neither of those two groups had many rights, so it wasn't a far stretch for them to admit their abject need of God's complete and total intervention on their behalf. Despite all our rights, all our freedom, all our effort at self-protection, the same thing is true for us. Christianity reminds us that we are first and foremost poor and needy souls. Christianity cuts us at the knees before it lifts our soul.

The one character flaw that has, and will continue, to most keep people from Christ is not greed. It's not lust. It's not lying, or stealing, or killing. It's pride. That's the only thing there is no room for at the foot of the cross. When we serve, then, we must be uniquely humble about that service because of what that humility communicates about the grace of God in the gospel.

### **Our service must be sacrificial.**

Here is another uniqueness of Christian service; it is sacrificial. Service ought to cost us something: time, energy, money, effort, or some other resource we have in limited supply. Because we love and value God and others, our service should reflect that love and value system through sacrifice.

Here again we see how the values of the kingdom run counter to those of the world. In the world, one might serve another, but rarely is that service done without some kind of ulterior motive. We might serve another so that they will owe us a favor, to increase our reputation, or even to make ourselves feel better. In all of these cases, the person being served might receive some benefit, but in the end, we are the ones at the center of our willingness to serve someone else. It is a self-centered kind of service.

As Christians, we are not only told to serve differently, but we are empowered to do so. We are freed from the compulsion to seek our own best interests because we are confident that God is seeking our best interests. When we don't need to look out for ourselves, we are freed

to look out for other people, even when it costs us something. This selfless service ought to be normative in the life of every Christ-follower, much less the leader:

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:3-4).*

How do we do that? How do we make sure that we are serving in a selfless, sacrificial kind of way rather than a self-centered one? One of the easiest ways to assume this posture is to choose opportunities of service that are behind the scenes or even in secret. That way we can know we are not serving in order to gain the approval of people and trusting that God alone sees what is being done.

*What is the relationship between humility and service?  
How do they work together in the life of a believer?*

### **Our service must be unbiased.**

By nature, we humans want to be around people who look like us, think like us, and dress like us. Environments filled with sameness make us comfortable, and we often find it easier to form relationships with people with whom we have the most in common. Consequently, people like us are also the easiest people for us to serve. But our servant posture must go beyond the familiar; it must be unbiased. If it is not, then we are guilty of what James called favoritism:

*My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ (Jas. 2:1).*

Why is this so important? Why must our posture of service extend beyond those who are most easy and familiar to serve? First of all, when we show partiality, we are, whether we know it or not, subtly neglecting the image of God in which all humans have been created. Because all of us have been created in God's image, every one of us is worthy of honor and dignity. When we remove some of that honor and dignity, even if it seems like a small thing, we are doing something more than exercising our preference for one group or another. We are, at a basic level, denying the image of God in the neglected party.

Furthermore, when we show partiality, we reveal that we see others as objects to be used. James powerfully illustrated the problem of favoritism being shown in the church, stating:

*For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (Jas. 2:2-4).*

The reason for favoritism in this case was simple: it's because we can get something from the rich person. By showing favoritism, we might money, a greater reputation by association, or approval. Whatever the case, we are trying to get something from him or her, which means we are using that person rather than serving and loving him or her.

While we might trick ourselves into believing that showing partiality just means that someone gets a little something extra from us, as if we are doing the sacrificing, it's really the other way around. Our focus is on ourselves and how we can potentially use that person for our own ends.

Finally, showing partiality sets us up in the place of God. We assume the role of God when we determine the worthiness of someone based on some preconceived notion based on their clothes, money, reputation, or whatever. But we are not equipped to make this judgment. Indeed, only God looks at the heart.

When we show partiality, we are putting ourselves in God's place. We are judging the worth of someone else.

When we see this trait inside ourselves—when we know that our tendency is to always favor one group over another—we would do well to remind ourselves that we are all on level ground at the foot of the cross. There is no one righteous, no not one. Not that group we tend to favor more than others and certainly not ourselves. And then we can look and see that God Himself did not show favoritism, but instead is building His kingdom from unlikely places and sources. So also should our attitude be.

*How does each characteristic of service address the roadblocks one might need to remove so he or she can assume a posture of service?*

## **In Summary**

As leaders, we should be careful of our posture, for our posture will in large part determine not only our effectiveness in our groups, but also the vitality of our ongoing relationships with Jesus. We must take active steps to make sure that our posture is one of abiding, kneeling, and service.

Out of that posture, we can then focus on the nuts and bolts of leading the group. We can know our purpose and possess the perfect posture and yet still come up short in making disciples by failing to prepare to lead our groups. Preparation does not guarantee success, but failing to prepare almost always guarantees that our groups will be less than what they could be. In the next chapter, Dwayne McCrary shares practical actions we can take to prepare to lead the weekly Bible study time, challenge the group to service, and move toward starting new groups. All of these things are based in our purpose and borne out of our posture.

## Chapter 3: Our Preparedness

Dwayne McCrary

*What do we do to prepare ourselves and our group to make disciples?*

We want to see people come to know Christ and move toward maturity in Him. Unfortunately, we do not control the outcome. But we do control if a person receives an opportunity to accept Christ, if they are challenged to move forward in their spiritual walk, and if they are made aware of potential service opportunities. We also control the investment we make in the life of the group we lead and in the lives of the people in that group. That investment is seen in our preparation. Preparation puts us in a position to share the gospel, nurture believers, and lead them to serve.

I say “us” here because I teach an ongoing Bible study group in my church. I actually teach two, a group of adults at 8 a.m. and a group of preschoolers at 11 a.m. (Worship is sandwiched between the two.) Both groups require preparation.

Some see preparation as limiting or unspiritual. They convince themselves that the Holy Spirit works best through a vessel with a clean slate. For them, preparation gets in the way of being sensitive to the Spirit in the moment. They forget that God is all-knowing and directs us in our preparation. God uses prepared vessels to do His bidding. Through preparation, we place ourselves in a position where God can use us in greater ways. Nothing could be more freeing or spiritual! We will pick a sharpened axe over a dull one every time.

### Preparing to Lead Our Groups

When we said “yes” to leading a group, we agreed to give focused attention to the weekly group time. The people in our classes expect us to lead the



group time and they expect us to be ready to do so. Leading the group time is what most people think of when they think about us preparing as the teacher.

Every week, we must answer five questions regardless of the age group we teach. Our answer to each question should be covered with prayer (part of our posture). Failing to pray when answering these questions will lead us away from our purpose. Here are the five questions:

- *What will we study this week?*
- *What does the selected passage mean then and now?*
- *What is the main point we need to focus on?*
- *How might this truth change the way we think, believe, act, and relate?*
- *How can I help my group discover these truths for themselves?*

Each of these questions must be asked in this sequence. Getting them out of order will short-circuit our preparation. For example, failing to ask what the passage means then and today, and going straight to preparing plans does not allow the passage to impact our own lives. The group will know we are simply executing a plan about content we have not personally examined and applied in our own lives.

### **Question 1. What will we study this week?**

Determining what we will study is half of the battle of teaching. We could spend most of our preparation time trying to figure out what to study next. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible made up of more than 31,000 verses. If we studied a chapter a week, we are talking about almost 23 years of Sundays. Most of us are thinking more about what we teach over the course of a year (52 Sundays) which means we have our work cut out cramming those 23 years of Bible chapters into only one year.

Think of all the decisions required to put together a comprehensive study plan that allows a group to examine the full counsel of God's Word. Duration, which passages to include (and which ones to pass over), and when each passage is studied all require careful consideration. Using an ongoing curriculum from a trusted source like LifeWay is worth the price for the study plan alone!

Even when we know the value of using a well thought-out plan, we sometimes balk at someone else setting a study plan for us. We either think we know what is best for our group, would rather study the passages we already know, don't want to be accountable to the church or church leaders, or don't want to study THAT passage (the one that makes us uncomfortable because we are not following the teachings of that passage). We sometimes forget that we need a study plan that makes us look at the whole of Scripture. Using a well thought-out study plan frees us to spend more time shepherding our group than figuring out what to feed them.

## **Question 2. What does the selected passage mean then and now?**

After we have determined what we will study, we can focus on what the passage means then and today. Let's look over the shoulder of a teacher who can walk us through this process. For the sake of showing us what to do, we notice that the teacher is studying Acts 15:36-41, the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark.

He begins by reading the passage and listing the people, places, and things found in the passage. In Acts 15, he includes the names Paul, Barnabas, Mark, and Silas. He also includes the phrases "sharp disagreement" and "sailed off."

He then turns to his Bible study tools (a concordance, a Bible dictionary, atlas, Bible handbook, commentary, study Bible, his Leader Guide, etc.) to discover information about the people, places, and things he listed. He follows the path of the first missionary journey to identify when Mark abandoned the trip. He also looks at Acts 9 to be reminded of how Barnabas had been an advocate for Paul when he was a new believer.

He also notices that the word translated "sharp disagreement" in the Christian Standard Bible appears in the New Testament only one other time (Heb. 10:24). Turning to Hebrews, he discovers the writer of Hebrews used the term in a positive way; to provoke someone to action. He finds out that the term was also used in medical circles to describe when a disease of some type takes a turn for the worse, becoming full-blown. Realizing Luke was a doctor (he wrote Acts), we get a clearer understanding of the conflict.

Our teacher then begins to list actions and behaviors seen in the passage. He turns to remind us that we may end up listing actions and behaviors prohibited or encouraged in the passage as well. For example, if studying 1 Timothy, we might list the actions Paul directed Timothy to be busy doing. For Acts 15, he listed the following: Paul desired to check on believers he influenced, Barnabas gave Mark a second opportunity, Paul focused on the mission, conflict happens to the best of people and in the strongest of relationships, and Barnabas and Paul quickly came to an impasse.

Before moving on, he makes sure to list actions taken by God in the passage. Rereading Acts 15, he writes the following statements: God made Paul and Barnabas the way they were for a reason, and God used conflict to accomplish His purposes.

He then begins to list questions related to the actions and behaviors identified, being sure to personalize some of the questions. Some questions he posed from reading Acts 15 are: How could this dispute have been resolved? Do I check on the people I have led to Christ? Who needs me to give them a second opportunity? Have I lost my focus of what is important and God's purposes in my life? Do I need to regroup? Where do I go to regroup? Am I investing in others? How do I deal with conflict in a healthy way? Has God used a conflict in my life to accomplish His purposes? How can I restore a relationship in my life that is broken by a conflict? Was it worth the conflict?

To get a clearer picture, he then converts open-ended questions to close-ended questions and vice versa. For example, the question "Am I investing in others?" became these: In whom am I investing? How am I investing in them? How do I know my investment is making a difference? What are my motives for investing in each person identified?

As his final step, he looks for themes and connections. He groups the questions (questions about conflict for example) and then draws lines to the other items listed under behaviors to the discoveries and back to the people we initially listed. He looks to see how the questions tie to the Bible text. He identifies one question set and the items listed that are tied to that set and begins to focus on that theme in the passage.

Before leaving, the teacher looks over his shoulder and gives us these steps:

- *Read the Bible passage.*
- *List people, places, and things.*
- *Use Bible tools to find out more about the people, places, and things listed*
- *List behaviors seen, prescribed, or prohibited. Include actions taken by God.*
- *Create questions based on the behaviors. (Convert the open-ended questions and close-ended questions.)*
- *Look for themes.*

*On a sheet of paper, create notes for an upcoming Sunday School lesson using the steps above.*

*How did this process help you get a handle on a Bible passage?*

### **Question 3. What is the main point we need to focus on?**

The selected theme becomes the focus of the lesson, giving us the answer to the third question we must ask every week. We may find sub-themes that support the larger theme, but we will want to make sure we keep the selected theme front and center. Doing otherwise may confuse and frustrate the group...and us.

Here's the good news, if we use resources from LifeWay, they have already done this for us. Using their resources will save us time since we will not need to go hunting for different Bible study tools or be left on our own to identify a main theme or generate thought-provoking question sets.

We have lots of stuff to do to prepare to lead the group time and we haven't even begun to create the group study plan itself. If we are going to prepare ourselves well, we need to start early in the week. As soon as the last person leaves our class, we are free to focus on the next lesson. There really is no reason to wait until midnight on Saturday to begin our preparation.

**Question 4. How might this truth change the way we think, believe, act, and relate?**

Starting early in the week also gives us time to answer the fourth question. Notice that “we” are included in this fourth question. We can't take people to a place we aren't willing to go ourselves. Ezra explained that he first studied the Scriptures, then sought to live out the truths he discovered in his own life, SO he could then teach others how to do the same. (See Ezra 7:10.)

Notice the four elements included in question four: think, believe, act, and relate. These four areas reflect different learning objectives. Thinking points to what we know. It is about facts and how we interact with those facts. The second area is about what we value and believe. This area of learning is very important because we can know a fact but not really value it enough to act on it. The third area of learning is action or putting a truth into practice in a visible way. The fourth area of change points to how we relate to others. Some may see this as a sub-set of act, but dogs can be trained to respond to a bell and start eating. As humans, we relate in a different way than the rest of God's creation, so we may need to give this area more attention when we think about what we hope happens in the lives of the people we teach.

**Question 5. How can I help the group discover these truths for themselves?**

Knowing the answer to the fourth question helps us put together a group study plan. The goal of the plan is to lead the group to voice their answers to this fourth question. They may do that privately, but they still voice an answer. We may even need to spur them on by revealing how we answered that question in our own lives.

We could tell them all we discovered, but that only gives the group information and in the process creates an unhealthy codependency.

Let's imagine that as we teach, we settle for being the lone voice heard. The expectation for the group is to sit and listen. We as the teacher prepare to deliver a well thought out presentation. We execute it flawlessly, saving only enough time at the end for a couple of prayer requests and an announcement. The group seems happy to soak in our wisdom and a few tell us how impressed they were with our presentation. As a group, they are content to simply sit and listen, and we are content with the pats on the back. We then begin to put together our next presentation so the group can easily sit and soak some more before they brag on our presentation. They depend on us to fill their heads with facts so they can feel good about their religious education while we depend on them to affirm us for the work we did to fill their heads with more facts. This is the classic example of an unhealthy codependency.

Unfortunately, what was just described gets carried out every week in Sunday School classes around the globe. The people in our groups need to discover the truths for themselves; this helps them learn how to do Bible study in the process. We cheat them when we settle for less.

Here are some steps to consider that will help us put together a study plan that goes beyond telling:

**1. Create a discovery activity around the big idea.** We want the group to discover for themselves what we discovered for ourselves as we prepared to lead the group. The possibilities are limitless here. We could lead the group to create song lyrics based on a Bible passage, create a time line of the actions of an event, holding various plants as we discuss the third day of creation, etc.

**2. Craft questions that move the group into the discovery activity and help them respond to the truth discovered.** The questions generated when studying the passage should help with this, along with our answer to how the big idea should change how we think, believe, act, and relate giving some direction.

We need to think in terms of question sets. We may have a great question that takes up all the group time, but that question may not take the group anywhere in the process. Questions work best when they are part of a larger set which move people to a conclusion. Start with the final question you want to ask. If that final question was about the group

examining their lives for evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and taking steps to give greater evidence of those fruit, then they need to know what those fruit are and why they should care. Question sets move the group from deciding to care to acting on what they discover.

**3. Identify what the group will need to know to complete the discovery activity and respond to the questions leading up to and in response to the discovery activity.** This action includes choosing the means by which you will communicate what they need to know. Possibilities include presenting a lecture, reading an article, reacting to a paragraph in the group member's resource, or reviewing a Bible dictionary entry, just to name a few.

**4. Add an introduction and conclusion to the group plans.** The introduction should serve as a means to engage the group and set a course for study. People arrive with all kinds of things on their minds so we need to help them get a clear focus on the study for the day. The introduction also gives them a clue as to where we are going in that study and is usually pointed toward the big idea we hope they walk away with at the conclusion of the group time. The conclusion should bring the study to a logical conclusion, giving the group the opportunity to summarize the main point, define a next step or action, or prepare them for additional study.

**5. List the things needed to make the plan happen and start gathering them.** Gathering items is another reason to start early in the week. We may want to keep bags in our houses where we place items needed. Things used the previous week may remain in the bag if we plan to use them again. This will make it easier on Sunday to just grab the bag as we head out the door.

Once again, using curriculum resources from a trusted Christian publisher like LifeWay helps. Each resource includes group plans that do all these things for us. That does not mean we are bound to complete every step as written. We are free to customize the plans to fit our groups. The plans serve as a starting point with us using what we need. It is much easier to adapt an idea sitting in front of us than to create one from scratch.

*How can you use these steps to prepare a group plan for your class? What other steps might you add?*

## Managing the Group Time

Before we move on, let's take a quick look at scheduling the group time. The group study time begins when the first person arrives no matter what age we are teaching. That is their reward for arriving first! Waiting to start only encourages the rest of the group to arrive later and later.

As we lead the group using our created plan, we will need to alter some of the actions as the group dictates. We can't plan every minute mainly because things will happen we never imagined. Sharing the gospel with a person as the rest of the group listens overrides all plans. Be flexible.

Leave time at the end of the group time to share prayer requests, identify opportunities for service, tell stories about how God is working in the lives of group members, and discussing ways of addressing discovered needs of group members. When teaching preschoolers and younger kids, we may want to find ways of doing these things throughout the group time.

With students and adults, if we do these things at the beginning, time for teaching the Bible will be squeezed out. Regardless of why a person may be motivated to attend our groups, we need to always remember that time engaging with the Bible is always expected. For some, the only time they actually engage in Bible study is when they sit in our room. We need to give them as much time as possible in Bible study. Gathering prayer requests and taking care of administrative items at the end usually protects the Bible study time. We will get the same information just in a more concise way.

*What might you need to change so you can better manage the group time? How might you go about making those changes?*



## Preparing Our Groups to Serve

Successful Sunday School groups do more than come together for an hour of Bible study each week. They also minister to each other through prayer, hold each other accountable for spiritual growth, find ways to make a difference as a team in the community, rally around each other when needed, and build meaningful relationships. Successful Sunday School groups also reach out to those who have dropped out or have yet to attend a Bible study group.

We cannot do it alone. We must organize our class to do the work. When we approach a person about a responsibility, we are doing more than asking them to complete a task or fill a spot. We are challenging them to meet a need that helps our groups fulfill their purposes. Each responsibility must tie to the mission of making disciples.

Imagine that we meet in a classroom used by multiple groups on Sunday, and we start at 8 a.m. Most of our group brings coffee, including us. Most of us forget how to use a trash can to dispose of our cup once we are done. We can recruit a person to be responsible for cleaning the room afterward, telling them that we don't want others to think our group is lazy or untidy. Or we can recruit a person to prepare the room for the next group so that the next group can make a good first impression on any guests they may have that day. Both volunteers would do the same task (picking up used coffee cups left next to chairs), but they would be doing it for very different reasons. The second person would be doing it with a sense of purpose that is tied to the mission of Sunday School (removing a stumbling block...or stumbling cup...that might get in the way of another group making a new disciple or reclaiming a wayward one).

Before we make our groups aware of a need, we may need to think about how that role relates to the mission of the group or organization. How will that role help the group make disciples? How will it help other groups make disciples?

Here's a list a group of men created during a series of weekly conversations over hamburgers. Their goal was to define what they needed to do as a group to succeed.

- *Someone prepares to lead the group Bible study time*
- *Challenges all to participate in the group Bible study time*
- *Holds each other responsible for spiritual growth*
- *Seeks to include others not in a Bible study group*
- *Actively contacts group members and potential members*
- *Welcomes guests, treating them as valued people*
- *Seeks to discover needs so they can respond to them*
- *Incorporates everyone in the ministry of the group*
- *Builds relationships within the group (uses fellowships if we can't do it any other way)*
- *Develops and maintains a prayer ministry within the group*
- *Each member prepares another person to do what they are currently doing (apprentices)*
- *Looks for ways of sending people out to start a new group, strengthens an existing group, or sponsors a new group*

At different points in the process, the list above included as many as twenty-five different actions and as few as seven. Through debate and ongoing conversation, that group of men settled on these twelve. They focused their discussions on the making of disciples, evaluating each potential action in light of that single purpose. They added the phrase “we make disciples by” to each statement and debated the validity of that statement.

What would you add to, remove, or alter in the list above?  
Explain your reasons.

After creating the list of actions, they began to give people in the group an opportunity to take on each task. Once again, they focused on how the task helped make disciples. Some members of the group took on more than one task. Others shared a task with another group member. They knew that the people in the group needed to step up if the group was to fulfill its purpose.

## **Cultivating a Culture of Service**

The people in our groups need to step up as well. How do we set the tone for the group when it comes to service? We can create a climate in our groups that fosters service. Talking about serving helps, but that is just a start. Relying on others in the group to do the work makes a difference. Securing an apprentice communicates we expect others to serve, reinforcing the service culture.

Let's face it, we will not always be the teacher of the group we now lead. Our jobs may change requiring us to move to new cities. Our health may force us to serve in different ways. We may be called upon to start new groups, leaving our current groups in the hands of a different teacher. Our investment in future leaders prepares us for the day we no longer lead our classes. We can move on to the next stages in our lives knowing that what we built will continue.

Our apprentices may end up starting their own group. They may become teachers in different age-groups. The preschoolers in our churches are depending on adult leaders to send them prepared teachers. The people adult leaders send to preschool, kids, and student classes become our missionaries. We might even identify a potential leader for another age-group where they can be apprenticed by an experienced teacher in that age-group while getting on-the-job-training. When making disciples is our goal, we celebrate the departure of missionaries to serve in other groups. They represent us in their service roles. The true test of our effectiveness as a disciple maker may be more seen in the number of people sent to serve in other groups than in the number of people who attend our groups.

If we teach a preschool, kids, or student group, we indirectly apprentice the next generation of teachers. The preschoolers, kids, and students watch us like hawks. Nothing we do goes unnoticed. One day, that kid who

asks us why they are building a wall with blocks will be asked that same question as a teacher. They will follow our lead since we are the model they have observed the most.

Our serving beyond teaching our groups cultivates a culture of service in our groups as well. We sometimes use teaching a group as a convenient excuse to avoid serving in other ways. We may be asked to help once a month in the preschool area during worship. We could easily point to our teaching Sunday School classes to excuse ourselves from extended care duty. Those leading preschool Sunday School classes can use this reason with a clear conscious, but the rest of us need to look for a better excuse. One wonders what would happen if the rest of us all decided to serve once a month in the preschool area. How might our volunteering once a month in the preschool area encourage others in our groups to step up as well?

Smaller groups also help us challenge our groups to serve. Ken touched on this in Chapter 1, but it bears repeating. People can hide in a larger group. The smaller the group, the more difficult it becomes to hide. We may not even notice who is serving and who is not. They may be a participant, but they are not invested in the group.

Smaller groups also help us find more teachers. The larger the group, the more difficult it is to find an apprentice. Put yourself in the shoes of the potential apprentice. You have never taught a group before. The teacher approaches you, asking you to serve as an apprentice teacher. You observe how he or she teaches and immediately determine that we could never teach a group that size with the same quality and polish. All those eyes counting on you also weighs heavy on you so you say no. Who can really blame you! The smaller the group, the greater the probability we will secure an apprentice and involve more people in service.

*What actions are you taking to foster a culture of service in your group?*

## Preparing Our Groups to Start New Groups

The last action created by the men's class pointed to the starting of new groups. This action appeared on every rendition of the list including the list of only seven actions. The group began as a new group borne out of a perceived need so it makes sense that they would include that action on their list. The original members were sent out of their former groups with a blessing and prayer support.

The teachers in their former groups created a culture that encouraged group members to look for ways of starting new groups. They used stories to build this culture. They told stories about people reached by new groups in the church. They told stories about people who accepted Christ as a result of a new group created just for that person and others like him or her.

Sharing stories about opportunities to share the gospel with others fosters this culture as well. We may tell of recent opportunities we had to share the gospel to illustrate a point in the Bible study. We may also choose to tell our stories as a prayer request instead.

Designating a Sunday of each month where we collect prayer requests only for people who do not yet know Christ also serves as a way to remind the group of the purpose—making disciples, with the first step being a commitment to Christ. We might even add initials of the names shared to a poster always on display to keep reaching others with the gospel in the forefront of our minds. Encouraging the group to pray for the lost functions as a reminder of their purpose as a group, highlighting the need for new groups that can reach the people for whom our groups are praying.

How we respond to guests also reinforces the starting of new groups. When a guest attends, we have a choice. We can greet guests and gather information so we can record their presence. Or we can offer them an opportunity to enroll in our groups, being careful to explain how enrolling will help them move forward in their spiritual lives. Taking this approach communicates expectations to the potential member (aka guest) while also communicating the potential need for starting a new group to better address the needs of a growing group.

## Steps to Starting a New Group

As leaders, we like seeing a room full of people. Most of us would rather prepare to lead a group knowing most chairs will be filled than prepare for a room dominated by empty chairs. But there comes a point when a full room works against us. As long as we have empty chairs, we have the possibility of reaching more people. But once most of the chairs are full, the group (and us) will stop being as concerned about reaching new people. A filled room means it's time to start a new group.

Here's one way a new group might be started. Our apprentice has been prepared to step up. We begin to let him or her teach more often. We begin to talk about the need for starting a new group so we can more effectively make disciples. We ask the group to pray about helping us start a new group. A couple of people approach us about helping to start a new group targeted to reach the names listed on the prayer poster. We now have a nucleus for a new group with a focus. We talk to the apprentice about taking over the current class so we can lead the new group. We explain that our experience will help us start this new group while they gain more experience by leading the established group so they can one day use that experience to start a new group.

We and the nucleus that agreed to help start the new group begin to contact people not involved in a Bible study group and the lost people who the former group had been praying for. The week prior to the selected start date, the former group spends the last 15 minutes of their group time praying for the new group. The new group also prays for the old group at the end of their first group time. We meet with the nucleus and begin to dialogue about what it will take for the group to succeed, creating a new list of actions to be assigned. New people are reached by both groups in the weeks ahead, fulfilling their mission of making disciples.

*What groups in your community are you not currently reaching as a church? What steps can you take to help start a new group to reach at least one of these unreached groups?*



## CHALLENGE

As we wrote these pages, faces flooded our minds. These faces demonstrated the purpose, posture, and preparation described in these pages. They taught us as we observed their lives.

For Ken, the faces of Les Cochran, A.C. Faulkner, and Milton Glenn came to mind. Les Cochran was Ken's high school Sunday School teacher. Mr. Cochran doubled as a coach on the boys' softball team at church. One day when leaving a game, Ken's car was hit broadside by a drunk driver. Mr. Cochran happened to be in the car behind Ken and stayed with Ken until the ambulance arrived; he then went to Ken's house with the wrecker and spoke to Ken's father just to make sure he understood that the accident wasn't Ken's fault. A.C. Faulkner, a great businessman, was one of the adult teachers Ken recruited as a young minister of education. A.C. had an infectious passion for Sunday School. He had a zeal for training, and wanted every member of his Sunday School class to have a specific job. Milton Glenn was another teacher Ken recruited at a different church. Milton, a teacher of senior adults, grew to love the weekly preparation meetings that Ken held on Sunday afternoons. He was one of Ken's biggest supporters. Milton loved preparing his Bible study lesson, which he started on Sunday afternoons at the weekly teacher's meeting.

Michael was reminded of Bob Utley, Andy Hicks, John Butterfield, and Dale Kendrick. Bob is a person Michael only had indirect contact with, and yet he influenced his life in a tremendous way. He was a faithful pastor who, for the first time, walked Michael's parents through the Scriptures in a logical, thoughtful way and truly taught them the Bible, something which Michael's parents passed on to him. Andy was a high school Sunday School teacher who showed up every week and was able, somehow, to form lasting relationships with a bunch of 16-year-old rascals. John was a youth minister in Michael's life who showed what it meant to truly be prepared in study, always seeming to know the answer to a difficult question or at least know the resource in which to find it. And Dale was another Sunday School teacher who taught the class Michael and his wife



attended during seminary, and who majored on relationship, never failing to pray by name for each person who crossed his path.

Dwayne saw the faces of David Tucker, Sonny Wyatt, and Warren Samuels. David, Dwayne's high school Sunday School teacher, never gave up on him. He faithfully taught a group of punky, know-it-all high school boys, demonstrating Christ's love at every turn. Sonny invested in Dwayne's dad, teaching adult Sunday School for more than forty years. Sonny was a true example of someone who prepared to make disciples week in and week out. Warren was the first person to recruit Dwayne to teach a Sunday School class, mentoring him along the way. He let Dwayne learn the ropes by teaching a group of seventh grade boys.

Ken, Michael, and Dwayne could have listed many others who led with purpose, posture, and preparedness. None of those listed or that could have been listed were perfect. Sure, they fell out of the saddle from time to time. They had their good days and bad days. But when they landed on the ground, they remembered the purpose and climbed back into the saddle. They knew God could use whomever He wanted to make disciples, and He chose to use them. They had disciples to make, and that was what they intended to do.

The writer of Hebrews called on his readers to remember the leaders who spoke God's Word to them, to carefully observe the outcome of their lives, and to imitate their faith (Heb. 13:7). The leaders listed challenge us to remember their lives, to consider the investment they made in us, and to invest in another generation of disciples. Their lives call all of us to saddle up and get busy making disciples.

Someday, we hope others will look at us in the same way. We have an opportunity to set the standard as well. As we lead with purpose, posture, and preparedness, we give a new generation a reason to carry on the call of being disciple makers. We pray that you will join us in this adventure of making disciples for the glory of God.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Simon Sinek, *Start with Why* (New York: Penguin Publishing, 2009), 39.
- <sup>2</sup> Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 36.
- <sup>3</sup> Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 46.
- <sup>4</sup> Harry Piland, *Basic Sunday School Work* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1980), 125-129.
- <sup>5</sup> Robby Gallaty, 25.
- <sup>6</sup> Brad Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008) 68.
- <sup>7</sup> Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014) 24.
- <sup>8</sup> John R. W. Stott referencing Emil Brunner in Stott's *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 174.



# Overview

## Introduction: Saddle Up and Ride

Sunday School is about making disciples. This discipling takes place as a group of people seek to reach people, teach people, and minister to people.

Reaching

Teaching

Ministry

Requirements for Making Disciples

Discipleship best takes place in a small group.

Discipleship best takes place in the presence of a discipler.

Discipleship best takes place when disciples are sent to do ministry.

# Overview

## Chapter 1: Our Purpose

Sunday School is Foundational Discipleship

Implications of Foundational Discipleship

1. Foundational discipleship means we resist the urge to “go deeper.”
2. Foundational discipleship means we choose trustworthy ongoing curriculum.
3. Foundational discipleship means we keep the attention of our groups focused outwardly.

Making Disciples Means Openly Enrolling Them

Open Enrollment and Open Groups

Principles for Making Disciples.

1. Disciples are made in smaller groups.
2. Making disciples requires proximity.
3. Growing disciples read God’s Word daily.
4. Disciples replicate themselves.
5. Disciples have preferences for Bible study. Disciples benefit from greater accountability.

Making Disciples is Fueled by Silence

Disciples or Degrees?

1. Are my Bible studies knowledge-focused or application-focused?
2. Is the goal to “get through” a lesson, or to allow for Spirit-led meandering?
3. Are there visible signs of people becoming more mature followers of Christ?

# Overview

## Chapter 2: Our Posture

### The Abiding Posture of a Leader

Abiding begins with a glimpse of Jesus.

Abiding is an intentional choice.

Abiding is driven by faith.

### The Kneeling Posture of a Leader

Pray regularly.

Pray specifically.

Pray collectively.

### The Servant Posture of a Leader

Our service must be humble.

Our service must be sacrificial.

Our service must be unbiased.

# Overview

## Chapter 3: Our Preparedness

### Preparing to Lead Our Groups

#### Five Questions Group Leaders Must Answer Every Week

- What will we study this week?
- What does the selected passage mean then and now?
- What is the main point we need to focus on?
- How might this truth change the way we think, believe, act, and relate?
- How can I help my group discover these truths for themselves?

#### Steps in Studying the Passage

- Read the Bible passage.
- List people, places, and things.
- Use Bible tools to find out more about the people, places, and things listed.
- List behaviors seen, prescribed, or prohibited. Include actions taken by God.
- Create questions based on the behaviors (convert the open-ended questions and close-ended questions).
- Look for themes.

#### Steps for Creating a Study Plan

- Create a discovery activity around the big idea.
- Craft questions that move the group into the discovery activity and help them respond to the truth discovered.
- Identify what the group will need to know to complete the discovery activity and respond to the questions leading up to and in response to the discovery activity.
- Add an introduction and conclusion to the group time.
- List the things needed to make the plan happen and start gathering them.

#### Managing the Group Time

## Preparing Our Group to Serve

- Create a list of actions needed for your group to succeed.
- Evaluate each potential action in light of that single purpose by adding the phrase “We make disciples by...” to each statement and debate the validity of that statement.
- After agreeing to a list, begin to give people in the group an opportunity to take on each task.

## Cultivating a Culture of Service

- Apprentice others
- Serve beyond teaching our groups
- Create smaller groups

## Preparing Our Groups to Start New Groups

- Create a culture that encourages group members to look for ways of starting new groups.
  - Tell stories
  - Pray for lost
  - Enroll guests
- Take steps to starting a new group.



*Notes and Reflections:*

[illegible]

Solomon declared that "A horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory comes from the LORD" (Prov. 21:31). He was reminding his readers that they needed to prepare themselves for battle but they dare not go into battle without God. The same is true for Bible study leaders. They need to prepare themselves to lead the group, but they need to do so with God leading them. We are seeking to make disciples which can not be done in our own strength. Leaders are called upon to be shaped by the truths they encounter and then pass those truths on to others, with God working in and through those leaders.

Ken Braddy defines why our groups exist and why we do what we do as leaders. Knowing why our groups exist helps us understand our role and the responsibilities we carry as leaders. Michael Kelley examines how we as the leaders of a group set the standard for others to follow. Our group members look to us to show them how to live out the truths found in the Bible. Dwayne McCrary identifies actions we can take to prepare ourselves and our groups to make disciples. As partners with God, we must put ourselves and our groups in a position to be useful instruments of His.

**Additional helps can be found at  
[www.LifeWay.com/TrainingResources](http://www.LifeWay.com/TrainingResources)**

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