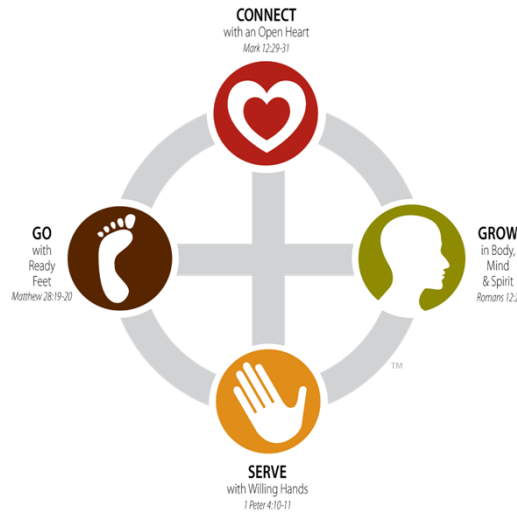


# Sunday School: *Grow, Connect, Serve, and Go*

## Creating a balanced and healthy class



**A series of four lessons to help a church understand how the Adult Ministry Strategy relates to the Sunday School**

**Written by P.K. Spratt**

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## Using this Resource

These lessons are provided as free downloads to help churches strengthen their process of making disciples and particularly making disciple through Sunday School and small groups. To be used effectively the church needs to think of discipleship in the broadest sense. The lessons help individuals see that their responsibility as a disciple goes beyond Bible study or personal disciplines such as prayer and scripture memory. As disciples we are also called to serve others and tell others about Jesus.

Consider using these lessons in the following possible settings.

1. **Teach a general class on the discipleship process.** Most churches have a sizeable segment of members who are not new Christians but who have never stepped up to accept the responsibility of becoming a growing disciple. This content is ideal for presenting a balanced process in four short lessons. Those who attend will be challenged to examine their Christian walk from some new angles. They might for example see service as something much more significant than someone trying to get me to do a job no one else wants.
2. **Incorporate this content into new member or new believer training.** These lessons provide an effective structure for any church to use to customize material to their situation. All four lessons allow many opportunities to insert church specific content, needs and issues. Your church can use this material and truly make it something that speaks specifically to what you want new members to know about your church and its needs.
3. **Train Sunday School leaders.** These lessons provide excellent training for all Sunday School leaders no matter what age group they teach. They would help any leader broaden their vision to the full scope of what any class or small group should seek to produce as spiritual fruit in the lives of those who attend. The lessons could be taught in a spring or fall leader training event or as the curriculum for a series of workers meetings.
4. **Teach this material from the pulpit.** Pastors could use this material very effectively as the basis for a sermon series or as the content to teach on Wednesday nights. The lessons provide a framework for understanding what growth in Christian maturity should look like.
5. **Pull out specific lessons for a needs based emphasis.** All four lessons have applications in this context but two will be highlighted. If a church needs to have an emphasis on being more open and welcoming the lesson on Connect provides the content needed for such a theme. If a church has a need to get more members to be open to serving in the church the lesson on Serve provides the content to support and appeal for workers.

**Note: A master for making Bible bookmarks has been provided at the end of this file. Make copies on card stock paper and cut the sections on the lines to create the bookmarks. Distribute these during the first session.**

## Sunday School: *Grow, Connect, Serve, and Go* Creating a balanced and healthy class



*Connect, Grow, Serve and Go* is a unique, simple, and concise way to organize a small group Bible study. *Connect* highlights the importance of worship, prayer, and fellowship in a group's life. *Grow* stresses the importance of knowing God's Word and how it makes a difference in the day-to-day world. *Serve* takes place when a believer or a group engage in ministry and become the willing hands of the body of Christ. Finally *Go* becomes the feet that move the Gospel outside the walls of the church. An effective Sunday School class engages in each of these in a balanced way that assists the greater church body to fulfill its Great Commission challenge.

**Series Objective:** The purpose of this study series is to help members understand the purposes and characteristics of an effective Sunday School class. Participants will be able to explain how the balanced use of these purposes; *connect, grow, serve, and go* impacts the Kingdom success of a class. Through the study of God's Word and interactive discussions, members will identify and implement ways in which their class can improve in each of these areas.

### **Lesson 1.** *Grow in Body, Mind & Spirit.* Romans 12:1-2



**Objective.** Sunday School leaders and members will understand that spiritual transformation occurs through effective Bible teaching. Two elements required for making Bible teaching effective will also be discovered. Participants will assess their spiritual transformation and discuss ways they can help improve the learning environment in their Sunday School class.

### **Lesson 2.** *Connect with an Open Heart.* Mark 12:29-31



**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will discover the importance of a class connecting with God and others. Participants will discuss how they can improve their ability as a class to connect with God, with members, and with guests.

### **Lesson 3.** *Serve with Willing Hands.* 1 Peter 4:10-11



**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will affirm that all believers are uniquely gifted and empowered by God to minister to needs of a community, class, or the church. Participants will assess the ministry structure of their class and discuss how they can better assist with the ministry needs of the church as well.

### **Lesson 4.** *Go with Ready Feet.* Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8



**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will be challenged to move the Gospel outside of the church walls into every part of the community and the world. Participants will create a plan to develop an Acts 1:8 strategy for their class.



## Lesson 1 Grow: Be transformed through effective Bible study!

### Leader's Commentary

**Biblical truth:** God's Word transforms lives and causes believers to grow.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will understand that spiritual transformation occurs through effective Bible teaching. Two elements required for making Bible teaching effective will also be discovered. Participants will assess their spiritual transformation and discuss ways they can help improve the learning environment in their Sunday School class.

One avenue for growing disciples in Christ is through Christian education. This can be done in many forms. A proven method is through small group Bible studies or what most of us know as Sunday School. Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building on-mission Christians through open Bible study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and worship. For the sake of this study, we will revise this definition to read:

Sunday School is the foundational strategy for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building on-mission Christians through open Bible study groups that *Connect, Grow, Serve, and Go*.

One goal of Sunday School is to help learners grow in their understanding of God's Word and relationship in Christ. Education is about knowledge. Knowledge should lead to changed behavior. Education centers around working toward a common goal. The ultimate goal of a believer's education to be more like Christ. The process of becoming like Christ is sanctification. Sanctification is the process of being made holy resulting in a changed life-style for the believer.

**The reason to grow:** Romans 12:1-2

*Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*

We are commanded by the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) to “make disciples.” A key role of the church is not only to evangelize but to disciple, that is, teach or train believers. People attending church come from a wide continuum range when it comes to spiritual matters. Some have no saving relationship with Jesus Christ (“pre-Christian”). Others have experienced the depth of God’s knowledge and are obediently following Him. Others are some where in between these two. The Bible speaks of a developmental process for the believer. At the initial point of salvation, Peter wrote that new believers are “new born infants” who desire spiritual milk (1 Pet. 2:2). Paul, on the other hand, scolded the Corinthian church (1Cor. 3:1) about their lack of growth in Christ when he wrote that he should be speaking to them as mature believers but cannot because they are still infants. An enormous responsibility of the church is to encourage Christians to grow in Christ. Part of Paul’s passion and purpose was to not only evangelize Gentiles but to see that their lives were grounded and growing in Christ. He wrote to the Colossian church that he “proclaimed Christ warning, and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” (Col. 1:28)

This process in which sanctification occurs is what most of us call transformation. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul brought this action to light as he discussed what is expected from us for true spiritual worship. He began by using an Old Testament concept of the ultimate, consumed, and unblemished animal sacrifice to illustrate our total sacrifice to God. We are required and designed to worship God. Our act of worship is to be a living sacrifice that is similar to this Old Testament example. We are to present ourselves to God with all that we have and are. He requires our mind, body and spirit. Like the Old Testament sacrifice fulfilled in Christ, we are to be the same.

Our mind and will, with the help of the Holy Spirit, play pivotal roles in the transformation process. Paul commanded us not to be conformed or like the world around us. The word “world” translates from the Greek word, *aion*, which means age, referring to this present age. Paul was referring to this age in which Satan has a controlling influence of what happens on earth. This age is further compounded by the sin nature which a believer must overcome. Transformation originates from the word *metamorphoo*, from which we get the word “metamorphosis.” Through spiritual transformation, our outward appearance and actions will reflect our redeemed nature (2 Cor. 3:18). This same Greek root word, *metamorphothee*, was used in Matthews’s gospel in reference to Christ’s transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). Christ’s inner

divine nature and glory were briefly reflected outwardly. It is through the renewed mind that transformation occurs. In it rests our will. Actions, attitudes, and habits form within the walls of the mind. The sanctification process includes our wills yielding to the Holy Spirit's control of our life. It is the transformed mind and will that work together and develop a lifestyle acceptable and pleasing to the Lord.

The end result of a transformed mind discerns (12:2b) or proves what is acceptable to God. It becomes the default for the believer's thought process, moral reasoning, and spiritual understanding. This new transformed mind functions as the filter for everything, accepting only that which conforms to the will of God.

The transformed and renewed mind is the mind saturated with and controlled by the Word of God, which leads to a transformed life. A transformed life is a *growing* life. It is the life that exhibits the fruits of the Spirit and *connects* with others. It is the life that focuses on others to *serve*. It is the life that acts in obedience to God's call to *go*. It is the transformed life that is the living sacrifice!

The accurate teaching of God's Word through an effective Sunday School class is foundational in growing believers. Effective teaching exposes God's Word to various levels of maturing believers. Essential truths from the Word are presented in a manner that becomes alive to today's context and is made applicable in living a victorious life.

### **The Means to Grow: 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, <sup>v</sup> so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

The Bible, God's Word, is a means for delivering life change. The primary teaching source is the Bible. It is the foundational resource for all transformational teaching. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to His lost creation. It tells of His plan for redeeming a sinful creation to Himself. God's ultimate revelation of Himself is through His Son, Jesus Christ. The story line of the Bible centers on Christ--His purpose, first coming, death, resurrection, and second coming. As Paul pointed out to Timothy, all scripture is "inspired by God." In between Genesis and Revelation we learn how to transform our minds and how to discern truths that lead to an abundant life.

The writers' thoughts were inspired and their pens were driven to write God's Word (2 Pet. 1:20-21). God directed their writing in such a way so that the writer's wrote God's Word. God used their personalities and life experiences as part of that directing. God did it all in such a way so that the Bible is without error and accomplishes God's purposes (Is. 55:11).

Paul affirmed the Bible as the authoritative teaching source for transformation. (2 Tim. 3:17). Scripture arrives at this end in four important ways.

The first is teaching. The original word for teaching is *didaskalia*. This term does not represent the process or method of teaching, but the content that is being taught. It can best be described as divine instruction or doctrine. Since the Bible is God's infallible and inerrant Word, God's absolute truth and doctrine are communicated to the reader. Doctrines are the basic body of Christian teaching and understanding that features a coherent and corporate expression of all truths discovered in Scripture. These doctrines provide the foundation for believers to live.

Paul noted a second purpose for scripture as rebuking (*elegmos*). As the standard, God's Word helps us identify false doctrines as well. The Bible convicts of misbehavior or false doctrine. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul spoke of the Bible as a divine sword that exposes sin in a believer's life. God's Word, as well, convicts a sinner of his need to come to know Christ.

The Bible not only rebukes believers of sin, but it also provides a path for redemption. *Epanorthosis* reveals a means to correct the inappropriate behavior. Think of this act as a process of restoration. It is the only time this word form is used in the New Testament. The idea is for one to discover how to get back in line. It is one thing to know you are wrong. It is another to know how to get things right. The Bible provides for both.

Finally, the Bible prepares us for training in righteousness (*paideia*). The original meaning is associated with bringing up and training a child. It is the counterpoint to correction. The Scriptures give positive guidance for maturing in faith and acceptable conduct.

Sunday School curriculum and the accompanying materials help us accomplish the task of transformation as a church. Curriculum is a systematic guide to help believers develop and mature. Good curriculum has three additional filters that become the driving force behind the transformational nature of the curriculum. The first of these is *spiritual discernment*. A godly leader, or group of leaders, relies on the work of the Holy Spirit to help them sense the critical issues in Scripture that a group may need to study, or the essential life concerns that must be addressed for a particular group. The second filter, *theological direction*, is the theological

presuppositions and doctrines that influence the developers. The third filter is balance. Good curriculum balances the life needs of learners with the need to learn sound biblical doctrine, presenting the entire counsel of God's Word.

Here are a few simple principles that can help us make good choices.

*Select curriculum that supports the design and intent of your groups.* Does the curriculum support the kinds of groups using the curriculum? If the group using the curriculum is open to accepting new members at any time, choose a curriculum with lessons that stand alone while creating, over time, the theological direction and balance you're seeking to achieve.

*Select curriculum that covers all the Bible.* Is the curriculum scope broad enough to cover all the Bible so that believers gain a perspective of the entire counsel of God?

*Select the curriculum that is relevant and has application that leads to life change.* Does the curriculum deal with relevant issues that are easily applied to the lives of the learners in your classes?

*Select curriculum from a source that is theologically trustworthy.* Do the developers of the curriculum share your values? Can you trust their basic theology?

*Select curriculum that leads to transformation.* Does the theological direction and spiritual discernment of the curriculum design help move people to spiritual transformation?

***(Note: LifeWay uses these filters to evaluate curriculum. More information about the resource provided by LifeWay can be found at [www.LifeWay.com/curriculumguide](http://www.LifeWay.com/curriculumguide).)***

The goal of an effective teaching experience is for members to be transformed--to be more like Christ. Teaching in a Bible study class should draw students into searching the Bible for answers. Sunday School classes should also develop in learners not only the ability to use and understand the Bible, but the desire to seek biblical truths for answers to life's questions.

### **The Method to Grow: Matthew 19:24-26**

*Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."<sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, "Then who can be saved?"<sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Christ was the master teacher. He was referred to most commonly as Rabbi. Jesus taught His followers using many methods, including lecture (Matthew 4-6), question/answer (Luke 10:25-37), objects (Matthew 19:24-26), stories/parables (Luke 15) and life lessons/situations (Luke 10: 38-42) to name a few. Jesus was always teaching. In the passage noted, Jesus used two familiar objects- a camel and a needle's eye (probably a very small gate in the ancient wall of Jerusalem called the "Needle's Eye") to teach about material possessions and believers commitment to the Kingdom.

An effective Bible study lesson is more than just presenting a lecture while everyone listens. Listening does not equal learning. Talking does not equal teaching. In many classes, however, that is the formula: the teacher talks, the members listen. Effective teachers engage learners in discovery through various teaching methods that connect with the learners primary learning styles so that transformation can be maximized. Christ utilized different methods of instruction that allowed the learner to easily connect with his teaching objectives, which prompted them to discover for themselves the spiritual truth He was conveying.

## **Conclusion**

It is a challenge for a leader to create a lesson for a class that has learners who are at various levels of Christian maturity. A lesson must be created that can benefit all learners. Mature members must understand that they can learn with and from younger believers and they should also accept the responsibility of mentoring and investing in the life of younger believers.

Authoritative teaching that presents biblical truths through a strategic plan along with effective methods in conjunction with the help of the Holy Spirit is desired in every class. The result of effective teaching will hopefully mirror the response by those who listened to Peter's preaching in Acts 2:37- "When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: 'Brothers what must we do?'" Effective teaching pierces the heart of the learner and encourages them to *Grow, Connect, Serve* and *Go!*



## Teaching Plan: Grow: Be transformed through effective Bible study!

**Biblical truth:** God's Word transforms lives and helps believers to grow.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will understand that spiritual transformation occurs through effective Bible teaching. Two elements required for making Bible teaching effective will also be discovered. Participants will assess their spiritual transformation and discuss ways they can help improve the learning environment in their Sunday School class.

### **Step 1:** Introduction (Introduce the four week lesson series)

Introduce the four study lesson series by explaining the purpose and the goals you have for this study. Explain that Connect, Grow, Serve, Go is the Adult Strategy being utilized by LifeWay to help churches and individuals better understand what it means to be a growing believer.

Distribute the themed bookmarks (see last page of file) and encourage participants to keep these in their Bibles, marking the passages identified. Explain that you will use the bookmark as a teaching tool, pointing to the Grow, Connect, Serve, and Go icons. Identify how they are essential in an effective Sunday School class and how each one works together in tandem to create a healthy and effective class. Explain that an effective class actively engages all four areas.

### **Step 2: The reason to grow:** Romans 12:1-2

State: "A common procedure for a pediatrician to perform on a baby during a routine office visit is to check the weight, height, and other various indicators to assess the development of the child. These measurements will be charted to determine how it is developing compared to statistical data for other children of the same age. For example, a four month old child weighing 15 pounds would be considered developing in the 80 percentile range that is compared of other children at that same age. Charting these indicators serve as a means for determining action that may need to be recommended by the doctor."

Call attention to the first two questions on the Grow Handout. Guide learners to respond, placing a response on the continuum. Explain that they will not be asked to share their response.

Read aloud Romans 12:1-2, calling attention to the appropriate bookmark.

Present an overview of the passage, stressing the following: 1) The importance of believers offering themselves as a living sacrifice, compare it to the required sacrifices of the Old Testament; 2) The nature of being transformed; 3) How a transformed mind that is renewed in Christ aids the believer in discerning God's ways from the world's ways. Invite participants to provide examples of situations they have faced where a transformed mind has allowed them to make a proper decision.

### **Step 3. The Means to Grow: 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Ask: If a friend asked you to define the Scripture, what would you tell him or her? How would you define it to a stranger who has never seen a Bible?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, asking participants to listen for how Paul defined the Scriptures. Invite volunteers to share how Paul defined the Scriptures.

Present key points about God's Word, making sure to emphasize that 1) It is God's inspired Word; 2) It is accurate; 3) It accomplishes what it says it will do.

Highlight verse 17, calling for participants to identify the benefits or purposes of God's Word. List the benefits or purposes identified on a marker board.

Present a summary defining the four purposes identified by Paul. Help participants understand the complete nature of Scripture.

Present an overview of the role curriculum plays in the class. Share the criteria and characteristics of good curriculum. Use the opportunity to help participants understand why your church uses the curriculum selected.

### **Step 4. The Method to Grow: Matthew 19:24-26**

Read aloud Matthew 19:24-26. Briefly describe how Christ used the objects of a camel and a needle to teach a Kingdom truth. Explain that Christ was the Master Teacher and that he used various methods for teaching about the Kingdom and God.

Distribute the *Approaches to Learning* handout. Explain that we all learn in different ways. Direct participants to complete the questionnaire. Explain that the purpose of this exercise is for you to better understand your preferred learning style. Explain that teachers will tend to teach toward their preferred style. Encourage teachers to discover the learning styles of those in

their class so they can plan learning activities that match the learning styles of those in their class.

Guide participants to list on their Grow handout things teachers and learners can do to maximize learning. Encourage them to share their response with another learner. Challenge them to begin to do the things they identified as they prepare and participate in Sunday School.





# Approaches to Learning: Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Determine your approaches to learning and teaching.

Check all the statements that apply to you. Circle the style that best describes you.

## **Verbal** (Solomon)

- Books are very important to me.
- I can hear words in my head before I read, speak, or write them down.
- I get more out of listening to the radio or a spoken-word cassette than I do from television or videos.
- I enjoy word games like Scrabble, Anagrams, or Password.
- English, social studies, and history were easier for me in school than math and science.
- When I drive down a freeway, I pay more attention to the words written on billboards than to the scenery.
- My conversations include frequent references to things that I've read or heard.

## **Logical** (Paul)

- I can easily compute numbers in my head.
- Math and/or science were among my favorite subjects in school.
- I enjoy playing games or solving brainteasers that require logical thinking.
- I like to set up "what if" experiments (for example, "What if I double the amount of water I give to my rose bush each week?")
- My mind searches for patterns or logical sequences in things.
- I like finding logical flaws in things that people say and do at home and work.
- I feel more comfortable when something has been measured, categorized, analyzed, or quantified in some way.

## **Visual** (John)

- I often see clear visual images when I close my eyes.
- I enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles, mazes, and other visual puzzles.
- I can generally find my way around unfamiliar territory.
- I can comfortably imagine how something might appear if it were looked at from a bird's eye view.
- I prefer looking at reading material that has lots of illustrations.

## **Physical** (Ezekiel)

- I engage in at least one sport or physical activity on a regular basis.
- I find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time.
- I like working with my hands at concrete activities.
- My best ideas often come to me when I'm out for a long walk or jog, or when engaged in some other kind of physical activity.
- I frequently use hand gestures or other forms of body language when conversing with someone.
- I need to touch things in order to learn more about them.
- I need to practice a new skill rather than simply reading about it or seeing a video.

### **Musical** (David)

- I can tell when a musical note is off-key.
- I frequently listen to music on radio, cassettes, or compact discs.
- I play a musical instrument. My life would be poorer if there were no music in it.
- I sometimes catch myself walking down the street with a television jingle or other tune running through my mind. I can easily keep time to a piece of music or musical pieces.
- I often make tapping sounds or sing little melodies while working, studying, or learning something new.

### **Natural** (David)

- I like to spend time outdoors.
- I enjoy collecting objects from nature.
- I know the scientific names of many plants and animals.
- My idea of relaxing is looking at a seed catalog or working in the yard.
- My hobbies include taking care of plants and/or pets.

### **Relational** (Barnabas)

- I'm the sort of person that people come to for advice and counsel at work or in my neighborhood.
- When I have a problem, I'm more likely to seek out another person for help than attempt to work it out on my own.
- I favor social pastimes over individual recreation such as video games and solitaire.
- I enjoy the challenge of teaching another person, or groups of people, what I know how to do.
- I like to get involved in social activities connected with my work, church, or community.
- I would rather spend my evening at a lively social gathering than stay at home alone.

### **Reflective** (Mary)

- I regularly spend time alone meditating, reflecting, or thinking about important life questions.
- I have a special hobby or interest that I keep pretty much to myself.
- I have a realistic view of my strengths and weaknesses.
- I would prefer to spend a weekend alone in a cabin in the woods rather than at a fancy resort with lots of people around.
- I consider myself to be strong-willed or independent-minded.
- I keep a personal diary or journal to record the events of my inner life.

--adapted from *7 Kinds of Smart*, Thomas Armstrong, pp. 18-23, Plume Books, 1993



## Lesson #2: Connect through Sunday School

### Leader's Commentary

**Biblical truth:** Believers are to love God and each other with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will discover the importance of a class connecting with God and others. Participants will discuss how they can improve their ability as a class to connect with God, with members, and with guests.

Humans are relational beings. We were made in the image of God as stated in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image.” Man was first and foremost made to not only sustain the earth but to relate to the Creator. Human’s need for relationship is seen on the sixth day of creation. God examined his creation and declared everything to be good except for one thing; “It was not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper that is like him” (Gen 2:18). So God created a second human. Prior to the fall, the first man and woman related with God and each other in perfect love. Their fellowship with God and each other in the garden was transparent and honest.

However, sin broke the relationship between God and man. Sin made it impossible for an imperfect human to genuinely relate to the perfect God. Sin also affected the ability of humans to properly relate to each other. Sin’s effect clearly damaged all types of relationships. However that did not change the fact that man was relational in essence.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary, man could once again experience a relationship with a loving God and also experience genuine fellowship with other humans. Through a redeemed life man is free again to experience a taste of the pure relationships that were once held before man’s fall. Believers must daily strive to maintain relationships with God and those around them. Connecting with the Father daily and with others is essential. Sunday School classes serve a vital role in man’s maintaining connectivity with God and others.

**The Basis of Connecting: Mark 12:28-34.** (Parallel passage – Matthew 22:34-40)

*<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked Him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”*

<sup>29</sup>“This is the most important,” Jesus answered: Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, The Lord is One. <sup>30</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

<sup>31</sup>“The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

<sup>32</sup>Then the scribe said to Him, “You are right, Teacher! You have correctly said that He is One, and there is no one else except Him. <sup>33</sup>And to love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.” <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And no one dared to question Him any longer.

The Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey. He deserted Paul in Perga of Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This Gospel was written while in Rome between 55 and 65 AD. The emphasis was on Jesus being the Son of God, the humanity of Jesus, and Jesus as the suffering servant. Mark focused on the work and teachings of Jesus. His gospel account is written in specific chronological order and contains more of Christ’s miracles than his sermons.

Jesus is in the middle of the final week of His life on earth. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem has already taken place (11:1-11), and He has cleared the temple of corrupt entrepreneurs (11:12-19). Jesus was now engaged in discussions with the apostles and arguments from the Religious leaders about his authority and the corrupt ways of those leaders. These discussions consisted of a series of question and answers with parables mixed in.

Toward the later part of these arguments, a scribe (Matthew’s parallel passage calls him a lawyer) approaches Christ asking him to identify the greatest of the commandments. A scribe was one that was well versed with the Jewish writings of the day. The scribes copied the scriptures and served as experts in interpreting the law in both civil and religious matters.

### **Connect with God. Mark 12:28-30**

The scribe’s question was not prompted by naiveté’ or personal curiosity. It was asked as an effort to “trip Him up” and create a controversy among the listeners. At this point in history, in addition to the Ten Commandments, Jewish religious leaders “tacked” on additional

requirements, increasing the number of laws to 613. Some religious leaders tried to distinguish between major and minor laws, and some taught that all laws were equally binding and that it was dangerous to make any distinction. Christ summarized all of these laws into two commands. The source of His answer originated from Old Testament passages of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Christ's initial response to the question began with the challenge to the listener to take extreme notice to what was being said. Listeners take heed! "Hear, O Israel" is from the *Shema* (see Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Num. 15:37-4) and would have been immediately recognized by the crowd. These are the first two words of a section of the Torah (Hebrew Bible) that is used as a centerpiece of all morning and evening Jewish prayer services and closely echoes the monotheistic message of Judaism. It is considered the most important prayer in Judaism, and its twice daily recitation was a religious commandment. What was about to be addressed about God was so significant that it was commanded to be upon the heart, discussed, displayed in the home and bound to the body. The important command is to love God! The word for love in this passage is *agape*. Because of our sin nature, we are not capable of this kind love apart from the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Man's love for God must engulf his entire being. Emphasis in this passage is placed on the word "all." It is used seven times (vv. 30, 33). All means complete or whole.

The heart, soul, mind, and strength represent the four areas that comprise all of our internal self and transcends our external actions. In this text man's heart referred to the core of one's personal being. King David was known as a man after God's own heart. The soul is the emotion and is the same word Jesus used when He cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane. The mind can be translated might. It carries the sense of intellectual, willful vigor and determination, involving both mental endeavor and strength. The final component was strength which referred to man's capability or personal potential.

The four elements pointed to by Christ were based upon internal qualities. Any outward religious practice without complete, heartfelt dedication falls short of God's plan (v. 33). This depth of commitment is very similar to the living sacrifice believers are called to be in Romans 12:2 (see lesson one). A relationship with God is foundational to all relationships.

## **Connecting with Others: Mark 12:31**

The second part of Christ's answer dealt with man's ability to connect with others. Christ once again drew from the Old Testament, pointing to Leviticus 19:18. The balance of the law dealt with man's relationship with others. Six of the Ten Commandments focused on relationships with others. The scope of others ranged from family to neighbors. The actions involving others spanned from thoughts (lust, coveting) to physical action (stealing, murder, etc.). A neighbor was anyone meet along the road of life. The same word for love, *agapo*, used in the first command is also used here. Believers are to love others the same way they love God. *Agapo* love is more intentional than emotional, in that it involves an intentional decision apart from emotion to love. It is demonstrated through doing, as Christ explained in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Samaritan modeled what James described in 2:16 of his letter where he commanded believers to provide for people in need rather than giving lip service.

A believer's ability to connect with others is directly proportionate to their ability to connect with God. Imagine connecting with God and others on two planes: vertical and horizontal. A believer's relationship with God is vertical, upward toward Heaven. If the quality, depth, and degree of a believer's relationship with God is good (vertically), then the natural outcome or fruit is horizontal connections with others. Many of the Fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) exhibit themselves in connecting with others. It is further demonstrated as John wrote in his first letter (1 John 3:17), "If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him – how can God's love reside in him?" A positive vertical relationship is the foundation for positive horizontal relationships. If relationships with others are hindered, then one of the two parties involved (or both) are likely to have a poor relationship vertically.

## **Connect in Sunday School**

Here are some suggestions of ways individuals can connect with God and others through the Sunday School.

### **Connecting with God.**

- Effective Bible studies that accurately and intentionally teach from God's Word can bring members to a point of "whole heart" worship. God can be lifted up through teaching that exalts Him and in turn brings learners to a point of praise. Paul

- Prayer is a second avenue in which participants in a class connect with God. Modeling prayer in class and frequently bringing members to prayer during class brings participants closer to God.
- Effective Sunday School classes connect with God when adequate teaching time is provided for learners to be able to connect. Make sure you budget the time you have to get the most out of it. Set the tone by starting on time and being on time.
- Effective classes model and encourage members to practice the spiritual disciplines of daily Bible study, worship, and prayer. An emphasis on corporate worship must be encouraged and more importantly modeled by everyone.

### **Connecting member to member**

- Fellowship is more than just an event. It is the ongoing bond that is established among believers. It is important for members to connect through social gatherings, worshiping together in class and corporately, performing ministry projects together, praying for one another, and sharing in life's events (good or bad) together.
- Members' connecting together means experiencing and living life together. This means more than meeting for socials or meals. It means sharing burdens, needs, cares, tragedies, and victories.
- Organize a Care Group Ministry. The greatest organizational advice given in the Bible was provided by Jethro to his son-in-law Moses. He advised Moses to organize the thousands of Israelites into small groups of ten. Each group had a level of oversight that guided and advised the people. As needs developed they were elevated to the appropriate level. (Exodus 18) Needs go unmet in every size of church simply because no one is aware of the need. By organizing into smaller groups of 4 to 6 people, more needs can be discovered and addressed. That smaller group can encourage each other, pray for needs, and work together to respond to discovered needs.

### **Connect members to guests:**

- All people have a desire to be accepted. People in any setting must feel secure about being welcomed and wanted. Guests attending a class should immediately feel the welcoming warmth of a class along with the feeling that they are accepted.
- “You only get one chance to make a good first impression.” First impressions are lasting impressions, and are usually made within the first 2-3 minutes. Are guests warmly received when entering a class? How long does it take to recognize the guest upon entering the room? Are long-term members huddled in groups talking about common interests and too busy to notice the guest? Do guests receive proper literature for ease of participation? Is movement within the room adequate for the guest to enter and find a seat? Is navigation within the room easy or difficult? At the conclusion of the class is the guest thanked for attending? Does someone offer to escort the guest to worship and sit with them? Is the guest asked to return? Is personal contact information obtained from the guest? Are the topics of casual discussions among members such that guests will not feel left out and uncomfortable?
- Follow up contacts. A contact, preferably in person, should be made to the guest thanking them for attending, inviting to return, and allowing to ask questions about the church and class. A personal follow up contact communicates to the guest that they are valued and are wanted as a part of the class. Evangelism through a Sunday School class has a greater percentage for reaching guests than other types of outreach programs.
- Hold intentional class fellowship events. Prospects attending a class social event have an easier time connecting with members in a fun, non-threatening environment. Consider how often your class should gather socially. Plan things that make it easy for a member to invite a guest or prospect.
- Guests can connect more easily with a class where the members exhibit a sense of transparency. Grace should flow. This should be apparent in the Bible study time when members can express themselves or ask questions freely without fear of rejection or embarrassment.

- Sunday School is a great assimilation tool for new church members. A new church member will be five times more likely to remain at a church after five years if they join a small group Bible study.
- Guests connect more freely when the lessons teach Biblical truth in a relevant and applicable manner that meets the needs of the participants. Use teaching methods that engage the learners and compliment their learning styles.

**Connect members to the unchurched:**

- Sunday School serves as an effective evangelistic arm for a church. Small group Bible studies are very effective in connecting with those that are non-Christian. A non-Christian regularly attending a small group Bible study has a greater chance of coming to know Christ than someone attending only a worship service. This happens when the non-Christian personally witness believers sharing experiences of how God and His Word comes alive in their lives. Non-Christians can personally view Christian community with believers. An effective Sunday School setting can have an incredible impact in conjunction with the Holy Spirit's work.
- Sunday School classes must foster in members a burden for reaching the lost. Classes need to maintain a list of those that have not professed Christ. Those on the list should be contacted routinely and invited to attend class as well as social activities. Members should be routinely inviting their friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors (FRAN's for short) to their class or another appropriate class. A system of contacting prospects via cards, phone calls, and face-to-face should be implemented. Members need to be trained how to share their faith. Ideally, class visiting teams should be created for the purpose of in-home visits of prospects with the desire and intention of sharing the Gospel.

**Conclusion**

Effective telecommunications, whether wired or wireless, depend on being properly connected and without restrictions. A Sunday School class has the same need. Efforts must be made in a class to allow learners to connect with God and others. Effective use of time, resources, teaching approaches, and intentionally fostering relationships are critical.



## Teaching Plan: Connect through Sunday School

**Biblical truth:** Believers are to love God and each other with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will discover the importance of a class connecting with God and others. Participants will discuss how they can improve their ability as a class to connect with God, with members, and with guests.

### Step 1: Introduction

Call for participants to create a list on the back of their copy of the Connect handout of changes that have occurred in telecommunications since Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Invite volunteers to share their lists. Direct participants to discuss with two or three others how our ability to communicate has improved and the importance of a good connection.

*Option.* Secure a ball of yarn or string. Place participants into two lines facing each other. Direct participants to pass the ball of yarn or string across each row from member to member. The strings must pass across from one line to the other. At the conclusion of the passing, point out ways members are connected and why it is important to be connected in a Sunday School class.

Stress the importance of being connected to God and others. Present a summary of the information provided in the introduction section of the Leader's Commentary.

### Step 2: Connect with God

Read Mark 12: 28-34. Remind participants to mark the passage using the Connect bookmark.

Present background information about the events leading up to the encounter with the scribe.

Explain the significance of the *Shema* and the Old Testament passages. Stress the constant awareness that Christians must have of God by comparing it with the command given to keep the *Shema* with them at all times—upon the heart, discussed, displayed in the home and bound to the body.

Ask: What skills are required for an elite athlete to compete? State: The success of an elite athlete depends on the ability to be *physically* prepared to use strength to meet the demands of the sport, *mentally* capable to overcome the challenges of the competition and the game's strategies, and master the *manipulative challenges* required to play their sport (bats, balls, clubs, racquet, etc.). These challenges require a total commitment of the athlete.

Explain that Christians need to make a total commitment to God, outlining how each facet of the entire body (heart, soul, mind, and strength) should be dedicated to Him. Explain the biblical parallel for each of the four body entities stated in verse 30.

Guide participants to brainstorm ways they can connect with God during a Sunday School class. List responses on a marker board. Make reference to the Leader's Commentary regarding connecting with God.

### **Step 3: Connect with Members and Guests**

Highlight verse 31. Identify who your neighbors are. Explain the relationship between being connected with God and being connected with others. Infer that one's treatment of others demonstrates his or her level of love for God.

### **Step 4. Connecting in Sunday School**

List on a marker board the four connection points identified in the Leader Guide (God, members, guests, unchurched). Create four groups or designate four different sections of the room. Assign one of the connection points to each group or section. Direct each group or section to list ways of connecting through Sunday School to the individual or group assigned. Call for a spokesperson or volunteers to share their lists beginning with connecting with God. Use the information in the Leader's Commentary to add to the lists suggested or to give more detail or insight. Encourage participants to record insights and ideas on the top section of the Connect handout.

Call attention to the matching activity at the bottom of the Connect handout. Direct them to complete the activity with a partner. Encourage each partner to pray with each other, asking God to help them develop a connecting Sunday School.



## Handout: Connect through Sunday School

Record ways Sunday School members can connect in the following areas:

- 1) Member to God.
  
- 2) Member to Member. How can this class improve this connection so active and inactive members continue to be encouraged by the class?
  
- 3) Member to Guest. Describe the ideal the environment in your class that says, *“We want you to be a member of our class.”*
  
- 4) Member to Unchurched

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Match the follow definitions in the left column to the suggestions on the right. Be creative. There are no correct answers.

Connect definition:	Sunday School Application:
A. connect, fasten, or put together two or more pieces B. associate: make a logical or causal connection; C. be or become joined or united or linked; D. join by means of communication equipment; E. join for the purpose of communication; be scheduled so as to provide continuing service, as in transportation; G. establish a rapport or relationship; H. get in touch: establish communication with someone; I. plug in: plug into an outlet; J. hit or play ball successfully	1. Member to member 2. A returning guest. 3. Connecting with guest. 4. Connecting God and man 5. Connecting member to guest. 6. Connect with a guest through follow up. 7. Connect a new member (assimilation) 8. Connecting member to member. 9. Calling a guest to say thanks for attending. 10. Connect through fellowship.



## Lesson 3 Serve with Willing Hands

### Leader's Commentary

**Biblical Truth:** God equips and empowers all believers to serve others through love and obedience to Him.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will affirm that all believers are uniquely gifted and empowered by God to minister to needs of a community, class, or the church. Participants will assess the ministry structure of their class and discuss how they can better assist with the ministry needs of the church as well.

First Peter was written around A.D. 64, just before Nero's run of persecuting the church. It distributed to the first century Christians that were scattered in and around the area of Asia Minor (now northern Turkey). The recipients were made up of Jews and Gentiles, with the majority primarily Gentiles who had suffered social, political, and personal persecution and rejection. Suffering is a primary theme of this letter, mentioning it sixteen times using eight different Greek terms, but it also balances persecution with encouragement and a call to persevere.

In the first three chapters of the letter Peter encouraged believers to live holy lives, while reminding them of the hope they had in Christ. He reminded them to be prepared for the upcoming trials of persecution and the irony of suffering for doing good (3:8-22). His challenge to them was to have their "mind prepared for action" (1:13) while ridding themselves of their past lifestyles and beginning to crave God's Word as a newborn baby craves milk (2:1-2). Peter communicated the importance of eliminating old pagan lifestyles such as "debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry" (vv. 3). Believers are to live their new life within the "will of God" not for the "lust of men" (4:2). Non-believers are aware of their different lifestyle as they "think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you" (v. 4). Peter charged them to be clear minded for the purpose of prayer and to live a life serving others.

### **Our Gift and Faithful Call to Service: 1 Peter 4:7-11**

*<sup>7</sup>Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be clear-headed and disciplined for prayer. <sup>8</sup>Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength, since love covers a*

*multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup>Based on the gift they have received, everyone should use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God. <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, his speech should be like the oracles of God; if anyone serves, his service should be from the strength God provides, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*

The source and origin of service is God. The reason for service is *agape* love--the type of love that is a willful act of giving to another (Mark 12:30-31). Peter encouraged believers to show love for all men, even to those who persecute them. This love should be displayed, extended and demonstrated through service. Peter introduced this in verse 10. It was modeled through Christ's life as he taught and demonstrated that all believers are to serve each other (Luke 22:24-30). Peter stated that each member is *gifted* for an act of ongoing service to others. God, through His love, graciously gives to all believers a gift to be used in the building of His kingdom. These gifts are not determined by the believer's inclinations, merits, or preferences but by God's sovereign and gracious will "to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the God's Son, [growing] into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around..." (Eph. 4:12b-14). Not only is the body built up, the church in turn fulfills its duty to glorify God (vs. 11) and fulfill the Great Commission.

Believers have not only been graciously given a gift for service, but each one has the responsibility to use it (vs. 10). Gifts from God carry a stewardship. God's gifts are given to be shared. Not using them is wrong! Christians must manage and apply their God given gifts in the same way they are to manage their time, finances and other provided resources. Christ, in His teaching, spoke about the gift of talents (money). His focus was on those who took their gracious talents and invested them to get a multifold return. Yet He also mentioned the person who failed to utilize their gift. This person was sent away into darkness (Matt. 25:14-30). Our given responsibilities are great and results are expected (Luke 12: 41-48). Luke recorded the words of Jesus, writing, "Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more" (Luke 12:48). Simply put, spiritual gifts are given to be used for the glory of the Lord.

## Various Gifts for Service: 1 Peter 4:11a, Romans 12: 3-8

<sup>11</sup>*If anyone speaks, his speech should be like the oracles of God;*

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<sup>3</sup>*For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. <sup>4</sup>Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup>According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the standard of faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.*

The church is a living organism. Unlike a secular organization with functional responsibilities and constraints from products and services, the church is a fluent organism that moves and adapts according to the direction of Christ. Paul referred to the church as a body. The word church, *ekklesia*, (assembly) is used 114 times in the New Testament. This dynamic organism, while universal, is meant to thrive at a local level that ripples throughout the world (Acts 1:8). It was easy for Paul to compare the church to the human body. It naturally translates into a single being which, by design, has many parts (v. 4).

The church is made up of individual members that form into smaller units that, in turn, work together to perform acts of specialized ministry that assist the church to do its work. God brings each member to a church equipped with a special, unique gift that is needed by that specific church at that exact time. A member not exercising their giftedness in the body of Christ is depriving themselves of Christian growth and limiting the church (local and universal) of its full capacity and capabilities. Members join together to perform acts of ministry together. Like human organs and systems, neither member nor ministry team may work separate from the other. Each part is dependent on each other. A Sunday School class, Men's/Women's Ministry, Worship Choir, Greeters, etc. should not act alone. Each ministry works as a unit (organ/system) that assists the church to achieve its greater mission.

Like the human body, the church body is made up of many parts or members with varying gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor.12; Eph. 4:11-12). No gift is less important than another. Behind the scenes activities and ministries are just as important as those that are highly visible. The Corinthian church was inappropriately exalting some gifts over others. Paul stressed that all gifts are necessary, and have value, even though they may be unseen or perceived undesirable (1 Cor. 12:15-20). For example, a young family attending a church for the first time with preschool aged children may be unimpressed with a church that has an understaffed, dirty nursery (which can be *perceived* as a less than glamorous job where obtaining workers is difficult) even though the Sunday School lesson, worship music, and sermon are done well. The difference in a guest returning to church could hinge on a member behind the scenes taking the time to make sure the preschool area is clean. The difference in an average children's department and a super children's department is a person that leaves the comfortable, relational, social atmosphere of an Adult Sunday School class and becomes a preschool volunteer.

Regardless of the size of a church, volunteers with varying responsibilities are needed to do the work of the church. The leadership of the church, pastors, teachers, etc. (Eph. 4:11-14) are responsible for equipping the body to do the work of the church. Sunday School classes serve as a key training ground for preparing members to recognize their gifts and prepare for ministry. Preparation for ministry takes place as member's lives are transformed through applicable teaching and through experiencing ministry together. Service can be performed in the class as well as out of the class. An opportunity and need to serve may call the member to leave their Sunday School class and minister away from the group. Classes should embrace this and discover ways to support, encourage, and remain in contact with their members on mission.

***Remember, the mark of a successful class is not its size but the number of people they send out into ministry.***

Many opportunities to serve exist in a Sunday School class. A Sunday School class is the smallest organized unit that performs a broad base of ministry. It is the common denominator in a church. A Sunday School class is a microcosm of the church; a smaller body within a larger one. As in Acts 2:41-47, the church should engage members in the functions of worship, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and evangelism. These foundational functions take place at the simplest level of the body: a Sunday School class. In order to do this effectively, a class must be organized with members serving in roles such as teacher, apprentice teacher, class secretary,

prayer coordinator, fellowship coordinator, ministry coordinator, class greeter, and care leaders. Engaging members in these roles helps to stimulate true Christian community.

Members that serve in the Sunday School can be groomed and mentored to serve in future leadership positions or ministries with greater responsibilities. Someone serving eagerly as a care leader may someday assume greater responsibility and become a Sunday School leader. Members having the potential to teach may be asked to present topics to the class periodically, while incrementally expanding topics into teaching a focal passage, and ultimately full lessons. As Paul invested in Timothy, so should we invest in others (2 Tim. 2:2).

Developing leaders and workers should be intentional. Equipping the body is vital (Eph. 4:11-12). Classes or churches where only a few members perform the responsibilities are not investing in future leaders and workers. An environment needs to be created through effective teaching and modeling that allows the Holy Spirit to encourage and prompt resistant members to get involved.

Many organizations and churches are surviving under a workforce theory called the 80/20 rule for service. This means that 80% of the work is performed by 20% of the people. Many people are engaged in multiple ministries because no one else will do the work. Get members involved. Distribute the workload. God's church is designed for everyone to willingly serve. Three hours of service opportunities exist on Sunday mornings. Members can serve in ministry; attend worship and a Sunday School class during one morning.

### **The Source for Service: 1 Peter 4:11b**

*...If anyone serves, his service should be from the strength God provides, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*

The use of a gift will require sacrifice. It may require a member to step out in faith and perform a task that he or she has never done before such as sing a song, teach, change a diaper, prepare meals for the youth, etc. It may require leaving a comfortable Sunday School class with lifelong friends. It may add to an already busy schedule. An entire Sunday School class may recognize the need to create a new unit that will result in several members leaving for the greater good of the church.

The ultimate and perfect example of sacrifice was Christ when he obediently left the comfort of Heaven, became flesh, and served mankind. Peter assures the reader that everything would be okay, provided that the believer depends on God's empowerment to do the task. The servant's source of energy is God – "if anyone serves, his service should be from the *strength* God provides, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." Peter is a perfect example of this. Following Pentecost, he was empowered to boldly preach the Gospel to the crowd and saw 3,000 claim Christ (Acts 2: 14-41). Later in Acts, he and John were so empowered to speak the Gospel so clearly that they astounded the Jewish leaders. Luke wrote, "When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and knew they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Members can be assured that He is faithful and will provide the needed resources and skills to perform His work. God does not require our *ability*, just our *availability*.

## **Conclusion**

Christians are saved to serve, not saved to sit. All have a responsibility and privilege to serve the Kingdom through the context of the local church. A unique, customized gift from God is held by every believer waiting to be unleashed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Numerous blessings await individuals and the church when members serve. The responsibilities are often difficult, challenging, time consuming, and requiring faith and sacrifice. Sunday School classes serve a vital role in helping members discover and apply their gifts, which in turn creates willing hands that say, "Wherever you need me I will go."

*Note: A Spiritual Gifts Inventory is available from LifeWay Christian Resources. The inventory can be downloaded for free from [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com) (search for "spiritual gifts inventory").*



## Teaching Plan: Serve with Willing Hands

**Biblical Truth:** God equips and empowers all believers to serve others through love and obedience to Him.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will affirm that all believers are uniquely gifted and empowered by God to minister to needs of a community, class, or the church. Participants will assess the ministry structure of their class and discuss how they can better assist with the ministry needs of the church as well.

### Step 1: Introduction

As participants arrive, direct them to review the case study printed at the top of the Serve handout. Encourage them to discuss their responses to the questions at the end of the case study with others as they arrive.

Invite volunteers to share their responses to the questions. Explain that during this session, participants will be challenged to use their gifts through service.

### Step 2: Our Gift and Faithful Call to Service: 1 Peter 4:7-10

Summarize the background information about Peter's first letter. Set the context of the chapters leading up to this text.

Read aloud 1 Peter 4:7-10. Remind participants of to place the Serve bookmark in their Bibles to mark this passage. Emphasize that Peter was stressing the purpose of service, even to those persecuting the early believers. Note that gifts are provided from God as a display of His love for us and believers are to display their love for God through service to others. Explain that all gifts originate from God to the believer. Emphasize they are to be used for the purpose of the church for God's glory.

Emphasize the importance of believers using their gifts. Highlight Peter's use of the phrase "good managers" in verse 10. Remind participants that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Help the participants understand that believers who do not use their gift create a "weak link" syndrome in a class or church. Ask the following two questions: How can a "weak link syndrome" be created when a member does not utilize their gift? What are the consequences

of someone that does not apply their gift? How does it affect the church body? Encourage participants to discuss their response to these questions with another person sitting next to them.

### **Step 3: Various Gifts for Service: 1 Peter 4:11a, Romans 12:3-8**

Read 1 Peter 4:11a and Romans 12:3-8. Explain how God has equipped members to serve in different ways. Emphasize Paul's analogy of the human body to the church. Explain how within a human body, a cell combines with other cells to make up tissue, then organs, then systems. Comment that a member works with other members to create ministry teams. Invite participants to call out examples of these ministries in the church. Remind members of the importance for each ministry identified to work together to serve the whole of the church.

Help participants understand the magnitude of volunteers required in the church. Challenge members who are not involved in ministry to prayerfully consider serving.

Call attention to the activity on the bottom half of the Serve handout. Direct participants to work with others sitting beside them to complete the activity. Invite volunteers to share their lists. Help participants realize the varied opportunities for service available through the Sunday School.

### **Step 4: The Source for Service: 1 Peter 4:11b.**

Read 1 Peter 4:11b. Remind members that God provides the strength to do ministry. Point to Peter's ability to preach as noted in Acts (see Leader Guide) as an example of how God empowers believers.

Suggest different ways God strengthens people stepping out into ministry. Invite a preenlisted participant to share a personal testimony about how they stepped out in faith to assume a ministry challenge.

Direct participants to review the list of actions developed on the bottom half of the Serve handout. Guide them to place a check mark by the actions they are fulfilling for their Sunday School class. Challenge them to circle the actions they could be fulfilling. Encourage them to ask God to help them find a way of using their giftedness for God's glory.



## Handout: Serve with Willing Hands

**Read the following case study and discuss your response to the three questions with someone around you.**

*Sally has recently been approached by the Director of the Children's Ministry Department to consider teaching the 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys' class. Sally, a mother of 3, has been a Christian for four years. She has been active in her Sunday School class since salvation. She has established strong relationships with the group. Her teaching experience equates to two years of teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in VBS. Sally prays about the decision and decides that she will accept the responsibility.*

### Questions

- 1) What would have been some of the barriers that Sally would have faced in making her decision?
- 2) What would be suggestions that could have been given to her to overcome these barriers?
- 3) What could be some positive short term and long term results that would come from Sally taking this responsibility (discuss impact for the class, Sally, and the church).

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### What it Takes

In the space below, record every action required before, during, and after the Sunday School hour for your class to accomplish all the goals of Sunday School.



## Lesson 4 Go with Ready Feet

### Leader's Commentary

**Biblical Truth:** Under Christ's authority, power, and accompaniment believers are charged to make disciples of all people.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will be challenged to move the Gospel outside of the church walls into every part of the community and the world. Participants will create a plan to develop an Acts 1:8 strategy for their class.

We serve a sending God. God sent Abraham to be blessed and a blessing (Gen. 12:1-4). He sent Isaiah for his purpose (Isa. 6:8) He sent John the Baptist (John 1:6). Christ was sent to redeem the world (John 3:16). Christ sent His disciples out two by two (Luke 9,10). The Gospel of John described Christ as sending his apostles out. "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you'" (John 20:21). The Greek word *apostolos*, from which we get the word "apostle" means sent. They were sent out. They were to go! The call of the church and all believers is to go! We, the body have the same charge as the Apostles: GO!

### The Command Matthew 28:18-20

*<sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Christ's time on earth ushered in the Kingdom of Heaven. His life and work modeled what the Kingdom should be for those living in it. His redemptive work on the cross and resurrection rescued man from sin's grip. Jesus made possible the glorious future hope that all believers will be glorified and join Him in eternity. Christ relied on His followers to spread His message after His departure.

Prior to Christ's ascent to Heaven, He issued the Great Commission to His body of followers. It is to be embraced as the call, charge, and mission of the church. The call is based on the authority that had been given to Him (v. 18). Daniel best described Christ's authoritative

right when he wrote; “He was given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.” (7:14) Christ was more than credible to have authority to assign to His body, the church, marching orders.

This assignment, being under Christ’s authority, provides and directs the church, leaders, and believers in their responsibility to perform His work. Fulfilling the Great Commission must be the sole mission and vision of the church. As Christ empowered the church to carry His mission forward (Acts 1:8), He also empowered His followers to represent Him. Pastors and leaders are given the strength, power, and influence needed to perform their duty. Christ has the authority to instruct and direct his leaders to guide the church to fulfill the Great Commission’s call. Members should be supportive of the mission vision of the church and her leaders.

Christ, through His authority instructs His followers to “make disciples.” This is the command of verse 19. The command has three participles that state the process in which it is to be carried out; go, baptize, and teach. The purpose of the mission is to reproduce in others what Jesus has produced in believers: faith, obedience, growth, compassion, love, and a bold, truthful message as His witnesses. The scope of the assignment is to all nations.

“All nations” in verse 19 represent the totality of all people. Christ came for everyone (John 3:16). The role of the church is to carry His call forward to everyone. Technology and travel has made the world very small. Taking the gospel to other nations can be done in almost in an instant. However, the word nation may not require believers to travel to another continent. The word used in this passage means culture or a group of people. Different cultures exist from town to town or even within a town. In most communities, the world is now at their door steps. We don’t have to go far to find the “nations.”

As noted earlier, the process is three-fold. *Go* is the act of Christians proclaiming and spreading the Gospel. *Baptizing* is the act of the new believer claiming Christ and making the decision to follow Christ and show a transformed life publicly. *Teaching* is the process of discipling the believer so that maturity occurs (see Grow & Connect lessons). The emphasis in the balance of this lesson will be placed on *Go*.

Go! Jesus assumed that believers would be going. Jesus assumed that every believer would be going. The Great Commission is not assigned only to those with the gift of evangelism. “Go,” as noted in the key terms listed above, represents behaving in a certain way. A believer’s

represents Christ in daily life, asking others to attend worship, Sunday School, and sharing the plan of salvation with non-Christians they encounter. Where ever believers go, they should be on mission to represent Christ and the Gospel.

Believers on mission for the Lord develop an awareness for the lost as they come into contact with them each day. This awareness should create a lens that acts as an “eye for the lost.” Christ sought the lost. He had compassion for the lost sheep that came into his presence (Matt. 9:35-38). He wept over their hopeless life (Luke 19:41). Following Christ’s example, Paul grieved for his lost Jewish brothers and sisters. He was grieved to the point of being willing to receive sin’s curse on their behalf (Rom 9:1-3). Believers must become passionate about seeing the lost come to know Christ. This passion should impact their view of each person they come into contact with. A primary question that should be on every believers mind is “Do they know Christ and how can I introduce them to Him?”

How much of an “eye for the lost” do we have today? To what degree of grief do we have for the lost? Approximately 80% of the U.S. population is not in church attendance on any given Sunday. Research shows that 85% of churches today are in plateau or are in decline. It takes approximately 86 worshiping members in a church to baptize one new believer. .More than 90% of church members will not share their faith and only 21% will invite someone to church. Only 2% of all believers will invite a non-Christian person to church.

These statistics reflect of a lack of concern for the lost. Believers must develop a passion for reaching the lost. The concern for sharing the greatest gift of an abundant and eternal life along with the burning passion of not seeing someone spend eternity in hell must be developed in all that claim Christ. Go is a behavior. It is being obedient.

### **The Strategy. Acts 1:8**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Luke, the physician and Paul’s traveling companion, authored the gospel bearing his name and the book of Acts. Acts is the sequel to his gospel account. Luke ends his gospel account with a note of expectancy which provides the setting for the opening of Acts. At this point, Christ had already given the Great Commission and His ascent was eminent. Christ was

ready to hand the baton off to the Apostles to carry forward to the world the message of repentance and the good news of forgiveness. Although the Apostles still did not quite understand their future role (Acts 1:6), Christ's brief charge was very explicit.

While the Great Commission released the Apostles, Acts 1:8 points to the source of power to spread the Gospel. The word "power" provided the fuel for this great task. The Greek word in this passage, *dynamis*, means strength and ability. This promise was further emphasized in Paul's prayer for the Ephesians as he prayed, "Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think- according to the power that works in you" (Eph. 3:20). Time and time again, throughout the Old and New Testament God demonstrated His ability to accomplish great things through those who were obedient and faithful. From Joshua's defeat of Jericho (Joshua 5:13-6:27) to Paul's tactful and inspiring testimony in front of Governor Felix and King Agrippa (Acts 24-26), God has provided the power, resources, inspiration, and words to say to meet what ever need a believer faces.

The Apostles' power would come with the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13, 24:49, John 7:39; 14:16) which happened ten days later at Pentecost. The promised Holy Spirit would come along side the Apostles and serve as the source to empower them to do great things.

The result of being empowered by the Holy Spirit would be reflected in the witnessing efforts by the Apostles. They were charged at that point to take their three year apprentice period with Christ and now transform the world. What appeared to still be a naïve group in verse six would, within days, become a powerful source of knowledge and testimony of what Christ's life and death meant. They would provide first hand knowledge of the life of the risen Lord. Their witnessing of His great acts, teaching, death, and resurrection, accompanied by the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, would give the world bold eye-witnesses willing to issue the call of repentance to the world. The term witness not only means to convey what has been seen or experienced but it also can come with a price. All of the eleven who heard this first charge would suffer for being a witness. Like the Apostles, Christians today are to take the witness about Christ in their personal life and share it with the world, no matter what the cost.

The great things the Apostles achieved and performed were recorded in the book of Acts. This book is the history of the establishing of the church. Christ charged the Apostles to intentionally carry the message in concentric circles radiating out from where they were at

(Jerusalem) to the neighboring town of Judea, into the culturally different area of Samaria, and to the end of the earth. These stages serve as an outline for the book of Acts. The balance of the book summarizes the advancement of the Gospel in Jerusalem (2:42-8:3), Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:24) and ends of the earth (12:25-28:31).

A practical implementation strategy can be found in Acts 1:8. This simple strategy of delivering the Gospel is suggested to be done from four perspectives: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the world. An effective church dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission aligns itself with this strategy. A Sunday School class should be involved in supporting and organizing itself in assisting the local church in achieving this strategy.

Obviously, the starting point for a church and class would be its Jerusalem- the communities and towns where the church draws its members. The spread of the Gospel can be accomplished in many ways. Classes can perform projects in the community that create awareness about the church (complimentary water at ballparks, umbrella escorts through parking lots during rain storms, working at inner city mission centers, assisting at local schools, etc). Members can be involved in evangelism by personally inviting others to attend church as well as Sunday School classes. Studies have shown that 75% or greater of guests attending a church do so because they were invited by a friend, relative, associate or a neighbor. A primary strategy that a class should implement is an intentional and active outreach (evangelism) process. A means of identifying prospects and contacting them should be developed. Next, a method of sending thank you letters, invitation cards, phone calls, emails, inviting prospects to class social events, and face to face invitations should be made. Finally, members need to become comfortable with sharing their personal testimony and learning to share the Gospel frequently and without fear.

The fear most Christians have of sharing their faith or even asking someone to attend church is great. Their fear stems from the rejection of being told “no” to having a door slammed in their face. The risk of an angered, slamming of the door is highly unlikely. Research indicates that most unchurched people would respond to an invitation to attend church if asked.

We live in a culture today where people are looking for answers to basic life questions. Many of the unchurched today desire relationships with Christians, but it appears that Christians are afraid to engage with the unchurched. If a large percent of the unchurched population would attend church when asked, why don't Christians ask? Class members must get into their

communities and engage their friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors in spiritual dialogue. Remember, opportunities to win someone to Christ are greater when he/she is attending a small group Bible study than attending just worship. Therefore, members should be striving to get the lost into their Sunday School class.

Starting new classes can be another piece of your church's strategy. New classes attract new members at a greater rate than existing classes. Multiple classes provide a greater opportunity for members to go and grow the body. Consider an apple orchard. If a community wanted to provide apples for all of its residents would it do so with one large tree or would it do so with many apple trees? Members participating in a new class usually have a greater outward focus than an existing one. If begun properly, a new class can generally increase overall attendance by a minimum of ten new members within one year. Other benefits of starting new classes include:

- Enables a Sunday School class to reach and assimilate more people.
- Multiplies the efforts to build Great Commission Christians.
- New classes tend to be more evangelistic.
- Create excitement.
- Builds the leadership base in the church and gets more involved in service.

A church can serve its Jerusalem by ministering to the needs of its community. A vital part of a local strategy is to understand the communities where the church serves. The areas in which a church serves will have varying people groups and cultures. A key strategy performed by missionaries is to study the culture of the people they will be serving. The local church today needs to apply the same strategy to the community it serves. A study of the demographics and their culture needs to be reviewed and understood before attempting to engage with them. Different methods to reach these groups may vary.

Ideas and opportunities for local service can come from a local association of churches. A variety of ways to serve are available through local associations. Financial support of the association and its mission efforts can be another way to serve.

As the circles of mission strategy expand (Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth), fewer church members may feel they may be able to participate. All believers have the opportunity to participate at some levels. All members should attempt, if at all possible, to go on a mission trip. Having the experience to go beyond a local region can be greatly rewarding. If for some reason a trip cannot be taken, other means of participation exist. Members and classes can provide finances to support individuals or purchase supplies and resources. Prayer for those participating

is essential. Financial contributions to various mission offerings (Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American Missions and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® for International Missions) help to strengthen mission activity around the world. Faithful giving to the church's general offering supports its ability to give to the Southern Baptist's Cooperative fund. These monies are used locally and to the ends of the world.

### **Conclusion**

The church and its members serve as God's ambassadors to carry His precious gift of reconciliation to the world. Paul wrote that God makes "His appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). Yes, Christ's Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples is a command, but true application of it is made by a natural outpouring of the love believers have for Him. Paul further wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:1 that, "We appeal to you: 'Don't receive God's grace in vain.'" The greatest gift in the world must be shared. It is disobedient to ignore this command. Sunday School classes can be actively engaged and make an impact world-wide. The world is waiting. Develop a strategy and go now!



## Teaching Plan: Go with Ready Feet

**Biblical Truth:** Under Christ's authority, power, and accompaniment believers are charged to make disciples of all people.

**Objective:** Sunday School leaders and members will be challenged to move the Gospel outside of the church walls into every part of the community and the world. Participants will create a plan to develop an Acts 1:8 strategy for their class.

### Step 1: Introduction

As participants arrive, direct them to complete the Evangelism Quiz on the top half of the Go handout. Encourage them to discuss their responses with others. After most have arrived, review the answers, allowing participants to comment to any surprises (answers: B, False, C, True, A, False, True, True, D).

Present a summary of the information provided in the introductory section of the Leader's Commentary. Stress that God is a "sending God."

### Step 2: The Command: Matthew 28:18-20

Call attention to the Go bookmark. Read aloud Matthew 28:18-20, directing participants to listen for actions to be taken.

Highlight the word authority. Explain the basis of Christ's authority. Comment on the responsibility leadership has to represent the mandate of Christ's authority.

Call attention to the term "make disciples." Identify this as the primary imperative in passage. Identify going, baptizing, and teaching as elements of making disciples. Explain how each compliments the other and relates to making disciples.

Lead participants to evaluate their "eye for the lost." Ask rhetorically: When you see another person, do you wonder about their spiritual condition? Challenge them to ask God to give them an eye for people's spiritual condition, seeing everyone as a person in need of Christ.

## **Step 2: The Strategy: Acts 1:8**

Present background information about Luke's gospel and Acts leading up to this passage. Read aloud Acts 1:8. Using the comments in the Leader's Commentary, comment on the passage. Emphasize the role the Holy Spirit played in empowering the Apostles.

Define the geographical locations of the four areas identified. Characterize the strategy in terms of concentric circles, beginning with the closest region. Note that the outline for the book of Acts can be outlined following this progression.

Comment that the growth of the early church can now serve as a model strategy for today's church to fulfill the Great Commission. Call attention to the bottom half of the Go handout. Offer suggestions of ways people in your church could be involved in each area using information in the Leader's Commentary. Lead participants to identify actions they can take to be a witness in each area. Encourage them to record their thoughts on the handout.

Challenge participants to use the same grid to identify at least one way their Sunday School class could engage in going in each area. Encourage them to plan a time for their class to meet to develop a strategy for being involved in going.

Read Matthew 28: 18-20 as the closing challenge.



## Handout: Go With Ready Feet

### Evangelism Quiz

1. What percent of the U.S. population attends church on any given Sunday morning?  
A. 50%. B. 20%. C. 65%. D. 37%.
2. An unchurched person has a greater opportunity of coming to know Christ within one year by attending worship than by attending a small group Bible study. True or False.
3. What percent of the unchurched are antagonistic to the gospel and will “slam a door” in your face?  
A. 58% B. 40% C. 5% D. 33%.
4. When invited to attend church 74% would be somewhat likely to reply positively. True or False.
5. What percent of church members will share their faith with someone who does not have a personal relationship with Christ?  
A. 10%. B. 33% C. 47 D. 55%
6. Only 34% of church members will invite someone to church. True or False.
7. Only 2% of Christians will invite an unchurched person to church. True or False.
8. In the U.S., 85% of all churches are in decline or are plateaued. True or False.
9. Approximately what ratio in America does it take for attending worship members to baptize one unbeliever?  
A. 5:1 B. 29:1 C. 53:1 D. 87:1

### The Acts 1:8 Challenge

List ways your class can fulfill its Acts 1:8 challenge.

Jerusalem	Judea
Samaria	Ends of the earth...

**Bookmark Master:** Make photocopies of this page on card stock paper (use various light colors). Separate along the dotted lines and distribute a set to each participant.



**GROW**

Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

– Romans 12:1-2 (HCSB)

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**CONNECT**

“This is the most important,” Jesus answered: “Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, The Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

--Mark 12:21-31 (HCSB)

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**SERVE**

Based on the gift they have received, everyone should use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God. If anyone speaks, [his speech should be] like the oracles of God; if anyone serves, [his service should be] from the strength God provides, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

– 1 Peter 4:10-11 (HCSB)

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**GO**

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 observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

– Matthew 28:19-20 (HCSB)

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