



How to Prepare a Lesson

Putting together a Bible lesson involves two important levels of personal preparation. The first is heart preparation, and the second is lesson preparation. Both are critical to the success of any Bible lesson. These preparations take time and energy, but they are likely to be the most exhilarating part of your week as you interact with the life-giving truths of Scripture.

I. How do I prepare my heart to teach?

There are three critical steps in heart preparation as you head into each week of teaching. First, you must gain an accurate understanding of what the passage is saying and what it means. Second, you must apply it to your life. Third, you must carefully think through how to apply and explain what you have learned to your students.

1. Understand the passage.
2. Apply the passage to yourself.
3. Apply the passage to your students.

A. Ask the Holy Spirit for His help.

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of the Bible. Thus, it is critical to enlist His help throughout your preparations. Practically, this means that you must pray. Prayer is not just a step in lesson preparation. Rather, it should permeate your entire week. Merely beginning and ending with prayer is not enough; all parts of your preparation should be bathed in prayer. It is not a step to check off. It is an ongoing attitude and action. It doesn't end even when you walk into the classroom.

Prayer is more than a **step** in lesson preparation. Teachers should pray **before**, **during**, and **after** the process.

B. Study God's Word to accurately understand it.

The first and foremost key to God-centered teaching is to properly understand God's Word. The main question you must seek to answer as you study Scripture is "What did the author intend his hearers to understand?" Without an accurate understanding of the Word of God, the next two steps will be not only difficult, but also prone to error.

Note: A helpful resource in developing your Bible-study skills is *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

There are six key questions to ask when studying to find an author's intent.

1. What is the purpose of the book?
2. What is the larger context of the passage?
3. What is the immediate context of the passage?
4. What is the main point of the passage?
5. What timeless principles does the passage teach?
6. How does God want me to apply these truths?

To answer these questions, begin by reading the passage several times and writing down observations as you read. If you are starting to study a new book, read the introductory notes for that book in *The MacArthur Study Bible*. This will give you a better understanding of the book's overall content. Next, read the background information in the "Prepare with the Truth" section of the *Generations of Grace* lesson. As you do this, write down questions such as "What does this word mean?" and "Why did God want him to do that?" Next, try to write a one-sentence summary of the passage. Then write a key-word outline of the passage. It takes a little time, but if you do one step a day, it really takes just a few minutes each day.

1. Read the passage several times.
2. Write down questions.
3. Read the background information.
4. Write a one-sentence summary of the passage.
5. Write a key-word outline of the passage.

C. Identify God's attributes and actions.

As you study the passage and begin to understand its message, remember that the Bible is God's story. It is how God has revealed Himself to mankind, and it teaches us how we are to respond to Him. All the commands, works, and words of God are based on the character and will of God. When you read a text, you must ask several more important questions, in addition to the six above. Some examples are: What is God like in this passage? What attributes of God do I see? Are there any attributes that are specifically mentioned in the text? What attributes are mentioned in the context? What attributes are displayed in the book as a whole?

1. Identify the explicitly stated attributes of God.
2. Identify the implied attributes of God.
3. Identify the attributes in the context.
4. Identify the attributes in the book.

It is important to ask what God is doing in a passage and how those actions fit into His overall saving purposes in the Bible. It is tempting to teach children good morals to obey instead of teaching them who God is and what He expects of them. But the purpose of our teaching must be to magnify the character of God.

Only when a child understands and submits to God's character and will can he submit to and follow Jesus Christ as his Savior. The most important thing that we can do for a child is to introduce him to Jesus Christ.

“Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord the your God am Holy’” (Leviticus 19:2).

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).

“Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:15–16).

We reflect and exalt God’s character when we obey Him.

D. Apply the truths of God’s Word to your own life.

In the opening of *The Devotional Life of the Sunday School Teacher*, J. R. Miller says, “The real power in Sunday School teaching is not in methods, important as it is to have the best of these, nor in equipment, valuable as this is, but in the teacher’s own spiritual life.”

Prayerfully ask God to show you ways to apply the passage you are teaching. Make your study for the lesson a part of your personal devotional time. Pray, meditate, journal, and ask God for a humble and contrite heart. It is far better to teach children something that God is teaching you than it is to mechanically teach through a passage that you have not applied to yourself. A great temptation and danger in teaching is to prepare a lesson for your class without applying it to your own life.

1. Ask for God’s guidance in your study.
2. Identify a specific area of your life that needs to change.
3. Teach children what God has taught you.

E. Proclaim the glory of God.

The fundamental purpose of teaching the Bible is to announce the glory of God and to call all men, women, boys, and girls to repentance and worship. The book of Deuteronomy says it this way: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (6:5). We are to show who God is and how we are to love Him.

We teach the stories of the Bible in order to introduce children to the God of the Bible. In every Bible lesson, we should teach the answer to the following questions: “Who is God?” “What has He done?” “What does He require?” and “How should I respond?” You students should come face to face with God each week as they learn in your class.

II. How do I prepare the Bible lesson?

Once you have gathered all the principles, facts, and attributes of God from the text, it is time to form a lesson that is age-appropriate and memorable. You need to figure out how to communicate the truths of the lesson so that children can understand and apply it. The

Generations of Grace curriculum is structured to facilitate this process. Here some practical tips to get you started.

A. Identify the main principle.

What is the message that God wants your students to learn from the passage? Write it down in one concise statement.

Example: Read Genesis 4:1–16, the story of Cain and Abel. The main point of this passage is that after the fall, mankind quickly descended to the lowest levels of sin, even to the point of murdering their own family members. There are many important lessons we can learn from this passage. For instance:

1. Sin is a powerful enemy from within and can master us.
2. God is merciful but will still punish sinners.
3. God wants men to obey with right actions and attitudes.

And there are dozens more. For this example, we will select the second statement. (See the *Generations of Grace* lesson “Cain Rebels against God.”) An appropriate focus statement for this lesson might be: The story of Cain and Abel shows us that God punishes sinful attitudes and actions.

B. Outline the passage.

Once you have written your focus statement, it is time to write your outline. The outline you develop will help you shape the rest of your lesson. You should practice running through this message several times before Sunday morning. Wrestle with the text throughout the week and learn it for yourself. During the course of your study, God will impress certain truths and applications on your heart. As long as you stay true to the meaning of the passage, you can focus on various aspects and applications of the passage.

Below is a sample outline.

Genesis 4:1–16

Focus statement: The story of Cain and Abel shows us that God punishes sinful attitudes and actions.

A. Steps to Sin (4:1–8)

1. Sinful Actions
2. Sinful Attitudes

B. Reaction to Sin (4:9–15)

1. Cain’s Reaction to God
2. God’s Reaction to Cain
3. God’s Punishment of Cain (4:9–12)

C. Our Reaction to Sin (application)

1. Master It (4:7)
2. Confess It (1 John 1:9)
3. Ask for Forgiveness

C. Apply the message

Once you have developed your outline, it is time to think about teaching and applying the lesson to your students. Think about these questions as you prepare to teach: Are there any words or concepts that will be difficult to explain? Don't take anything for granted. What ideas do you need to explain before the lesson so that your students can understand what you are teaching? How would what you teach apply in a specific student's home? You can answer these questions as you observe the spiritual condition of your students. Watch their behavior and ask questions about their motivations. Ask their parents what struggles their children recurrently face.

1. Consider specific students in your class.
2. Identify words or concepts that need to be explained before the lesson.
3. Determine what your student will do this week that will require knowledge of this lesson in order to honor God.
4. Observe the spiritual condition of your students.
5. Find out what daily struggles your students face.

Add appropriate illustrations from your life and your students' lives. Think of examples from their world to help them understand the lesson. Clearly spell out the issues they face to help them relate to the passage you are teaching. Write out questions to engage the students as you teach.

Four questions to ask when illustrating:

1. What examples from everyday life can help clarify the lesson?
2. What examples from nature can help explain the lesson?
3. What objects can help clarify the lesson?
4. What questions can I ask to draw out the truth?

III. How do I use the *Generations of Grace* curriculum?

A. Prepare with the Truth

The first page of any lesson has the key truths and or objectives that you should cover. Remember: **you will not be able to teach everything**. Choose a few truths and objectives to focus on as you put your lesson together. We have broken the curriculum into four sections. The first section is "Prepare with the Truth." This section includes the Bible background information and references for additional study.

1. Review key truths and objectives.
2. Choose one key truth to focus on.
3. Study the passage.

B. Point to the Truth

After you have read through the biblical text several times, have studied the Bible background, and have written your outline, take a look at the ideas in the “Point to the Truth” section. This section contains ideas that will help you introduce the coming Bible lesson and review the previous week’s lesson. In educational jargon, this is called an “anticipatory set,” or “set” for short. For preschool children, you may need to introduce the idea of a “bad attitude.” You may need to explain what a herder or a farmer does. The lesson will make no sense to the students if they do not understand certain concepts. The ideas in this section help “point” students to the coming lesson. In a sense, these activities are active “pre-lessons.”

The lesson begins the moment the first child walks into the classroom. You should select a few activities to engage the children as they arrive. Make these activities purposeful. While you are reading through the curriculum, you may come up with ideas that are not in the curriculum. That is good! As long as it helps you teach the concepts in an age-appropriate manner, feel free to incorporate your own ideas.

1. Select ideas/concepts to review.
2. Select ideas/concepts to introduce.
3. Adapt ideas to fit your classroom and style.
4. Begin the moment the students enter the classroom.

C. Proclaim the Truth

The third section, “Proclaim the Truth,” contains presentation ideas and song ideas. In the EC level, it also contains a sample Bible lesson. Use this section for teaching the core of the lesson. Don’t be surprised, however, if your lesson is slightly different from the sample Bible lesson. The sample is not for you to read verbatim to the students. It is merely a way for you to get ideas for presenting your lesson.

Read the passage aloud (if appropriate), and go through your outline. As you teach, ask questions from the passage, as well as questions from everyday situations. Ask some open-ended questions rather than just questions with yes-and-no answers. And use illustrations to make the lesson come alive.

Leadoff Questions (LOQs)

In the EL and JR lessons, we have included leadoff questions (LOQs). These questions are designed to engage students in the lesson through a question-and-answer format. This helps the students to actively think about the lesson. You can use the LOQs directly from your outline as you teach a lesson. You also can use visuals and incorporate other aids alongside the LOQs.

D. Practice the Truth

The final section of each lesson is the “Practice the Truth” section. In this section, we have included review and application ideas. It is important to make sure that your students understand the facts; they must understand the lesson before they can apply its truths to their lives. Select ideas from this section to review the lesson actively and creatively. Craft and activity ideas are included here. The goal at the end of the lesson is to both to review the lesson and to apply what students have learned.

E. Sample Lesson Schedule

The following is a sample lesson schedule for teaching *Generations of Grace: Genesis* “Cain Rebels against God” (Genesis 4:1–15).

8:00–8:15 a.m.	Setup
8:15–8:45 a.m.	Check-in (Pre-Point Time)
8:15–8:30 a.m.	Entrance Activity 1: “Play-doh Tables”
8:30–8:45 a.m.	Entrance Activity 2: “Happy/Mad Face Masks”
8:45–8:55 a.m.	Point Time: “Puppet Disobeys”
8:55–9:05 a.m.	Bathroom Break
9:05–9:20 a.m.	Welcome New Students
	Music Time
9:20–9:40 a.m.	Proclaim Time: “Cain Rebels against God” Read the biblical passage to the children. (In EL and JR lessons, LOQs should be used.)

A. Steps to sin (4:1–8)

LOQ: What were Cain’s and Abel’s jobs?

1. Sinful attitudes

LOQ: What kind of attitude did Cain have?

2. Sinful Actions

LOQ: What sinful things did Cain do?

LOQ: How should Cain have responded?

LOQ: What are temptations you have? How should you respond?

B. Reaction to Sin (4:9–15)

LOQ: How did Cain respond to God?

1. Cain’s Reaction to God

LOQ: What did Cain tell God?

2. God’s Reaction to Cain

LOQ: What did God tell Cain?

3. God’s Punishment (4:9–12)

LOQ: How did God punish Cain? How was God still gracious?

C. Our Reaction to Sin (application)

LOQ: How does God say we should deal with sin?

1. Master It (4:7)

2. Confess It (1 John 1:9)

3. Ask for Forgiveness

- 9:40–10:00 a.m. Practice Time
- 9:40–9:50 a.m. Snack Time (small group discussion; review questions)
- 9:50–10:05 a.m. Craft Time “God’s Mercy Flower”
- 10:05–10:30 a.m. Check-out
- 10:00–10:15 a.m. Exit Time: “Roller Ball Review”
- 10:15–10:30 a.m. Cleanup (Enlist remaining children to help clean up the classroom.)

IV. How do I present an effective Bible lesson?

A. Consider the attention span of the child.

Many adults are used to sitting in church and listening to their pastor speak for 30 to 50 minutes. As a result, they often make the mistake of making a lesson too long when teaching children. We tend to think, “There is so much good stuff here. I want to cover more.” But to quote one of our veteran trainers, “It is better to drive one point home than leave three on base.” Don’t try to cover too much material. It is difficult for any kindergartener to sit still for longer than 20 minutes, unless you are a television show. As a general rule, use the age of the child plus five minutes to determine a student’s attention span. That means that if you are teaching a six-year-old, your Bible lesson should be about 11 minutes long. As you get better at teaching and engaging children, your lessons can be a little longer.

Attention span—age of the child plus five minutes
It is better to drive one point home than leave three on base.

B. Make it memorable.

Students can’t apply what they don’t remember. They can’t apply what they don’t understand. It is imperative that you are clear and engaging when teaching children. This takes time and creativity.

“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6–8).

The word *teach* in the above passage means to “put into.” There are two pictures here. The first picture is that of a scribe who takes a stone tablet and carefully carves his words into it so that they create an indelible impression. The second picture is of doing this repeatedly over time to make the marks deeper and deeper. This is how we should view the week-after-week and year-after-year teaching of Scripture. We are to teach children in such a way that they will not be able to forget God’s Word. This involves creative, engaging presentation and repetition. We are to teach children faithfully whenever we have the opportunity.

“Then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 6:12).

“That they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments” (Psalm 78:7).

A Jewish father was expected to teach his children in ways that brought Scripture to bear on everyday life. He was to do this over and over throughout his children’s time in his home. You should do the same. When you present your lesson, include one or two of the following teaching aids. These will help to keep student’s attention and help them to remember the concepts you teach.

Using audiovisuals is an effective way to burn the lesson into the minds of your students. You can’t use all of these in a single day, but if you incorporate two or three per week, your students’ learning will increase dramatically.

1. Creative Sights

In essence, this is nothing more than visual aids. Use object lessons, props, costumes, and pictures. Decorate the room to fit the Bible lesson. Flannelgraph pieces, pictures, and props give students something to look at while you are teaching. If you have a series of pictures or props, pull them out one at a time. Children will look forward to what is coming next.

2. Outrageous Sounds

Utilize various sounds as you teach. Lower your voice to a whisper at some points, or raise it very loudly at others. Incorporate sound effects such as splashing waves, trumpet sounds, or shuffling feet. Music is another effective tool. Use songs to reinforce the ideas you are presenting. Use chants, or have students repeat rhythmic phrases.

3. Warm Affection

“Affections are the more vigorous and practical exercises of the will and inclination of the will and the soul.”—Jonathan Edwards

Affections are the emotions that move us to act. Affections can be good or bad. They can move us to sin or to act righteously. If we submit them to truths of God’s Word, they can be a help we can utilize in teaching. The greatest preachers have understood this element. It is not manipulation; rather, it is allowing the truths of the Scripture to influence how we feel. There is an emotional element to excellent teaching. Sometimes we call it “passion.” Consider these command words found in Scripture: love, rejoice, trust, and fear. These all have an emotional element. Both Peter and Paul knew the right use of affections.

“And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made

manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

We will yell and scream at a ball game that has little eternal influence, but we routinely present our Bible lessons with almost no emotion. When part of a story in Scripture is sad, tell it that way. When a character in Scripture speaks, think about the emotion that he is speaking with and communicate it. The book of Psalms is filled with emotionally charged language. When you speak of heaven or of the goodness of God, it should be with tremendous joy. When you speak of hell or of God’s wrath, do so with deep concern, gravity, and sadness. Use the emotions that correspond to the truths you are presenting.

4. Animated Action

Learning is a spiritual, cognitive, and physiological process. Studies show that people retain more information if a body movement is associated with it. When our brains are active and our blood is flowing, we learn better. This is especially true for children. This means that we need to utilize action in our teaching. We should be active in our movements and should ask the students to be active as they listen to the lessons. Periodically have students sit up straight, take a deep breath, or stretch their arms. This gets their blood flowing and helps them to pay attention. Use hand motions, games, or other controlled movements during the lesson to help the students remember what they are learning. However, keep the movements minimal and controlled. It does not take much to get a student overly wound up. A common misconception is that students need to “get their wiggles out.” Rarely can a teacher get children really active, to “get their wiggles out,” and then be able to settle them down to listen to the lesson. Use activity, but use it carefully.

Note: Each lesson of *Generations of Grace* includes games, activities, and other ideas designed for active learning. Children can learn truth, be active, and have fun.

Make activity intentional.
Keep it minimal and controlled.

5. Magnetic Attention

You probably have heard the saying “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” That may be true—but you can salt his oats! You can create a thirst in your students, an attraction to what the Word of God has to say. There are several ways you can do this. First, be enthusiastic. Act as though, and believe, that the day’s lesson is the most important lesson the students ever have heard. Next week, do the same thing. Be God-infatuated. Let your love for His Word and His character permeate your lesson. Vary the tone and intensity of your speech. Be sincere about what you are teaching. We all have read articles or watched documentaries about topics we don’t really care about. But if the writer or speaker was enthusiastic, we often read or listened anyway.

Be enthusiastic.
Be in love with God.
Be sincere.
Be varied.

C. Ask questions.

We have already discussed leadoff questions. At the beginning and the end of the lesson, be sure to ask questions. Don't ask only yes-or-no questions. Ask "how," "why," and "what" questions. Ask questions that force students to apply what they have heard. Students are the most engaged in the class when you are asking them a question. At the end of the lesson, ask questions to find out if they have learned what you taught. One author said, "You haven't taught if they haven't learned." The only way to gauge what your students have learned is to ask them questions.

Ask open-ended questions.
Ask questions students can answer.
Ask questions about the text: "What did the Bible say?"

D. Use everyday illustrations.

One of the best tools to help children understand and remember is an illustration from everyday life. When talking about disobedience, use an example from your life, or give an illustration of something that the students likely have done themselves. Illustrations can help explain abstract concepts or help a child apply the truth in an everyday situation.

E. Activate a desire for obedience.

Obedience is not meant to be drudgery. We are blessed when we obey. The basic meaning of *bless* is "to make happy." We need to show the blessedness (happiness) of obedience. Throughout the lesson, call your students to obey.

Encourage and plead with your students to obey what they have heard. God's expectation is that we obey the Bible, not just memorize the facts. We are not to be only hearers of the Word, but also doers (James 1:23–25). Don't let children off the hook by not showing them how they can obey the message. Show them, and then plead with them to obey the good and holy God of the universe.

Encourage students to obey.
Give them specifics to obey.
Explain the benefits of obedience.
Warn against disobedience.

"That they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

"O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, *in* a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 6:3).