



Church-School Partnerships

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

We show love in our communities because God wants us to.

We become aware of needs in our communities because God's Spirit opens our eyes to them.

We rely on the light of God's Word to guide us in planning our response.

So if you're considering a new relationship between your church and a local school, it only makes sense to ground your plans in Scripture. Start by looking at what the Lord tells us about love, service, communities, and children. Let that spark your group's thoughts about how to move forward.

This Bible study guide is designed for that purpose. It could be used as a series of devotional lead-ins to group planning meetings. Or you could devote eight weekly meetings to the exploration of these Scriptures and the ideas they ignite. These Scriptures might even form the basis for a few sermons that might energize a whole church to adopt a school-partnership project.

Each session focuses on three Bible passages, along with discussion questions for each. The first will be about **children**, the second about our **attitude**, and the third about our **action**.

This guide is intended as a companion piece for other material that focuses specifically on school partnerships.

>> *NOTES TO LEADERS:*

The Scriptures and questions are meant to be "elastic." They can stretch to fill an hour or so, but they could also shrink to fit a shorter time frame. Use what you like; leave what you don't need.

The passages printed here are from the Good News Translation, but feel free to use whatever version you prefer. Adjust the questions as needed.

In assembling the passages and questions, we're not trying to push any particular point, except possibly that children matter, and that Scripture calls us to put love into action. This leaves lots of room for discussion. It also should lead nicely into your plans to work with local schools.

Be careful not to leave the impression that you're going to go into these public schools and "make them Christian." Many of these Scriptures teach about humility. Our best posture is servanthood. Let's help the schools do what the schools do—as we are motivated by the love and service of Christ.

SESSION 1

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

MARK 10:13-16

How do you think people responded when Jesus did this?

How would you have responded if you were there?

Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” What did he mean by that?

How does someone “receive the Kingdom of God like a child”?

What do you think happened to these children afterward? How would they have been affected?

In what ways could we “bless” children in our day?

So then, my friends, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.

And because of God’s gracious gift to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you.

ROMANS 12:1-3

What does it mean to be a “living sacrifice”? Have you ever known anyone who lived this way?

In what way could this be considered “true worship”?

What “standards of this world” are you tempted by?

How would you describe the attitude of a person transformed by God?

How would modesty in your thinking affect your relationships with others?

If Christians became known as people who were modest in their thinking, would that change how outsiders see us? Why? How?

*This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others!
If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God?
My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.*

1 JOHN 3:16-18

According to this text, what is love?

How do we “close our hearts” against people in need?

Does truly loving God mean that we’ll respond to every need in our community?

Do you know people whose love is “just words and talk”? Has that ever described you?

What sort of “action” can get us out of “just words and talk” mode?

SESSION 2

O Lord, our Lord,
 your greatness is seen in all the world!
Your praise reaches up to the heavens;
it is sung by children and babies.
You are safe and secure from all your enemies;
 you stop anyone who opposes you.
When I look at the sky, which you have made,
 at the moon and the stars, which you set in their places—
what are human beings, that you think of them;
 mere mortals, that you care for them?
Yet you made them inferior only to yourself;
 you crowned them with glory and honor.

PSALM 8:1-5

How would you describe the tone of this psalm?

How is the Lord's praise "sung by children and babies"? Is it talking about Sunday school songs or something else?

What does this psalm say about the value of human beings? Is it exalting us or putting us down?

What "glory and honor" have we humans been crowned with?

Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

*He always had the nature of God,
 but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.*

*Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had,
 and took the nature of a servant.*

*He became like a human being
 and appeared in human likeness.*

*He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—
 his death on the cross.*

*For this reason God raised him to the highest place above
 and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.*

*And so, in honor of the name of Jesus
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below
will fall on their knees,
and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-11

What are three things this passage says about Jesus?

How should Jesus' attitude affect our attitude?

When we consider others better than ourselves, what effect does that have on our actions?

This was written to a church. Is it surprising to think that there would be "selfish ambition" in a church?

When people in your community look at Christians in general, do they see selfish ambition and boasting or do they see a Christ-like humility?

Which do they see when they look at your church in particular?

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, as you offer them the message of life. If you do so, I shall have reason to be proud of you on the Day of Christ, because it will show that all my effort and work have not been wasted.

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-16

How does this passage describe believers?

How does it describe the world?

What is the "message of life" being offered?

Does it surprise you that the way to distinguish ourselves as God's children is to avoid complaining and arguing? Why would that be the main thing here?

With that in mind, what could you do to "shine" in this corrupt world?

What could the church do?

SESSION 3

*May our sons in their youth
be like plants that grow up strong.
May our daughters be like stately columns
which adorn the corners of a palace.*

PSALMS 144:12

How are children like plants?

How are they like columns of a building?

How do children provide the strength and identity for future society?

What can we do now to help?

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you prosper.
May there be peace inside your walls
and safety in your palaces.”
For the sake of my relatives and friends
I say to Jerusalem, “Peace be with you!”
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God
I pray for your prosperity.*

PSALM 122:6-9

Jerusalem was a special city, but it was also the Psalmist's home town. How does this psalm guide us in praying for our community?

What kind of “peace” is needed in our community?

How can we promote various kinds of peace in our community?

“The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those people whom he allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take away as prisoners from Jerusalem to Babylonia: ‘Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what you grow in them. Marry and have children. Then let your children get married, so that they also may have children. You must increase in numbers and not decrease. Work for the good of the cities where I have made you go as prisoners. Pray to me on their behalf, because if they are prosperous, you will be prosperous too.’”

JEREMIAH 29:4-7

How would you describe the gist of this passage?

Do you find it surprising that God would ask his chosen people to settle down like this in foreign communities?

How do you think the captive Jews felt when they heard this?

In this passage, what does it mean to be “prosperous”?

Can you invest in your community in a similar way? How?

What would it look like for the church to get involved like this?

SESSION 4

The Lord Almighty gave this message to Zechariah: “I have longed to help Jerusalem because of my deep love for her people, a love which has made me angry with her enemies. I will return to Jerusalem, my holy city, and live there. It will be known as the faithful city, and the hill of the Lord Almighty will be called the sacred hill. Once again old men and women, so old that they use canes when they walk, will be sitting in the city squares. And the streets will again be full of boys and girls playing.

“This may seem impossible to those of the nation who are now left, but it’s not impossible for me.”

ZECHARIAH 8:1-6

How would you describe this scene?

How does it make you feel?

What do you think the Lord mentioned both old people with canes and young people playing?

Is this just a vision for a future “kingdom of God” or could it become a reality in our communities?

Then God said, “And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small.” So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food”—and it was done. God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased. Evening passed and morning came—that was the sixth day.

GENESIS 1:26-31

What does this passage say about human beings?

What does the Creator ask human beings to do?

“Like himself” could also be translated “in the image of God.” How could it affect our attitude toward our community—and its children—when we realize that they bear God’s image?

If you’re reading ahead, you see that sin enters the story in Genesis 3. How should the reality of sin affect our attitude toward the image-of-God people we live with?

“You are like salt for the whole human race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it.

“You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:13-16

In what way are followers of Christ like salt?

In what way do we shine like light?

What is the result of our shining?

What specific “good things” can we do to be “light” and “salt” in our community?

SESSION 2

Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their life.

PROVERBS 22:6

Has this proven true for you? Are there things you were taught as a child that you still remember—and perhaps practice—today? Like what?

How does this make you feel about the importance of good parenting?

How does this make you feel about the importance of good schools?

What particular lessons in “how they should live” would you like children to be taught today?

This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us.

1 JOHN 4:10-11

According to this passage, what is love?

There’s an essential integrity here—we act out of our basic identity. So what’s the connection between God’s love for us and our love for others?

How is God’s love “made perfect” (that term often means “brought to completion”) in us?

If God loved us in spite of our sin (Romans 5:8), how should we be treating the sinful people around us?

What specific acts of love would be important to do in this community?

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Which of these descriptions of love stands out to you?

Which is the hardest for you to put into practice?

Which of these qualities, as they're lived out, would mean the most to your neighbors?

Can you come up with an example of a person being “patient” in this community? Being “kind”? Avoiding jealousy or conceit or pride? Go through each of these descriptions and consider what it actually looks like—or what its opposite looks like.

SESSION 6

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, asking, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?”

So Jesus called a child to come and stand in front of them, and said, “I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child. And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me.

“If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose his faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be drowned in the deep sea. How terrible for the world that there are things that make people lose their faith! Such things will always happen—but how terrible for the one who causes them!

MATTHEW 18:1-7

What’s the answer to that first question?

How can we “become like children”?

The millstone thing is pretty severe. Why would Jesus speak so harshly about this situation?

How does this passage confirm or change your view of the value of children?

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group.”

“Do not try to stop him,” Jesus told them, “because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterward to say evil things about me. For whoever is not against us is for us. I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive a reward.

MARK 9:38-41

What were John and the other disciples assuming about the man who was driving out demons?

Do you think they expected the response Jesus gave them?

Are you surprised by the statement “Whoever is not against us is for us”? Why or why not?

What could that statement mean for our efforts to serve the community? Who could we partner with?

For I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and again on my way back, in order to get help from you for my trip to Judea. In planning this, did I appear fickle? When I make my plans, do I make them from selfish motives, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? As surely as God speaks the truth, my promise to you was not a “Yes” and a “No.” For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was preached among you by Silas, Timothy, and myself, is not one who is “Yes” and “No.” On the contrary, he is God’s “Yes”; for it is he who is the “Yes” to all of God’s promises. This is why through Jesus Christ our “Amen” is said to the glory of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:16-20

Some sort of change happened in Paul’s itinerary. What do you think it was?

Why do you think Paul makes such a big deal about it?

He seems to be talking about integrity. How important for us as Christ-followers to say what we mean and follow through on our commitments?

How could this be important as we partner with others in our community?

SESSION 7

Count seven weeks from the time that you begin to harvest the grain, and then celebrate the Harvest Festival, to honor the Lord your God, by bringing him a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing he has given you. Be joyful in the Lord's presence, together with your children, your servants, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows who live in your towns. Do this at the one place of worship. Be sure that you obey these commands; do not forget that you were slaves in Egypt.

DEUTERONOMY 16:9-12

These are instructions for one of several festivals observed by the Israelites. What was involved in this Harvest Festival?

What emotions do you find in this passage?

Various groups are listed as people to share the joyous celebration with. Who's first on the list?

Who else is on that list?

What does being "slaves in Egypt" have to do with anything else in this passage?

Be under obligation to no one—the only obligation you have is to love one another. Whoever does this has obeyed the Law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery; do not commit murder; do not steal; do not desire what belongs to someone else"—all these, and any others besides, are summed up in the one command, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." If you love others, you will never do them wrong; to love, then, is to obey the whole Law.

ROMANS 13:8-10

According to this passage, what's the relationship between love and the commandments?

Does it surprise you to read this? Do you think it would surprise your neighbors?

Think of three people who could, very specifically, be considered your "neighbors." What precise actions could you take to show love to them "as you love yourself"?

Think of some things you could do to support a local school. How would these things be examples of loving your neighbors as you love yourself?

What shall I bring to the Lord, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the Lord be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.

MICAH 6:6-8

The prophet Micah wonders about the most appropriate way to worship a great God. What options does he consider?

What options does he settle on?

How can we practice justice in our society today?

Is it significant that the “humble fellowship” with God is connected with the “constant love” we show to others? Why?

As we serve our community, can we consider that an act of worship for God? If so, how well should we try to serve?

SESSION 6

Early the next morning Abraham gave Hagar some food and a leather bag full of water. He put the child on her back and sent her away. She left and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water was all gone, she left the child under a bush and sat down about a hundred yards away. She said to herself, "I can't bear to see my child die." While she was sitting there, she began to cry.

God heard the boy crying, and from heaven the angel of God spoke to Hagar, "What are you troubled about, Hagar? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. Get up, go and pick him up, and comfort him. I will make a great nation out of his descendants." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went and filled the leather bag with water and gave some to the boy. God was with the boy as he grew up; he lived in the wilderness of Paran and became a skillful hunter.

GENESIS 21:14-20

Hagar was a servant girl who gave birth to Abraham's son Ishmael. At this point she was sent away into the desert. How would you describe your feelings at the beginning of this story?

By the end of the story, how did your feelings change?

What did God do in this situation?

How do you think Hagar felt to know that God had heard her son crying?

What "cries" should we pay attention to in our communities and local schools?

Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father.

Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents always, for that is what pleases God.

Parents, do not irritate your children, or they will become discouraged.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people. Remember that the Lord will give you as a reward what he has kept for his people. For Christ is the real Master you serve.

COLOSSIANS 3:17,20-21,23-24

We know the Bible tells children to obey parents. Are you surprised that parents are told not to irritate their children?

What irritates or discourages children?

As community members, how can we help the children in the community? What are the possibilities?

According to these verses, *how* should we do whatever we do?

Knowing that Christ is our “real master,” how should that affect the way we do ministry?

Then the King will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.’ The righteous will then answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!’

MATTHEW 25:34-40

This is a story Jesus told about final judgment. Why were “the righteous” surprised by the reward they were receiving?

The King in the story is clearly Jesus. When you think about him as the true recipient of helpful deeds, how does that affect the way you see needy people?

What “least important” people exist in our community?

What do they need from us?

Specifically, as we consider partnering with a public school and just helping out, how could that be a gift to Jesus as well?