

Keeping the Faith in Public Schools

Bible Study

Eric Buehrer



Gateways
TO BETTER EDUCATION

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About the Author

Eric Buehrer



Eric Buehrer is the founder and president of Gateways to Better Education. He writes and lectures extensively on the subject of religion and public education. His audiences include parents, teachers, school administrators, school board members, student educators, and pastors.

Mr. Buehrer's work has been twice featured as the cover story of *Focus on the Family* magazine, and on *BreakPoint* with Chuck Colson. He has also written articles for *Teachers in Focus*, *Christian Parenting*, *Insight*, and *American Family Association Journal*. His books and materials have been endorsed by Dr. D. James Kennedy, Rabbi Daniel Lapin, and Josh McDowell.

He has appeared on numerous radio and television programs including *CBS This Morning*, *The Coral Ridge Hour*, *The 700 Club*, *Point of View*, *Family Life Today*, and as a guest commentator for *Family News in Focus*.

Eric and his wife, Kim, have three daughters who attend public schools.

Keeping the Faith in Public Schools

Bible Study

Welcome to the exciting experience of bringing a Godly influence to your school with grace and confidence. God is already at work in the lives of people at your school. He used Christians last year in your school, and now He wants to use you. In fact, He placed you right where you are for a reason!

For many years, our public schools have been seen as battlefields. However, nothing much grows on a battlefield. Instead, we can look at our schools as gardens to cultivate. God wants you to plant seeds of love and truth in the lives of those people He has put within your sphere of influence.

Schools are enriched when Christians appropriately express their faith in word and deed. Over the years, a vocal minority has intimidated many educators and school officials into thinking that there is very little room for expression of, or teaching about, Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values.

Now is the time for people to restore what the law already allows: freedom of religious expression and appropriate inclusion of religion in the curriculum. Let God use you to make a difference.

You Are Not Alone

Gateways to Better Education exists to help public school parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members move from fear to freedom so they can confidently help students learn about the Bible and Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values.

Mission

As a Christian in a public school, you are not alone! The majority of Christians with school-aged children send them to public schools. In all likelihood, there is at least one Christian involved in every classroom in your school (the teacher, or a student, or a parent). Imagine the positive impact of dozens of Christians on your campus participating in God's activity! You will experience greater confidence and peace of mind as you connect with one another for mutual support. As the Bible says, "let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24)

Strategy

This Bible study series is designed to do four things:


1. Help you deepen your walk with God
2. Help you connect your faith to the culture
3. Help you teach each topic to your own children at home
4. Give you practical ways you can promote the appropriate inclusion of the Bible and Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values in schools

How to Use this Study

Keeping the Faith in Public Schools is divided into ten topics. Each topic has four lessons. It can be done as a ten-week study (with four daily lessons), or as a ten-month study (with four weekly lessons).

You can study the topics in whatever order best fits when you started the study during the school year. For example, if you start the study in January, you will most likely want to study Topic Eight (Resurrecting Easter) before Topic Five (Recognizing Christmas) unless you specifically want to address how Christmas was handled the month before at school. However, it is vitally important that you complete Topic One as your first subject. It gives you five key steps you will use in all the other topics. As written, the series assumes you are starting at the beginning of the school year.

What to Do

1. Complete each of the four lessons in one topic before your Bible study group's next meeting.
2. Fill in the blanks as you study each lesson. As a group, you will review the answers and, as you find helpful insights from others, make a note of their comments.
3. Pay special attention to the questions with a  (discussion bubble) in the margin. Complete each discussion question and be prepared to have meaningful interaction with your fellow Bible study participants.
4. The sections marked "Teaching Your Children" are designed to give you practical ways to relate the topic to your children and help them to stand strong in their faith. You may not always be able to affect change in your school, but you can help your own children grow spiritually.
5. Regularly review the next-to-last page of the "Leader's Guide" located at the back of this Bible study entitled "Measuring Results." Carefully read the questions your leader will ask you at the beginning of each lesson. **Note:** at each of your group's meetings your leader will ask you about your results involving *all* the topics you have completed to that date since it may take time to apply some of what you learn in each lesson.
6. You can find footnotes and additional help from www.GatewaysPartner.org. You will find helpful articles at Gateways' main Website www.gtbe.org. You will find information on students religious liberties at Gateways' special Website www.ReligiousFreedomDay.com.

To Make This a Twelve-Week Study

- A. To make this ten-topic study fit a twelve-week schedule, begin week one as an introduction to the topic, overview of the material, and discussion of concerns people may have about public schools. At this first meeting, distribute copies of *Keeping the Faith in Public Schools* to each participant so they can complete Topic One for the next week's meeting.
- B. For week twelve, have a time of praise and planning. Have participants share how they have grown and what they have seen God do through them at school or with their own children. Talk about participants' plans to lead their own group through this study with others from their schools (if you are currently meeting as a church-based group), or (if you are meeting as a school-based group) their plans to introduce it to others at their churches.

Topic 1

Having a Heart for People at Your School

It is easy to think “political” or “legal” when you think of Christian involvement in public schools. For years, public school involvement for Christians has been defined as confrontation, protest, and petitions. There is a time and place for politics and legal action. However, if we are going to have lasting cultural impact we need to think differently. I like to think of it as “relational activism”—that is, being intentional about your positive influence on those within your spheres of activity.

In this first study topic, you will learn the five steps essential to being successful in helping those around you move from fear to freedom so they can confidently help students learn about the Bible and Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values.

I call them the five steps of F.A.I.T.H.:

Lesson 1 **Focus on Those Around You**

Lesson 2 **Ask God to Open Doors**

Lesson 3 **Invest in Preparation**

Lesson 4 **Take a Step of Faith With God &
Help Someone Move From Fear to Freedom**

Lesson 1

Focus on those around you

Key Verse

“And when he saw him, he had compassion.” Luke 10:33

Begin your study by reading the Key Verse and praying that God will speak to you through His word.

Turn in your Bible and read Luke 10:25-37. This is the story of the Good Samaritan and it applies well to the first of the five essential steps of F.A.I.T.H. The “F” stands for Focus on those around you.

Jericho is about eighteen miles from Jerusalem and the road between the two was a notorious hideout for thieves and robbers. Many priests who ministered in Jerusalem lived in Jericho. The people who heard Jesus tell this story knew such a scenario was a very real possibility.

Verse 30 says that a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho “fell among” thieves. The term literally means thieves surrounded him.

What three things did the thieves do to the man?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Read verses 31-33. Compassion distinguished the Samaritan from the priest and the Levite. Use a dictionary and write the definition of the word *compassion*:

The Samaritan could have been headed to Jericho to conduct business, or visit a relative, or deliver a package. He didn’t set out that day to help a wounded man. It was an inconvenience, it delayed him in his trip, and it cost him money.

As the Samaritan attended to the man in his path, so we should focus on those God has put in our path at school this year. Many of them are “walking wounded.” Everyone needs our love and compassion. It may be that they face personal frustrations, heartaches, and setbacks and need a listening ear or a helping hand.

In comparing the story to your experience in public schools, there are people who, at some point in their lives, have been surrounded by others who intellectually stripped them, emotionally beat them, and left them totally defeated—half dead when it comes to a proper understanding of the “separation of church and state.”

Maybe they have been intellectually or emotionally “beaten down” by a professor while studying to become a teacher; or maybe this happened because of an administrator, a colleague, an angry parent, or the news media.

They’ve been stripped of what belonged to them—an understanding of America’s Christian heritage or their appreciation for how the Bible relates to their academic subject matter.

They've been emotionally beaten down—intimidated—by “the system.” For example, they live in fear of getting in trouble if they teach about the birth of Jesus at Christmas, or allow a student to include his faith in a school assignment.

They are only “half alive” when it comes to understanding America’s Judeo-Christian foundation and, if they are Christians, they feel they cannot, in any way, integrate a Biblical worldview with the subject matter.

Have you personally felt this kind of “wounding”? Yes No



If “yes,” briefly describe the circumstance and be ready to share about it with your group.

If you have seen this kind of “wounding” at your school, briefly describe it and be ready to share about it in your group.

Who has God put in your immediate path related to public schools? It could be people at your school, your church, your friends, or neighbors. Your list may have five names or it may have twenty-five. Write the names of teachers, parents, and administrators within your sphere of activity.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____

14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Copy this list onto a note and put it in a place where you will see it frequently, such as on your refrigerator, in your Bible, by your night stand, or in your daily planner.



Be prepared to share with your Gateways Bible Study group where you placed your list.

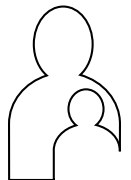
Prayer

“Lord, give me the eyes to see the needs of those You’ve put in my path.”

Teaching Your Children

Many of your children’s classmates come to school wounded emotionally, physically, and spiritually. You can help your children open their eyes to the classmates God has placed in their paths.

1. Read the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) with your children.
2. Ask them to think about ways that their classmates might be emotionally stripped, beaten, and left totally defeated. (Bullying, teasing, name-calling, embarrassment, etc.)
3. Discuss ways your children can be like the Good Samaritan to others at school.
4. Have your children each think of one classmate they could be kind to and help heal some wounding. Discuss that child’s situation.
5. Lead your children in a prayer for those wounded children, asking God to help them see an opportunity to be a Good Samaritan.



Lesson 2

Ask God to open doors

Key Verse

“Continue earnestly in prayer...that God would open to us a door...” Colossians 4:2-3

Begin your study by reading the Key Verse and praying that God will speak to you through His word.

In lesson one, you studied the importance of focusing on those around you, and you wrote a list of the people you regularly encounter in your sphere of influence. That may have been the first time you thought about these people as your opportunities from God. Now you may be asking what you should do next. The best place to find the answer is to ask God.

Prayer is so important that even Jesus prayed regularly. He is both fully God and fully human. Speaking from his humanity in John 5:19, Jesus says “the Son can do nothing Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”

Read John 5:30 and fill in the blanks:

“I do not seek My own _____ but _____ who sent Me.”

Jesus modeled for us the kind of communication we should have with the Father.

Read 1 John 5:14-15 and fill in the blanks:

“...if we ask anything according to his _____, He hears us.”

Read Romans 8:5. What does it mean to set your mind on the things of the Spirit?

Read Galatians 2:20. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ?

Read Colossians 3:1-4. What does Paul say we should be seeking?

In Galatians 5:24, Paul tells us we are to die to our own passions and desires—in other words, our own agendas. Instead, we are to live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit—that is, live with a passion and desire for the priorities that God has.

It is easy to treat God like our genie—our servant. Instead of focusing on God’s passions and desires for the world, we focus on our agendas.

For those in your sphere of activity, pray regularly that God will open doors of opportunity for you to be a blessing to them in word and deed. Ask the Lord for opportunities to cultivate relationships and plant seeds of love and truth.

Certainly, we can, and should, ask God for specific requests. Such requests remind us of our dependence on Him. To cry out to God for His blessing is a humble acknowledgement of our need for Him. The main challenge is to make our petitions with an openness to accept God's will.

Asking God Questions

Since we don't know what God has planned for the people with whom we come in contact in our schools, these prayers should include seeking His direction—asking questions of the Master:

- “Lord, help me see why You put so-and-so in my path. How can I be a blessing to her?”
- “Lord, what are You doing in so-and-so's life, and how do You want me to be part of that?”

Read what Paul wanted people to pray for in Colossians 4:2-4. His request was focused on his mission, which was in line with God's passion and desire.

Praying for open doors helps us think about the needs of those who are the object of our prayers. As you pray, think about what you know of the person, conversations you've had, situations that person is in, stresses he or she may be facing. Opportunities can be as simple as sending a “get well” card to the principal who is sick.

Opening Doors to Some Place

The idea of “open doors” implies doors that open to some place. Think about what place you hope a door will open to. An open door may involve passing along information on religious liberty at school which leads to the teacher or principal promoting freedom of expression. An open door may involve giving a teacher information on how to appropriately teach about the birth of Jesus which will lead to her moving to the “place” of experiencing greater academic freedom during the Christmas season.

Think about your current situation with those in your sphere of activity. Check the boxes that represent “places” you would like to see God open doors.

(Note: While you may be tempted to check all the boxes, it may be best to pray for various things at different times throughout the year. Choose a few to focus on for now.)

- A more welcoming relationship that allows for further conversations
- An opportunity to let the person know I'll pray for their health, circumstance, etc.
- Acknowledging the religious aspects of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter
- Adding Christmas carols to the music program
- Avoiding the occult themes of Halloween
- Teaching students what the Pledge of Allegiance means by “One nation under God”
- Teaching the significance of Biblical characters
- Including Biblical phrases that we read in literature and use in everyday speech
- Including a few of Solomon's proverbs as famous quotes for history or language arts
- Explaining the Biblical allusions Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. used in his writing and speaking
- Teaching about the Biblical perspective of America's Founding Fathers
- Seeing my school offer an elective class on the Bible

- Teaching the meaning of prominent Jewish holidays such as Passover and Yom Kippur
- Informing students of their religious freedom of expression at school
- Choosing a more wholesome book for a classroom reading assignment
- A willingness to provide balance to a biased textbook
- Acknowledging various faith-based perspectives on academic subjects
- Teaching students about the theory of Intelligent Design
- Confidently teaching what state academic standards allow regarding Christianity
- Starting or helping with an after-school Bible club for students
- Helping with or starting a campus ministry for students
- Teachers forming a prayer group among themselves
- Seeing someone have a fresh start with God through faith in Jesus Christ
- Seeing more people from my school join my Gateways Bible Study
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Be prepared to discuss your choices with your Gateways Bible study group.



Review the list of people within your sphere of activity (from lesson one). Are there key people on your list who might move to the “places” you checked above if God opened a door for you? If so, list them below and be prepared to discuss these opportunities with your group.



Prayer

“Lord, help me align my passions and desires with Yours for my public school. Show me what You are doing in the lives of people around me, and guide me to join You in your work to bless them and help them move from fear to freedom.”

Lesson 3 Invest in Preparation

Key Verse

“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside...that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” Colossians 4:5-6

Begin your study by reading the Key Verse and praying that God will speak to you through His word.

In lesson two, you studied about praying for those in your sphere of activity. You pondered a number of “places” to which you might like to see God open doors. In this study you will look at being prepared when God answers your prayer and opens a door of opportunity for you. There are three areas you will want to focus on in your preparation: (1) Preparing your attitude; (2) Preparing your eyesight; and (3) Preparing your information. Let’s examine each one.

Preparing Your Attitude

Read Colossians 4:6 and fill in the blanks:

“Let your speech always be with _____, seasoned with _____, that you may know how you _____ to answer each one.”

Write a definition of grace: _____

Jot a note and be prepared to share an example (real or hypothetical) of how speaking with grace would apply in a public school setting.



Discussion

In verse six, Paul refers to seasoning your speech with salt. In the ancient world, sharing salt was a symbol of hospitality. For Israel, it was also a symbol of covenant relationship. In Leviticus 2:13, God commanded the people to include salt in their grain sacrifices. Commentators vary in their views on what this symbolizes. Descriptions include a covenant of preservation, protection, and purity. For purposes of how you talk to those around you, we can conclude that Paul is encouraging you to use words that are hospitable, winsome, and uplifting.

Choose why you add table salt to your meals.

To make it better To make it bitter

When talking to people at your school, your conversation should make them:

Better people Bitter people

This is how Paul tells us we “ought to answer each one.” (Colossians 4:6)

Prepare Your Eyesight

It is easy to pray without looking for how God may answer your prayer. However, when you pray with anticipation of seeing God move, you can have the exciting experience of seeing God at work.

Read Hebrews 11:6. In this verse, what two things must we do?

_____ that He is, and diligently _____ Him.

What does it mean to seek Him? If you have believed in Christ as your Savior, you have “found” Him. So, what does it mean to seek God in your life? If your child was outside playing and you go seek him, what are you doing? You are looking for his presence. Since God is spirit, He makes Himself evident in His activity around you.

Read Psalm 123:2. What are the servant and the maid doing in this verse?

These two verses indicate that we are to look for the Lord to answer our prayers—actually look! In our previous study (lesson 2), we examined praying in the form of a question—“Lord, why did you put so-and-so in my life?” You can combine this with a prayer request, “Lord, did You place me in her life so I can help her to teach her students about Jesus this Christmas? If so, help me see how.”

When the master in Psalm 123:2 gestures a command to his servant, that servant better be prepared to act. Likewise, if you are praying for an improvement in some aspect of your school, you need to be preparing yourself for when the Master gestures for you to act.

Spectrum of Views

There are three ways that people can look at the issue of religion and public schools. They are reflected in the boxes below.

Evangelization	Integration	Separation
<p>“My faith compels me to try to convince others to adopt my beliefs.”</p> <p>In class it leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers violating the law <p>Is allowed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In student free speech• In student homework• In after-school clubs• In conversations between willing adults	<p>“An educated person needs to have an academic appreciation for Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values.”</p> <p>In class it leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom of expression• Well-rounded education• Cultural preservation <p>Is allowed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the classroom• In music, art, and drama	<p>“Separation of Church and state requires us to shield our schools from religion.”</p> <p>In class it leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Censorship• Civil liberties violations• Incomplete education <p>Is allowed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the privacy of one’s own home

How does knowing these three distinctions in the “Spectrum of Views” give you more clarity in how to address issues of religion in a public school setting?



You Don’t Need to Be the Expert

Preparing your information doesn’t mean you have to be a legal or academic expert. It means preparing yourself to give the right information to the right person at the right time. At Gateways, we have both printed and online resources so you can do that.

Visit www.gtbe.org right now. At the home page, click on “News & Articles,” then click on “Articles.” Spend some time exploring articles that may help you with topics of interest you indicated in the last lesson.

So you can help others in your Gateways Bible Study, write down the names of the articles you found particularly useful. Be prepared to share your findings.



Prayer

“Lord, help me prepare my attitude, my eyesight, and my information to be a blessing to those You’ve put in my path.”

Lesson 4

Take a Step of Faith With God

&

Help Someone Move From Fear to Freedom

Key Verse

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

You’ve made a list of the people God has placed in your path; you’ve been praying for them, and you’ve been preparing. Now, as God opens a door, take a step of faith with Him. God is at work in your school. He wants you to walk with Him.

Read Micah 6:8. What does God require of you?

To do _____

To love _____

To walk _____

Jesus explained his mission in Luke 4:18. Read it and write a brief answer summarizing what Jesus said about setting people free.

God is about the business of setting people free. That’s the direction He is walking in the world, in your community, and in your schools. When you are walking with God, you are joining Him in setting yourself and others free because that’s what He is about.

The reason Paul writes in Romans 10:15 that people’s feet are beautiful is because they are feet that are walking with God. They are “on mission” with Him. When you do this you are bringing “glad tidings (news) of good things!” You are part of “setting the captives free.”

What hesitations might you have about taking a step of faith with God when He opens a door for you at your school? Briefly note it and be ready to share it with your Gateways Bible Study group.



Help Someone Move From Fear to Freedom

You have the good news of the Gospel to bring to people you encounter. You also have the good news of academic freedom to share with people within your schools. Many are captives of misinformation. They have been misinformed about the meaning of the separation of church and state. Many of them—especially like-minded Christians—suffer under this wrong thinking. They want to help their students gain an appropriate academic appreciation for the Bible and Christianity, but they are afraid. You have good news for them!



Read Colossians 2:8. This is Paul’s warning to believers. Think about the many believers in your school or people in your church who are involved in public schools. How do you think some of them have been “taken captive through hollow and deceptive” ideas, or “human traditions” regarding the place for teaching about the Bible and Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values in your school?

Understanding that you may just be getting started on this journey with God in your schools, have you yet seen someone begin to move from fear to freedom because of information you’ve shared with him or her?

Look at your school like your own garden to tend. Much of what you do will be “seed planting.” It may not “sprout” immediately. Keep in mind that for the last twenty years the educators in your school may have only heard all that *cannot* be done in schools regarding religion. They may be captives to the notion that it is inappropriate or even illegal to mention the Bible or some aspect of Christianity. Even if they know that it is permissible to teach about these things, they may be living in fear that they will get in trouble from an administrator or a parent.

Read Luke 8: 5-8. Which option below do you think best fits how you should respond in your school based on the parable Jesus told?

- Only sow seed in fertile soil
- Move to another field
- Get angry at the rocky soil
- Keep on sowing

Prayer

“Lord, give me the courage to move from fear to freedom myself so I can take a step of faith with You when You open a door of opportunity for me.”