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# Introduction

God established a testimony through His acts of faithfulness and power in the Old Testament and through the words of the prophets (Psalm 78:5; Hebrews 1:1). In the New Testament, God has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus revealed to us the nature of the Father (John 17:26). He spoke the words of the Father (John 17:14). He was a reflection of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). And He welcomed children into His Father's kingdom (Matthew 18:5; 19:14).

We have been commanded to acquaint the next generation with both the acts and the words of God. When we blend our own hearts of faith and affection for God with the powerful testimony of the character and acts of Jesus, the living Son of God, and with God's ongoing work in the life of the church, the Word of God can go forth with power, conviction, and conversion. We can show little children the greatness of God.

This is the purpose of *He Has Spoken By His Son*. By showing children the heart of God through New Testament stories, we have the privilege of being part of God's work in their hearts to set their hope in Him (Psalm 78:5-7).

## Curriculum Overview

*He Has Spoken by His Son* consists of 52 chronologically arranged New Testament story references and the key themes found in each story. Each lesson also includes the main storyline, an opening illustration (called the Hook), possible review and application discussion points (called the Look), an accompanying coloring book page, and a take-home page for parents. In some cases, there may be visuals. In addition, there is a teacher preparation page for each lesson to help guide the teacher in preparing to teach the lesson.

The intent of this curriculum is to acquaint young children with a big picture of God and to build a foundation of Bible doctrine for them. The key themes are emphasized repeatedly, not only so they will be remembered by these young children, but also to show the amazing consistency of a God who never changes. Stories are not written out. Instead, the teacher is encouraged to study the Scripture and the key themes, and to rely on God's work in his heart to reveal Himself through the story. The teacher is then encouraged to tell the story in his own words, weaving in one or more of the key themes.

## Intended Audience

Although intended for preschoolers, *He Has Spoken by His Son* can be used with kindergartners and lower-elementary-age children as well. The teachers need only adapt their vocabulary and explanations to the age group they are teaching. Preschool children should be told story summaries in very simple language, emphasizing one to three key themes. For older children, more details can be added to the story and the themes can be more complex and explained more completely.

## Distinctions of *He Has Spoken By His Son*

The approach used in *He Has Spoken By His Son* to acquainting young children with God's Word is marked by four distinctions.

### 1. Comprehensive Approach Leading Toward Teaching the Whole Counsel of God

Children love repetition. They love to hear their favorite stories over and over. Repeating the same Bible stories to a very young child is a good way for that child to remember and begin to understand those stories.

At the same time, although repetition is helpful, especially for toddlers, preschool children are often told the same stories over and over while vast portions of Scripture are overlooked. While it is helpful for young children to hear the same stories repeated many times, it should not be to the exclusion of hearing other Bible stories. Sometimes, by the time a child reaches the age of five, he has heard the story of “Noah and the Ark” numerous times. But many other stories, such as the bronze serpent, an idol called Dagon, Ahab, Ananias and Sapphira, and Simon the magician have been hidden from them. If “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16), limiting the Scripture a child is exposed to can also limit his view of God. It is hard to truly conceive of the faithfulness of God unless you have seen His patience and mercy toward Israel time and time again. But if you have seen story after story in which God forgives His people and calls them back to Himself even though they repeatedly reject Him, you begin to understand that God is a faithful God. When God is consistently shown as unchanging in many different stories, the impression is made that God never changes. Concepts such as these are much harder to grasp when children are exposed to a limited number of stories.

In using *He Has Spoken By His Son* and its Old Testament companion, *He Established a Testimony*, you will acquaint young children with 104 to 116 different Bible stories (depending on whether you choose the 52- or the 64-lesson option for the Old Testament curriculum). This will give young children a fairly comprehensive knowledge of key Bible stories and prepare them to benefit from the other curricula in our scope and sequence. These two curricula, combined with the other Truth78 curricula, will give children an understanding of a vast number of Bible stories and Bible passages, a robust understanding of biblical doctrine, and a fairly comprehensive knowledge of God’s character.

Perhaps the most common criticism of teaching the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) to young children is that some stories are not appropriate for children. Stories deemed inappropriate are those with content that is too mature for children (such as Potiphar’s wife’s attempt to seduce Joseph, David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba, or Herod’s evil order to kill children under age two) or too violent for children (such as Israel’s annihilation of whole cities, including livestock, women, and children).

Rather than dismiss a whole story because of age-level inappropriate content, it is often possible that such content can be omitted from the story or tactfully presented. For example, in the case of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, the story could be told as, “Potiphar’s wife wanted Joseph to do something wrong.” David and Bathsheba can be presented as, “David saw Bathsheba and wanted her to be his wife instead of Uriah’s wife, so David brought Bathsheba to his palace and treated her like his wife instead of like a friend.” Herod’s order can be summed up as, “Herod was a very, very bad king. He did not want Jesus to live and grow up. But he didn’t know who Jesus was. So he told his soldiers to not let any children younger than two years old live. Omitting details or softening the language often solves the problem of inappropriate content.

Fairy tales and other children’s stories are often wrought with violence. Red Riding Hood’s grandmother is eaten by a wolf, which is later chopped apart by a woodsman, and the three little pigs boil the wolf in a pot of water, and yet we tell these stories to children. In addition, children are exposed to vast quantities of graphic violence through the mass media. It seems more appropriate to limit this viewing than to limit exposure to the Bible due to violence. Screen violence is often senseless and motivated from a heart of hate or is shown as *fun*, as in cartoons.

On the other hand, the violence in the Bible (which can be told in a tactful rather than graphic way) is due to a holy God’s intolerance of evil. Violence in the Bible is always either the result of the consequences of sin or is shown as a sinful act. God’s judgment is never meted out arbitrarily but is always a just punishment. Children usually don’t have a problem with this because they have such a sense of fairness. In addition, it is not a bad thing for children to see the wrath of God and to gain a respect for the consequences of sin or to learn to loathe sin. It is a wonderful thing for them to see that often punishment was well-deserved, yet God extended mercy and forgiveness.

## 2. A God-Centered Emphasis

So often the Bible is used as a tool to teach children to be *good little girls and boys*, and the stories in the Bible are told with this framework in mind. The story of Moses in the bulrushes becomes a lesson on helpfulness: Miriam helped her mother by watching her baby brother in the Nile. David facing Goliath is an example of courage, and the feeding of the 5,000 becomes a lesson on sharing (e.g., “A Little Boy Shares His Lunch”). In addition, the lessons become very *me-centered*: God loves ME, God cares for ME, God provides for ME, God hears ME when I pray, and so forth. So often the attention is focused on man rather than on God.

The main purpose of the Bible is to instill faith by revealing the character of God. Rather than focusing on man and his needs, God is the main character in the Bible. Instead of Moses in the bulrushes being a lesson on helpfulness, it is in fact the story of our faithful God, in His love and compassion for Israel, honoring His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make of them a great nation, and rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt. It is the story of our sovereign God imposing His will on Pharaoh and defeating Satan’s evil scheme by delivering His people with His mighty arm because He is all-powerful, He is faithful to His people, and He always accomplishes His purposes. It is the story of God showing Egypt that He is the LORD! (Exodus 7:1-5).

In every Bible story we read (or tell), we should ask ourselves, “What does this say about God?” As we get to know God better through encountering Him in the Word, and experiencing Him in daily life, faith grows. Good morals then grow out of an admiration for God’s character. We tend to imitate those whom we admire. As we admire God’s character more, we have a greater sense of our own sinfulness and inability to live holy lives, which pushes us to repentance and dependency on God.

## 3. A Chronological Approach

The Bible is one continuous, interconnected story, not a collection of independent, individual stories. When stories are not told in relation to each other, the themes of Scripture, which are woven all through the Bible, are often missed. With a chronological approach, it is easier to see how everything fits together. The Moses in the bulrushes story is understood to be the same Moses who receives the Ten Commandments. David the shepherd boy grows up and becomes the king of Israel. As people are born and then die, as one king comes on the scene and then is removed, and as one situation arises and then is resolved leading to another, God is seen as the great constant in all of life. He is unchanging through all the years of biblical history. He is always present with His people. He is eternal, unlike everyone else. The Bible repeats the same themes over and over—it is the story of the character of God, and He never changes.

If a child hears merely a conglomeration of miracle and high adventure stories, it reduces the Bible to sounding mythical. Is it any easier to believe a story of a sea being split in half, a donkey speaking, or bread and fish multiplying than to believe a story of a child who meets a talking wolf on the way to grandmother’s house? Bible stories become believable as they are placed in the context of everyday life with the fabric of God’s character woven in and out of every event.

Not every study of the Bible needs to be chronological, but it is important to have a strong chronological foundation, especially for children, before branching off into topical studies. Once the character of God and the themes of the Bible are firmly established in a child’s mind, and hopefully in his heart, then other kinds of studies can be attempted because everything will then be understood in the context of the big picture. A study of the mercy of God cannot be fully understood or appreciated without first seeing how Israel continually rejected God and turned to idols, and how God repeatedly punished His people in order to bring them back to Himself and forgive their sins. When it is obvious to the reader of Scripture that man continually sins and is incapable of saving himself, God’s grace causes rejoicing and thanksgiving.

In order to stay true to the intent of Scripture, it is important to study a passage in context—not just its immediate context but also the foundation leading to it. A chronological approach shows the conclusion of a matter and therefore demonstrates that God’s way is always best. As the events and life stories of biblical characters unfold, the truth of Scripture is often driven into the heart as these histories and biographies come to a conclusion. The folly of Israel demanding a king and rejecting God’s kingship is fully realized by studying the life of Israel under the influence of its kings. The wisdom of God’s prohibition to intermarry with the heathen nations is obvious when we see how Solomon’s wives turned his heart from God. God is revered as a promise-keeper when we see the Messianic promises in the Old Testament being fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the Son of the living God.

Because Scripture progressively reveals who God is and how He works in our world, a chronological approach builds on elementary knowledge and understanding and matures faith step by step. Who would want to miss any part of this great story? Why approach the Bible haphazardly and run the risk of missing portions of God’s truth? Why settle for scattered pieces of this continuous story when such richness and depth of understanding and faith can be gained? Why see events and people when you can see the character and heart of the Almighty God?

Admittedly, the two studies—*He Established a Testimony* and *He Has Spoken By His Son*—are limited in their scope, and therefore cannot establish a complete chronology, but they are a good starting point for preschoolers and do establish at least a partial framework for understanding the Bible as a whole. Our recommendation is that this be followed up in the elementary years by reading *More Than a Story: Old Testament* and *More Than a Story: New Testament* (both published by Truth78.)

#### 4. Emphasis on Teaching the Bible from the Heart through Personal Study

The Bible is not just information that a child needs to know. It is the life-transforming, living Word of God, which can penetrate our children’s hearts with faith, conviction, comfort, encouragement, and wisdom. Though the work of true heart persuasion can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, we can be the means the Holy Spirit uses to impart the living Word of God, so it lands with power and influence. We need not be master teachers, but we must be people under the guidance of the Master. The Bible taught from a heart engaged in communion with and affection for God can be contagious. In order to teach from the heart, our hearts must first be moved upon by the Holy Spirit. Then we will be able to teach from the overflow of our own heart. Though the Holy Spirit can work through an unprepared heart, how much better it is to share from our own interaction with God through His Word.

For this reason, the stories in *He Has Spoken By His Son* are not written out for the teacher to read to the children. *Reading is not teaching, and parroting someone else’s words is not the same as telling a story you have studied, mulled over, prayed through, wrestled with, rejoiced in, marveled at, wept over, and been convicted by through God’s Word.* Our goal is to instruct the mind, engage the heart, and influence the will of the child.

### The Curriculum

*He Has Spoken By His Son* is intended to immediately follow *He Established a Testimony*. We have chosen 52 key stories from Scripture either because of what they reveal about the character of Jesus or because they preserve the storyline, and we have presented them in chronological order. The curriculum is intended to cover one full year, telling one story a week. However, if it is being used at home, it can be used more frequently and repeated through the preschool years.

Each lesson is comprised of the following components:



### Lesson Title

The titles have been carefully chosen to reflect God as the main character in biblical history. They point to His sovereign work through the generations:

- Jesus, the Bread of Life, Provides Bread for 5,000 (not A Little Boy Shares His Lunch)
- A Faithful Father Welcomes Back His Lost Son (not The Prodigal Son)
- Jesus Comes to Seek and to Save Zacchaeus (not Zacchaeus, the Wee Little Man)

The titles are worded for the teachers and are intended to reflect a God-centered approach to the story. The titles are appropriate for school-age children, but if you are teaching preschoolers you may need to simplify some of the language in the titles (e.g., Jesus Feeds 5,000 People).

### Scripture References

It is our contention that the best way to prepare to tell a Bible story is to study the passage of Scripture on your own. By asking God to make that Scripture live in your heart and by wrestling with the passage, you will present more depth and heart in your teaching. Reading a story in a Sunday school quarterly cannot compare with interacting with the living, inspired Word of God—one process encourages teaching from the head, while the other encourages teaching from the heart.

The process we would suggest is to study the Bible passage early in the week, review it often, mull over it, pray for wisdom and inspiration all week long, and ask God to make that passage real to you. A team-teaching approach where each person teaches every other week, thus having two weeks of preparation, would be ideal.

### Key Themes

Each Bible story lists possible themes to emphasize in telling the story. The list is not exhaustive but suggests some possible themes. It may not be possible or desirable to emphasize every theme listed, but they may all enhance your own personal study. In telling the Bible story for young children, one or two themes will be all they will be able to comprehend. Each time you tell the story, you may choose a different theme or themes to emphasize. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you seek to discern what your students need that week and where God is moving in their lives. The themes should be woven naturally through the story and repeated often. Although, at first glance, some of the themes seem difficult to understand, with some careful thought they can be brought down to a child's level. The following are a few examples.

#### ▪ **Jesus is all-powerful. Jesus is the highest authority.**

*Jesus just told the storm to be still. All He did was talk. Jesus is so powerful that His words can stop a storm. Jesus can do anything. Nothing is too hard for Jesus. When Jesus told the storm to be still, the storm stopped. The wind obeyed Jesus. Jesus is in charge of everything. He is greater than the wind or big storms. Even the wind and storms have to listen to and obey Jesus. Jesus is the boss of everything. Nothing is greater than Jesus.*

#### ▪ **God knows everything.**

*Jesus told Thomas to touch His hands—where the nails had been. He told Thomas to touch His side. Jesus knew what Thomas had said. He knew that Thomas did not believe that He had risen from the dead. Jesus knows everything.”*

OR

*Jesus told the disciples, “Throw your net over the right side of the boat. There are fish there.” How did Jesus know that? He wasn’t even in the boat. Jesus knows everything. He even knows where fish hide.*

■ **God is sovereign.**

*The disciples asked Jesus to send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food. But Jesus told the disciples, “You give them something to eat.” Jesus had the right to tell them what to do because He is in charge. He is greater than anyone else.*

OR

*God sent Philip to tell the Ethiopian man about Jesus. God put Philip in just the right place at just the right time so that He would meet the man on the road. God is in control of all things.*

OR

*When the disciples tried to pull up the net, they couldn’t because it was so full of fish. Jesus put the fish there for the disciples. He commanded the fish to swim into the nets. And the fish did just as Jesus said. Jesus is in charge of all things—even fish.*

These examples illustrate how complex themes can be simplified. You will probably want to illustrate the themes concretely or flesh them out a little more. Merely mentioning the theme may not be enough. In some cases, however, a simple statement like “God can do anything” will sufficiently communicate your theme. Repeating the theme a number of times in the same story is a great way for children to grasp the theme. With young children, you will need to choose one or two themes to stress. With older children, you may be able to stress more themes.

By emphasizing key themes, you will not only be acquainting children with Bible stories, but you will also be teaching them doctrine. For example, telling how God provided oil for a widow to pay her debts so her children would not be sold is a story, while telling that God is good is theology. Both of these things can be taught at the same time simply by showing the character of God in the story. If these themes are emphasized repeatedly throughout different stories, a preschooler can actually acquire a simple theology. A list of the key themes emphasized throughout the curriculum appears in the appendix.

## Main Storyline

The main storyline is *not* intended to be the story the teacher tells. This is information for the teacher only and is simply an accounting of the major events in the story. It does not present how the story should be told, which details should be included, or which biblical theme should be emphasized. It just records the facts with no emphasis or manner of presentation. *Please note that the main storyline is far too complex for preschoolers.* The storyline is meant to give the teacher a synopsis of the biblical event—a context for the story the teacher will tell the child. Since the curriculum could easily be used with children in the early elementary school ages, the additional details may be helpful to the teacher.

After reading and praying through the Bible passage/s several times, the teacher will need to discern which key theme/s the Holy Spirit is leading him to emphasize, the vocabulary to use, and the manner in which to present the truths of the story. Reading the main storyline is just meant to help the teacher sort out the information. To read the main storyline to the class would be *reading*, not *teaching*. The vocabulary would not be appropriate for the children, no spiritual emphasis would be made, no commentary on the passage included, no creative storytelling incorporated, and no Bible verses would be read.

The Teacher Preparation Page is the tool to use to actually structure your lesson, note the key theme/s to emphasize, include a verse to read/explain, and note your approach to telling the story. Do not neglect your own study of the

Word and miss the work God will do in your heart and the blessing you will receive in thinking through the biblical truths and shaping the story presentation.

### Hooks

Each lesson has at least one idea for introducing the story. (See a more complete explanation in the “Building a Lesson” portion of this introduction.)

### Looks

This section contains ideas for helping children become aware of the relationship of the truth in Scripture to their lives. (See a more complete explanation in the “Building a Lesson” portion of this introduction.)

## Building A Lesson

In his book *Creative Bible Teaching*, Larry Richards describes the four elements of a good lesson as the Hook, Book, Look, and Took.<sup>1</sup>

### Hook

The Hook of the lesson is the attention-getter. Its main purpose is to lead into the lesson by grabbing and focusing a child’s attention. It should give the child a reason for listening to the lesson and lead naturally into the rest of the lesson. It may also be used to help children understand a concept they will need to understand in the story. Some examples follow.

- Bring in significantly fewer number of pieces of candy than the number of children in the class. Show the children the candy and talk about the problem of so few pieces. Then ask the children, “How would I get more pieces of candy? I would have to go to the store and buy more candy. Could I just say to the candy, ‘Let there be more candy’? No. I can’t just speak to make more candy show up on this plate.” Use this as a lead-in to the story “Jesus, the Bread of Life, Provides Bread for 5,000.”
- Call a child with a cut to the front of the class, and show him what it would be like to have a lot of sores. For example, “What if you had two owies? How about if you had owies all over your arm? How about if you had them on your arms, legs, face, and hands? What if these owies would not get better, and no doctor could ever help you?” Use this as a lead-in to the story about the healing of the ten lepers.
- Show the children a big heavy chain and a big lock. “If you were locked up with this chain and this lock, could you break them and get free?” Have a child or two try to break the chain or the lock. “Do you think a big daddy could break the chain?” Have a man come forward and try to break the chain and open the lock. “Who do you think is strong enough to break the chain?” Use this as a lead-in to Peter’s rescue from jail.

Unless the Hook is used to help the children understand a concept that will be introduced in the story, the Hook should be very simple. A pitfall to avoid is spending too much time on the Hook, with the result being that the rest of the lesson must be rushed. The Hook should be done very quickly. It is merely a lead-in to the lesson.

The way you want to tell the story will help determine the best Hook for the story. Most of the Hooks used in the curriculum are fairly generic, but you may think of a particular Hook that will work better for your story. As you become more familiar and practiced in using the Hook ideas, it will become easier to think of your own.

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete explanation, see: Lawrence Richards, *Creative Bible Teaching*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 108-113.



**Note:** In the Hooks section, there are sometimes answers to suggested questions. You will find these answers in [brackets] to set them apart from the questions.

## Book

The “book” is the telling of the Bible story. Struggling with the Bible passage is essential preparation for telling a Bible story. Pray, meditate, and wrestle over what God is saying about Himself in the passage. Ask God to make the passage real to you and show you how to communicate its truths to the children you are teaching. Reading a story from a Bible storybook as preparation for telling a story rather than from the Bible tends to bypass the heart. It encourages speaking from the head about the facts of a story you know rather than speaking from the heart about a passage of Scripture you have struggled with, and which God has made real to you. This is why the use of Bible storybooks is recommended only as an example of how to summarize a long passage.

When the story is told, it should always be told in light of the following question: “What does this passage say about God?” The Bible reveals the character of God, and the central figure in biblical history is God. The Bible story should be told as a revelation of the character and work of God.

## Steps for Preparing to Tell the Bible Story

- Read the passage several times. Become very familiar with the text.
- Try to find the themes in the Bible text.
- Meditate on the passage and the themes and pray that God will touch your heart with the truth. Pray that He will show you what themes to emphasize to the children.
- Decide on the themes you will emphasize.
- Decide how you will tell the story. It is helpful in deciding how to tell the story to ask yourself the following questions:
  1. What details can be omitted? What can be summarized, and how should I do it?
  2. Are there terms or concepts that I need to explain? How will I do that?
  3. Is there anything I need to review? How will I do that?
  4. Are there questions I will ask? Which questions are rhetorical questions, and which questions require answers? How do I expect the children to answer the questions? Have I asked the question in such a way that the children understand how to answer the question?
  5. What vocabulary will I use to tell the story? Are any of the words I am using too difficult for the children? If you are teaching preschoolers, check all your words and use the simplest words you can. Even though a word may be familiar to a three-year-old or a four-year-old you know, you will be teaching children of differing verbal skills. In a class of children, there can be a wide range of ability. Therefore, you will need to choose language that will be understandable to the children with poor verbal skills. Then all the children will understand the story, not just the most articulate. Many Bible stories contain words that would not be familiar to the children, such as “idol,” “ark,” or “mercy.” These unfamiliar words can be used, but they must be explained or defined in terms the children will understand.
  6. Are there verses I should read directly from the story in the Bible? How will I read them? (See the “Reading Bible Verses to Young Children” section in this introduction.)
  7. How can I encourage the children to participate in the story?
  8. What visuals will I use? (See the “Visuals” section in this introduction.)

### 9. What application will I make to the children's lives?

- Decide on the Hook idea for your story.
- Make notes to follow while telling the story.
- Gather your visuals.
- Practice telling the story aloud.

## How To Summarize Bible Stories

In telling Bible stories to little children, do not attempt to communicate details of the story unless they are pertinent. Many of the passages we have chosen for our stories are long and to tell every detail would bore children. For example: In the story about God hearing Cornelius' prayers and sending Peter to tell him the gospel, it would be very confusing to young children to hear every detail about Peter's dream. They don't have the background to understand what "unclean" animals meant in the Old Testament dietary laws. So it would be simpler and more understandable to tell the children that "God gave Peter a dream about different kinds of animals on a sheet so that Peter would understand that he should tell all different kinds of people about Jesus." This would convey the main idea of the text without confusing young children with the details.

Sometimes whole chapters can be summarized in a sentence or two. It is helpful to look at some Bible storybooks to see how they summarize stories. However, many Bible storybooks are not God-centered and do not emphasize doctrinal themes so they should not be used as a guide for how to tell the story.

## Review

Some of the stories in the curriculum are part of a series or unit of stories. These are stories that have something in common—often the same character or setting. One unit ends and the next begins at a natural shift in the Bible narrative, such as a change in or the passage of time (e.g., the stories about the birth of Jesus, or the stories of the death and resurrection of Jesus).

If you are team-teaching a class (two or more teachers), it may be best to split the teaching responsibilities according to unit rather than simply rotating. This way, a teacher can have an overall unit theme as well as the key theme/s for each story. Natural unit changes occur every four to six lessons, but the structuring of units is flexible enough to accommodate individual schedules.

Teaching units helps preserve the continuity of the Bible for children—especially if the teacher includes a brief unit review before telling a new story. Although children may be accustomed to a rather haphazard chronology of Bible stories, a distinction of this curriculum is the opportunity to begin to establish for them the unity and continuity of the Bible.

If you are doing a series of stories or a unit, it is helpful to briefly remind the children of what has happened to this point. The coloring book visuals can be very useful for this.

It is also helpful to remind the children of earlier promises or commands of God that have a direct bearing on the present story. For example, in presenting the story of the birth of Jesus, remind the children that God promised to send a Savior. Go back repeatedly to the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as you show the children God's faithfulness to Israel. In the story of the resurrection, be quick to point out to the children that Jesus rose from the dead just as He promised He would. In the story of Peter's denial of Jesus, remind the children that before it happened, Jesus said Peter would deny Him.

You may also want to refer back to a previous story in order to emphasize the same theme you are presenting or to help the children understand the concepts in the current story.

For example: In making the point that “Jesus is God” in the story of Jesus stilling the storm, you may want to remind them of other stories that show that Jesus is God: “Jesus could stop the wind and the waves because Jesus is God. He could turn the water into wine because Jesus is God. He could forgive the lame man’s sins and heal his legs because Jesus is God. Jesus can do all things because Jesus is God.”

All of these review techniques will help the children to realize that the Bible is one continuous interconnected story, rather than a collection of isolated stories. Review is also helpful in preserving links between stories. This is most crucial when starting a new unit, especially if teachers switch at that time. For young children to understand the chronology of the Bible, the story units must have some continuity, even though settings, characters, and teachers change. God stays the same. His character, His ways, and His plans do not change. Teachers need to plan how they will make this explicit. A special, slightly longer connection to past stories at the beginning of a unit can be helpful. Use the connection to reinforce the phrases, themes, and ideas that are being carried over from the previous unit, and to overview the new unit.

Most links between stories do not need to be lengthy or complicated. They usually fit naturally into the hook or into the beginning of the story. Some sort of reference needs to be made to the previous lesson, but it can be quite simple. For example, start the lesson by showing the coloring book visual from the previous lesson, and ask a question or two that leads into the current story. This will engage the students’ attention from the beginning of the story.

## Reading Bible Verses to Young Children

It is important not only to open the Bible and show children that the story you are telling them is from God’s special book, but also to read the actual words of the Bible to the children. God’s Word is powerful and effective and, even though young children may not understand the whole verse, they may understand part of the verse. It is also important for children to see that truth comes from God’s Bible, not from the teacher’s mouth. Reading the Bible verse will help the children to understand that these are God’s words, not the teacher’s words. Giving the children the visual picture of turning to the Bible for truth is also an important habit to cultivate even from a very young age.

How the Bible verse is read can help determine how understandable the verse is to the children. If it is read quickly and with no expression, young children will understand little of the verse. But if important points are read slowly and with expression, it will promote understanding.

Some verses are more important to read to the children. Verses that simply continue the narrative are not as important to read as verses that teach a key concept or contain the words that God speaks. For example, in telling the story of Jesus stilling the storm, you might want to read Mark 4:39 or 40:

**Mark 4:39—And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.** (Read the first part of the verse in a normal voice; read the second part loudly and boldly; read the third part expressing wonder or amazement—slowly and fading into a whisper at the words “great calm.”)

**Mark 4:40—He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”** (Read the second part with a sadness in your voice and shaking your head.)

In telling the story of God hearing Zechariah’s prayer and promising him a son, weave in this memory verse, reading it from the Bible:

**Luke 18:27—“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”**

In telling the same story, you may want to read Luke 1:13-16. It is not necessary with young children to read every single phrase of the verse. Some phrases can be skipped as shown below (skipped portions are bracketed):

**Luke 1:13-16—But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [<sup>14</sup>And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for] he will be great before the Lord. [And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.]<sup>16</sup> And he will turn many [of the children of Israel] to the Lord their God.**

After you have read a Bible verse, you may need to explain it a little or question the children to make sure they have understood the key point/s. For example: “Elizabeth will bear you a son means that Elizabeth will have a baby” or “What would John do?” Little by little, you will be teaching children to pay attention to Scripture and to begin to analyze Scripture. Even little children can learn to answer questions about Scripture texts such as, “What promise did God make?” or “What did God tell them to do?”

## Visuals

With young children, it is very important to use visuals. Visuals help to hold children’s attention and help them to understand the unfamiliar. For example, showing a picture or flannel board figures of Abram on a camel in a caravan will help them to understand the unusual mode of transportation and the barren conditions of the slow journey Abram faced.

We recommend using the Betty Lukens felt figures,<sup>2</sup> pictures, and actual objects. You may want to vary your approach to keep the children’s interest. Within the same story, you can also use different kinds of visuals. The more concretely you can illustrate the story, the better.

## Flannel Board

Flannel board or flannelgraph figures may seem like an outdated manner of telling a story. But little children love the felt figures. They like to help put the figures on the flannel board, when it is not distracting to have them do so. So although we may consider this to be old-fashioned, little children do not. It has the added benefit of providing much versatility in telling the Bible story. Unlike a picture, which is static and ties you to the concept it portrays, with flannel figures, you are able to create the scene, actions, and people you desire when telling the story.

The Betty Lukens Bible in Felt is a very versatile system. It is available in six-inch and 12-inch piece sizes. The six-inch size is easier to use and works well with small groups of children. But if you have a large group of children, the large size is easier for the children to see.

Although the accompanying manual suggests which pieces to use, the sheer number of pieces included allows a teacher to customize a story. We recommend that you use the accompanying Bible storybook only as an aid in choosing figures, and then develop your own God-centered story. This will mean at times using different or additional figures than those recommended in the manual for a particular story. Be aware that children can be distracted by details. For example:

“Teacher, Jesus is tied to the cross—there aren’t any nails!” (At this point just merely state, “The picture is wrong—the Bible says that the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross.” or “Maybe the nails are under the ropes and we can’t see them.”)

They will also notice if you select the figure they know as “Peter” to be “Paul,” or if you use “Jesus” in a crowd scene.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at [bettylukens.com](http://bettylukens.com) or by calling 800-541-9279. Note: We do not recommend telling the Bible story as it is told in the Betty Lukens manual.

Felt figures are designed to illustrate the physical action and settings of a story, not necessarily spiritual truth. At the beginning of each unit, or early in the week, you will need to prepare your story and check the pieces Betty Lukens provides so you can plan with them in mind. For example, you may discover that you can't show Pharaoh's chariots following Israel into the Red Sea because the Lukens chariot faces the wrong direction and is four inches taller than the parted walls of water. But you can use the chariot piece to show what a chariot is and then have your hands free to turn toward the class while you share the wonder of what God did.

A flannel board can be difficult to use and requires considerable practice to use effectively. But it is not necessary to be elaborate in your presentation. Some stories seem to require more than one background. It is much simpler to use only one background, even if that means perching Pharaoh's throne on a hillside. Or you could divide the board by adding a second background. You could also use a second scene board next to the first one. But in general, it is too time consuming to change backgrounds midstory. Be sure to set up your scene/s before starting the story and ensure that the pieces are stacked in the order in which you will use them.

As your skill increases, you may want to become a little more elaborate. But start out simply by just putting key figures on the board or moving a figure from one spot to another to demonstrate movement. Again, the short attention span of a preschooler is better filled with God-themes than a technically precise depiction of what happened inside and outside in the story.

Lukens offers a filing system for the pieces that is well worth the price. If you are new to using the Lukens flannel, take the time to browse the filing system so you have in mind the range of pieces available. The pieces will arrive printed on sheets that need to be cut out. Recruit some cutting help and have all the pieces cut out and filed before the year starts; your preparation time is better spent studying the Word than cutting out pieces.

You may also supplement the Lukens pieces with custom pieces. Two items you'll use often are a large piece of black felt for a night sky and a generic covering like a small tablecloth to drape over the whole board to hide it. The latter allows you to set up a time-consuming scene like the palace interior ahead of time and keep it out of view until you are ready to draw the children's attention to it. You may also use colored craft felt to cut custom pieces when the ones Lukens suggests don't suit what you have in mind.

### **He Has Spoken By His Son Coloring Book**

It is also helpful to show the coloring book picture where appropriate in telling the story. Then when the children see their coloring book picture, it will be familiar to them. For example, the picture of baby Jesus can be a constant reminder of God's promise to send a Savior. If children regularly see this picture and you regularly refer to the promise of God throughout the New Testament stories using this picture each time, the children will become so familiar with the picture that it will be an automatic memory trigger of the promise of God to provide a way of salvation.

Including the corresponding coloring book visual in the lesson is also a helpful way to set up later small group discussion. When you show the visual, repeat the key themes you are emphasizing in that story. If you don't need the picture to illustrate a story point, it helps to use it during your conclusion, as you reinforce the ideas you most want the children to remember. The children will have better recall during small group time if they have begun to associate the key themes with the picture during the story.

If children spend small group time talking about that story's key themes while coloring each picture, the coloring book becomes a wonderful review tool both for teachers and later for parents when the children bring the coloring book home. For example, each time you review that Jesus is God, flip through the colored pictures of Jesus teaching in the temple, Jesus turning the water into wine, Jesus calming the storm, and Jesus healing Bartimaeus, pausing at each picture to remind the children that Jesus is God.



If you are teaching a story about Jesus' power to heal, flip through previous stories that show Jesus' power to heal. In telling the story of the crucifixion, you may want to show the picture of Jesus' birth and remind the children that the reason that Jesus came was to die on the cross.

If you team-teach, share a colored set of children's coloring book visuals. A simple way to use and store the pictures is in clear page protectors in a ring binder. Slip a blank page behind the picture to provide yourself with a place to jot down the key themes you want the picture to elicit in the words you want the children to remember. When another teacher selects the same picture for a future lesson, she'll be able to use the same words. Each week, select the pictures you'll use and arrange them in the order in which they'll appear in your story.

### Three-Dimensional Objects

Props are crucial to storytelling with preschoolers. Young children are concrete thinkers and, in this pre-reading stage, engaging their senses is a key to memory and understanding. Showing a picture of Peter chained in jail will give the children an idea of what it is like to be chained. But bringing in a heavy chain and a big lock that they can touch changes the illustration into an experience. By feeling the heavy chain and trying to break it apart, they can begin to understand the miracle of Peter's rescue and the power of God. Bringing in a crown of thorns or very large nails (or spikes) for the children to feel may help them begin to imagine the pain that Jesus felt on the cross. Giving the children palm branches to wave as they sing may make the triumphal entry more concrete for them. When telling the story of Jesus being anointed by Mary, bring in a bottle of perfume for the children to smell.

### Using Your Own Body Language as a Visual

A gifted teacher who loves God is the best visual there is. No picture, flannel board, or prop can communicate a passion for God like the face, voice, hands, and body God created for that very purpose. In this sense, it is important to prepare the lesson in such a way that the key themes aren't lost in the busyness of illustrating the story. The teacher needs to be free at key points to look the children in the eyes and say from the heart, "God did exactly what He said He would do! We have a faithful God!" A blessed byproduct of our media-saturated culture is that children are fascinated by a living, breathing human telling a story. Storytelling may seem low-tech compared to computer graphics and illustrations, but it allows a teacher to communicate exactly what God lays on his heart.

Good storytelling is dramatic but is not necessarily drama. Unlike a play, a teacher/storyteller often plays all the roles himself, and the teacher's ordinary self becomes a narrator. The story should be told with some description and some short commentary. Remember, you are teaching Bible stories and Bible doctrine.

### Hints For Storytelling

1. Use visual aids when appropriate to illustrate the story and to focus attention.
2. Speak at a moderate pace most of the time. Speaking too fast makes the story unintelligible. Speaking too slowly bores the audience.
3. Vary the pace according to the action of the story and to create a mood. For example, Moses standing before Pharaoh with the message from God could be spoken slowly and authoritatively, "Let...my...people...go." On the other hand, in the story of Jesus calming the sea, you may want to speak rapidly and dramatically when speaking of the wind howling and the waves crashing against the boat.
4. Speak loudly enough to be easily understood.
5. Vary the volume according to the storyline.

6. When using visual aids, organize your materials so your story can flow smoothly (e.g., when using flannel figures, arrange them in order of usage so you can always pull the next piece off the top).
7. Repeat key themes often so they are firmly grasped by the children.
8. When possible and appropriate, use words that describe the sounds in a story (e.g., “clip clop” for a walking donkey).
9. Use sound effects if you can do them well.
10. When possible, appeal to the five senses. For example, when telling the story of Babel, listen to a recording of someone speaking a foreign language.
11. Encourage the children to participate with you in telling the story. This can mean clapping in response to something God did, making sound effects, repeating a key theme, helping with a demonstration, etc. For example: Ask at various times during a story showing God’s power, “Is God weak?” Teach the children to respond, “God is strong! God can do anything!” Or in telling the story of the resurrection, encourage the children to joyfully exclaim with you, “He is risen!” In the story of Jesus appearing by the sea, have the children pretend to try to “pull up the net” with you.
12. Practice your story a couple of times before presenting it. Some people find it helpful to tell the story to another person or to tell it in front of a mirror.
13. Use simple language. A common problem among teachers of young children is to use words that are unfamiliar to the children, such as “plague” or “idol,” or even words that are frequently used but have not yet entered a young child’s vocabulary. Try to use very simple, everyday words such as “told” rather than “commanded,” or “God did everything He said He would do” rather than “God fulfilled His promise.”

**Note:** The appendix contains several sample stories.

## Look

Although the Look portion of the lesson can be taught either in the large group teaching session or in small groups, it is usually more effectively done in small groups. The Look is the process of discovering the implications of the biblical truths for the learner’s life. It is asking questions to bring the child to an awareness of the relationship of the truth in Scripture to his life. It is helping the child to understand what God is asking of him.

The teacher must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion. Pray for sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit and depend on Him to show you the right questions to ask. Rather than telling a child how the story relates to his life, it is better to ask questions that will draw out where God is working in a child’s heart.

For example, in the story about Jesus healing a man born blind (John 9), there are many implications for us: obeying Jesus’ word; telling others what Jesus has done for us; thanking Jesus for His greatness and worth (worshiping Jesus); standing on what we know to be true; etc. The teacher does not know where God is leading, so it is important to depend on the Holy Spirit.

A possible line of questioning could be, “Is it sometimes hard to obey Jesus’ Word? What is one thing that is hard to obey? Why is it hard for us to obey?” Another line of questioning could be, “Can you tell me about one thing that Jesus has done for you?” Or perhaps you may ask, “What does that tell you about what Jesus is like? Who could you tell about that?”

Before a child can apply truth, it is crucial that the child understand the truth. When teaching a large group of children, it is hard to discern what an individual child has understood. That’s why small group questioning or one-on-one

questioning about the key points of the story is crucial. The Looks portion of each lesson has some suggestions for clarifying and applying the lesson. These are only suggestions and should never take the place of struggling with the Scripture, praying for an application for your children, and depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Seeing the various suggestions in each lesson will be helpful in learning how to clarify and apply the lesson. They are meant to sharpen your skills, not to replace your own wrestling with the scriptural truths.

Older children should be able to make deeper application of the biblical truth than the suggestions for younger children indicate.

**Note:** In the Looks section, there are sometimes answers to suggested questions. You will find these answers in [brackets] to set them apart from the questions.

## Took

A good teacher will help a child to see the personal implications of God's truth, but it is the child's responsibility to respond to the truth. This will usually happen outside of class when the Holy Spirit brings about situations in which the child can respond to the truth of God's Word. When the child responds, the Word of God becomes real in his life, the Bible is understood and appreciated in the heart and not just the head, and God is honored.

## Student Coloring Books

Each lesson in *He Has Spoken By His Son* has a corresponding picture in the coloring book. The coloring book is intended to be used and kept in the classroom and sent home at the end of the study. Each child should have his own coloring book. The coloring book is available spiral-bound with just the coloring pages or with both coloring pages and the corresponding take-home pages for parents to use in reviewing the stories. The coloring pages each have a simple illustration to help the children remember the Bible story. The take-home pages provide Scripture references and some possible application questions.

The coloring book serves two purposes in class. The first is to provide children with an activity to reinforce the stories. The second is to give adult leaders an opportunity to ask basic questions, restate the theme/s, and draw out personal applications from the story while the children are coloring the pictures.

The spiral-bound edition of the Student Coloring Book is easier for parents to use as a review tool than loose pages printed from the electronic download. The edition of the coloring book with both the coloring pages and the take-home pages provides parents with a single volume to review the stories and remind the children of the basic themes once the study has been completed.

**Note:** Preschoolers are just learning to color, and though they have varying degrees of competency, generally speaking, most 3-year-olds basically scribble on the page. Four-year-old children may try to color somewhat within the lines, and it can be helpful to give them a little instruction about trying to color inside the lines, using different colors, etc. However, the Student Coloring Book is not intended to be a tool for children to practice coloring. Rather, the illustrations provide meaning and context for the stories. They also help children picture unfamiliar biblical scenes. Therefore, we are less concerned about coloring ability and more concerned about communicating concepts and giving children a review tool.

The coloring book can also be used as an activity book beyond just coloring the pages. You can provide markers, colored pencils, paint, stamp markers, glitter pens, stickers, and cut-and-paste objects for the children to use with the coloring book. For example:

- **Lesson 4: Wise Men Worship Jesus**—Put glitter on the wise men's headpieces and gold glitter on the star.

- **Lesson 10: Zeal for His Father's House**—Color the coins with a gold metallic pen.
- **Lesson 13: Jesus Calms the Storm with a Word**—Cut little squares of blue and green tissue paper. Stick the paper squares to the “water” with a glue stick.
- **Lesson 30: Peter Denies Jesus**—Glue orange glitter on the rooster's comb and glue feathers on the rooster's tail.
- **Lesson 39: Power from on High**—Glue glitter on the flames.

## Parent Pages

A Parent Page to send home after each lesson is included with the Classroom Kit to help the parent and child interact with the Bible story and to encourage a personal response to the truths in the Scripture passage/s. These same parent pages are also included in one of the two versions of Student Coloring Book for use as a long-term review tool after the study has ended.

The first week of the study, there is also a Note to Parents to send home with the children to acquaint the parents with the content and goal of the curriculum.

Parents have many opportunities to reinforce the story and themes and to apply the truth taught in the lesson during the week. But often teachers must encourage parents to take advantage of this opportunity to reinforce what has been learned at church. If a child misses a class, the Parent Page can be emailed to the parents or given to them the following week.

## Memory Verses

We do not often think to begin Bible memory work with preschoolers, yet preschoolers are very capable of memorizing. Often, they have storybooks memorized almost verbatim with no apparent effort. Two years old is not too young to begin memorizing simple Bible verses. Although preschoolers may not fully understand a Bible verse, they can often understand the main idea. Understanding of the truth grows as the child matures and can often be understood well even at a young age because memorized truth is very present. Memorizing at a young age can also encourage a child to build a lifetime habit of Bible verse memorization.

Rather than choose verses directly related to the Bible stories in the curriculum, it seems more beneficial to provide young children with a storehouse of broad foundational truths. For this reason, we recommend that both *He Established a Testimony* and *He Has Spoken By His Son* be used in conjunction with the Foundation Verses memory verse program (resources available through Truth78). These verses have been especially chosen for young children with the intent of building a foundation of easily understood memorized biblical truth.

The curriculum notes when each verse is memorized, and it notes weeks when the children will review previously memorized verses. You may want to introduce the verse in the classroom and work on reviewing previous verses as well. However, the main responsibility for teaching the memory verses should belong to the parents. One way to encourage parents to help their children memorize is to keep a memory verse chart. The child can add a sticker to the chart for each verse memorized. Or each child could have his own card to mark for each verse learned. There is a memory verse schedule in the appendix. Some of the verses have a direct link with the story they accompany, but because the goal is to give the children a foundation in Bible memory of easily understood truth, many of the verses do not coincide with the story for the week. Therefore, a simple explanation of the meaning of the verse will be helpful for the children. For example, for Proverbs 1:10—My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. (ESV)—a simple explanation would be: “If someone wants you to do something wrong, don't do it.”

In saying the verse, the reference should be stated, then the verse, and then the reference again at the end. This will help the children to better learn the references. It will be necessary with young children to teach the verse phrase by phrase.

The Foundation Visuals Pack (full-color visuals pages with a picture for each verse) can be helpful when teaching the verses to small groups of children. The picture is a memory trigger you can show to the children as you teach or review the verses. You may also want to make the Foundation Verses Packs (full-color, 2.25" x 3" cards with these same pictures and verses) and the Foundation Verses Coloring Book available for parents to use in teaching and reviewing the verses with their children. The Foundation Verses are also available in the Fighter Verses™ App. See the appendix for more information about each of these resources and other Scripture memory incentives available from Truth78 (Truth78.org).

## Class Structure

### Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the class should be calm, friendly, and organized. This means that the children should be greeted warmly as soon as they walk in the door. You may want to designate someone as the greeter each week. You will also need to have everything for the class, including any transitional activities, set up before the children enter the room.

The room should also reflect a godly atmosphere. We suggest that the leaders for each room or department pray together for a few minutes before the children arrive. It may be necessary to note a specific time that parents may drop children off in the classroom and close the doors until that time. This will allow the team to pray and to set up activities before the children enter the classroom. (Some teachers may need to arrive early to make preparations ahead of time.)

When a parent or child walks into the room, the room decorations they see should reflect that God and the Bible are the focus of the class. This means, for example, that the room should be decorated with New Testament pictures rather than cartoon characters. Permission is given to enlarge the coloring book visuals to use as room decorations. (Suggestion: Large figures can be laminated and used on bulletin boards or walls.)

### Team Structure

A good ratio for preschool classes is one adult leader for each six students. (If you have enough staff for a smaller ratio, such as 1:4, this is even better.) Ideally, a preschool class should not have more than 20-24 children in the room. For young children, it is hard to concentrate and play calmly if there is too much stimulus in the room. We recommend having two unrelated adults in the classroom even if the class is very small. Adults may need to fill many roles. If the class is large, a team may split responsibilities.

A way to structure the team is as follows:

- **Team Leader**—The team leader is responsible for maintaining the goals of the classroom, supporting the other team workers with their responsibilities, and communicating with parents.
- **Teacher**—The teacher is responsible for preparing and presenting the lesson.
- **Worship Leader**—The worship leader prepares and leads the weekly department worship time.
- **Small Group Leaders**—Small group leaders give spiritual leadership and form a mentoring relationship with the children in their group, as well as assist in maintaining communication and positive relations with parents.



These responsibilities can be shared, or they can be designated responsibilities for individuals. For example: The worship leader may also be a small group leader. Or the teaching responsibilities may be shared by two or more adults in the classroom.

A note of caution is that shared teaching needs to be done in a way that is not distracting for students. This means that the teachers should be people who consider themselves a part of the class even on Sundays when they are not teaching. Some teachers may choose another assigned role, like small group leading, in the classroom. If teaching is shared, it may be beneficial for a teacher to teach a unit of lessons (as discussed earlier) rather than just be part of a weekly rotation schedule.

## Structuring Class Time

Because of the limited amount of time that children spend in church, it is beneficial to maximize the opportunity to impart Bible learning and faith experiences with the children. This means that every activity should have a purpose. For preschool, there will be times of free play activities, but even these can be maximized for the Kingdom. The appendix contains some suggested schedules. You will need to experiment and see what works best for your group of children. All the schedules include the following activities:

### Free Play

Free play can consist of learning center activities, such as:

- Manipulative toys (e.g., Lego® Duplo® building blocks)
- Art activities (coloring, stencils, rubber stamps, Play-Doh®, drawing)—Cover the table with a table-sized piece of blank paper, etc. It is ideal if the art activity can correspond with the lesson of the day, such as Noah's ark rubber stamps.
- Blocks
- Cars
- Dollhouse
- Reading corner—Be sure to put out books that correspond to the lesson.
- Puzzle corner (both individual puzzles and floor puzzles)—Use Bible story puzzles when possible.

If you start the class time with free play activities, each of the learning center activities should be set up before the children walk in the door. As the children enter the room, they can be directed to an activity. These activities should vary from week to week.

Children should be involved in one of the centers but should be free to move from center to center. Children should not be allowed to take out other activities but should choose from among the designated activities.

Free play time should not be seen merely as *filler* time. While it is true that preschoolers have a limited attention span and formal instruction must be limited to meet that time span, free play activities can offer opportunities for other kinds of instruction, such as casual conversation about spiritual issues, preparing children for the lesson that will be taught that day, and instruction in righteousness (i.e., modeling, instruction, and correction).

For example: The following instruction can occur while a child is playing with blocks: "Can you make a house from the blocks? Today we are going to hear about some men who made a hole in the roof of a house. That seems strange! We will have to see why they did this!"

While a child is playing with Play-Doh®, you can comment on how well his fingers work and how strong his hands are, and then point him toward his Creator: "Who made those fingers and hands? Could you play with Play-Doh® very well

if you had only two fingers?" (Let the child experiment.) "Ten fingers work better. Wasn't it a good idea for God to give us 10 fingers? God always has good ideas!"

If a child has taken a whole bunch of markers, leaving few for the other children: "If you have all these markers, the other children will not have any markers to use. Can you let everyone choose one of your markers? It is good to share and to let everyone have a marker."

If the child refuses to share, you may have to do some modeling and correction: "I am sorry that you do not want to share the markers. In this class, we will share the markers. You will need to give me the markers. I will make sure that everyone gets a marker, and I will make sure that you get a marker, too." (Proceed to distribute the markers.) "It is a good thing when everyone has a marker to use. I think God is happy about us sharing markers."

Free play offers unlimited opportunity for instruction in righteousness. Everything from polite manners and kind speech to correcting unruly behavior can be taught during these moments. The most important factors are that the adult must be involved with the children, be alert, seize the opportunity, and act wisely. The adult is the key to turning play into play plus learning.

Many teachable moments occur during free play time, and this time can be wisely used if the adult leader is actively looking for teaching opportunities. It is helpful to have the key themes from the stories posted in the classroom as a reminder to the adults to weave these themes into everyday conversation. (See the list in the appendix and the key theme poster in the Curriculum Resources downloads.)

If the free play activity occurs after the story, it is a good time to review the story or its themes. Role playing the story in costume is a good way to review the story during free play. Children remember stories that they retell, so you may want to provide the children with pictures and flannel figures and ask them to repeat the story to you. A drama learning center and a flannel board learning center can be set up following the story some weeks. Free play can also be a time to casually review memory verses.

## Lesson Time

The lesson time is when the Bible story is presented. Preschool children should sit on small chairs, carpet squares, or carpeting. It is helpful if the teacher sits on a chair so that eye contact can easily be made with the children. This also puts the visuals just above the eye level of the children.

Children should be taught to sit attentively during the story. If a child is being disruptive, another adult in the class should attend to that child. This way the teacher will not have to interrupt the flow of the story or battle to redirect the interest of the children to the story. This may mean that an adult may need to have a disruptive child sit beside her or that problem combinations of children should be quietly separated. It is the job of the other adults in the room to monitor the behavior of the children for the teacher so the teacher can concentrate on teaching. This means adults need to be present with the children, not doing something on the other side of the classroom. (If someone needs to quietly prepare a snack, another adult could fill that role.)

Children should also be taught to politely raise their hands to ask or answer a question. Children's comments that do not pertain to the story (e.g., "We went to the zoo yesterday") should be politely deflected ("Let's talk about that later" or "Small group would be a great time to talk about that") or woven into the story briefly ("Then you saw some of the animals that were on the ark") so that you can continue with the narrative.

A group of small children may only have an attention span of 10-15 minutes, so you will need to tell the story efficiently. It is not helpful to finish the story beyond the children's attention span. Once children begin to wiggle and get distracted, they distract others and will miss the conclusion of the story. Often the conclusion includes the most critical teaching, so it is imperative that children are still attentive for the conclusion. As the children get more used to sitting and

listening, you may find them more capable of listening for longer periods of time. Sometimes it takes a number of weeks to train a group of children how to sit and listen to a story.

## Worship Time

While the singing of appropriate secular songs is not bad, it does not maximize the spiritual impact for the children. Children have plenty of opportunities to hear and sing secular preschool songs. They have fewer opportunities to sing about God. Some songs the children will sing in Sunday school will merely tell the facts of a Bible story. As long as the song is accurate, there is benefit in this. Some songs are instructive such as “O Be Careful,” “Jesus Loves Me,” or “The B-I-B-L-E.” However, children should also experience during the class a time of true God-focused worship.

True worship is God-centered, not man-centered. Much Sunday school music for children focuses on man rather than on God. For example, “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man” is about Zacchaeus, not about God. Many songs are high in entertainment value but low in worship value. Singing them during worship time does not change their content—it changes the worship. Relying on familiar or commonly used songs may not be helpful, as the content of many of them may be inaccurate, silly, or inappropriate. So some intentionality must come into focus in choosing worship music for children. Some commonly sung songs can be redeemed simply by changing a few of the words or making the song understandable for children. For example, we understand “He” in “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” as God, but children may not. This can be remedied simply by changing the word “He” to “God.”

The goal of worship time is to introduce children to meaningful worship. True worship is a heart-response to God. Worship as we do it as adults requires reflection that, on many levels, preschoolers aren’t yet capable of. But young children are very emotional, and they are capable of great delight and admiration, and they can rehearse the wonder of God’s work in the world.

Worship time can follow the story time to help children respond to the truth they have just heard. If the story ends on a sobering note, the worship time may start with a low-key song and work up to more enthusiastic ones. If the story ends on a note that makes children want to jump up and praise God, this can be done first, and the worship time can work toward a reflective tone at the end. Or perhaps a story is most appropriately followed simply by exuberant praise music.

It is a sobering thought that God is allowing us to train children how to respond to Him. Since we have been given that responsibility, we must be sensitive to the range of emotions an encounter with God can produce and try to model for children how to appropriately express that emotion. It is often helpful for children to label how they are feeling, and then to show them an appropriate response.

In leading children in worship, it is important to make a connection between the song and what it reflects about God or how it relates to the truth they have learned or will learn. This may require a few words of commentary. For example, in preparation for hearing the story, “Jesus Has Mercy on Blind Bartimaeus,” the worship leader can say, “Do you think God is good? What are some things that you can think of that show that God is good?” After soliciting some responses from the children [He gives us air to breathe; He made pretty flowers for us; He helped Daniel in the lion’s den], the worship leader can say, let’s show God how happy we are that He is so good. Then the worship leader can lead in the song, “Praise Him, Praise Him.”

The leader may then follow that song with a connection to the story such as, “Today we are going to hear another story about God’s goodness.” After the story is told, the worship leader can lead the children once more in singing, “Praise Him, Praise Him,” encouraging the children to clap while they are singing because God is so good.

This kind of interaction serves an even higher purpose than reinforcing the lesson. It teaches little children how to interact with God. It teaches them that encounters with God do not leave people unchanged. God wants people

to relate to Him, not simply know about Him. Little children are very capable of appreciating God and showing that appreciation—if they just receive a little thoughtful guidance.

Another key goal in leading children in worship is to prepare them for a lifetime of worshipping God. Therefore, it is critical to introduce children to hymns and worship songs that we sing as a church. This prepares children to participate in corporate worship. It may be necessary to explain some unfamiliar words to the children. Other words and concepts the children may just have to “grow into.” This means that you will either ignore the concept at this age or make a simple, incomplete explanation, knowing that, as the children mature, they will gain more understanding. This may mean, for example, explaining the meaning of “holy” before singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” but the concept “God in three persons” may be a concept that a child must grow into. Regardless, enough of the content should be explained that children have a clear idea of what they are singing about. For example, in introducing the song “Holy, Holy, Holy” to preschoolers, you can explain that “holy” means “God is different from everyone else—He is greater and better. He has never sinned and never will sin.”

If you are teaching three-year-olds, you may just want them to sing the words “God in three persons” without explanation. It is enough that they are singing about a God who is different—greater and better—than anyone else and is sinless. If you are teaching four-year-olds, you may want to explain the concept of the trinity as follows: “God in three persons? What does that mean? It means that God is three persons (hold up three fingers) in one person (move the three fingers close together). (Separate the fingers and identify each person of the trinity.) He is God the Father-Creator (Point to the first finger); He is God the Son, Jesus, (Point to the second finger) and He is the Holy Spirit (Point to the third finger)—three persons, but one God (Pull the fingers back close together again).” The children will not really understand the concept of the trinity (for that matter, adults have difficulty understanding the trinity), but they will have a vague notion of what “God in three persons” means. As they mature, that understanding will be refined and expanded.

Be careful to introduce new songs or new verses to songs one at a time. The worship time should consist of familiar songs and include not more than one new song. This new song would need to be reviewed frequently until the children learn it well. New songs can also be reviewed at times other than during worship time. Free play is a good time to simply review the words of a new song.

Motions and sign language can be useful tools for helping children understand and remember the words to songs. The actions need to enhance the song, and not just encourage the children to get silly or overly active. Good motions can, in fact, help wiggly children sit longer. If a worship leader will be playing an instrument, another adult leader should lead the motions. In time, as the children learn the motions well, a child may lead the motions with the adult.

Eye contact with the children is very important in leading little children in worship. Children learn a lot about worship through observing the body language and facial expressions of the worship leader. If the worship leader plays the piano, he must face the children, rather than present his back to the children. If this is not possible, the pianist should play the piano and another adult lead the children.

In the preschool age classroom, it is not imperative that the worship leader play an instrument. It is more important that the leader be a person who can lead with his whole body and with strong facial expression, and who truly knows how to worship.

## Small Group Time

Small group time consists of groups of about six children with each adult (if the class is large enough to need splitting). These smaller groupings make it easier to discuss the Look portion of the lesson and to complete the coloring page. The children should be with the same small group leader every week (in deliberately assigned groups). This way, the leader can get to know his group of children personally, pray for each child weekly, meet the parents, etc.

Small group time can be a good time to reinforce chronology as the coloring books present the stories in chronological order. Small group leaders can quickly review sections of the coloring book with the children. It is helpful to make this interactive, asking the children questions rather than just telling them what you want them to remember. In addition, small group time can be used to serve the children a snack, review memory verses, and pray with the children.

## Prayer

Unless taught differently, preschoolers tend to pray the same kind of prayers—“Thank You for the nice day,” or “God bless Mommy and Daddy...” Young children can be taught to share prayer requests and pray for each other. They just need some modeling and encouragement. Small group time is an ideal time for prayer requests and simple prayer.

Young children can also be taught to pray using Scripture—“Help me to trust in You with all my heart and not lean on my own understanding” or “Thank You, God, that You watch over the way of the righteous.” They can also be taught to use Scripture in praying for other people—“Dear Jesus, please help Jimmy in the hospital. When he is afraid, help him to trust in You.”

Preschoolers can also be encouraged to pray aloud in front of the class. When it is someone’s birthday, ask a child to pray for that child, and then you pray for the child. Preschoolers can lead the class in praying for a special need.

Instruct the children that there are four kinds of prayers:

- “I love You” prayers (adoration)—These prayers tell God how wonderful He is. These are praising prayers—telling about the greatness and the goodness of God.
- “I’m sorry” prayers (confession)—These prayers tell God about the wrong things we have felt and done, and then ask God to forgive us.
- “Thank You” prayers (thanksgiving)—These prayers thank God for His goodness and for answers to prayer.
- “Please” prayers (supplication)—These prayers are when we ask God for something. God’s answer can be “Yes,” “No,” or “Wait.” But God always answers prayer.

Children may be shy about praying in front of others at first, or their prayers may be trite repetitions. But, as you model real prayer to them and encourage them, they will little by little grow in their understanding of prayer.

## Group Games

In addition to being fun, the purpose of group games is to teach the children to cooperate with one another, to follow directions, and to participate in a group activity appropriately. All these skills are important for a child to learn in order to participate in a corporate worship service.

One of the goals of teaching preschoolers is to prepare them to participate in the adult worship service. To do so, they must learn to join the group in participating in the same activity. A child cannot be counting aloud while someone is praying and others listening to the prayer. A child cannot run up and down the aisle while others are standing and singing. From time to time, directions are given in a worship service. If children are familiar with following directions, they may be able to participate with the help of their parents.

Familiar games can be modified for church settings. For some of them, you may want to change the words to reflect something that has been taught in the classroom or to reflect a truth about God or the Bible. For example, “London Bridge is falling down” can be changed to, “Jericho walls are falling down...blow the trumpet” or “Jericho walls are falling down...shout out loudly.” “Duck, Duck, Grey Duck” can be explained as a child choosing someone just as God chose Paul to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.



Other games will need to be simplified so that the children can participate successfully. As in any group game, the first few times a new game is played, the children will be somewhat confused and the game chaotic. Once some of the children are familiar with the game, it should run smoothly. For this reason, it is wise to introduce new games one at a time. Play a new game enough times that the children are familiar with it before introducing another new game.

Group games are easier for four-year-olds than for three-year-olds, so any group game for three-year-olds must be very simple and short. For three-year-olds, you may simply want to start group participation by teaching them a very simple fingerplay. Just as you must be careful in choosing worship songs for children, you will need to take the same care in choosing fingerplays. Many are inaccurate or man-centered.

The appendix contains some memory verse games that can be used in a group setting.

## Conclusion

The results of working with children are not always immediately evident, but rather are often seen over a lifetime of faithful sowing. It may be tempting to wonder if it is worth the effort. Teaching regularly is a big commitment. It can be done halfheartedly, or it can be done wholeheartedly. Do you want great rewards in your ministry? Great rewards often come through years of faithfulness, sacrifice, and steadfast effort—"...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). Although this truth is stated in reference to money, it seems biblically consistent that it applies to any sowing and reaping we do for the Kingdom. Grabbing a lesson at the *eleventh hour* and throwing it together at the last minute will probably produce small rewards, both in your heart and in the hearts of the children you teach. If you struggle and pray over the passage you are teaching, pray diligently for insight and creativity, and for the softening of the children's hearts, asking God to make His Word dwell in you richly; and if you work hard at teaching the Word, the rewards are great. Is it worth it? How much is it worth for you to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21)?