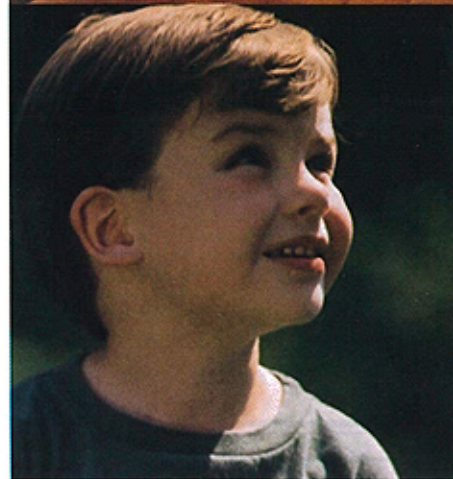


Oklahoma Baptists Protecting Children



A PLAN FOR
PROTECTING
PRESCHOOLERS AND
CHILDREN IN
OKLAHOMA BAPTIST
CHURCHES



PHASE VI

(a removable supplement to
the *Equipping* magazine)





Dear Pastor and Church Leader,

This phase, Phase VI "Oklahoma Baptists Protecting Children: Spiritual Development" is the last of the phases promised to you November of 1998. However, it is among the most important of all phases of protecting preschoolers and children, as it is the phase that the secular world refuses to address.

What was Jesus' response toward the children? "...It would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

Anything? Anyone? Prevents? As we examine things that prevent children from coming to Christ, we must admit there is spiritual neglect and abuse. There is no law against spiritual abuse and neglect. In a court we cannot be found negligent or be liable for preventing a child from learning about Jesus. But, in God's eyes we are responsible—as parents, the church, and the body of Christ.

Effects of spiritual abuse and neglect can affect a child's spiritual development for life. What can a church do to prevent a child's spiritual neglect and abuse during these developmental years? How can we insure that a child has a quality experience each time he is at church? What can a church do to encourage and support parents in bringing the child up in a nurturing Godly home? Pastors and church leaders we are the ones who can prevent spiritual neglect and abuse at church. We are the ones who can support, undergird, and encourage parents as they seek to follow God's plan for their family.

As you read through the following pages, my prayer is that God will open our minds and hearts toward His children and that we will seek to give children a quality experience each time they are at church. I pray that children will learn to love God with all of their minds, hearts, and strength and that we as leaders will constantly be looking for ways to insure that each child is taught about God from His Word, in a way that the child learns best. I pray that God will continue to give us wisdom as we teach, nurture, and love His children and their families.

Thank you for protecting, teaching, and guiding preschoolers and children in your church.

You are a blessing!

Sheri Babb
Preschool and Children's Ministries Specialist
Church and Family Equipping Team
Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma

A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was,
The sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove,
But the world may be different because I was important in the life of a CHILD.
.... Author Unknown

Oklahoma Baptists Protecting Children: Phase I, Hygiene, Safety and Security Systems; Phase II, Preventing Child Abuse; Phase III, Playground, Emergency and Disaster Preparedness; Phase IV, Protecting Children During Crisis; Phase V, Transportation, Field Trips, and Summer Safety; and Phase VI, Protecting Children's Spiritual Development are available by contacting Michelia Moore, Preschool and Children's Ministries Secretary, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 3800 N. May Avenue, Oklahoma City, OK 73112; 405/942-3800; email mmoore@bgco.org.

Protecting Preschool & Children's Spiritual Development

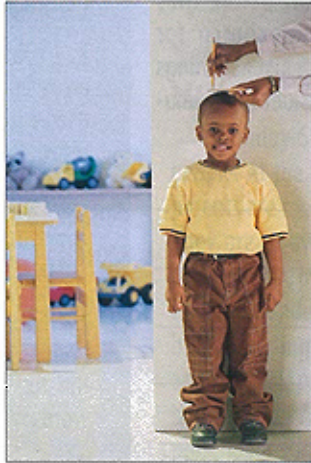
“Children can literally reintroduce us to God and His world when we allow them to share their discoveries.”

Over the past few years we have seen an increase in awareness of child abuse and neglect. Hardly a day goes by without the media covering an abuse case or giving information on how to prevent abuse and neglect. How tragic to realize in 1998 we had 16,584 victims of abuse and neglect reported in Oklahoma! Even more tragic is the fact that those incidents of abuse and neglect do not stop with that one experience but the effects live on in the life of a child forever. How saddened we are as Christians, and rightfully so, that abuse and neglect are a part of our world. We should do everything we can to stop child abuse and neglect.

As we think about abuse and neglect we should consider the whole child—physically, spiritually, emotionally, socially and intellectually. God intended for us to attend to all aspects of a child's development rather than separating it into separate areas. “*And Jesus grew in wisdom [intellectually] and stature [physically], and in favor with God [spiritually] and man [socially and emotionally]*” (Luke 2:52). When we consider the spiritual development of a child as important as his physical, emotional, social and intellectual development, we recognize that a child can suffer from spiritual neglect and abuse too. If parents refuse to tell their child about God or wait until he can decide for himself, is this spiritual neglect?

The question, “What would you consider as spiritual child abuse and neglect in the home?” was asked to several people, their responses were:

- Lack of spiritual guidance in the home.
- Keeping a child from attending church.
- Keeping a child from reading a Bible or learning about God.
- Neglecting to answer important questions a child asks about spiritual things.
- Parents who opt for mediocre.
- Raising a child in a religious home rather than a godly home.
- Living double standards. Failure to live what you teach or model Christ for a child.
- Sending children to church rather than going with them.



- Not wanting to push religion on children, allowing a child to wait and make up her own mind.
- Allowing children to watch too much television and movies and play too many video games.
- Anything that keeps a child from unfolding into the person God intends for him to be.
- Failing to teach a child about God in and through all things at all times.

- A community that refuses to protect children from evil or things that lead them away from God.

If this list indicates spiritual neglect in the home, what indicates there is spiritual neglect and abuse at church?

- Failing to provide spiritual guidance.
- Leaving children to learn on their own.
- Failure to disciple children.
- Failure to recognize or listen to children by being so involved with oneself or others (teachers or parents).

- Neglecting the church's responsibility to encourage and support the family in spiritually guiding and nurturing children.
- Failing to build a relationship with children and minister to them.
- Neglecting the child's level of understanding and presenting facts and information he is not capable of understanding—even if he can quote the facts back to you.
- Failure to greet a child with a warm welcome.
- Failure to help a child feel secure and safe and know that God loves and provides for him.
- Having an unprepared teacher or a teacher who comes without planning the lesson on the child's level of understanding.
- Being inattentive to a child or playing favorites and not being fair.
- Allowing entertainment to take the place of Bible teaching and worship or wasting time on games and entertainment not designed to accomplish the Bible emphasis.



- Letting fun overshadow and take priority over Bible teaching. Bible teaching can be fun too. Bible teaching is also more than a Bible story time.
- Filling a position on the children's leadership team but not sensing God's call to the position.
- Failing to separate fellowship from Bible teaching. There is a time for both.
- Failure to provide an adequate number of teachers.
- Providing babysitters rather than teachers. Preschoolers and children need consistent teaching each time they are at church.
- Refusing to follow the literature, thus not providing for the many learning styles of the preschoolers or children.
- Teaching the lesson the way you learn rather than the way the child learns.
- Teacher-centered rather than child-centered.
- Separating children from adults during corporate worship, thus preventing children from learning to worship from adults. When else will a child see adults praise, worship and respond to God and the Holy Spirit.
- Teaching through inappropriate developmental practices.
- Not providing the age appropriate resources and space.
- Not sharing Jesus with a child who desires to know Him.
- Neglecting to witness to a child or his parents.
- Neglecting to help parents know how to share the gospel with their child.
- Neglecting to reach out to unchurched and unsaved families and children.
- Passive learning (watching videos, or providing inactive methods of teaching) rather than interactive learning (Doing for the child rather than the child doing for himself).
- Failure to get parents involved.

Spiritual Development: Who's Responsibility Is It?

As the physicians rolled my daughter into the
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room holding my first grandchild, we marveled at this miracle—our child. While the nurse placed my grandson in the warmer, I peered through the plastic cradle, and asked, “How could this be?” From across the room I heard Renee whisper, “Mom, you can touch him.” I stretched one finger out and stroked his tiny leg. Never had I felt anything so soft. My heart responded, “Oh God, thank you for choosing me to touch this precious life so small!”

Every Sunday God chooses thousands of people (teachers and church members) to touch the lives of preschoolers and children in the local church. How could it be



that He has chosen us to take His message to His children? What an awesome responsibility, honor, and privilege to be His chosen people to teach a child about Him! He chose us to walk alongside parents as a church family, connecting and supporting them in their obedience to God as they rear their child in a godly home.

Although the parents have the primary responsibility for their child's spiritual development, the church and Christian community share in that responsibility. Teachers, pastor and staff, deacons, and all members are called to participate in fostering a child's Christian growth. Therefore, it is critical that every member of the congregation be constantly growing in their faith as they model a disciplined, joyous, fervent relationship with Christ. How else will the child learn who God is, what His love is like, how He wants to relate with us, how He accepts and forgives us, how merciful He is, and what a mighty God we serve? Let's thank God that He has chosen each of us as a major contributor to the lives of children on an ongoing basis so that they might have a heart for Him.

Responding to Children as Jesus Did

It is important that the church strategically plan to respond and minister to preschoolers, children and families. Jesus modeled the way He wants us to welcome, love, and nurture children. “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the child in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:13-16).

What ministries of the church enable us to take the little children into our arms and bless them? What ministries enable us to help children become like Christ? What preschool and children's programs are basic and foundational to a child's spiritual development? What programs are basic and foundational for families with children? How does a church

design children's ministries? To answer these questions let us rethink what values we desire for our children. “What do we want children to know and experience spiritually before they leave our church for college?” List five things you consider most valuable to a child's spiritual development.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Perhaps you listed:

- Love God with heart, mind, and strength
- Understand and live according to God's will
- Develop a deep relationship with Christ
- Portray the fruits of the Spirit
- Enjoy studying, memorizing and applying the Bible to life
- Worship God in both corporate and private worship
- Develop a prayer life which involves confession, praise, thankfulness, intercession, and petitions
- Love the church
- Develop a love for missions and missionaries
- Be sensitive to spiritual matters
- Live ethically and morally
- Show a concern for the spiritual condition of others
- Love others and minister to their needs
- Put God first in all of life's decisions

Look at your church's ministries or programs. How do they support the values your church feels are important for children? A healthy balanced children's ministry requires developmental Bible Study, spiritual development, and missions and ministry learning and involvement. Without all three present, children's ministries soon become unbalanced.

Telling Bible Stories

B—Become acquainted with the story inside and out. Know the story well. Garbage in/garbage out, as the saying goes. If you don't know it well, it shows.

I—Be aware of all of the senses that come into play in the story and use them. Example: clear blue sky or the sweet smell of rain.

B—Consider your audience (age, characteristics and vocabulary).

L—Learn the purpose of the story or why you are telling the story. Example: How is the story used with the Bible Study unit? A story can be repeated to teach different things—depending on how it is presented.

E—Eliminate the fluff (any elements that are not necessary in the Story can be eliminated).

S—Sequence the events of the story in your mind. Memorize the beginning and the end of the story. Tell the middle of the story in your own words sequencing the events.

T—Tell the story to yourself over and over and over . . . so that you know the story well. To get good at telling stories in front of others, videotape or audio tape yourself as you tell a story.

O—Organize a great beginning and a captivating conclusion to the story. Catch their attention at the beginning with your voice, use of words, and face and body actions.

R—Remove any competitive influences while you are telling the story. Establish eye-to-eye contact. Save any pictures or props for after you have told the story the first time. After you have told the story, use the pictures and props to reinforce the story.

I—In your lap, have the Bible. This way you can show that the story comes from the Bible and is God's true story.

E—Enthusiasm is necessary. Use inflections. Whisper to get their attention, never shout. Remember monotone is BORING. Use action words and use your voice to put the action words into action.

S—Surely the Christian storyteller is never alone. God is always with you.

—Jerry Vogel, LifeWay Christian Resources

Develop A Balanced Children's Ministry

The first twelve years of a child's life are short. The majority of people make the most important decision of their life—that eternal decision of following Christ—during their childhood years. During these years the spiritual foundation is laid and decisions are made for life. Children need a balance in their Christian education to help them develop in all aspects of their Christian growth.

Sunday School—Developmental Bible Study

Sunday School Is The Reaching, Teaching, Ministering, Worshipping, Witnessing, And Fellowship Strategy For Children In The Church.

Sunday School—Teaching

Sunday School is the church teaching preschoolers and children about God, from His word, on their level of understanding. As teachers plan their lesson, they must ask:

- How do I want this child to be different because of his being here today?
- What impact will this Bible Study make on her life?
- What are the attitudes or behaviors we want to see as a result of this Bible Study?
- What teaching methods will help him learn more about this Bible Study?
- How do I structure the environment to make a difference in each child's learning?

The teacher then plans the Bible Study and teaches children accordingly.

As we rethink the one-size fits all Sunday School, we recognize each child has different needs and ways of learning. This recognition leads us to rethink our teaching methods. LifeWay Christian Resources provides resources that give a number of activities that are designed to meet varied learning styles and the age level needs of preschoolers and children.

These activities incorporate a Bible teaching emphasis in active teaching methods where children can move and participate throughout the session. Bible knowledge and Bible application are absorbed by the children and become a part of who they are.



Sunday School—Ministering

Sunday School ministers to families of children when a child is sick, a parent loses a job, the family has a celebration such as the birth of a baby, or when a child has a special success in their life. The ministry provided through Sunday School shows the church's love for Christ and desire to obey him, as they love one another. For a child, it lays the foundations that people at church love God, each other and me. People at church take care of others and me.

Sunday School—Witnessing

Sunday School witnesses to people. At the birth of a new baby parents are more receptive to God. They are in awe of this newborn and sense the overwhelming responsibilities of caring for him. Sunday School teachers can celebrate the birth, building a relationship with these sensitive and receptive parents, and then share the gospel with the parents. As teachers visit in the homes of older preschoolers and parents, they find ways to locate unchurched and unsaved parents. During home visits they cultivate a relationship, invite the family to church and lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ. Teachers are also prepared to witness to children who are ready to make a decision to follow Christ. Teachers not only know how to share the gospel with a child, but understand what questions children ask about spiritual matters, how to answer these questions and whether a child is ready to receive Christ. Teachers and parents attend training sessions that assist parents in preparing to understand their child's questions and share the gospel with their child.

Sunday School—Worship

Sunday School sessions are designed for preschoolers and children to worship at their own age level in both small and large groups by giving an offering, praying, singing and hearing a Bible story. After Sunday School older preschoolers and children attend corporate worship. In the corporate worship they have the opportunity to see others respond to God and the Holy Spirit through Bible Study and worship.

Sunday School—Fellowship

Teachers enjoy building relationships with the boys and girls they teach whether they be babies or sixth graders and plan fellowships accordingly. What about a play day with parents and their baby, or a picnic where you get to know parents and children better? What about a fourth, fifth and sixth grade party where you play yard games? See "Using Entertainment Appropriately" on page 10 for other fellowship ideas.

Southern Baptist Sunday School has been recognized by other denominations as the best ministry for fellowship. Sunday School is the church organized to do its work.

Discipleship—Developmental Spiritual Growth

Discipleship is crucial as it trains church members to become more like Christ in every area of their life. Jesus called us into a relationship of continual change—that of becoming more like Him each day. Thus, discipleship is a process not a program. Discipleship lays foundations for preschoolers' and children's beliefs about God, church, and missions. Discipleship helps children become:

- ✓ Christians and grow in their likeness of Christ, (*TeamKid, Fundamentals, Now That I'm a Christian*)*
- ✓ Gain knowledge and develop skills in the responsibilities of Christians (*Now That I'm a Christian, Fundamentals, TeamKid*)*
- ✓ Develops core values in stewardship, missions and cooperative work (*Bible Foundations, TeamKid, Fundamentals*)*
- ✓ Helps church members become familiar with Baptist doctrine. (*Now That I'm a Christian, TeamKid, Fundamentals*)*
- ✓ Develops skills in Bible research, missions, understanding and evangelism. (*Bible Drill, Bible Buddies, Bible Challenge*)*
- ✓ Increases participation in full-range of ministry and missions. (*TeamKid, Fundamentals*)*

*These materials are designed to help teachers give children opportunities to become disciples. A ministry planning guide with a list of these materials is available by contacting, Preschool and Children's Ministries, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

Discipleship is at the very core of the church's life and mission.¹ Discipleship gives people a foundation (continued on page 6)

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tion to build on where they do not wander aimlessly.² Without discipleship, we are losing an understanding of Baptist distinctives and theology. Many do not know what they believe or why they believe it.³ "Many think (discipleship) is the most important but neglected part of the Great Commission. Therefore, it is the ministry of the church. When Christians grow more like Christ, all other parts of the ministry of the church will automatically be done. If I am like Christ, I will witness, give, minister, etc."⁴

Missions—Sharing Christ Cooperatively

Southern Baptists work together to share Christ throughout the world. They supply missionaries through Associational and State Missions, the North American Mission Board, and the International Mission Board.

Girls in Action (GA) is a gender specific mission organization as is the Royal Ambassadors (RA) program. If you prefer a coed missions organization, Children in Action (CIA) has the same goals but the material is written for a coed audience.

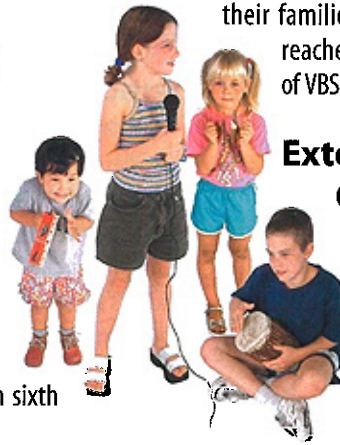
Through all of these organizations, children learn how to pray, learn about missions, pray and give to missions, and grow spiritually toward a mission lifestyle. For instance, children learn about the Cooperative program and special offerings that are unique to Southern Baptist churches. Our children today are the ones that will be supporting our mission efforts in the future. If children do not learn now about the importance of the Cooperative Program, can we expect them to support our mission efforts when they become adult leaders in Southern Baptist Churches?

All of these organizations not only promote scripture memorization, but also help the children understand the meaning of the scripture and how it applies to their life. The activities in GA/RA and CIA are not based on competition because all children who attend church need to feel like they are winners. In addition the material written for the children is educationally sound and the various learning styles of children are reflected in the material.

Mission organizations for children make for a well-balanced children's ministry program in the local church. Sunday School provides Bible Study; a discipleship program provides growth in the knowledge of their faith and a mission program nurtures their heart as they learn the meaning of serving others.⁵

Music—Developmental Music

Preschool and Children's choirs provide a special time for developing ideas and understanding about music, church music, and spiritual growth through musical experiences. Age level activities for older preschoolers and children through sixth grade are provided in choirs.



their families. Many unchurched families are reached and return to church as a result of VBS.

Extended Teaching Care—Developmental Worship

The desire of Extended Teaching Care (ETC) is to provide continued Bible teaching for babies through threes or fives during the Sunday morning and evening worship services. ETC for babies through fives should take place in the child's Sunday School room and use the same Bible emphasis, story, and Bible truths. This provides consistency for the child and helps him feel safe, secure, less anxious, and ready to learn on his level. Older preschoolers and children learn best about worship from parents and other church members. The worship services on Sunday mornings and evenings provide opportunities for older preschoolers and children to worship with the church body. These worship experiences help form the child's attitudes, knowledge, and comprehension on the importance of worship and how to worship (See "Tips for Worshipping with Children" on page 11 of this document for tips on worship with children).

Other Developmental Ministries

Church Weekday Education

Church Weekday Education provides foundational education and social development in a spiritual atmosphere. It should offer spiritual based educational childcare for children of parents who find it necessary to work outside the home. Church Weekday Education extends the mission of the church (meeting the needs of others) ministering to younger members in the church and the community. It extends the outreach of the church by inviting preschoolers' and children's parents to attend Sunday School and worship and other church events. It should be evangelistic as it makes an effort to share Christ with the parents and the community. The Church Weekday ministries may be Day Care, Preschool (two and three days per week programs), Parent's Day Out, Parent's Night Out, and After School ministries. It may also include ministries like senior adult day care or respite for the families of special needs children.

Vacation Bible School—Developmental Outreach

VBS gives the church an opportunity to reach the children, youth, and adults in the community with a weeklong concentrated Bible Study. VBS provides opportunities for families to hear about Jesus and how he wants them to live. The church members have opportunities to invite their friends and families who are unchurched or not Christians to come to a "fun-filled" adventure in learning about Jesus. Older children hear an evangelistic message and many accept Jesus as their personal Savior during VBS. VBS follow-up gives teachers opportunities to visit homes of children who have no Christian influence and share the gospel with



¹ Keith Wilkinson, Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries Specialist, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma

² Carl Thionnet, Director of Missions, Concord-Kiowa Association

³ Dr. Bill Green, Executive Director, Church and Family Ministries Equipping Team, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma

⁴ Dr. Ernie Perkins, Director of Missions, Capital Baptist Association, Oklahoma City

⁵ Mission Section written by: Lawanna Roberts, Youth and Children's Missions Ministries Specialist, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and Jaye Smith, Preschool Consultant, WMU, Southern Baptist Convention

Understanding Children—What is the Child's Level?

To avoid spiritual neglect and abuse, pastors, teachers and church members accept and support the child on his level. "What is the child's level?" To answer this question let's look at the child and how he learns.

Play And Fun— Developmental Learning

Often, we hear parents say, "Just let them have fun. Church should be fun." Yes, church should be fun for children. Children learn best when having fun. Some people think play is the opposite of work when in actuality play is work. It is through play that we all learn. My husband enjoys woodworking. Often when he is sawing and hammering, I ask, "What are you working on?" His response is, "Oh, I am just playing." Then in awhile he enters with a beautiful piece of wood trim for a cabinet. From his play he created a useful and beautiful piece of work. Children learn from play in the same way.

We learn best when we are having fun. Play fuels healthy development for children and adults. Play in Bible Study takes form in many ways for various ages. For a preschooler play or fun takes place when building with blocks, cooking a pretend meal in the home living area, or painting at an easel. For younger children it may be playing a game, using props in a drama, or completing a shoebox diorama. For older children it may be writing riddles, playing a guessing game, striking a Bible character pose, or filming a present day Bible story. Our play becomes more complex as we grow, but we play at all ages for pleasure.

While having fun at church, teachers have opportunities to teach about God. As we talk about the Bible, sing songs and repeat rhymes, a child develops language skills. These language skills enable him to articulate the message of God throughout life. While he chooses and participates in an activity or plays Bible games, a child learns to make choices and direct activities that involve strategy and planning. These skills help him become a wise Christian leader and a problem solver. While playing with others at church, children are developing interpersonal skills that range from communication to cooperation thus, helping children develop into cooperative church members.



These skills play a big role in a Christian's life as he develops a strategy for sharing Christ, makes choices about right or wrong, influences peers toward what is right and develops as a person like Christ. The majority of our life skills are learned through play. So relax and have fun with children as they learn about God, Jesus, the Bible, church, and become more like Christ.

Curiosity Leads to Learning

Children are naturally curious and constantly drawn to new things. They ask questions, explore, prod, probe and discover all sorts of things around them. A caterpillar crawling across the driveway will bring a four-year-old to his knees and keep him there, watching for hours. When we are curious about something new, we want to explore it. And while exploring we discover and learn.

Five-year-old Bryan discovers that Nehemiah built a wall. Bryan looks at the blocks curiously and begins stacking them in a wall like manner. His building brings him pleasure (satisfaction). A teacher sits near Bryan, she tells him another fact about Nehemiah. The social interaction (relationship) along with Bryan's satisfying experience entices him to repeat (repetition) or continue in his discovery. Bryan explores turning a corner with the wall of blocks and he succeeds. His pleasure leads him to master a new skill.

Mastery of a new skill leads to confidence. Confidence increases his willingness to learn more about Nehemiah. This pleasurable experience, which began with curiosity, leads to discovery and mastery and the desire to learn more about what the Bible says. Pleasurable experiences lay the foundation that church is a fun place to learn about God and God's word.

The teacher encouraged Bryan's curiosity by investing her time in his exploration and discovery and by providing a safe place and safe blocks. She facilitated his discovery rather than restricting it. A teacher can induce fear, frustration, failure and disapproval by telling a child what to build, moving blocks, talking about how the blocks may fall and hurt someone or adding a lot of "don'ts." Assist a child in learning by taping off a four by six area in the corner

of the room for block play. Use gentle reminders if needed, say, "Build no higher than your (the child's) shoulders. Provide appropriate blocks for the age group. (Large cardboard blocks for ones and twos, wooden unit blocks for threes through Kindergarten).

Of course there are several areas in the room where preschoolers and children learn through curiosity, repetition, satisfying experiences, relationships, and play. Each area is designed to meet individual differences in children's styles of learning. Some children who explore with their minds are more verbal, logical, and reflective (books, puzzles, games, manipulative games, discussion, reading) others in more physical ways—touching, smelling, tasting, moving (nature, cooking experiences, movement games, dramas), and still others more visual (art, pictures).

For instance in a fifth grade room, children hear about a sick man's friends who lowered him through a roof to see Jesus. Curiosity leads them to look in a Bible dictionary for more information about the roof. Learning more about the roof, they wonder where this home was built. Curious, they look at the map and define the location of Jesus' ministry. With a blank sheet of paper and a colorful marker they draw what Jesus may have seen that day. They think about how friends care for one another and conclude that Jesus wants us to help and love one another.

The curiosity of these children led them to discover more about Jesus, His ministry, and what He wants them to do in their lives. Each experience a child has at church whether a baby or a sixth grader is one that should lead him to discover more about Jesus, God, the Bible, how to apply that knowledge to life, and give him a desire to return to church and repeat those "fun" activities with his teachers and friends.

Preschoolers enjoy activities surrounding blocks, art, home living, music, puzzles, and nature, books, games and group time experiences. These activities help preschoolers associate church with familiar experiences from home and everyday life. Pleasurable experiences at church help preschoolers feel safe and secure in their world and encourage them to try new experiences.

School age children enjoy games, art, music, and drama, creative writing, doing research, timelines, making maps, conducting interviews, and writing newspapers. Because children absorb new materials gradually, differ in their abilities, and learn from repeti-

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tion, their learning is enhanced when they are actively involved, doing and creatively designing.

Teachers and parents determine how children view their experiences at church and can enhance their learning by allowing children to share their discoveries with them.

When we experience the joy of children's new discoveries about God and what He does in our lives we rediscover God ourselves and in doing so, learn more too.

"Children can literally reintroduce us to God and His world when we allow them to share their discoveries."

Teachers are the Lesson

Each ministry at church should consider the number of teachers needed to provide good Bible teaching experiences for the children, adequately meet the age group needs, and provide opportunities for personal relationships. Provide: 1 teacher to every 2 babies, 1 teacher to every 3 ones and twos, 1 teacher to every 4 threes through Pre-K, 1 teacher to every 5 Kindergartners and 1 teacher to every 6 children in grades 1 through 6. Two teachers should always be present regardless of the number of preschoolers or

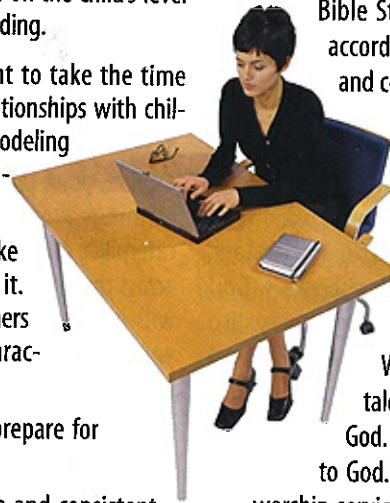
children there are. One teacher should never be left alone with preschoolers or children at any time.

Not only should we consider the number of teachers needed, but also consider a teacher's:

- Spiritual maturity.
- Understanding, respect, and love for children.
- Call to teach on the child's level of understanding.
- Commitment to take the time to build relationships with children thus modeling Christ's relationship with others.
- Willingness to live a Christ-like life as well as teach about it. Children observe their teachers and look for Christ-like characteristics in them.
- Commitment to plan and prepare for each lesson.
- Commitment to be on time and consistent in their attendance each week.

- Response to the needs by ministering to the children and their family.
- Desire to reach all children for Christ.
- Response to training for their ministry and learning more about preschoolers and children and how to teach them.

Teachers who use the Teacher's Guide and prepare for the session by reading the personal Bible Study, planning the activities according to the session emphasis, and continuing the lesson throughout the week by contacting the boys and girls receive a great blessing and enjoy teaching. Teaching preschool or children in Sunday School and other ministries is a vital part of a teacher's worship. When one gives of their time, talent, gifts, and self they give to God. This is a part of one's service to God. When teachers come to the worship service a big part of their worship is offering up their service to Him.



Hindrances to Developmental Preschool and Children's Ministries

Inappropriate Teaching Methods vs. Developmental Bible Study

How would you feel if you entered an adult class room and the teacher taught on a Kindergarten level? Often, a Kindergartener, 3rd grader or 6th grader is taught on an adult level and it goes unnoticed. Jesus Christ stood a child in the midst and said, "Unless you change and become like this little child, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18:3) These words clearly tell us that we are to become like little children—not expect children to become like adults. Preschoolers and children learn in a unique way. They do not learn the same as adults. When teaching babies through sixth graders follow the recommended Bible learning activities, age-appropriate Bible truths and scriptures, and appropriate activities.



rooms into theme type areas. Perhaps you have seen on television or in feature articles of newspapers churches that have such décor. Often times these churches use this décor to attract children. Parents may think this is what it takes to get their children to come to church.

Some children may be attracted to decorated rooms. However, research indicates some color is good but large amounts of bright colors and patterns can deter a child's learning. As church members we

must ask: Are the children as attracted to Jesus and his teaching's as they are their surroundings? Can children concentrate and have fun with the Bible learning activities rather than concentrate on the décor? Does the room overshadow the Bible content? Do the children even notice some of the things we notice as adults or is most of the décor for the parents? Are the parents as excited about the child's relationship with teachers and friends at church as they are the décor? Are the parents as excited about the child's learning the Bible and building a relationship with Christ as they are the decorations or thematic preschool and children's area?

Bright colors, murals, and cutesy wall décor can be overwhelming and scary to preschoolers and children and can cause them to become over stimulated and anxious. Themes and murals distract from the Bible content and session emphasis. Even if the mural is one of Jesus or a Bible scene, the mural locks the teachers into the same Bible emphasis and focus. Thus, it is a challenge for

Environment vs. Developmental Bible Study

To attract children we may be tempted to turn our

teachers to refocus preschoolers and children and have them concentrate on the session focus or Bible emphasis for the day.

Décor and attractions to entice children add to the materialistic view children are dragged into by the world. Rather than repeating what the world offers and keeping children from learning, consider ways we can enhance children's Bible learning. Have plenty of light in the preschool and children's entry, down the hallway, and by the doorways to the classrooms. Paint the entry area and hallway a warm inviting color. The rooms on the south or west side of the building may be warmer especially in the summer. Paint these rooms a cool color such as a pastel blue or green. The rooms on the north or east side of the building may be cool or cold and can be paint-



ed warm colors such as pastel yellow, soft peach or soft beige. Use paints that can be easily washed.

A bulletin board on the wall (without thumb-tacks, pins, or push pins— try velcro) can be used for wall decorations. The teaching pictures that go with each session, the teaching items, the furniture and the resources become the main decorations for the room.

Remember the relationship between the teacher and the child is the greatest attractor for Bible study. Children enjoy learning with teachers and friends when the experiences are relaxing, challenging, non-threatening, and child-centered. Bells that ring, fire engines that scream, caves to hide in and slides to slide on can never take the place of the loving and trusting relationships between children, teachers, and friends at church. It is through these relationships that foundations are laid for a trusting loving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Appropriate Bible Teaching Methods

Every age group deserves planned activities specifically designed for them. See "Curiosity Leads to Learning" and "Play and Fun is Important" in this document. Through LifeWay you can purchase Leader Guides, Leader Packs, Teaching Pictures and Learner Guides for each age group— birth through sixth grade. (A Planning Guide is available. Contact the Preschool & Children's

Ministries, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 3800 North May Avenue, Oklahoma City, OK 73112; or call (405) 942-3800 ext. 648).

Inappropriate Verses vs. Developmentally Appropriate Verses

Every age group deserves to learn scriptures they can understand. Every age group deserves to hear and learn scriptures they can apply in their lives. Choose materials that help children learn appropriate Bible verses for their age.

Some materials use inappropriate scriptures. Inappropriate scriptures are verses that the age group cannot understand or apply to their life. Children may be able to quote a verse but have little or no idea what it means. A child repeating back the teacher's words of what a verse means does not necessarily mean

that a child understands. A parent coaching a child to say what he or she has told her or him does not equate with understanding. When verses are used from the Bible they should be ones a child can understand and use daily. For example, a first grader cannot understand a verse you use with a sixth grader. Thus, the first grader is given verses he can understand as first grader. As he grows each year he will be given verses that help him as he grows in his understanding of God's word.

Some materials stress memorizing verses at an early age. Many children have difficulty memorizing at any age and should not be burned out at an early age. Save the scripture memorization until a child is older and can enjoy his learning. We can rush a child too soon and then he is "turned off" and does not want to memorize later. Also consider, can the child understand what they have memorized, is it just memorizing to please others, and will he later forget or not be able to recall the scripture at all. Help children be successful with the Bible and its content.

Appropriate Bible Verses

Kyle, Elizabeth and Kelli were in the fourth grade. When we started Bible Drill in the fall, each child enjoyed playing the games that introduced them to the books of the Bible, key passages, and verses. They

enjoyed learning a verse each week and what it meant. We talked about how they could apply the verse to their life the next week at school. Kyle and Elizabeth could repeat the verses back to you very quickly. I noticed that Kelli struggled with memorizing the verse but could always tell me what the verse meant. Each week she returned to Bible Drill to tell me how she had used the verse at school that week.

One Sunday the children were drawing a picture of what the weekly verse reminded them of. The verse was, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NIV). As I looked at Kelli's picture, I noticed she had drawn a picture of Jesus' full face. His eyes pierced mine as if he was staring right me. I asked, "Kelli, would you like to tell me about your picture?" Kelli said: "Oh can't you see how much Jesus loves you. Look in His eyes. He is telling you that He loves you so much He gave His life for you. Now, He is your friend." I stood in amazement as I heard this young child's understanding of the scripture. When I asked Kelli where we could find that verse in the Bible, she apprehensively said, "I think it is in the book of John."

Throughout the year Kelli struggled in memorizing the verses but she was competent in her Bible skills and thought a lot about the meaning of each verse. Did Kelli learn the scriptures? Yes, she sure did. And she has grown into a beautiful young dedicated lady who ministers and witnesses to her friends constantly.

Kyle and Elizabeth memorized the scriptures quickly. They could quote them easily.

When time came to choose if they wanted to participate in the church Bible Drill, Kelli declined, Kyle and Elizabeth leaped at the opportunity and both did well in the church drill.

At the Associational Bible Drill, Elizabeth froze. She confessed she did not want to stand before a large group of people she did not know. That was an option for Elizabeth so she sat next to Kelli and their parents as they watched their friends participate. It was a team effort. Kelli and Elizabeth celebrated with the other children

over their success. Kyle and the other children went on to the State Bible Drill. Kelli and Elizabeth went along and they all enjoyed their year of Bible Drill together.

Learning had taken place for each child because scriptures appropriate for fourth graders were used and each child learned the scriptures in the way they learned best. The children worked together and became competent in their Bible Skills and successful with

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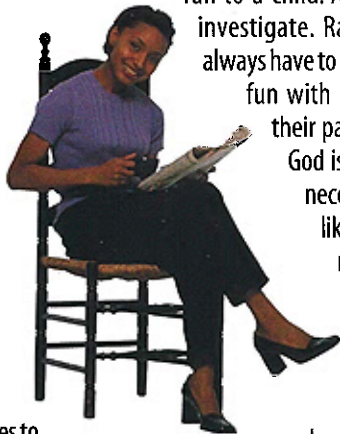
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their Bible learning. When competition and rewards are removed from Bible learning, children flourish in their learning.

Lack of Preparation vs. Preparation

Ask teachers to think about the feelings they would have if they entered a worship service and the preacher was not prepared to preach. And yet, often teachers of children, birth through 6th grade, enter the room with little or no preparation. Children are in Bible Study such a short time as compared with other influences in life, thus we need to take advantage of each moment. If a child comes to Sunday School each week, only 52 hours a year are spent in Bible Study. The average child is plugged into television about 30 hours a week. A child spends more time seeing T.V. commercials than he spends in Bible Study. Thus, teachers must spend time preparing for teaching children. Teachers must:

- ✓ **Prepare through personal Bible Study.** If teachers are to teach from the overflow of their relationship with Christ, a personal Bible Study on a daily basis is a must. A personal Bible Study that corresponds with the lesson for each Sunday is located in the *Family Bible Series* literature available from Lifeway Christian Resources.
- ✓ **Plan appropriate age-level Bible Activities and games** that teach Bible truths and are connected with a session emphasis. The Bible is the textbook at church. Whatever the session emphasis, the Bible should be center of that emphasis.
- ✓ **Prepare for quality group time experiences** (games, songs, prayer, Bible story) keeping in mind the story should be no longer than one minute for each year of age of the children. There is no chronological age formula for group time but on the average, group time should be, 5 to 10 minutes for three-year-olds, 10 to 15 minutes for four-year-olds, 15 to 20 minutes for five-year-olds and 25 to 30 minutes for children. For great story telling, see pages 74 and 75 in *Crayons, Computers, and Kids* and suggestions on page 4 of this document.
- ✓ **Follow-up** on responses in class and with those who are absent, ministering to the needs of each child throughout the week.
- ✓ **Use time wisely.** Remember time is valuable and the years are limited—make every moment a special moment for a child.



Fun vs. Developmental Bible Study

Constantly we hear, "Just have fun!" Learning is fun to a child. A child's curiosity leads him to investigate. Rather than have children who always have to have fun, fun, and fun; try having fun with Bible Study. Help children and their parents know that learning about God is fun. Wild wacky games are not necessary because fun for a child is like one child said, "He (the teacher) really loves me mom."

Appropriate Fun!

We make a Bible game fun when we relax, build a relationship with a child, and enjoy the game with the children rather than inviting or encouraging competition, excellence, perfection, or working for awards and rewards (which introduces failure, unfairness, feelings of incompetence and winners and losers). Have fun with Bible games and songs. Invite a parent to play an instrument one Sunday as the children sing, ask a friend to dress up and portray a Bible character, or make a giant game board on the floor to help recall facts from the Bible story.

Any time you use a teaching method ask, "What foundation does this lay for a child's future thinking about church, Bible Study and worship?" Many times playing wild wacky games turns Jesus into a wild wacky character. We must ask ourselves: "How do we want children to see God? What does God want us to show children about Him? How do we want children to worship and show their love for God and Jesus? How do God and Jesus show love for us? Does this resemble the world so much that it is hard to see God?" Plan so that children know God is Holy, loving, kind, peaceful, and faithful. Save the wacky games for fellowships where your purpose is to play, socialize, and have a blast together. Have fellowships at times other than Bible teaching times so that children know and can tell the difference.

Entertainment vs. Developmental Bible Study

How would you feel if you entered your room and the teachers were only prepared to play games without a purpose, show videos and have little interaction with you, or use the time for passive learning giving you little time to interact? It seems when we have entertainment for the sake of entertaining, we continue to expect to be entertained and each time the entertainment must change or we

won't come back. How sad when we turn the Bible Study opportunities into an entertainment time.

When will we lay the foundations and help children know how to pray, study the Bible, repent of personal sin, witness for Christ, obey Christ, respect and love others, handle temptation and the ups and downs of life, build healthy friendships, give an offering and tithe, and understand church life, if we use church times for entertainment? It is with teachers and friends during Bible study and discipleship that children learn these spiritual concepts. It is at home and in daily life where parents, children, and friends interact that a child lives out, practices, and continues to learn these spiritual concepts. A video with animated characters that tell Bible stories, an entertaining adult, a puppet show, or other forms of entertainment cannot replace a teacher, a parent, or friends. Jesus came to give us a relationship not to entertain us.

Using Entertainment Appropriately

Children need fellowship times. They can develop life long relationships with friends and adults and ways of relating with others during Christian fellowships. During fellowships appropriate recreation is used. Although Christian movies, videos, puppet shows or magic shows can be used, be creative and entertain children with active entertainment like:

- Miniature golf
- Swimming
- Skating
- Ball
- Organized and unorganized games
- Free play
- Music activities
- Field trips
- Pet shows
- Farm trips
- Camps
- Drama
- Crafts



With creative entertainment where children are involved in active play and have some choice in how they play, they have opportunities to learn to entertain themselves and not depend on passive learning like T.V., movies, videos and others for entertainment.

Technology vs. Developmental Bible Study

Young people 4-18 years old spend an average

Tips For Worshipping with Children

Encourage families to worship together. Our children are overtired and over-scheduled. We wake them before the sun rises and often keep them scheduled in school, after-school programs and lessons, and sports well into the night. They have little time to themselves, and too few opportunities to be with their families. Therefore families need opportunities to worship together.

Of course, the young baby through three-year-old will need to remain in the same room where they attend Sunday School for consistency and a feeling of security. But, the four-year-old through sixth grader need the opportunity to sit alongside his family in worship. The morning and evening worship times at church may be the only time some families are together during the week. For others it is a time when the family can sit together, reflect on God and worship together. When else can a child see parents and adults singing praises, praying, committing their lives to God, and responding to the Holy Spirit?

I shall never forget the time I heard an adult shout to the Lord, her hand went up and she literally shouted. As an older child I could not understand her response to God in this method. Since that time I have experienced the Spirit of God so powerfully that I too have felt like shouting. It is during those times that I am drawn to think of the lady's way of praising God. I thank God for that dear saint who expressed her joy and praise to God in my presence. I thank Him for loving us so much that we are filled with this overwhelming joy. Children benefit from worshipping God with adults and seeing adult response and commitment to God.

As you give children opportunities to worship alongside you, assist them in participating in the corporate worship.

- **Help children know when to sit and stand** at appropriate times.
- **Offer them a songbook** to hold and invite them to sing the words they know or hum the tune while others sing.

- **Give them opportunities to greet people** and shake their hand at the appropriate times.
- **Help them know they can bring their own Bible**, look at the pictures, turn to the Scripture passage as referred to by the pastor, and take notes that pertain to the Scriptures being studied.
- **Invite children to assist** in passing the offering plate along and give an offering.
- **Assist them in following along in the bulletin** with the order of service and highlighting announcements that pertain to children's ministries.

lighting announcements that pertain to children's ministries.

- **Guide him to quietly and briefly ask his question** and keep conversation to a minimum during the worship time. This is an important way of guiding his understanding and behavior.

- **Offer him a crayon or pencil to use during the quiet moments** of the service. He can either draw a picture

about or take notes on the sermon. Invite him to listen for a word (Jesus, God etc) and count the number of times it is used during the sermon.

- **Help parents understand that their child is welcomed in the worship center** and they can enjoy a special closeness during the worship time. Children love sitting close, leaning against, standing beside, holding hands, and feeling the approval of the people they love most. These moments provide warm and special feeling toward the church and God for the child.
- **Remember that as adults sometimes we wiggle, talk, cough or have to move around.** Children too have even greater needs to move about. When a child moves excessively be understanding. Look for the positive things he is doing in worship and reinforce them. Say to him after the service, "You really like to sing in church. I like to hear you sing praises to God."

Bulleted items adapted from "Tips for Parents," Todd Capps, former Minister to Children, Council Road Baptist Church, Bethany, Oklahoma.

of 4 hours and 45 minutes per day, outside of school, plugged into electronic media of all kinds.¹ Substantive reasons for parents and teachers to be concerned about the unquestioned and growing use of computers for early childhood learning has been done. "Teachers find that today's video immersed children can't form original pictures in their mind or develop an imaginative representation."²

Children need opportunities to read the Bible or hear Bible stories and then form the pictures in their minds. Seeing Jesus walk along the road and heal the blind man probably looks different to each of us as adults. Why? Because each of us formed a picture of Jesus as He strolled along that dusty road and scooped the dust and spat into it. We see Him pasting the eyes of the blind man with mud and we feel the excitement the blind man felt as he viewed the world. Each of us want children to have the opportunity to form their own pictures so they can rejoice at the things Jesus did for others and for us. Leave the technology for another place and time and paint a picture for children as you tell a Bible story. (See "How to Tell a Bible Story" on page 4 of this document.)

Television vs. Developmental Bible Study



Are we really making the best use of a child's time when we use television with preschoolers and children? With the average child watching 30 hours of television a week and half of that time being commercials, Bible Study is a must while at church. Otherwise, the influences of television—violence, sex, unhealthy lifestyle, materialism, sports worship, etc.—will have a bigger influence on our children than God's word.

Watching television is a passive, noncreative time and it steals time from social interactions, thinking, creativity, problem solving, play and spiritual development. Even an hour of "educational" television or Christian videos does not have the same power as an hour of creative play and social interaction.

When you watch television, movies, and videos at church, you lay the foundation for a child to watch TV and videos everywhere. This may encourage a child to want to watch more TV and videos at home. More TV at home may lead to watching inappropriate shows and develop undesirable behavioral patterns.

¹ Fools Gold: A Critical Look at Computers in Childhood, by The Alliance for Childhood, Edited by Collen Cordes and Edward Miller, Alliance for Childhood, P.O. Box 444, College Park, Maryland

² Ibid.

Supporting Families

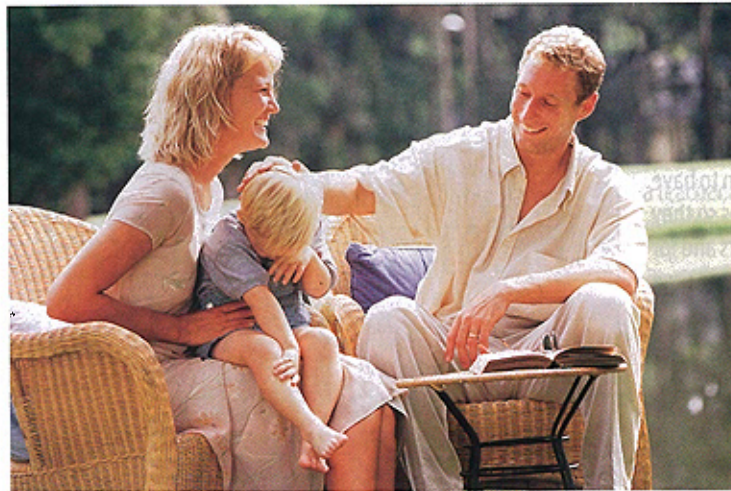
As the church walks alongside families and shares in the responsibility of spiritually nurturing the child, gently guide parents toward healthy Christian lives. Help families understand that if they provide a safe, nurturing, and Godly enriched environment, their child will do just fine. The playful, creative child who comes to love learning about God is more likely to achieve and succeed than the anxious, pressured five-year-old child who knows that materialism and success are important.

Tips For Supporting Families

Often during parent/baby dedications the church family commits to supporting parents in their commitment to biblical guidance for their child. Thus, families, preschoolers and children see the church as important people of God. Churches support and encourage families when they:

- **Design children's ministries with a balanced purpose** of developmental Bible Study, discipleship (spiritual) development, missions, and ministry.
- **Focus on the children and what is appropriate for them.** It is easy to be swayed by parents or teachers who insist on a program that meets their needs. Always ask: Is this the best for the child? Does it keep in mind the different learning styles of the children and the unique characteristics of the age group? Does it contain age appropriate and well-balanced Biblical content? Is it varied in teaching methods? If you sense a family is pushing their child too much and too early, guide them in an understanding of what is beneficial for their child.
- **Communicate policies and guidelines that protect children and organize for effective teaching** so the child becomes the priority. God has provided and equipped enough persons in every church to meet the needs of every person attending the church. Pray for people to respond to God's call. Help people discover their gifts and call to teach children.
- **Provide child-centered Bible Study.** Think of the child and how he learns best—respond by providing Bible Study that is simple, concrete and active.
- **Enlist at least two caring teachers** (see pupil/teacher ratio requirements) for each room who:

- ✓ **Feel called to teach.** Teachers who are called make relationships their priority. Children who feel loved are free to learn.
- ✓ **Are growing in their personal relationship with Christ and model Christ for children.** Jesus teachings lived out in the lives of teachers lays the foundation for Jesus being someone children love and want to learn more about.



- ✓ **Use approaches that are on the development levels of the learner.** We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Each child is developing according to God's plan. Using approaches that meet each child's needs, lay the foundation that each child is unique and special to God in his own way.
- ✓ **Commit to regular planning and preparing.** God had a plan when he created the earth. He planned for Jesus Christ to live and die and He has a plan for us. Planned and prepared teachers show children that they are important and loved and lay a foundation for what God has planned for them.
- ✓ **Are present every Sunday morning.** Consistent faithful teachers lay the foundation that God is faithful and consistent.
- ✓ **Continue to minister** to the preschoolers and children during the week.
- **Provide adequate space and age-appropriate equipment and resources.** For guidelines on space, suggested equipment, and resources, see *Preschool Sunday School for a New Century* and *Children's Sunday School for a New Century*.
- **Provide parent-training classes.** Consider topics on:
 - ✓ How your child grows and learns

- ✓ How to discipline
- ✓ How a child learns about God
- ✓ Discovering your child's learning style or love language
- ✓ How to lead your child to Christ
- ✓ How to love your child
- ✓ Helping your child understand money
- ✓ Helping your child understand the truth
 - ✓ Resources for you to use with your child

- **Involve families in worship services** each Sunday. Invite families (older preschoolers, children, parents or significant adult to child) to:

- ✓ Greet guests
- ✓ Distribute bulletins
- ✓ Serve as offering receivers
- ✓ Read scriptures
- ✓ Make announcements

- **Encourage families to worship together** making the service a child-friendly service (include a

pastor's message, a children's bulletin, and sing a song the children know). See "Tips for Worshipping with Children" on page 11 of this document.

- **Provide discipleship ministry.** Helping children learn more about Jesus helps those who are Christians become more like Him. It helps those who are not Christians learn to love him and lays the foundation for them to accept Him as their personal Savior when the Holy Spirit helps them understand God's plan for their life. Guide children to become disciples.
- **Keep competition out of children's ministries.** There are no "winners" or "losers" according to Jesus. When it comes to Christ and church, all children should be winners. All children should feel adequate and accepted. Avoid rewards and competition in attendance and memory skills. Use literature that encourages teamwork, working together, loving one another, and competency rather than memorization. Use materials that develop morals and sound truths about God for children.

Modeling Prayer For Children



Be in an attitude of prayer constantly thanking God for everything, anytime, and anyplace. Prayer is the thread that holds a day together, is noticed by preschoolers and children. They recognize God's spirit in you and that communicating with God is a vital part of your life.

Modeling prayer is voicing aloud prayer thoughts. As children and preschoolers hear you verbalize prayer thoughts, they observe an ongoing communicative relationship with God and man being lived out and a foundation for prayer as a part of a vital living relationship with Christ is modeled for the child during the most important years of his/her life. Children and preschoolers will feel at ease in voicing aloud their communication with God because of your freedom to pray openly and honestly with Him.

Mean What You Say and Say It From Your Heart And Soul.

Tossing out words that come from an ungrateful or flippant heart hinders preschoolers and children. They need to hear teachers, parents, and significant adults pray with a humble heart. A sincere prayer prayed from a humble heart relays to a child that God is one that we love and adore and that he is our friend that listens, hears, and meets our needs.

Remember Age Appropriate

- **Keep it short and understandable.** Pray short understandable prayers. This helps preschoolers and children develop behavioral patterns and makes prayer a part of our lives.
- **Use words that children understand.** Even older children are literal minded and have difficulty thinking in abstract terms. Use simple concrete words like, "Let's thank God for helping us" or "Thank You God, for good food" rather than "Express your thankfulness to our father for his goodness."
- **Pray about the things that interest the preschoolers and children.** As a child wraps a doll in a blanket, pray, "Thank You, God, for Leah's hands to care for the doll." When a third grader is concerned about his sick grandmother, stop and pray with him for his grandmother.

- **Allow a child to relate positive experiences to God and prayer.**

While a baby scoots toward you, pray: "Gracie crawls to Mr. Lee. Thank You, God, for helping Gracie crawl." When older children enter the room, pray, "Thank You, God, for my friend Nikolas." As a sixth grader tells you about a mended friendship, let him hear you say, "I thank God that you choose to be kind".



- **Let preschoolers and children hear your praise.** A child's first steps toward God are truly a miracle. When a child says: "I have been thinking about God. I sure love Him," give God praise for the child's efforts to express his love for God. Say, "Thank You, God, for Mitch's love for You."
- **Pray prayers of thanksgiving often.** Prayers of thanksgiving used early in life help a child sense his dependence on God. Children sense through the attitudes and actions of others that adults know and love God.
- **Model the appropriate way to humble yourself before the Lord.** Humbly thank God for His provisions. For young children that may be bowing your head and closing your eyes, however, for preschoolers it may be sitting on the floor near their friends and hearing you say, "Thank You God for Nolan's cracker" as you place a cracker in his hand. For an older child that may be seeing or hearing you humbly ask God for forgiveness or express gratitude for his mercies. Forcing a child to bow his head and close his eyes may frighten him and cause him to avoid prayer.
- **Avoid memorized prayers.** Children need to learn they can pray anytime anywhere. Memorized prayers can cause a child to learn to repeat meaningless words without a grateful and humble heart.
- **Accept a child's prayer.** Encourage children and preschoolers to use their own words as they pray. Never force a child to pray. Avoid correcting or laughing at a child's words, thoughts, or actions during prayer. Never laugh at a child's prayer. What is important to a six-year-old may not be important to you. He may ask for forgiveness for something insignificant to you but it may be "huge" to him. The important thing is that a child is expressing himself to God and that is the priority.
- **Let children hear you ask for forgiveness.** Children see us do things wrong. As teachers they may see us be unintentionally be unkind. We do need to be Christian role models and live lives that glorify God, but we all will make mistakes. When we do, children need to hear us ask others for forgiveness and ask God for forgiveness.

Prayer is essential for the church. Be in continual prayer for our children and their families —for those from Christian homes and for those who have no Christian influence. And, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." *Philippians 4:6, The NIV Study Bible.*

"Three Parables"

Adapted from DEVELOPING A CHILD'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH THE SENSES, by Judy Smith

Once upon a time I took a child's hand in mine. He and I were to talk together for a while. It was such an awesome task. . . such a great responsibility. I was to lead this little child to God. And so I talked to this child only of God. You see, he "had" to understand that were he to displease God, God could become quite stern. I spoke of the child's goodness as something that would appease God's wrath. We walked under the tall trees. I told the child that God had the power to send them crashing down with the fire of His thunderbolts! We walked in the sunshine. I told him of the greatness of God who made the blazing, burning sun. We walked along the beach among the roar of the waves. I told him of the time God destroyed the world with the waters of the great flood. I told him that it was his DUTY always to please God.

One twilight we met God. Immediately the child hid behind me. He was afraid! He could not look at the face of God, so loving. The child remembered MY picture. I was between the child and God. He did not take God's hand. I wondered. . . for I had taken my job so seriously. . . and I had been so conscientious!

Once upon a time I took a child's hand in mine. I was to lead her to God. I felt so burdened with all of the things I had to teach her. There was absolutely no time to waste, and so we began. At one moment we looked at the leaves of the different trees. The next moment we glimpsed a bird's nest. The child was about to ask a question, but we didn't have time. . . we had to hurry to catch the butterfly! No. . . not a minute to waste. We spoke of God often and rapidly. I drilled her on all the stories I thought she ought to know. But we were interrupted by the wind blowing, of which we must speak, by the coming of the stars, which she must study, by the gurgling of the brook, which she must track to its source.

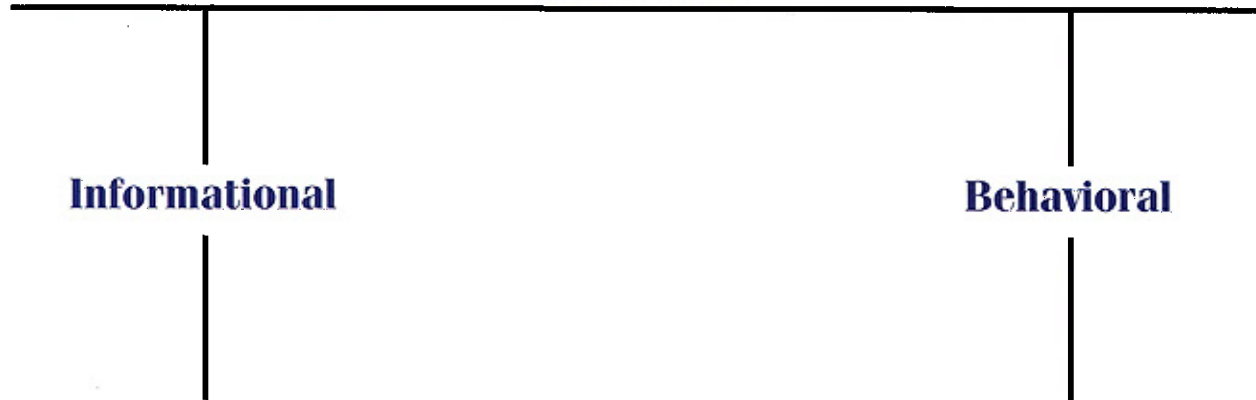
And then in the twilight we met God. The child merely glanced at Him, and then her gaze wandered in a dozen different directions. God stretched out His hand. But she was not interested enough to take it. . . She just dropped exhausted to the ground and fell asleep. I was between God and the child. I wondered. . . After all, I taught her so many, many things!

Once upon a time I took a little child's hand to lead him to God. What a humbling awe filled privilege. We walked side by side, slowly, I pacing my steps to his short ones. We spoke of the things the child noticed. Sometimes it was one of God's birds. We watched it build its nest, and we saw eggs laid in another one. We wondered later at the care it gave the young. Sometimes we picked up God's flowers, stroking the soft petals, admiring the bright colors. Often we told stories of God. I told them to the child, and the child told them to me. We told them, the child and I, over and over and over. Sometimes we stopped to rest, leaning against one of God's trees, letting the breeze envelop us.

And then in the twilight, we met God. The child's eyes shone with wonder! He took God's hand and walked away with Him.

Spiritual Development

Relational



Our goal as teachers is to move the child from informational (Bible truths) to behavioral (changes) in behavior to relational (a change in behavior and lives because of our relationship with God)

Four Stages of Spiritual Development

STAGE	AGE	DESCRIPTION
Discovering	birth – 6 years	Storing information: (learn through family, nature, rules)
Discerning	4-9 years	Lots of questions (Death, Santa, creation, God, sex, etc) Learn through discussion, observing
Deciding	8-14 years	Most fruitful years for Commitment: Learn through sorting, examples, discussion, teaching
Discipling	10-Adult	Preteen through whole life: Growing and maturing period, need goals and accountability, good heroes, encouragement, challenges, critical thinking, fellowship

Resources

- Aldridge, Jerry; *Understanding Today's Children: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Boucher, Pamela; *The Ministry of Childhood Education, Updated Edition*; Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Burns, Jeanne; Morris, Cindy; Wiley, R. Scott; *Beyond the Walls: Focus on Preschoolers*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Capps, Todd and Crew, Roger; *Beyond the Walls: Multiply Your Children's Ministry*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Carpenter, Darlene; *Spiritual Nurturing: How To Help Your Child Grow Spiritually*, Carpenter Shop Resources, Lewisville, TX
- Chapman, Gary and Campbell, Ross; *The Five Love Languages of Children*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Davis, Cos; *Now That I'm A Christian Leaders Guide*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Dawn, Marva J., *Is It A Lost Cause? Having a Heart of God for the Church's Children*; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI
- Edwards, Cathy, Editor; *Level of Biblical Learning*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN—available by contacting Sheri Babb, Preschool and Children's Specialist, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 3800 North May Avenue, Oklahoma City, OK 73112, (405) 942-3800 or by email mmoore@bgco.org.
- Hargrave, James and Morrow, David; *Children's Sunday School for a New Century*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Haysted, Wes, *Teaching Your Child About God: You Can't Begin Too Soon*, Regal Books, Ventura, CA
- Levin, Diane E.; *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC
- Lumpkin, Cindy and Sander, Tommy; *Preschool Sunday School for a New Century*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Mahand, Melinda and Van Brink, Clara Mae; *Love, Laughter, and Learning*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Maynard, Morlee and Aldridge, Jerry; *Understanding Today's Preschoolers: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Murphy, Art; *The Faith of a Child: A Step-by-Step Guide to Salvation for your Child*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL
- Ratcliff, Donald E; *Handbook of Children's Religious Education*, Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama
- Sanders, Tommy and Bradberry, Mary Ann; *Teaching Preschoolers: First Steps Toward Faith*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Sanders, Tommy, *When Can I?*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- St. Lifer, Holly, *Teaching Kids, One by One*, www.connectforkids.org/resources3139/resources_show.htm?doc_id=121089
- Stringer, Paula and Hargrave, James; *Crayons, Computers and Kids*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Tonks, Anne and Latham, Judy; *Beyond the Walls: Focus on Children*, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Ward, Chris; Morrow, David; Tonks, Anne; *Teaching Children Laying Foundations for Faith*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN
- Young, William E., *Now That I'm A Christian Learner Guide*, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN